Some Curare Murders?
Dr Ann Ferguson

The President: Now it is my pleasure to introduce Dr Ann Ferguson. The title of her talk is “Some Curare Murders?” Well, that interests me. Dr Ferguson is a retired anaesthetist and she says that her particular interest in curare goes back to a research year at McGill University, in Montreal. Then, on retirement, she did the Diploma in the History of Medicine at the Society Apothecaries and her examination lecture was entitled “Arrow poison to anaesthesia – a short history of curare”. This evening’s talk was written following a question she was asked when giving the original talk at The Royal College of Surgeons. She is also a judge for the Crimewriters' Association Golden Dagger Award. I understand she is going to tell us why curare kills and give some examples of use in real life.

So do let us welcome Dr Ferguson. (Applause.)

Dr Ferguson: Please note the question mark in my title. I think if I said “curare” to any of you, you would all say “South American arrow poison”. Most people know that the South American Indians (Figures 1 and 2) use these little darts and put curare at the end and shoot them through a blowpipe to collect prey for food, and they use these darts for small birds and small animals. If they want slightly larger animals, they will use arrows. Arrow heads have longitudinal and circumferential grooves cut into them and the curare poison comes up like boot polish and it is smeared into the grooves.

Figure 1
Cast of an Amazonian Indian using a blowgun
Richard Schultes, the ethnobotanist, reckoned that the Indians have been doing this for about 8000 years, but I don't know how he came to that conclusion.

Curare-containing arrow poison was first brought to this country by Edward Bancroft in about 1766, and he put some in a chemist's in The Strand so that it could be investigated by pharmacologists and physiologists so that they could find out how it worked, and in Victorian times doctors tried using it for tetanus. They were right; it is the right treatment for tetanus; but they didn't realise how it worked, because it actually paralyses the neuromuscular endplate so that the muscles are paralysed in relaxation, so the patient's airway muscles are paralysed and they can't breathe, so they die of asphyxia. But we do now use curare, or at least “son of curare”, for tetanus, and it is an extremely good treatment.

Let's fast-forward to World War I. Lloyd George had been head of the rapidly expanding Ministry of Munitions, but was now Prime Minister. He had been up to Glasgow, to the Clyde, to talk to the non-combatant workers and had been given a very, very rough reception. He was convinced from then on that there was German money on the Clyde, which shows how jumpy the Government were during the World War I.

The Government was having problems with the non-combatant labour force and they developed a primitive spy service called MPS2, which was a branch of the newly formed MI5, and this had people infiltrating the non-combatant workers to see what they were up to.

One of the troublemakers on the Clyde was a small, attractive Irishman called Arthur McManus, who had a very persuasive way of speaking. He was deported from the Clyde area and went into hiding near Derby.

Lloyd George became extremely unpopular at around this time because he introduced conscription. It was the first time in English history that conscription had been introduced, and it was not popular, so Fenner Brockway introduced the No Conscription Fellowship near Derby. The growing socialist movement in the country was a considerable irritation to
the Government, and the socialists were producing a banned newspaper, which they managed to distribute every week. One of the families involved in this was the Wheeldon family, who lived in Derby. MPS2 had a file on this family. They had been watching them for several months and all their post was being intercepted at the post office and copied and then sent on to them. This was being done by an agent called de Valda. He was a buccaneer. He had had a very exciting life having had a bad head injury at one point and actually had a plate in his head. He later wrote that he was *delighted to be caught up in something hot.*

Probably the reason that the Wheeldons were watched in the first place was because of the son, William, who I think we would now call a Marxist. He had been in trouble with the police and was about to be conscripted so had gone into hiding, probably in Southampton near his sister. The rest of the family lived at 12 Pear Tree Road, in Derby, and consisted of, essentially, Hettie and Alice. Hettie was Secretary of the No Conscription Fellowship and she was having a *bit of a carry on* with our small, attractive Irishman, mentioned earlier. Winnie lived in Southampton with her husband. Alice was the mother. They had all been suffragettes before the war and had been implicated in the burning of Breadsall Church, which was never proved to be arson, although there was a hatpin found in the remains.

MPS2 had a spy called Alex Gordon. He had been a soldier; he was then a reporter, and he was sent to Sheffield to find out if there was anything going on, and he came back saying, “Sheffield has no problems” and a tram strike broke out, so his job was on the line. He was next sent to Derby to see what was happening. We found out a lot about this man. He was mentally unstable. At the age of 8 he had been sent to a lunatic asylum for beating up another child, he had been had up for blackmail for saying somebody was a homosexual and he had been convicted of stealing jewellery in Folkestone, and when he finally went to Scotland Yard while he was a spy, somebody there recognised him as somebody with a lot of previous. His real name was William Rickard.

So here we have two men employed by the spy service who are paid informers, no espionage training and paid on results. Their boss was Herbert Booth, who was a barrister’s clerk and knew his way round the courts.

Alice, the mother, was part of the Underground Train and she would get conscientious objectors from Derby up to Liverpool and out of the country, and she never argued that she was not doing this, she freely admitted it. The family hated Lloyd George; they thought he was responsible for a large number of deaths, as a Prime Minister in war time he probably was.
Because Winnie and her husband lived in Southampton they wrote to each other every day, and their post, as I have said, was copied and then sent on to them. Winnie wrote: “Now that damned buggering Welsh sod’s got into power. Gott strafe his blasted iz. Ain’t the whole caboodle lovely”.

I have a problem with this, because I have seen some of their letters in the files at Kew. They had beautiful handwriting, they had lovely spelling and their grammar was correct. It’s only in the copied letters that this happens. I don’t know why. You can imagine what the spy services thought when they got this. They had no idea what was going on. It’s actually just a poem from Mason to his mother-in-law, but the spy services thought it might be German instructions and so they didn’t tell the code breakers what language to look for. The key to the poem is “We will hang Lloyd George from a sour apple tree”. Another day Alice wrote: “What the Lloyd George is wrong with the post”. I think she was suspecting that something was happening. And another day, “Lloyd George is not fit for Heaven nor Bloody Hell”.

Gordon had by now registered himself as a conscientious objector in Derby and was hidden in the Wheeldon household. He cottoned on to this hatred of Lloyd George – it was difficult not to – and he asked Alice for help. At this point he stopped being a spy and quite frankly became an agent provocateur. He said he had three friends in an internment camp – these were his imaginary friends – and he wanted to get them out and into Liverpool, and he needed poison because he said the camps were guarded by guards who were bribable and by dogs that they would have to poison. There were no dogs, this was another figment of this man’s imagination. He claimed then that Alice had suggested to him that he get a syringe full of curare, get a job as caddy to Lloyd George at Walton Heath Golf Club, fall up against Lloyd George and inject it into his leg; and he told his boss, Herbert Booth, that there was a plan to murder Lloyd George.

Mason, Alice’s son-in-law, was a pharmacist and dispensing chemist at Hartley College in Southampton, which is now Southampton University, and one of his jobs was to kill stray dogs, rabies still being a threat, and he reckoned he had done between two and three thousand this way. He was also an expert on curare. He had some in his possession perfectly legally and he demonstrated this at Hartley College. Alice asked him for poison for these imaginary dogs at this imaginary camp with these imaginary friends in it. Mason had been using prussic acid in meat or bread to kill the dogs, but he didn’t like the idea of sending prussic acid through the post, so he suggested that they use strychnine on bread or meat, and then as an afterthought he suggested, if they could not get near enough to the dogs, to try curare. So he also supplied some curare, and a parcel arrived in Derby which was sent to one of Alice’s neighbours. Hettie went and fetched it.
Booth by this stage had taken over from the unreliable Gordon (Rickard) and he made Alice open the parcel and read out what was in it to him, and the instructions. We think that this was so that he could say that she knew what was in the parcel. Booth then claimed that Alice had told him to shoot Lloyd George at Walton Heath Golf Club with an air rifle with a curare dart.

The directions that came with the poisons: “Powder A (strychnine) on bread or meat. Curare: either inject in solution or use a walking-stick gun. Soak a dart in solution, let it dry, dip again and cover in the paste. Do not advise unless in urgent dilemma.”

And lower down it says: “If the bloke who own it does suspect it will be a job to prove it. As long as you have a chance to get at the dog, I pity it.”

None of these suggestions can mean anything to do with killing Lloyd George. There is no way he would have picked up a bit of meat and eaten it. All the correspondence is about dogs. Winnie then wrote a letter saying, “I do hope it all right abaht them things for the dawg”. There is absolutely no correspondence between family members mentioning killing Lloyd George. The only evidence they had was Rickard and Booth’s unsubstantiated claims that Alice had suggested that they kill Lloyd George using curare.

So on Thursday 1 February, Inspector Parker arrested Alice on a charge of conspiring to murder the Prime Minister. He later said that he wasn't happy about this as he was not convinced that she was guilty. There are big files at Kew on this case and I have been through them all and it is quite obvious that nobody individually was convinced of their guilt, but this case developed a momentum that nobody could stop, and then they had to go on with it, and then they had to win it.

They arrested the Masons and Winnie, and they took Mason's chemistry set from his house. The case was first heard at Derby. They were defended by their solicitor, Mr Clifford (and I hope a lawyer can explain this to me), but Mr Clifford didn't want them to mention the dogs at the first hearing, and I don't know why that was. He then stopped working for them, so he really dropped them in it.

Then the case was moved to London. This was said to be nicer for the defendants. It was no such thing. It was nicer for Frank Smith, who by then was prosecuting them. Also it moved them from Derby, where a jury would know them – Derby wasn't that big – and would know what they were like, and it moved them to an all-male jury in London who had never heard of them.
Frank Smith was Attorney-General and a great friend of Lloyd George. He had a distinct problem prosecuting this case. His main witness was Gordon (or Rickard). I have told you what he was like. Imagine him in the witness box; he'd be awful, even if they could have got him there. So Smith said he took full responsibility for not calling Gordon. It was far too dangerous for him and they had actually shipped him out of the country to South Africa and paid for him to go there so that he would be well out of the way, and in a later book Frank Smith said that Gordon was clearly right out of his depth in this case.

The second problem Smith had was the dogs. That was easy, there weren't any dogs, so they can't have been conspiring to kill dogs. That was just a lie, they weren't doing that. So that left him with very little to go on, so he prosecuted by demolishing these women's characters. The two daughters were teachers and he was saying, “These dreadful women, they've been in charge of children; they shouldn't be”, and he said to Alice in court, “Do you swear?” “Yes, sir, sometimes I do.”

I am sorry, occasionally I have sworn and I can tell you every surgeon in this country swears roundly and often and it doesn't make us all murderers. It was nothing to do with it, but he successfully demolished their characters.

They found it very difficult to get anybody to defend them and the only person they could get was little Mr Riza, who was Iranian. So he was foreign, he was a different colour, he was bankrupt and he had a pregnant wife, so he needed the money, and several of us who have been going through this case think that actually Booth, who was a barrister's clerk, had gone round all the barristers' chambers and said, “Don't touch this one”. That is only surmise on our part, but that is what we think. But this was the first trial in English history to rely on the weight of a secret Government agent who didn't even appear, and Riza didn't really manage to make the best of this and he did miss a lot of things in the court. I have read all 350 pages of the court transcript and sometimes I think I could have done better than he did, but in a court situation opposite Frank Smith probably not.

Bernard Spilsbury appeared. He has been branded recently as hubris on legs and it gives me little pleasure to give him any leeway, but I do think he didn't know what he was dealing with in this case. I don't think anybody told him about the dogs, and so on his cards, that have recently been bought by the Wellcome – please don't try and read them; they took me half an hour – all he says is what curare and strychnine do, but he does mention the book Wanderings in South America. It is a very good read. If any of you can get hold of it, it is well worth reading, and it does describe a South American Indian shooting an arrow straight up at a bird and it came back and hit the Indian and that was the end of the Indian. So Spilsbury knew
that it could kill a human. He had also done his homework, because the notes say: “Both C and D have a paralysing effect similar to that produced by curare by Mr Webster and Dr Spilsbury with rabbits”.

In a book on curare that was published between the two wars there is a description of the method of standardising solutions of curare by injecting them in very small doses into a rabbit until it dropped its head, but not enough to stop it breathing. The next day the rabbit would have picked its head up again and a second solution could be injected. So solutions could be compared against each other. This was very economical on rabbits at a time when labs couldn’t afford many of them.

The case went on for some time and an article in *History Today* does show a lot about the court case, but it is written from a very different point of view. I came at this case from an interest in curare. This author comes from “Attorney-Generals shouldn’t be prosecuting Government cases”. Of course, they were convicted, except for Hettie, against whom there was insufficient evidence to prove guilt. They kept trying to re-arrest her, but couldn’t find anything that would stick, and so Alice, Winnie and Alfred were sent to prison.

Three days after they were convicted the Amalgamated Society of Engineers published an open letter to the Home Secretary that included the following: “We demand that the police spies on whose evidence the Wheeldon family is being tried be put in the witness box, believing that, in the event of this being done, fresh evidence will be forthcoming which will put a different complexion on the case”

This was rebounding nicely against the Government.

Alice went on hunger strike in prison and after 10 months it was quite obvious that she was going to die and she was going to become a martyr. The Home Secretary had to let her out, so he recommended to Lloyd George that he agree to her being let out. “The PM has been informed of this and quite agrees”. This is on a scrap of paper in the files. The newspapers all said: “Our wonderful Prime Minister has agreed that this poor lady should be forgiven and let out”.

So what happened to them all? McManus and Hettie married, she died in childbirth, and he is buried in the Kremlin. William went to Russia and was shot in one of Stalin’s purges. The Masons went to Australia and had a successful life. Gordon (Rickard) came back from South Africa and said that he was a spy and he had worked for the Government, and nobody believed him and he got banged up again. Alice died of Spanish flu a year later and was buried in the grave of her sister Elizabeth. There were
sensational incidents at the graveside and it was described as a “climax of one of the world's most poignant tragedies, a judicial murder”.

So, in the political climate of the time the unproven word of an absent agent provocateur was more reliable than the testimony of socialist feminist opponents of war.

By the time I became an anaesthetist in the 1960s curare had become a standard drug in our armamentarium, and it came in boxes marked: “Warning: the dose for an adult should not ordinarily exceed 15 mg. Large doses may cause respiratory depression” (see Figure 3). Of course it does. I used 30 mg for an average adult and 45 mg for a big one, as standard, and then intubated and ventilated them, then reversing it at the end of surgery, and it was quite safe.

![Box of curare from the 1960s, showing the warning that it may cause respiratory depression](image)

Figure 3

Box of curare from the 1960s, showing the warning that it may cause respiratory depression

What this labelling does is advertise the fact that curare can be used as a murder weapon, which is what may have happened at Riverdell Hospital, in Oradell, New Jersey, where Mario Jascalevich was chief surgeon. He was generally regarded as a very gifted surgeon and they were very pleased to get him for the hospital, but he wasn't the sort of chap to go to the pub with. Other surgeons were Dr Harris and Dr Briski and there was a physician called Dr Lans, and there were associated anaesthesiologists that don't seem to take much part in this story.

In late 1965 and early 1966 unexpected deaths were occurring. The records for the hospital have gone; I can't tell you what proportion of patients this was, what proportion of deaths or what proportion of
operations; but the patients were often rather young, and they were mostly
Dr Harris's patients. The autopsies were mostly inconclusive.

One lady aged 26, who died the day after surgery, complained of being
unable to swallow shortly before she died.

The last patient was a repeat caesarean section, a young lady who had
small children at home and was a patient of Dr Harris. He went to the
postmortem thinking, “Please let it be a pulmonary embolism”, but it wasn't.
He was very upset and he drove home thinking about all the phone calls he
had had: “Dr Harris, your patient is not doing well. Dr Jascalevich is looking
after your patient.” He phoned Dr Lans. I know from somebody who knows
Dr Lans that he is an extremely nice man, very approachable. He was
independently unhappy. Jascalevich had told him over the weekend that
everybody should start talking to their malpractice lawyers. He also told him
that Harris had left a swab in a patient, which was untrue, and that he had
checked up on Dr Harris's mortality rates at another hospital. This would be
a reasonable thing for the chief surgeon to do if he had done it, but he
hadn't, it was all a pack of lies.

Dr Harris and Dr Lans met and reviewed these patients who had died. All
had an intravenous line; all were sudden and wholly unexpected. A large
number had taken place at about 8 a.m. I gather that is very significant.
Respiratory arrests stood out and Dr Jascalevich had always been about.

Dr Harris asked for a meeting with the Board of Directors and they met at
the home of one of them, and death by scoline was discussed because
Carl Coppolino, an anaesthetist in New Jersey, had just murdered his wife
with this. The administrators were really not very convinced by all this and
one of them actually said, “Bring me some evidence. I'm going bowling”.

Dr Harris was very upset by their reaction and he did a very silly thing,
understandable but stupid. He opened Dr Jascalevich's locker, and in it he
found two different drug companies' boxes of curare, some empty curare
ampoules, syringes and needles. He phoned Dr Lans who came and
looked, and they contacted the administrators. The next morning Dr Lans
watched Dr Jascalevich open his locker. The two sorts of boxes were quite
clearly in view and Jascalevich didn't show any signs of surprise at all, he
just got what he wanted out of his locker and locked it again.

So the administrators dashed into the office of Guy Calissi, Bergen County
Prosecutor, saying, “What are we going to do now?” The administrators
arranged a meeting between them themselves and Jascalevich at the
home of one of them, with a policeman in the cupboard sent by Guy
Calissi.
I can see several of you laughing. I mean, this is silly, isn't it, it couldn't have happened. I asked my New Jersey niece where I could get decent photographs from newspapers of the time, which, as you can see, I haven't really managed, and she said, “That is the case with the policeman in the cupboard, isn't it?” I said, “Amy, how do you know that? You are far too young to know that.” She said, “It was my grandfather's house and my mother was there”, and I have spoken to Carol, her mother, since and she said “Oh, yes, there was a policeman in the cupboard and I was told not to worry and I went upstairs out of the way while the meeting was taking place”. So it did happen.

Jascalevich said that he had curare in his locker because he was operating on dogs at Seton Hall and he needed to partially paralyse them. He needed to keep the empty ampoules because some of the curare hadn't worked and he had had to complain about it – he hadn't – and he had bought the curare from Lily, and so he left that meeting. He went back to Riverdell, took all the curare and syringes out of his locker, took them to Seton Hall, did a dog experiment, contaminated everything with dog hairs and dog blood and took them all back to the hospital.

He was asked to do a deposition, which was actually 204 pages long, and there were lots of inconsistencies in it. He did say though that he had bought the Lily curare but not that from Burroughs Wellcome.

Guy Calissi asked if Burroughs Wellcome curare was in the hospital and was told it wasn't, but then the pharmacist went and looked and it was found in theatre, pharmacy and fridge; it had been ordered by the previous pharmacist; and they checked the serial numbers on the boxes and ampoules and the serial numbers on the Burroughs Wellcome curare that they found in theatre, and that in Jascalevich's locker were the same, so either Jascalevich had stolen it or it had been planted there, and nobody could produce evidence either way. Calissi asked if curare could be found in the bodies and was told it was not possible. There was nothing he could do, and the investigation was wound down.

In June 1975 the editor of *The New York Times* got an anonymous letter, which he handed to Myron Farber, one of his investigative reporters. He later wrote: “I scanned the letter on the way back to my desk, where, filling my pipe, I read it again. A hospital was cited, but not identified. Doctors were referred to, but not by name … . But the charge animating the letter was clear and chilling: the chief surgeon of a hospital had, a decade earlier, murdered thirty to forty patients. Not simple malpractice, according to the letter; not some errors in judgment, not some unfortunate slips of the knife. But murder … . Right away, I was curious to know the name of the hospital.
The letter offered no clue, but it indicated that drugs or chemicals might have been involved in the deaths. I picked up the phone ...."

Farber went to Joe Woodcock, who was now Bergen County Prosecutor. He had just got out the Jascalevich file because there had been another case at Ann Arbor with people misusing pancuronium, which is sort of “son of curare”, and several people had been murdered using it, and so Farber managed to get his hands on the file – he probably shouldn't have done, but he did – and so he got all the names, and he went round everybody, nursing staff, patients, lab staff, went to Seton Hall; he did everything he could; and in January 1976 he wrote an article that was so long that it went over three days of *The New York Times*.

Joe Woodcock had to re-open the inquiry. He asked Michael Baden, who I gather is a member of this Society, to investigate the deaths, and he thought that they were suspicious but that there was not enough evidence to command a disinterment, but they asked the relatives' permission and five families agreed to it. Interestingly, there were organs missing from all who had had autopsies. Baden's toxicologists found curare in all the bodies.

Jascalevich was arraigned on a charge of murdering these patients and in 1978 the trial started, under Judge William Arnold. The Prosecutor was Sybil Moses, who was a young lawyer. She has just retired, having had a very distinguished career, but it was her first murder that had come to court. The Judge apparently fell asleep several times and she tried to get him changed, but didn't manage it.

The defence lawyer was Raymond Brown. If anybody in this audience knows anything about Raymond Brown I would be delighted to hear about it. He could wear people down with objections, he was very quick-witted, and he wrote: “I can go out there and whip the hell out of every white lawyer they put against me. When I die, I hope they put on my tombstone that I was angry, nasty and competent.” He'd throw witnesses off balance, rubbish hospital notes and made, frankly, sexist remarks about Sybil Moses. He made Jascalevich behave impeccably, shaking hands with everybody, thanking people for their testimony and kissing the ladies.

There were two medical examiners and two anaesthesiologists. Prosecution Dr Francis Foldes gave evidence for the prosecution. I did my research year in Montreal on muscle relaxants and I knew this man's name because he had written a lot about curare. He said that these deaths were due to curare, so Brown called him a quack. Dr Valentino Mazzia, for the defence, said these deaths were from natural causes, and eventually
became a forensic anaesthesiologist, which is not a career path I had considered.

There was a football team of toxicologists, but they had a problem. Nobody knew what happens to curare in a dead body. Nobody knew what happens to flesh that was embalmed and then interred for a decade; and assuming that curare had been administered, how would you find it after 10 years? What would give false-positives?

So they used radioimmunoassay, high pressure liquid chromatography, thin-layer chromatography, ultraviolet spectrophotometry and mass spectrometry. But they were left with a problem. Everybody found curare in the little girl's liver. Now, she was only four, she was little, and she will have had an adult dose, so it is not surprising that there was a lot of curare in her, and it does go to the liver, so it's not surprising they found it there.

Dr. Rieders, for the defence, mixed curare and embalming fluid and showed that embalming fluid denatures curare. So he said it had been planted there. Baden said it couldn't have been.

My argument on this (and this is only my take) is that that little girl had had a postmortem. Her liver would have been disconnected from her circulatory system before she was embalmed, so embalming fluid would not have got into the liver, therefore the curare could have stayed there. But my husband, who is terribly logical, said: “Well, if the liver had been there for ten years and was still recognisable, why was this? It must have been embalmed”, and I couldn't answer this, so I tried to get hold of Michael Baden, but he doesn't seem to be answering people like me, so I got hold of a coronial pathologist, who said, over a period of two pages, the answer was “I don't know”. (Laughter.) So we are no further forward on that.

Brown alleged that it had been put there mischievously by one of the prosecution team. He made allegations about corrupt practice, and so he did what he was so good at: he threw the entire court, he changed tack, and he arrived one morning and said, “Right, I want Myron Farber here with all his notes and everybody he has spoken to; I want all that evidence.” Farber was a journalist. He would have lost every job he might have got thereafter if he'd agreed, so he said “No”. So the Judge said, “Yes, you will, you will bring all your stuff”, and Farber said “No”, so Farber was put in jail, and if you “Google” this case you get more about this trial within a trial than you do about the poisonings, or not poisonings, according to your point of view.

By this time 37 weeks had passed and everybody was getting very fed up and the trial was getting nowhere, and The Miami Herald actually described
it as a *debating society gone berserk*, and the jury threatened to walk out, so the Judge sent them out to consider their verdict, and 37 minutes later they came back – “Not guilty”.

Jascalevich was free to practise, except that the New Jersey Medical Licensing Board had him up for seven other counts of malpractice. So he skipped the country, and he didn't pay Brown's bill! (Laughter.) He died shortly afterwards of a cerebral haemorrhage. But it was a not guilty verdict, so this doesn't appear in any accounts of murder by health-care professionals, and I only happened on this by feeding the word *curare* into *The Times* website one day when I had nothing better to do. So hence the question mark on my title slide.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

**The President:** Well, thank you very much indeed for a fascinating talk. I am going to resurrect an old custom of the Society and that is to invite a member of the audience, namely Dr Robin Moffat, to give a vote of thanks.

**Dr Moffat:** I am not quite sure why I have been invited to propose this vote of thanks, but the President tells me I suggested that Ann should speak to us tonight, and she accepted. The last time I heard her speak was at another medical society founded in 1832, so it is older than this Society, and she brought the house down; she was very, very good indeed. My own experience of *curare* goes back to 1947 when I was a Medical Rating at the Royal Naval Hospital in Haslar and I worked for Surgeon Commander Ross, who was an anaesthetist, and a very good one too. He introduced *curare* in 1947 in that naval hospital. But he was a very cautious man and he said to me, “You have drawn up the neostigmine and the atropine, Robin, haven't you?” and I said, “Yes, sir, it's all there waiting.”

“Well, we have got to be careful, you know, because they can die with *curare*”, and I said: “Well, I don't think they will in your hands.” So all these patients survived. The surgeons, particularly the abdominal surgeons, were delighted, because no more retractors and muscles relaxed so they could do what they wanted to do, but of course Ross was very careful to ensure that they were properly monitored. That is my story of *curare*. No murders at the Royal Naval Hospital!!

**Dr Ferguson:** Good.

**Dr Moffat:** It is my pleasant duty to propose a vote of thanks to Ann Ferguson for an excellent address. (Applause.)
The President: And I have a small presentation to make to you, as a token of our thanks for this evening. Thank you very much.

Dr Ferguson: Oh, that is very kind. Thank you very much.

Footnotes

1. The Medico-Legal Society. A meeting of the Society was held at the Royal Society of Medicine, 1 Wimpole Street, London W1, on Thursday, 10 February 2011. The President, Miss Elizabeth Pygott, was in the Chair.

References

Books
4. Waterton C. Wanderings in South America. 1825 1st edn, with many subsequent editions

Newspapers and magazines
2. Daily Sketch. Photos on front pages of March 1, 2, 6 and 7. 1917

Files at the National Records Office at Kew

CRIM 1/66
DPP1/50
HO144/13338
This Article

Citations:

1. Med Leg J June 2011 vol. 79 no. 2 49-57
2. doi: 10.1258/mlj.2011.011010