



Historic Heroes



Edward Jenner was born in 1749. As a young boy, Edward enjoyed science and nature, and spent hours on the banks of the River Severn looking for fossils. In 1770, at the age of twenty one, he began training as a doctor in London. Two years later Edward began to practise as a doctor in his home town of Berkeley, Gloucestershire.



During this time, people were terrified of a horrible disease called smallpox. People who got this disease got severe scarring from lesions and sometimes even died. As a doctor, Edward Jenner listened to what the country people said about smallpox. They believed that someone who caught a different mild infection called cowpox from their cows would not catch the much more serious smallpox.



Jenner carried out an experiment to see if the people were right. In 1796 a milk maid called Sarah Nelmes came to Jenner complaining of a cowpox rash on her hand that she caught from Blossom the cow. Jenner took some of the pus from the cowpox rash on Sarah's hand. He scratched some of the pus into the hand of an 8 year old boy called James Phipps, the son of his gardener. James fell ill with cowpox but soon recovered.



Jenner then took some pus from someone with the dangerous disease, smallpox, and scratched this into James' arm. James developed a scab but did not develop smallpox, Jenner's theory was right. Jenner's discovery came to be known as vaccination from the Latin word for a cow: vacca. Jenner went on to vaccinate all the local children with the cowpox to stop them from getting the more dangerous smallpox disease.

