

ART. XVI. – *A Cumbrian Medical Student at Edinburgh University in 1806–7.*

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THOUGH histories of Scottish universities and of medicine have established how they and their medical schools evolved,¹ specialist librarians state that there is a distinct shortage of detailed information on matters like the living and study conditions experienced by students, even in the early nineteenth century, and on the medical training they received.² As considerable benefits are to be gained from small scale studies which concentrate on the character and activities of individuals and which place them into their detailed social environment,³ this article will study several letters written by an aspiring surgeon to his relations in Cumbria when he attended Edinburgh University in 1806–7. At that time no compulsory qualification was required to practice as a surgeon in England, though a seven year apprenticeship to a surgeon was normal. However in 1806, in Scotland the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh stipulated that candidates for their diploma must have served an apprenticeship to a surgeon for three or more years and have attended lectures on anatomy, surgery, chemistry and the practice of medicine in a university, or given by a teacher who was a member of one of the Colleges of Surgeons at London, Edinburgh or Dublin. These regulations were intended to improve surgeons' training which was so inferior to that of physicians and Doctors of Medicine that surgeons were usually limited to relatively menial tasks and the crude medical practices of war.⁴ An innovation at Edinburgh made midwifery lectures compulsory for *all* medical students during the professorial tenure of James Hamilton who succeeded his father (Alexander) as Professor of Midwifery in 1800.⁵

The letters used in this study are among the papers of the Browne family who owned Townend, Troutbeck, for over four centuries and who were influential yeoman farmers, often with legal or estate management skills. The letters are kept at the Cumbria Record Office, Kendal. Seven were written by Benjamin Browne to his mother, one was a reply from her and another was written to a sister.⁶ Benjamin was born on 15 April 1787,⁷ the second son of George Browne (1741–1804), who had qualified as a lawyer in London in 1764⁸ before returning to Townend to farm more than 250 acres of enclosed land and a large area of open grazing on the fells. His legal work spread beyond neighbouring valleys to a considerable part of Westmorland. On 6 July 1775 he married Elizabeth Benson of High Green, Troutbeck, who bore him eight children: Elizabeth, George, Ann, Eleanor, Benjamin, Dorothy, Thomas and Susan.⁹

George Browne made a will on 30 March 1796,¹⁰ leaving sons Benjamin and Thomas £200 each and his four eldest girls £150 each at age 22 or at his wife's marriage or death. Provision was made for Townend to pass to his wife and then to George, Benjamin and Thomas in turn if need arose. Thus, with slight prospects of inheriting the family farm, a little over a week after his father's death on 11 October 1804, Benjamin arranged an apprenticeship for himself with his mother's consent.¹¹ The indenture, dated 20 October 1804, bound the seventeen-year-old youth for three years to Dr William Simpson of Ambleside to learn the "Mystery, Occupation or Business of Surgeon and Apothecary".

In addition to agreeing to serve his master, keep his secrets, obey him and not leave his service or embezzle or waste his master's goods, Benjamin promised not to play cards or dice, frequent taverns or alehouses, or marry and, notably, not to commit fornication. In return, Simpson would "instruct him after the best manner", discipline him as required and allow sufficient food, drink and lodgings, but not clothes or washing of them. Under these quite normal conditions Benjamin no doubt set to work with a will but, before he had served two years, William Simpson died on 18 July 1806 and was buried at Ambleside on 21st, aged only 34 years. Thus Benjamin was released from his apprenticeship, and set out to further his education and career.

By the beginning of November 1806, he had reached Edinburgh and, on 15th, wrote to his mother from "Mrs Watters's, No.5 South College Street, Old Town, Edinburgh". First he outlined his journey and travel expenses:

After leaving Kendal which was about three o'clock afternoon, we took Post Chaise all the way to Carlisle which was [reached] about eleven o'clock at night.¹² We were three of us in the Chaise, Mr Towers, another Lady [sic] and me. The Lady left us soon next morning and took another coach, but we took the hea[v]y coach for Edinburgh and so set off[f] about nine next morning and as it was a wet morning we went in the inside there. Nothing particular hapened. We got dinner at Hauick and arived at Edinburgh next morning about two o'clock. It was so very late that they were all gone to bed at the Inn; one of them got up to open the door and we all trudged off[f] to bed without our supper. We spent the next day at the Inn before we went to our lodging.

"Expenses on the Road and stopping a day at the Inn"

	£	s	d
My one third share of Expences from Kendal to Carlisle	1	7	3
Breakfast at Carlisle	0	1	6
Waiter for taking our luggage to the coach	0	0	6
Coach fare from Carlisle to Edinburgh (inside)	1	17	0
Cakes	0	0	6
Dinner at Hauick	0	2	3
Waiter	0	0	3
Usquebaugh [whisky] at Falkirk [an error for Selkirk]	0	0	6
Six Stage Drivers 6d each	0	3	0
Guard	0	2	0
Bed at Edinburgh	0	1	6
Boots	0	0	3
Breakfast	0	1	6
Dinner and ale	0	3	0
A bottle of ale	0	1	0
Waiter	0	0	6
A Hackney coach for carrying our luggage to our lodging	0	0	9
	<hr/>		
	4	3	3

As Benjamin used the first person plural in the remainder of the letter, it seems that he and Towers¹³ had intended to travel together and share accommodation and expenses.

Their first concern was to find a Mr Moir, so they bought a town map “for one might as well ask a dog as ask any person for a place”, perhaps because they were more troubled by the local accent than by unfriendliness. Moir helped them find lodgings. He called the next morning to see if they were settled and introduced them to his bookbinder who, with a partner “kept a very fine large Shop of Books” with newspapers they could read and who offered to send a boy to show them round town. The next day Moir invited them to his “house about a Mile and a half into the country, a very pleasant place”,¹⁴ introduced them to “all his genteel friends”, gave them dinner and tea and took them home in a post chaise.

With the fresh eye of a newcomer, Benjamin went on to give a very useful account of his introduction to an unfamiliar way of life:

Our Rooms (that is a sitting Room and a bed Room) is a very genteel looking place, fourth door up stairs. The street that we live in is in general about 8 or 9 stories high and there is not a room but what is high as Mr Wilcock’s great dancing Room.¹⁵ We pay 12s. 6d. a week for them and they find us fire, Cooks us any thing we want and Cleans our shoes. We live well and cheap and is as happy as can be . . . We get tea about 9 oClock and for dinner . . . we get a piece of Beef and gets it roasted, has it warm the first day and so eats Cold after with a few warm potatoes. We dine about 4 afternoon and then has bread and Chese about 10 at night.

For drinking we have ale and Porter. The ale is Captial, far better than any . . . in England. It is sold . . . at 6d. a bottle and porter at 5d. a bottle. We get very good bread, but there butter is nasty stuff just like reasted [rancid] swine same . . . Mr Towers had brought a p[ot wit]h him and 2 Dried legs of Mutton. He has done very well for us. I eat of his butter so you must get a pot ready and . . . send it . . .

I find Mr Bramble’s account true about their emptying there close stools out of the windows at Night, but it is all cleaned away in the Morning. We are very ill of that way. We are forced to wait till Night and then when it is dark we go out into the street and obey the calls of nature in the Middle of the street.

I have seen Sally once since I came but as we were so well of[f] in respect to friends . . . I said nothing to Sally’s Master or Mistress, neither have I seen either of them we have been so throng [busy]. It has been their introductory lectures . . . [in which] all the lectures let every Person go that will for the first week, so that 12 or 14 hours of the day was intirely taken up that we could hardly ever get our dinner before 7 or 8 oClock at night.

There was a very unfortunate circumstance hapened last night; a young Man was murdered, a Clark to the Custom house at Lieth about a Mile from Edinburgh. He was going into the office and a man stabled him. He had with him £5000. There is 500 Guineas reward . . .

Benjamin Browne sent his next letter to his mother on 3 December 1806 and was by then well settled in Edinburgh which, he stated, “is just as quiet a place as either Troutbeck or Ambleside and the people are as civil and polite as ever I saw”. He went on to itemise “a somewhat cheaper way of living . . . Which is as cheap as one can With deacency”. Expenses were: for breakfast, milk 1½d., bread 1d.; for dinner, meat 4d., potatoes 1d., beer 1d; for supper, milk 1½d., bread 1d. Not a balanced diet! Thus, at 11d. a day, plus 6s. 3d. a week for lodgings, expences were only 12s. 8d. a week. Clothes of all sorts were much cheaper in Edinburgh, but he had bought only a pair of stockings. Further items could wait until he got home in four or five months time. He reported that:

The first week went very hard with my money, having to pay for Anatomy, Surgery, Midwifery, Desecting, Door Keepers &c. Mr Towers has spent £57 already, which is more than I had at first, but he attends more Lectures than I do. I think a hundred and fifty pounds will not do for his journey but he is bying a quantity of Books and instruments. I have got a set of desecting knives of a young man who was giving over desecting, for 5s. less than bying a set of new ones and I am going to get a set of pocket instruments; these are things I cannot do without.

After paying for all my lectures I have £9 left which will serve me four or five months yet . . . Mr Towers is very careful about living and steady in every thing which renders him a very pleasent companion, indeed if I had not had his company, I should have been entirely lost.

On the remaining paper, Benjamin added a piece especially for his brother Thomas, now aged fourteen, saying that he was “not much fatter but a good deal wiser; my work is not hard work, but very disagreeable”. He gave no reason for the last comment. He described Edinburgh as “a very large town with prodigious high buildings” and commented “the castle is a very grand place”, though he had not been inside. He continued:

I have been to Lieth and seen all the shipping which is a very grand sight. The new town of Edinburgh is a beautiful place so neatly built and so clean that it far exceeds the old town. There is a new College building in the old town which is suposed to be one of the largest in all England [sic]. There was a subscription of £20,000 to begin building it with but it is such a large one that the money is all gone before it is half built. There is at this time 800 or 1000 young surgeons attending it, between 2 and 3 hundred young attornies and perhaps 1000 young priests . . .

Noting that “The players has been in the town above a month”, he had seen them the previous evening and was impressed: “for [of] all the sights that ever I saw this is the grandest”. He would leave the details until he got home. He advised Thomas “Be sure now that you keep going to school and if you . . . get to be a good scholar you may some time or other get to see all these things”. Perhaps Thomas heeded this advice for he later entered the church and became vicar of Carlton in Cleveland. Benjamin concluded with “best respects” to his sisters and “to schoolmaster, G. Brownrigs, Robt. Docwray and old friends”.¹⁶

On 10 December, Benjamin wrote again, taking the opportunity to send it “by John Chambers, who leaves town tomorrow morning”. By chance Chambers had met “Sally, of Mr Ferriers” who told him where Benjamin lodged. The latter was surprised to find that neither the letter written a fortnight after his arrival in Edinburgh, nor the other three weeks later, had been received at home. He had written also to Mrs Simpson at Ambleside and to Ned Tindale and asked his mother to write soon. He outlined his work, admitting to:

. . . getting a little wiser, it realy is a good place for learning. I learnt more the first week than ever I knew before particular[ly] in midwifery. Dr [James] Hamilton is a very clever Man, he lectures on Midwifery. My time is pretty Middleingly employed. I get up as soon as it is light in the morning, gets breakfast, goes to the desecting Room and stops there till 11 oClock and then attends Dr [John] Barclay on Anatomy and surgery from 11 to 12; attends the infermary from 12 to 1; the opperation Room from 1 to 2; from 2 to 3 we have time to dine; from 3 to 4 I attend Dr Hamilton on Midwifery; from 4 to 7 I go to the College Libery and reads; and then from 7 to 9 I go to the Hospital and write down Notes of different cases that happen to sick and lame people

and then at 10 our people that we lodge with locks up the door and in general I write to near 12 oClock and sometimes later.

I have got intimate with a very nice young man that comes from Liverpool. His father was a surgeon and his Uncle is a physician and by that means he has got a great number of Books and he is so good as to lend me them which I am now writing down and reading others, that I find him a steady, usefull companion. I was one evening to drink tea with him and his Uncle who is come with him.

Benjamin wrote that he would need money, amongst other things for “buying dead bodies to desect” and “If I get a set of Midwifery Instruments and a suit of new close it will take near £15 more”. Although Tower’s butter might last until after Christmas, Benjamin wanted his mother to send a pot as it was 18d. to 20d. a pound in Edinburgh. As an economy they had reduced their meagre meat ration by a third and also changed from beef to mutton, which cost them about 3s. a week. However, despite being hard up, he mused “I am here and it is an opportunity that I shall not have again and so I might as well make the most of it”.

On 16 December, Elizabeth Browne replied that Chambers had delivered the letter the previous evening after a bad journey in heavy rain on the outside of the coach. Her son’s first letter had arrived after Chambers left for Edinburgh and the other three days later. She intended to send a half firkin of butter on Christmas Eve and promised to send money at Candlemas or, if he could not manage, she might be able to send £5 as she was proud of Benjamin’s thriftiness. They would all send letters with the butter, but “Eleanor is gone to Skelwith and does very well”, no doubt in service either with her eldest sister Elizabeth (see note 9) or with her father’s sister Ann (1744–1825) who had married William Benson of Skelwith Fold.

Benjamin’s next letter was sent earlier than intended “on account of our changeing our lodgings from College Street”. It was headed “Dear Sister”¹⁷ before 5 January 1807, but the date and other details, including his address, are missing as if the last was cut out and perhaps pinned on the kitchen door for reference. He reported that the new lodgings were:

much better both in respect to cleanliness and cheapness. At College Street we paid 12s. 6d. a week, but here we only pay 7 shillings . . . We have only one Room but it is a very clean one. It is a woman that is only begining to let Lodging and she takes a great deal of Pains and all her furniter is new and clean which makes us very comfortable and happy. [He confided] we had a very difficult job to get away from our old lodgings because when people leave . . . [landladies] grow Idle and won’t wait on one, but we would not give them a weeks notice as it is common to do, for we thought they might steal our cloths, or books . . . So we contrived to make a quarel and fall out, but we took care that we should have another lodging ready before we left the old one and so, when we thought they would be in hearing, we would begin and call one another as hard as ever we could and derectly I went and called a coach and took away all the heaviest of our things . . . to our lodgings and left him at the old place . . . Mr Towers called in Mrs Watters and told her that we had had some words and were going to part . . . that he could not . . . [afford] the price of the rooms himself and so he would go to friends of his that took lodgings in the town, but he stopped till evening . . . [He] then came to me with the latter end of his things and we are living together in our new lodgings as happy as can be . . .

Benjamin was relieved that they were still friendly with Mrs Watters and he called later to collect his mail. He asked for his new address to be passed to his sister Eleanor at

Skelwith and to Mrs Simpson at Ambleside. He had not yet received the butter and hoped to have more news from his brothers and sisters, particularly young Thomas who was told to practice letter writing. He noted that severe storms in Edinburgh had blown down large trees, blew tiles from roofs and killed three or four people in the streets. He wrote "I intend to make myself a good Anatomist, I now think of attending Dr Barclays second course of lectures" and he reckoned that £20 would allow him to pay his way. He thought it would be best "to send a check of the bank as English notes will not go in Scotland". This was how Towers received money, a £50 cheque costing only a shilling to cash.

The next letter, dated 5 January 1807, was from his new lodgings at Mrs Nelson's, Richmond Court, No. 2 Fyfe Street, Old Town, saying that he had sent a note with George Brownrigg after receiving his mother's letter. He added "yesterday I received a whole parcel of Letters by the favour of Mr Firken who was a very welcome visitor. We were just going to sit down to dinner when it came and so we directly broke into it and found it excellent good and will serve us as long as we stop". He complained that Thomas and his sisters had left too "much white paper un wrote" in their letters and might easily have told him "how many cats had kittled . . . whether Mr Manning's family were gone away or . . . whether Thos Storey and Mary Dixon were got intimate"¹⁸ or, even, whether the local roads and bridges remained in position. He said they lived like "2 petty princis" in their new lodgings and "when we have nothing else to do we go and buy a sheeps head and desects it Brains and Eyes for they are the same as a Christians . . . I am the desector and Mr Towers looks on and . . . tells me all the names, which is of great importance to me and when we are out . . . of sheep heads he questions me of all the different parts of the human Body, and of Physick" to mutual benefit.

With growing familiarity he had begun to like Edinburgh and noted, with a clear sense of anticipation, that "three people [are] going to be Hanged either tomorrow or next day, which I purpose going to see; there should have been 5 Hanged but 2 of them got clear. One of the 3 is a woman for murdering her Husband, and the other 2 is men for horse stealing. I shall let you know in my next how I like to see such treatment". Then, in total contrast, "I have a good deal to say about Churches, Chappels and Publick Buildings, and most particularly the Castle and Kings Pallase, which is the produce of my Sunday work as I have no other time to look after such things. But as the College Bell rings . . . I must referr the discription of these till I get Back to Troutbeck. . .". In a postscript, he sought information to clarify thoughts about his future career:

When you write . . . give me some account of Dr Scambler, whether he gets any buisness or not, or how people likes him, or what such [sort of] a carracter he gets in Troutbeck . . . I have quite fixed my mind to come and set up Business in Ambleside as I have herd a good deal of them is tired with him . . . he charges so very hard . . . I would thank you to hold a consulation among yourselves and let me know what you think about it but say nothing of it to anyone.

Since Dr Scambler seemed to pose a threat to Benjamin Browne's future, it is worth digressing briefly to outline his life. *The Lonsdale Magazine*, vol.i (1820), 553, provides a generous obituary:

Richard Scambler, Surgeon, was born at *Burton Head* near Lower Bentham in the year 1781. He received the rudiments of his education at Wray school [Hornby, N. Lancs] and at a proper age

was bound apprentice to Doctor Bickersteth, then of Kirkby Lonsdale, now of Liverpool.¹⁹ He afterwards attended a regular course of lectures on anatomy etc. after which he commenced business as a medical man, in the room of Doctor Robinson of Hawkshead.²⁰ During his short continuance at that place he married Miss Bownass of Middleton.²¹ He lived about two years at Hawkshead, and then removed to Ambleside where he resided till his death. Few men were more extensively or more deservedly respected than Mr Scambler. To the indigent he was a kind and constant benefactor. He seemed to feel as much pleasure in distributing his well earned gains as others do in hoarding up the useless treasure. Though his warm hearted charity frequently met with a cold return, it never cooled – And he might justly be said to be an honour to his very honourable profession – He died on the 9th of September [1820].

The Ambleside parish registers gave his age as 38 years and, in 1829, his widow Alice lived at Walton Cottage, Ambleside. Their children were baptised there; Richard (1806, lived only one week), Richard (1807), Thomas (1813), Alice (1814), Jane (1816), Dorothy (1817) and Henry Christopher (1819). The eldest son William Middleton was born at Hawkshead on 1 April 1805, was privately baptised there on the 28th and was then publicly baptised at Ambleside on 28 September 1806 only two months after William Simpson's death. Clearly Scambler was an opportunist.²² He was not liked by all, for the artist William Green (d.1823) could "find very little to praise" in an obituary he wrote, perhaps remembering the sort of medical treatment meted out to his children when, for example, his son George suffered from croup and the doctor "bled him in the jugular vein, blistered and purged him with calomel, and lowered his pulse with foxglove". Nevertheless he was "somewhat better in the morning".²³ With this reminder of the state of the art of medicine, we must return to our subject's next letter.

On 24 January 1807, Benjamin Browne replied to a letter, dated 18th, from his eldest brother George, who indicated that the family agreed about his "begining business at Ambleside". Having lived there, Benjamin knew the people and surrounding country and thought that, "with a little industry and my conducting myself with that *respectability* both of which I think I am Master of, I should soon . . . get my share of business". For £2. 14s. extra cost, he decided to "attend a second course in Midwifery Lectures, which will entitle me to a certificate", presumably to work as a male midwife. As Dr Audrey Eccles, the author of *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor & Stuart England* (1982), told me several years ago that there was a serious shortage of information on the identity and training of male midwives, it is worth drawing attention to Benjamin Browne's comment and to some other local material. Although Browne's certificate has not been found, that of a William Coward has survived and is reproduced in the Appendix. Coward's certificate was awarded at London in 1781 and he appears to have practised at Kendal before 1790.²⁴ Handbills of two other male midwives, William Ross of Ambleside and Robert Charnock of Bootle, were published in William Rollinson's *Life and Tradition in the Lake District* (1974), 71–2.²⁵

Benjamin's letter then revealed his precarious finances. Allowing £6 for living expenses for fourteen weeks, 25s. for books, "A few more Instruments £2 [and] My Expences Home £3. 10s.", he would need all of £15. 9s. to finish his training. Also, he expected to "dress rather better than what I did before or it will not do. I can here get as good a coat for £1. 10s. as I could at Amblesid for £3 . . . and particularly Stockings and Handkerchiefs the latter of which I can get for 2s. a Dozen, where[as] the travelers that comes to Troutbeck sells them at 14d. or 16d. each . . . By buying a quantity of

Stockings together one might get very cheap; besides the carriage home would be nothing as I mean to bring all my things with me in the coach. I found it quite a mistake only being able to carry 16 pounds . . . for one may take 4 or 5 stone and they will take no notice. . .". He expressed surprise that Troutbeck people allowed one Mr Manning to stay there in view of his debts. Then, responding to the news of recent deaths at Troutbeck he wrote prophetically:

Death is the most tremendous thing that happens to humane beings; every one fears it, yet all must submit to it in the End, though we should not think so much at aged people being cut off, as young ones. In my last I was mentioning that three Criminals where going to be hung – which was one of the most affecting scenes that ever I beheld – I beg that every person may see to take good ways, and . . . not come to this untimely and most shameful End.

On 12 February Benjamin briefly thanked his mother for sending a banker's draft which was cashed without difficulty, but he wanted the next to be better wrapped. It arrived by 10 March with a request to buy some house linen for which, "being only an immoderate judge, I intend getting Mrs Nelson to choose it for me and also the shawls and Pockett Handkfs". He then detailed his proposed travel arrangements:

As the lectures end about the latter end of April, I intend setting out on the first of May. The coach sets off from Edinb[urgh] about 7 o'clock Morning and arrives in Carlisle about 12 at night and as there will be four of us coming together we intend taking a post chaise and going forward that night. It will be cheaper than coming in the Mail Coach and shall be in Penrith that Morning about 5 or 6 o'clock . . . [or else] it will be 11 before the coach get to Penrith, it not leaving Carlisle till 8 in the morning . . . You will find me there on Saturday the 2nd of May. As the time is so short, it will be unnecessary for you to write again unless you are in want of something particular . . .

This comment concluded the correspondence. We are not told whether family and friends enjoyed a grand re-union that first weekend in May or when he began practising at Ambleside, but disaster overtook him. On 16 July 1807 the Troutbeck parish registers recorded the burial of Benjamin Browne who "Died ye 13th". He was drowned in an accident on Windermere, maybe while preparing for the Regatta which was to be raced on Thursday 6 August.²⁶ The *Cumberland Pacquet* noted that "whilst adjusting the ropes of a newly launched boat, not having a sufficiency of ballast, she upset and his remains were not found till the following day". If this tragedy ended a too brief career, it is not quite the end of the story for, on 22 March 1808, the Ambleside registers recorded the christening of "George, son of Agnes Simpson, Widow of the late William Simpson Surgeon, born the 18th Inst, a Bastard, the late Benjamin Browne, Surgeon, the reputed Father". So, the young man had not only taken over his former master's practice but, apparently, his wife too. Although she was nearly fourteen years his senior, his letters indicate that they kept in touch through the previous winter. However, we cannot know whether they had discussed marriage before the accident, for she was only one month pregnant at the time. It would, at least, have given a measure of security for Agnes and her young family.

It is possible her husband qualified as Doctor of Medicine at Edinburgh in 1793, with specialism in puerperal fever.²⁷ If this helps to explain his former apprentice's choice of

university and interest in midwifery, it is difficult to believe that he would have approved of such a short training and the subsequent scandal. William Simpson was initiated a member of the Union Lodge of freemasons at Kendal on 12 May 1795²⁸ and married Agnes Stuart at Ambleside on 21 May 1796, with William Wilcock (of the Salutation Inn) and Anthony Airey as witnesses. She was baptised on 1 August 1773, the daughter of Rowland Stuart, a house carpenter of Ambleside. Her legitimate children were Rowland (baptised 4 May 1797, buried 20 May 1816 aged 19) and Frances (born 4 August 1805, died 20 March 1808 aged 2). Thus, having lost her husband, this unfortunate woman was deprived of her lover and then lost her baby daughter just at the time her illegitimate son was born. In view of the large gap between her first two children and the nature of subsequent events, a cynic might even question the fathering of her daughter. If Agnes lived on in Ambleside until her eldest child died in 1816, no further mention of her has been found in local records.

Although Benjamin Browne's letters and the supporting evidence leave many questions unanswered, we are fortunate to have a first-hand record of the life and training of an ordinary medical student at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Despite attempts in Scotland to tighten-up surgeons' qualifications, no such enforcement existed in England at that time and it was possible for ill-trained persons to practise, though normally after a seven year apprenticeship. Thus Browne's three year contract, shortened by misfortune and followed by only two terms at university, would have given minimal training indeed. Though his family enjoyed superior yeoman status in Troutbeck, the letters suggest that, after his father's death, finances were stretched to meet even that commitment. If Benjamin was in love (or infatuated) with Mrs Simpson, he had still more incentive to earn a living quickly and could have taken over Richard Scambler's dissatisfied patients simply by establishing a popular reputation. Although Browne said nothing of course syllabuses and only touched on the subjects and tutors, his life style, learning environment and study methods are clearly exposed. Modern students would find his accommodation and financial problems familiar, but they would be exasperated by a requirement to pay for door-keepers and for each element of the course and even corpses for dissection. In addition to throwing light on his attitudes, travelling, lodgings, diet, money matters and economies, Benjamin Browne's letters present a very human story of how a lusty youth, with little prospect of inheriting the family farm, tried to better himself despite limited resources. He might well have succeeded had not fate intervened so decisively.

Appendix

In view of Benjamin Browne's claim that he could qualify at Edinburgh for a certificate in midwifery after just two courses of lectures, which he no doubt completed, it is unfortunate that the document has not been found in the family papers. Therefore it is worth examining a certificate awarded to William Coward, who seems to have been listed as a surgeon at Kendal in the 1790 *Universal British Directory*. The entry does not state whether he practised midwifery, but he qualified at London on 15 May 1781 after diligently attending three courses of lectures and performing *real* deliveries, as if the latter experience was not always a compulsory part of midwifery training elsewhere.



FIG.1 The Certificate in Midwifery awarded to William Coward in 1781. (Source: C.R.O., Kendal, WDX, 3541.)

Although it is strange that the name of the awarding authority was omitted from his certificate, this probably suggests that it was well known to contemporaries rather than that it was deliberately concealed for any nefarious purpose. Its identity must be associated with the coat of arms appearing next to the signature of David Orme.

Without the crescent cadency mark of a second son, Papworth's *Ordinary of Arms* (1961, p.545) identifies the shield as that of Orme of Magdrum (Fife) and blazons it: Or, two chevrons gules, in chief as many buckles azure, in base a horn of the last stringed of the second. *The Roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London* (by W. Munk, vol.2, 1878) states that David Orme was a Scotsman who graduated as Doctor of Medicine at Edinburgh on 29 June 1749, specialising in Angina. He was admitted as a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians on 25 June 1765 and died at Lamorbey, Bexley, Kent on 4 April 1812 in his eighty-fifth year. He left an only surviving daughter Mary-Anne who married Neill Malcolm of Poltalloch, Argyllshire on 9 October 1797. Thus the arms of Orme came to be borne as an escutcheon of pretence over those of Malcolm.²⁹

Munk states that David Orme held the post of "man-midwife extraordinary" at the City of London Lying-in Hospital, but gave no dates. That hospital was instituted, on 30 March 1750, at Shaftesbury House, Aldersgate Street, to provide charitable, safer child-birth facilities for poor married women who, "for want of the timely Assistance of a Man-midwife" during difficult labours, too often died or were "deprived of the Use of their Limbs".³⁰ In 1755 there were 1,141 deliveries. The institution was rebuilt on a new site in City Road in 1770-3 and was designed to take forty-two patients in three long wards, the staff comprising a matron, two nurses, twelve pupil midwives and eighteen pupil nurses. In 1780 it was decided to lengthen the training of pupils from just two months to three!³¹

In view of Orme's position, it is feasible that the City Lying-in Hospital awarded the certificate and used its chief midwife's coat of arms at least during his tenure. Alternatively Orme might have validated the certificate as a representative of another awarding authority, not yet identified. This could explain William Louder's signature, for Munk notes that he practiced as a midwife too, lecturing at St. Saviour's churchyard, Southwark. He was born at Southampton, graduated MD at Aberdeen in 1775, became a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians in 1786 and died at Upper East Hayes on 24 October 1801. It is possible that, as a young man, he might also have been associated with the City Lying-in Hospital around 1781, but searches have failed to produce conclusive evidence. One must control suspicions that the anonymity, the coat of arms and the ornate certificate might have been used to enhance the public image of a midwifery qualification which appears to have been based on woefully inadequate training.

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Notes and References

- ¹ For example: Alexander Bower, *History of the University of Edinburgh* (1817); J.D. Comrie, *History of Scottish Medicine* (1932); C.H. Creswell, *The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh* (1926).
- ² Information from Marjorie Robertson (October 1986) and Mrs Jo Currie (December 1989) of the Edinburgh University Library.
- ³ For a good example of the benefits see Linda Campbell, "Wet Nurses in Early Modern England", *Medical History*, vol.33, no.3 (1989) 360–370.
- ⁴ Information given by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (November 1986) and the Royal College of Surgeons of England (March 1987).
- ⁵ *University of Edinburgh Journal*, vol. xxxii (June 1985), 38.
- ⁶ Cumbria Record Office, Kendal, WD/TE, bound mss v, 246–8, 253, 305–6; and box 9/7. Hereafter WD/TE.
- ⁷ WD/TE, box 8/5, Diary W, 29, 37. Benjamin was baptised 13 May 1787.
- ⁸ WD/TE, bound mss xi, 94.
- ⁹ Elizabeth (bn 1777, m. 1804 James Benson of Skelwith Fold, Hawkshead); George (1779–1838, m. 1801 Jane Harrison of Holehird, Troutbeck); Ann (bn 1782, m. 1807 John Walton, school-master, later of Patterdale); Eleanor (bn. 1784, m. 1808 Matthew Forrest, a farmer of Troutbeck); Benjamin (our subject); Dorothy (bn 1789, m. James Wilson of Troutbeck Bridge); Thomas (bn 1792, m. Mary Jackson), later vicar of Carlton in Cleveland. Susan (1796–7).
- ¹⁰ WD/TE, unbound mss 124. His wife's will is bound mss iv, 29.
- ¹¹ Apprenticeship indenture, WD/TE, bound mss, ii, 1–2.
- ¹² The timing seems to compare unfavourably with that of coaches noted in W. Parson & W. White's, 1829 *Directory of Cumberland & Westmorland . . .*, 668, 509 and 167. For example the 'The New Times' left Kendal daily from the King's Arms in Stricklandgate at 3 p.m. for Glasgow via Shap. It left Penrith at 7 p.m. to arrive at Carlisle at 9 p.m. Perhaps his continuation to Edinburgh, via Langholm and Selkirk, was also slower.
- ¹³ The University Librarians say that James Towers studied medicine for two sessions (1806–8) but did not graduate. His career is unknown. Maybe he was the James Towers who married Ann Goff at Kendal on 6 December 1814 and who, as an apothecary, had a son James baptised on 17 September 1815 at Kendal.
- ¹⁴ Moir's identity is uncertain. As he introduced Browne to his bookbinder, he may have been John Moir, a printer with premises in West Register Street and a house at 6 Buccleuch Place (near the University) and noted in the *Post Office Directory* of 1826 (p. 132). Perhaps it is significant that a "John Moir, Gent. and Catharine his wife" lived at Ambleside when a son George died, aged five, on 3 July 1806 (two weeks before William Simpson) and a daughter Isabella-Cumine was born on 22 September 1805. Maybe they used Simpson as their doctor and were related to the Edinburgh Moirs.
- ¹⁵ William Wilcock (an unusual surname in Westmorland) kept the well-known Salutation Inn at Ambleside where, on Thursday 26 July 1810, a ball was to be held after a Regatta on Windermere. Daphne Foskett, *John Harden of Brathay Hall* (1974), 8; William Rollinson, *Life and Tradition in the Lake District* (1974), plate 170.
- ¹⁶ The schoolmaster was no doubt John Walton who married Ann Browne in 1807 and the others were close friends. Robert Dockeray witnessed Eleanor Browne's marriage in October 1808 and George Brownrigg, a carpenter who married Mary Storey in 1807, was a witness at the marriages of both Ann Browne and her eldest brother George (in 1801). (All at Troutbeck).
- ¹⁷ Probably Ann (aged 25) rather than Dorothy (aged 18).
- ¹⁸ One Thomas Storey married Rachel Hayton at Troutbeck on 15 January 1810, with Thomas Hayton and George Brownrigg as witnesses. In 1829 Storey was a stonemason and Hayton and Brownrigg were wheelwrights. Parson and White, *Directory . . .* (1829), 680.
- ¹⁹ In 1824 Robert Bickersteth was a surgeon at 4 Elliot Street, Liverpool. Baines's *Lancashire Directory*, vol.i (1824), 215.
- ²⁰ No doubt Charles Robinson, who treated minor ailments of the Wordsworth boys at Hawkshead. W.T.

- Thompson, *Wordsworth's Hawkshead* (1970), 47. As he seems to have been replaced by Scambler about 1804 but was not buried until 4 September 1807, aged 60, he might have been ill for some years.
- ²¹ Probably Alice, daughter of William and Alice Bownas, baptised 18 March 1781 at Middleton-in-Lonsdale, second of their four daughters Dorothy (1778), Alice, Ann (1784) and Margaret (1786).
- ²² He was baptised at Hornby, Lancs, on 13 October 1782. His parents were William Scambler and Elizabeth Middleton, married at Tatham, on 15 May 1760. Their children were William (1761), Jennet (1763), Henry (1765), John (1767), twins Thomas Middleton and Betty (1772) and Christopher (1778) followed by Richard in 1782. Scambler's birthplace was a remote farm at Botton Head (SD 661 619) in Tatham Fells.
- ²³ M.E. Burkett and J.D.G. Sloss, *William Green of Ambleside* (1984), 30, 22.
- ²⁴ Noted in *Universal British Directory* 1790, 473a. Midwifery certificate in C.R.O., Kendal, WDX 354/1.
- ²⁵ As William Ross trained at Edinburgh, perhaps he equates with the only doctor of that name in the Edinburgh University, *Doctors of Medicine, 1705-1845* (1846), 249. If so, he qualified in "Typho" in 1815. On 29 June 1807, Robert Charnock, surgeon, married Mary Skelding at Bootle. He was not mentioned in the 1829 *Directory* but, in 1847, his wife was listed there. The parish registers add no further details.
- ²⁶ *Cumberland Pacquet* (Whitehaven), 21 July and 11 August 1807.
- ²⁷ Edinburgh University, *Doctors of Medicine, 1705-1845* (1846), 24. Copy at the Bodleian Library. Wm. Simpson was described only as "Anglus". The Royal College of Surgeons of England state that a William Simspn [sic] of Knaresborough (Yorks) was listed in the Corporation of Surgeons list in 1794 and was last mentioned in the members List of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1801. Possibly this refers to the same man.
- ²⁸ C.R.O., Kendal, book *Union Lodge No. 129, 1764-1864*. William's marriage to Agnes Suart was reported in the *Cumberland Pacquet* on 7 June 1796.
- ²⁹ Ann (Orme) died on 14 October 1830. Burke's *Commoners* (1838), 648b. Sir James Balfour Paul, Lord Lyon King of Arms, *Ordinary of Scottish Arms* (1903), 86, notes the escutcheon as of Orme of Balvairst Castle (NO 169 116), about two miles west of Auchtermuchty, North Fife.
- ³⁰ Bodleian Library, G. Pamph 69 (14 and 15); *A sermon by James Hallifax to the President and Governors* (1755); and the *Rules of Administration and Accounts for the City of London Lying-in Hospital* (1755).
- ³¹ R.B. Cannings, *The City of London Maternity Hospital* (1922), 13-5. The building was demolished in 1903.

