

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86584-5 - Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History

Rod Edmond

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Leprosy and Empire

An innovative, interdisciplinary study of why leprosy, a disease with a very low level of infection, has repeatedly provoked revulsion and fear. Rod Edmond explores, in particular, how these reactions were re-fashioned in the modern colonial period. Beginning as a medical history, the book broadens into an examination of how Britain and its colonies responded to the believed spread of leprosy. Across the empire this involved isolating victims of the disease in 'colonies', often on offshore islands. Discussion of the segregation of lepers is then extended to analogous examples of this practice, which, it is argued, has been an essential part of the repertoire of colonialism in the modern period. The book also examines literary representations of leprosy in Romantic, Victorian and twentieth-century writing, and concludes with a discussion of traveller-writers such as R. L. Stevenson and Graham Greene who described and fictionalized their experience of staying in a leper colony.

ROD EDMOND is Professor of Modern Literature and Cultural History at the University of Kent. His previous publications include *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (1997) and, as co-editor with Vanessa Smith, *Islands in History and Representation* (2003).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86584-5 - Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History

Rod Edmond

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories

Series editors:

Margot C. Finn, *University of Warwick*

Colin Jones, *University of Warwick*

Keith Wrightson, *Yale University*

New cultural histories have recently expanded the parameters (and enriched the methodologies) of social history. Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories recognises the plurality of current approaches to social and cultural history as distinctive points of entry into a common explanatory project. Open to innovative and interdisciplinary work, regardless of its chronological or geographical location, the series encompasses a broad range of histories of social relationships and of the cultures that inform them and lend them meaning. Historical anthropology, historical sociology, comparative history, gender history and historicist literary studies – among other subjects – all fall within the remit of Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories.

Titles in the series include:

1. Margot C. Finn *The Character of Credit: Personal Debit in English Culture, 1740–1914*
2. M. J. D. Roberts *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787–1886*
3. Karen Harvey *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture*
4. Phil Withington *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England*
5. Mark S. Dawson *Gentility and the Comic Theatre of Late Stuart London*
6. Julie-Marie Strange *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870–1914*
7. Sujit Sivasundaram *Nature and the Godly Empire: Science and Evangelical Mission in the Pacific, 1795–1850*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86584-5 - Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History

Rod Edmond

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Leprosy and Empire

A Medical and Cultural History

Rod Edmond



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86584-5 - Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History

Rod Edmond

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,
New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521865845

© Rod Edmond 2006

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2006

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-86584-5 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-86584-0 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for
the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or
third-party internet websites referred to in this publication,
and does not guarantee that any content on such
websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86584-5 - Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History

Rod Edmond

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

‘Whan he was in his lusti age,
The leper cawhte in his visage
And so forth overall aboute,
That he ne mihte ryden oute.’

(John Gower)

‘A distemper so noisome, that it might well pass for the utmost corruption of the human body, on this side of the grave.’ (Anonymous seventeenth-century traveller)

‘It is in truth a distemper corrupting the whole mass of the blood, and therefore considered by Paul of Aegina as an universal ulcer.’ (William Jones)

‘There is hardly anything on earth, or between it and heaven, which has not been regarded as the cause of leprosy.’ (Arneur Hansen)

‘The ugly troubles and weakens man, it reminds him of deterioration and impotence.’ (Friedrich Nietzsche)

‘Death is the most contagious plague and we’ve all got it; it moulds its features upon the features of the living.’ (Robin Hyde)

‘Wonderful! To study history as if it were a body!’ (Michael Ondaatje)

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 Describing, imagining and defining leprosy, 1770–1867	24
2 Scientists discuss the causes of leprosy, and the disease becomes a public issue in Britain and its empire, 1867–1898	61
3 The fear of degeneration: leprosy in the tropics and the metropolis at the <i>fin de siècle</i>	110
4 Segregation in the high imperial era: island leper colonies on Hawaii, at the Cape, in Australia and New Zealand	143
5 Concentrating and isolating racialised others, the diseased and the deviant: the idea of the colony in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries	178
6 Writers visiting leper colonies: Charles Warren Stoddard, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, Graham Greene and Paul Theroux	220
Postscript	245
<i>Index</i>	249

Illustrations

1	Father Damien on his deathbed. Photo by Sydney Bourne Swift, physician at the Kalaupapa leper colony on Molokai	page 93
2	(a) Patient with nerve leprosy (b) Patient with tubercular leprosy From George Thin, <i>Leprosy</i> (1891). Wellcome Library, London	96
3	Map showing the distribution of leprosy around the world in 1891. From George Thin, <i>Leprosy</i> (1891). Wellcome Library, London	104
4	(a) Kalaupapa peninsula, Molokai (National Park Service, Hawaii) (b) Graveyard at Kalaupapa. Photo by author	146
5	Christmas party for female lepers, Robben Island (early twentieth century). Cape Town Archives Repository (Ref. C16/4/3/2)	162
6	(a) Nga Mokopuna Island, off Somes/Matiu Island, Wellington harbour. Courtesy of Lynette Shum (b) Leper grave of Ivan Skelton, Quail Island, Lyttelton harbour. W. A. Taylor collection, Canterbury Museum (Ref. 1968.213.123)	172
7	Frontispiece to William Booth's <i>In Darkest England and the Way Out</i> (1890)	199

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86584-5 - Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History

Rod Edmond

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Wellcome Trust for a research leave fellowship that allowed me to do much of the research for this book. Particular thanks are due to Michael Worboys for his advice and guidance as I began the project, and for his support as I pursued it.

I also wish to thank librarians at the Wellcome Institute; the British Library; the Mission Houses Museum Library, Honolulu; the Hamilton library at the University of Hawaii, Manoa; and at my home institution, the University of Kent.

Colleagues in my own department, especially those in the Centre for Postcolonial Studies – Abdulrazak Gurnah, Lyn Innes and Caroline Rooney – have provided an unfailingly supportive context in which to write and teach. Colleagues in Kent's History Department – Ulf Schmidt and Charlotte Sleigh – have offered a new and welcome context in which to pursue my research.

Elsewhere, it is a pleasure to thank Sara Salih and Vanessa Smith for their friendship, emails and support.

Bits and pieces of this book have been aired at several conferences and research seminars, and I am grateful to audiences at the 'Reconfiguring the British' seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, London; the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, Oxford; the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, and the Wellcome Unit at the University of Manchester; the History of Medicine Centre at the University of Warwick; and the University of Sussex for their suggestions and criticisms.

I have previously published some of the material in chapter 3 in 'Returning fears: tropical disease and the metropolis', in Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (eds.), *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2005), and in '“Without the camp”: leprosy and nineteenth-century writing', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29:2 (2001). A shorter version of chapter 4 was published as 'Object bodies/object sites: leper islands in the high imperial era', in Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (eds.), *Islands in History and Representation*

x Acknowledgements

(London: Routledge, 2003). I am grateful to the publishers of this material for permission to republish it.

Many individuals have helped in many ways, often by pointing me in the direction of new sources and references. These include (I'm sure the list isn't exhaustive): Tim Armstrong, Henry Bernstein, Jo Collins, Cilla Corlett, Hugh Cunningham, Harriet Deacon, Ursula Deith, Brian Dillon, Felix Driver, Marion Edmond, Murray Edmond, Catherine Hall, Mark Harrison, Colin Jones, Jonathan Lamb, Andrew Lincoln, Allan Mitchell, Jan Montefiore, Nancy and Al Morris, Dave Murray, Emily Nash, Maria Nugent, Felicity Nussbaum, Evelyn O'Callaghan, Marion O'Connor, Bill Purcell, Nigel Rigby, Jo Robertson, Stephanie Rudgard-Redsell, Martin Scofield, Lynette Shum, Tony Skillen, Amy Smith, Murray Smith, Scarlett Thomas, Marina Warner, Val Wilmer.

As before, thanks to Sarah, Cassius, Daisy and Jo, and for the first time, Ed and Molly; Claudia, Louis and Otto.