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Medical Anniversary

EDWARD JENNER, 14 MAY 1796

On this date Edward Jenner (1749–1823) became famous, for it was on this day he extracted the contents of a pustule from the hand of a milkmaid Sarah Nemes, affected with cowpox, and injected it into the arm of an eight-year-old boy, John James Phipps. Then on July 1, he injected the same child with smallpox, for the incubation period of smallpox is 14 days. The experiment was a success and he was able to write his treatise “An inquiry into the causes and effects of the Variolae Vaccinae. . . Known by the name of cowpox”. His old teacher John Hunter had always advised him with the words “Why speculate . . . try the experiment”.

Edward Jenner was born on 17 May 1749 at Berkeley, Gloucestershire, son of a clergyman. He gained worldwide recognition and honours when vaccination was accepted as being safe and effective.

— DG James

Photo courtesy of Gloucester Cathedral