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**THE APOTHECARY AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE
PRACTICE OF MIDWIFERY**

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Traditionally midwifery was regarded as women's work. There is some doubt when the licensing of midwives by bishops began but it was certainly in operation in the early days of the Reformation. The process seems to have been completely ineffective, conferring no exclusive legal rights (nor were restraints placed on unlicensed practice), but licensing may have been seen by some as a recommendation of the woman's competence, discretion and reliability. For long it was regarded as unnatural for men to undertake midwifery and those who did so, with a few exceptions, were firmly placed on the lowest rung of the medical ladder. There was much ill-feeling on both sides, the women bitterly resenting their male competitors and the men, not without some justification, proclaiming that the women were ignorant and a menace to the lives of both mother and child.¹ In an attempt to bring about reform, men such as the Chamberlens of the seventeenth century and **Frank Nicholls** of the next, and women such as Mrs Cellier in the 1690s, advocated instruction and examinations for midwives and even a College of Midwifery. Every obstacle was put in the way of such proposals.

But change was to come. Not only were men-midwives to become an accepted part of the medical scene, but some, such as William Hunter, reached the highest pinnacles of professional life in London. Ehrenheit quotes Sir William Sinclair as believing that the advances in British obstetrics were due to the fact that here male doctors practised obstetrics and midwives played only a secondary rôle, whereas in continental Europe the reverse tended to be true, with female midwives taking the leading role.² He identifies as 'advances' the theoretical and practical achievements of the English Contagionists before 1850, men such as Charles White of Manchester (1773), Thomas Denman (1788) and others. This is a view largely endorsed by Parsons.³ It is pertinent to look more closely at those to whom we are indebted for these developments and advances.

Perhaps the first name that springs to mind is that of William Smellie (1697-1763) who practised as a surgeon and apothecary in Lanark and London but did not obtain his M.D. of Glasgow University until he was 47. His fame rests on two great works, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* (1752) and *A set of Anatomical Tables* (1754).

The next to claim our attention is surely Thomas Denman (1733-1815). The son and brother of an apothecary in Bakewell, Derbyshire, where he received his early training, he became a naval surgeon for nine years. He soon decided to specialise in midwifery and succeeded in establishing himself amongst the first rank in London although only after a hard struggle.⁴ In 1769 he was appointed physician man-midwife to the Middlesex Hospital, having received an M.D. of Aberdeen five years earlier. The following year he and William Osborn (1736-1808) founded a school of midwifery. Osborn too had received his first instruction from a country surgeon and apothecary, John Fordyce of Uppingham, and did not obtain his M.D. (St. Andrew's) until he was 41. Denman wrote in 1782 the first version of his famous *An Introduction to the Practice of Midwifery* which was to be much enlarged and magnificently illustrated in later editions. It is interesting to note in the preface that Denman's attention had been drawn by Thomas Kirkland (1722-98) (a surgeon and apothecary in Ashby-de-la-Zouch) to a manuscript work of Percival Willughby (1596-1685), a well-known and respected member of the London Company of Barber Surgeons and man-midwife who had practised in Derby and London.⁵

Also demanding our attention is Charles White, (1728-1813), the author in 1773 of an important work, *Treatise on the Management of Pregnancy and Lying-in Women*, in which he insisted on the importance of hygiene, exercise, diet and fresh air. Like so many others, Charles White received his first medical instruction from his father, Thomas White (1695-1776), surgeon and apothecary in Manchester; he in his turn had been trained by Edward Baker, Citizen and apothecary of London.⁶

Amongst the lesser figures should be mentioned David Orme (1727-1812), member of a family of Leicestershire apothecaries but who became an M.D. of Edinburgh at the early age of 22. Like David Osborn he was a good teacher. One of his pupils was Matthew Flinders (father of the explorer), a surgeon, apothecary and man-midwife in Donington, Lincolnshire,

who has left us an account of his midwifery practice in which he relates his satisfaction at his increasing skill in using obstetric forceps. One who became a fashionable obstetrician in London was Maxwell Garthshore (1732-1812) who bought John Fordyce's practice in Uppingham. In 1764 he and Richard Pulteney travelled up to Edinburgh together in order to obtain their M.D.s, leaving their practices to the tender mercy of Garthshore's apprentice John Aikin (1747-1822). After Garthshore forsook Rutland for the capital, John Aikin finished his time in Manchester with Charles White. Aikin's father, the Nonconformist minister and a lecturer at Warrington Academy, in a letter to Pulteney in which he discusses his son's future career, makes a revealing remark: '... we have therefore determined on physic, and as it grows pretty common to unite the two professions of apothecary and surgeon I could wish my son were place where he has opportunities of learning both these branches, though I would have the principal attention given to surgery and midwifery'.⁷

No paper on midwifery would be complete without mention of the Huguenot family of the Chamberlens. The first to arrive in this country was William who confusingly called two of his sons Peter, the elder being born in France, and the younger in England in 1572. He taught both of them medicine, both practised midwifery and became members of the London Barber Surgeons' Company; both fell foul of the London College of Physicians, but having influential connections this caused them little concern. The younger Peter married Sarah daughter of William Delaune, M.D. (Rheims) and so became brother-in-law to Gideon Delaune, the moving spirit behind the founding of the Apothecaries' Society in 1617. Their first child, Peter III, was baptised on 8 May 1601.

This third Peter was a remarkable personality; an M.D. of Padua (still the leading medical school of Europe) by the time he was 18, he showed great inventive powers so that it is generally believed that it was he who devised the famous Chamberlen obstetric forceps. It is often stated that Peter III was mentally unstable and that from about 1648 he was insane, but as Clark notes, 'he marvellously preserved his prosperity and influence until he died in 1683 aged 82'.⁸ Certainly his will, made in 1681, is perfectly lucid and sensible even if he did term himself, 'His Majesties First and Eldest Phisitian in Ordinary to his Royall Person'.⁹ In 1634 he petitioned the King to allow midwives a corporation, but went further than his father by requesting that he should be made governor of the new body. The bishops and the

physicians were completely opposed to the proposition and it is at this point that we first hear of the Chamberlen method of using "iron instruments" for delivery.

The Chamberlens have been castigated for keeping the use of their forceps a lucrative family secret. To three of his sons, Hugh, Paul and John (children of his first wife Jane, daughter of Sir Huy Myddleton of New River fame), all of whom practised midwifery, Peter III undoubtedly revealed the secret of the forceps. It is probably that Hugh told his own son Hugh, but as he was a physician he is unlikely to have been interested. Nevertheless the secret was spreading further than the immediate family. The older Hugh had a sister Elizabeth who married a Colonel William Walker of Ireland. Their third son, Chamberlen Walker, who died in Dublin in 1732, is described on his memorial as a 'famous Man-Midwife'. The fifth son, Myddleton Walker, was told in 1728 by the London College of Physicians to present himself for examination, to which Walker replied that, 'as man midwifery was his profession, he thought himself exempt from being incorporated into the body of physicians'.¹⁰ The College thought otherwise: Walker made smoothing noises but nevertheless does not seem to have appeared.

Furthermore, it seems very likely that the relatives of Jane Myddleton, Peter III's wife, also became party to the secret. Jane's brother Henry, fifth son of Sir Hugh, Keeper of the library at Whitehall and the king's garden as well as distiller of 'sweete herbes and water', married late in life and was dead by the time his son, also Henry, was apprenticed in 1677 to Robert Andrews a surgeon in the Barber Surgeons' Company.¹¹ This Henry became a surgeon of some note as he attended Robert Harley, though this may have been merely a case of nepotism as his cousin Sarah was Harley's second wife. He married Anne Starkey in 1687 and had two sons by her, Starkey and Thomas, both of whom, like their father, became members of the Barber Surgeons' Company.¹² There is no doubt that Starkey practised as a man-midwife because in 1724 he issued a token advertising this fact and two of his papers on the subject were published in the *Philosophical Transactions*. Unlike the Chamberlens, he did not make a financial success of his profession. His unwitnessed will, written in 1745 ten years before his death, begins with the unhappy statement that he was very conscious that he had nothing to leave his wife and children except his blessing, but then adds he wished his wife to give their son Henry his 'Beauroe', 'all my Books in physick and surgery', and,

significantly, 'instruments of every kind belonging to Midwifery as well as Surgery'.¹³

The obstetric forceps have had a chequered history. Some have proclaimed them to be an invaluable instrument, saving both lives and suffering, others believe them to be dangerous and unnecessary. However once the very idea of assisting a child into the world without its inevitable death (as in a craniotomy) was bruited abroad, many applied their minds to the problem with varying degrees of success. William Giffard, a surgeon in the east of London, wrote in his book (produced posthumously in 1734) that he had been using forceps since 1726. More important, though, was the work and book of Edmund Chapman published a year earlier, as his forceps are of superior design. They appear to be modelled on those of the Chamberlens, and in fact Chapman does not claim to being their originator.

Little is known about Edmund Chapman except that he was a provincial surgeon practising in his early days in Halstead, Essex, and that he was probably the son born to Edmund and Ann Chapman of Lamarsh near Sudbury in 1684. From his '*A treatise on the Improvement of Midwifery*' we learn that he had been in practice since at least 1708 and that he had moved to London before October 1732, when he attended a case near Newgate Street. In the second edition he relates that on Christmas Day 1734 he was called to a near relative who was just sixteen and was having her first child; almost certainly the patient was his daughter Sarah who was baptised on 9 November 1718 in Halstead.¹⁴ Both mother and child were doing well. Since the publication of the first edition, he wrote, he had instructed 'Dr. W. Weltzen, Mr. Smithes of Reading and Mr. Philip Hast junior of Coggeshall, Essex'. It is also probable that he informed his two apprentices James Skynner and Robert Young, bound to him in 1711 and 1724 respectively.¹⁵ In London he set up as a teacher and the new techniques soon found a ready audience.

A man who has not received his full due is Benjamin Pugh. He was the inventor of an excellent pair of obstetric forceps which bear a close resemblance to those of William Smellie. Benjamin, although baptised at St. Mary's, Shrewsbury, in October 1715, hailed from Bishop's Castle, the son of Maurice and Grace Pugh. The family had been in that border town since at least the early days of the Restoration, whilst his mother's people, the Wollastons, had been of importance there for even more generations.¹⁶ We do not know

with whom Benjamin trained but it is likely to have been either Richard Wollaston, an apothecary in Bishop's Castle and a relation of his mother's, or perhaps his own elder brother, John Pugh, who had been apprenticed to another apothecary in the town. After Shropshire he went to Chelmsford. We do not know the exact date that he arrived there, or whether he went after a short stay in London, but we do know that on 23rd January 1739 his marriage contract was drawn up in Chelmsford. His intended bride was Amy Evans, widow, the daughter of Sherman Wall, apothecary in Chelmsford; other signatories to the contract were Amy's two brothers, Sherman junior (an apothecary in Fetter Lane, London) and Anthony (a vintner in the capital). The bridegroom was by no means impecunious for he held in reversion after the deaths of his Uncle Robert Wollaston and Aunt Hannah Abley, a capital message in Spoad, Shropshire, and a considerable amount of land in the same area which had been bought by his grandfather, Walter Wollaston. In return Amy's father settled upon them a house in Chelmsford known as the Mansion House which they virtually rebuilt and where they much enlarged the garden before it was sold in 1773, the probable date when Pugh retired.¹⁷ Such cumulative evidence makes it clear that some apothecaries had excellent social connections and an enviable position in society in both town and country.

Pugh's book *A Treatise of Midwifery* appeared in 1754. He had hoped to publish it by subscription four years earlier, but, as he said, 'it did not fill'. Undeterred, he eventually went ahead with the publication, '... because every young surgeon now intends practising midwifery'. The book was illustrated and showed his forceps with the all-important pelvic curve; the blades were fenestrated with round wooden handles instead of being curved or hooked and were joined by a slotted arrangement without screw or pin. Pugh claimed, 'The curved forceps I invented upwards of fourteen years ago (and were) made me by a man of Mr. Archers, Cutler, now living in Chelmsford'. This would give a date of 1740 or even 1736 for the invention, which thus ante-dates the very similar ones of Smellie by some ten years. Pugh made no attempt to exploit his invention and continued to practise at Chelmsford. About 1760 he was joined by his nephew Maurice Pugh, son of his clergyman brother Walter.¹⁸ A few years after the formation of the partnership, Benjamin managed to obtain an M.D. but it is not known from which university.¹⁹

Benjamin retired to nearby Much Baddow for a few years and then in July 1781 he and his

wife left England in the company of a Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston. Mr. Wollaston was a patient of Sir George Baker whom he put into the care of Pugh, instructing him to take the invalid on a tour of France and Italy. Three years later (in 1784) Pugh wrote a pamphlet with his observations on Naples, Rome, Nice, Avignon, etc. He was not won over to their health-giving properties; quite the reverse in fact, saying that Abergavenny would be better for tuberculous people. He thought poorly of the French apothecaries: '... for example Monsieur F. of Nice was a notorious apothecary whose drugs were bad and his advice worse and had very high fees. Their sole panaceas were bleeding, blisters and bouillons'.²⁰ The following year he published another pamphlet, this time on the waters of Balaruc near Montpellier which had proved greatly beneficial to Mr. Wollaston.

Benjamin lived to be over eighty and became a man of wealth. His last years were spent at South Stoke near Bath at Milford Castle which in his will (proved in February 1799) he enjoined his trustees to sell for not less than £10,000. He also had a not inconsiderable amount of property in Essex. It is interesting to note that amongst his beneficiaries is a Mrs Sarah Archer of Howard Street in the Strand, who was possibly related to the cutler who had made his first forceps.

Long before the last years of the eighteenth century, the presence of men-midwives had been accepted. As early as 1696, the apothecary John Houghton placed in his newspaper (no. 215) the following advertisement: 'Mr. David Rose, the Chirurgeon and Man-Midwife, lives at the first Brick-house on the Right Hand in Gun-yard in Houndsditch near Aldgate, London. I have known him I believe this twenty years'. Examination of the Overseers of the Poor accounts for townships such as Eaton Socon, Bedfordshire, or Enfield, Middlesex, show that from the beginning of the eighteenth century it was not uncommon for men-midwives to be employed in difficult deliveries. Frank Nicholls believed that in 1752 there were several hundreds practising in London alone. All this is further corroborated by the Inland Revenue Apprenticeship Records in which the masters refer to themselves as surgeon, apothecary and man-midwife (as did men such as William Daw of Marylebone or Andrew Raynes and William Burton of Sheffield), or else Surgeon and man-midwife (as did Trantham Thomas of Kingston-on-Thames and Thomas Champney of York and London). When Josiah

Wedgewood set up his mini-health service at Etruria, it is not surprising that he added a man-midwife, John Crewe, to his pay-roll.

By the time that all this had come about, as the Reverend John Aikin had so rightly observed when discussing his son's future career, the man who was an apothecary was also, to lesser or greater degree, a surgeon, whilst the surgeon dispensed his own prescriptions and had a shop as well. In fact there was little to distinguish the two. They themselves were well aware of this, because on one occasion a man would describe himself as an apothecary and on another as a surgeon, although there had been no change in his type of practice. These men were the general practitioners of the eighteenth century, a description which is all the more apt when we recollect that most of them added the practice of midwifery to their skills. Although neither of the London Royal Colleges wished to associate themselves with midwifery, the Society of Apothecaries was wise enough to recognise its importance and in 1827 added the Principles and Practice of Midwifery to their examination for the Licentiatehip.

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Notes and References

1. See, for example, H. Bracken, *The Midwife's Companion*.... (1737): 'Dreadful stories are reported on good authorities of mutilation and death caused by ignorant midwives'. (Quoted by T.R. Forbes, 'The Regulation of English Midwives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Medical History*, 15 (1971), p. 354).
2. O.P. Ehrenheit, 'Oliver Wendell Holmes and Ignaz Semmelweis viewed one and a quarter centuries later', *Orvostörténeti Közlemények (Communicationes de Historia artis medicinae)*, 23 (1977), pp. 9-26.
3. G.P. Parsons, 'The British medical profession and contagion theory: puerperal fever as a case study, 1830-1860', *Medical History*, 22 (1978), pp. 138-50.
4. J. Bumby, 'Thomas Denman: One of Bakewell's Greatest Sons', *Pharmaceutical Historian*, 13 (1983), p. 11.

5. Percival Willughby was born at Wollaton Hall, Nottinghamshire, the sixth son of Sir Percival. After becoming a B.A. of Magdalen College, Oxford, he was apprenticed to James Van Otten for seven years. His *Observations in Midwifery* contains 150 case histories covering the years 1640-70; it was however not printed until 1863.
6. P.R.O., Inland Revenue Apprenticeship Records, I.R./1/1. Nov. 1712. Thomas was the son of Thomas White of Manchester, gentleman.
7. Linnean Society, Pulteney Letters, John Aikin snr. to R. Pulteney, 19 May 1761; his underlining.
8. G. Clark, *A History of the Royal College of Physicians of London* (London, 1964), Vol. 1, p. 282.
9. P.R.O., P.C.C., Prob. 11, 375-2.
10. Clark, *op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 502.
11. W.H. Myddelton, *Myddletons of Gwaynyog* (1910), p. 135.
12. Guildhall Lib., *Barber Surgeons' Company records*, bindings, MS 5266/1, f.61; MS 5266/2, f.39; admissions, MS 5265/4, f. 51r.
13. Starkey Middleton married Dinah Swan (in January 1720 at the Mercers' Hall Chapel, Cheapside) who was the mother of his children. After Dinah's death he married Sarah Roberts in 1741; in his will (PCC, Prob. 11, 817-197) he begged her look on his daughter Ann, "...as her own child and prove a friend to her" as she had no living female relatives.
14. Edmund Chapman married Katherine Jordan at Great Yeldham in 1709. Two of their children, Sarah and John, were baptised in Halstead in 1718 and 1722 respectively.
15. *Apprenticeships*, *op.cit.* note 6, I.R./1/41; I.R./1/10. It is probable that Robert Young (died 1772) took over Chapman's practice in Halstead.
16. A Walter Wollaston was churchwarden of St. John the Baptist in 1614, as was another of the same name in 1682; Morris Pugh senior held the same position in 1664, as did Maurice Pugh (probably Benjamin's father) in 1699.

17. Essex R.O., marriage contract, D/DU 755/45. Benjamin also received £100 from his grandfather Walter Wollaston.
18. Maurice Pugh was later in partnership with another nephew of Benjamin Pugh, William Bird, MRCS.
19. Benjamin Pugh was a subscriber to a number of books and the M.D. first appears for a book published in 1769.
20. B. Pugh, *Observations on the Climates of Naples, Rome, Nice, etc.* (1784).

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