Captain William Hobson, our first governor, had a tumultuous year before his untimely death in 1842. Marred by opposition, limited funding, understaffing and personal bad health, he battled through duties with vigour and dedication. What ultimately took his life days before his 50th birthday is still shrouded by speculations and conspiracy. Was it stroke, yellow fever or even accidental overdose? This book not only looks at the potential cause of Captain Hobson’s death but also looks into the illnesses and disabilities that he suffered from throughout his career, from the early years when he was serving in the navy fighting pirates in the Caribbean to the last few days of his life serving as New Zealand’s first governor.

Trubuhovich attempts to decipher and investigate the cause of his death by sieving through available evidence, documentation and publications. By summarising evidence from the Royal Navy record, newspaper articles, first person account, personal diary and correspondence, we get an insight into the signs and symptoms Captain Hobson was suffering from; differentiate between myth and truth.

This is not an easy read. Unlike other free-flowing stories telling bibliographies or non-fictional books, this book is punctuated by evidence, notes and indexes, making reading more like reading one’s private notes. One needs some degree of understanding of New Zealand’s history and its leading historic characters to follow the series of events without getting lost.

However, if history and medical knowledge is your forte, this book makes for an interesting read, particularly about one of the more important characters who shaped and influenced New Zealand’s history.
Competing interests: Nil.

Author information:
Yee Chen Lau, General Surgery, Christchurch Hospital, Christchurch.

Corresponding author:
Dr Yee Chen Lau, General Surgery, Christchurch Hospital, Riccarton Avenue, Christchurch. ychenlau@gmail.com

URL: