



The Arsenic Century: How Victorian Britain Was Poisoned at Home, Work & Play, by James C Whorton (OUP, £9.99)

Arsenic was everywhere in Victorian Britain, as this meticulously researched scientific and social history ably demonstrates. During the 19th century, more than a third of all cases of poisoning were attributed to arsenic. But people were also being poisoned by the cosmetics they used, the clothes they wore and the candles lighting their homes. "A vast deal of slow poisoning is going on in Great Britain," wrote one physician in 1857, having discovered that he was himself being poisoned by the wallpaper in his home - it was green, made from copper arsenite. Even ale - "the historic sustenance of British yeomanry" - was not immune. In 1900 the Manchester Guardian revealed that "a peculiar epidemic" was sweeping Britain's hardest-drinking city, Manchester: 6,000 fell ill due to arsenic contamination. From shocking accounts of parents poisoning their children to claim the insurance, to men who risked a horrible death to cure baldness with arsenic shampoo, Whorton brings this deadly subject vividly alive.

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