

ADULATION or ADULTERATION?

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‘Adulation or Adulteration? Representing Chemical Dyes in the Victorian Media’ is the latest paper written by **Dr. Carolyn Cobbold #644** on the web family tree, who is a Research Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge. Her research looks at the intersection of science and food production and consumption at the turn of the 19/20th centuries.

This essay describes how the Victorian media reported on the transformation of coal tar into a synthetic palette of colours in the form of aniline and azo dyes. These dyes were the first of many new chemical substances including drugs, perfumes, and flavourings, which chemists began to synthesise and produce on an industrial scale from a waste product of the coal gas industry. Although intended for use in the textile industry, the new dyes soon began to be added to food, becoming one of the first examples of laboratory–created, industrially manufactured chemicals to permeate our daily life in unexpected ways. The essay describes how the initial media portrayal of the dyes as wonders of science became more nuanced as the risks as well as the benefits of the new dyes being used in textiles, and then subsequently in food, became better understood. By examining the media representation of new chemical substances, from their creation in the laboratory to their widespread use in consumer products, sometimes in ways not intended by their creators, my research provides an intriguing case study to add to the growing historiography of how science is represented in the press.



Dr Carolyn Cobbold

<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/mc8vkWPIbbQMqKbcef3x/full?target=10.1080/00026980.2019.1574385>