

Henry Atherton MD: Town's Physician of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1682–1700

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SUMMARY

*Henry Atherton was Newcastle upon Tyne's municipal medical officer at the end of the seventeenth century. Studying medicine at both Cambridge and Oxford, he exemplified mid-seventeenth-century academic medical education. Practising physic privately in Carmarthen, he published a paranormal story which associated him with a circle around the philosopher Henry More who tried to prove the existence of God through stories about spirits and ghosts. While at Newcastle, he published *The Christian Physician*, a devotional guide to effective healing, which showed both the influence of the Cambridge Platonists at Christ's College and his immersion in Restoration Anglican divinity. Fined in the Court of King's Bench for criticism of the Williamite government, he demonstrated a political conservatism which adds detail to our knowledge of local allegiances during the 1690s. No history of Newcastle upon Tyne would be complete without attention to his biography.*

INTRODUCTION

HENRY ATHERTON WAS TOWN'S PHYSICIAN OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE from August 1682 until his death in January 1700. He was the town's official medical officer, charged with caring first for the burgesses and then, as circumstances permitted, for the poor. No social history of late seventeenth-century Newcastle would be complete without reference to Atherton. But he was also the kind of minor historical figure whose life story provides illuminating detail — educationally, theologically, socially and politically — in a period of rapid and profound change in the life of the nation. He was a Cambridge MD who also spent time studying in Oxford, so his story highlights the medical training offered at Oxbridge and the place of the educated physician within a wide spectrum of licensed and unlicensed medical care in Restoration England. His early medical practice in Carmarthen, in Wales, suggests an acquaintance with Bishop William Thomas of St Davids. The publication in 1680 of a broadsheet recounting the recovery of Atherton's sister from a coma places him within the circle around the Cambridge Platonist philosopher Henry More and Archbishop John Sharp who attempted to prove the existence of God by recounting paranormal stories. Atherton's appointment as Town's Physician of Newcastle requires a glance at municipal health care in the later seventeenth century, as well as a sharper focus on his place within Newcastle's mercantile society. His only full-length book, *The Christian Physician*, published in 1683, shows us his patronage by the Earl of Radnor, his engagement with the problem of atheism among Restoration intellectuals, his interest in herbal pharmacology and his devout espousal of Restoration Anglican divinity. It also demonstrates the influence of the Cambridge Platonists at Christ's College (where More was a long-standing Fellow, and Ralph Cudworth was Master) who used arguments from natural theology to prove the existence of God. Finally, his quarrel with Thomas Knaggs, afternoon lecturer at All Saints' church in

Pilgrim Street, reveals a political leaning towards Jacobitism and shows us how punitively the Williamite government dealt with seditious words.

THE EDUCATION OF A PHYSICIAN

Henry Atherton was the son of Philip Atherton of Hillfarrance, Somerset, near Taunton. The extant parish registers for Hillfarrance do not begin until 1708, but we know of Henry's father's name and status as a gentleman, and of Henry's birth in 1649, from the admissions register of Christ's College, Cambridge (Humphreys 1905, 365; Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 611). The will of 'Philip Atherton the elder, of Hill Farrance, Somerset, gent.', dated 1643 and proved in 1650, must be that of Henry's father. It mentioned Philip's wife, Mary, who came from 'Munton' (probably the nearby village of West Monkton) but her maiden name was not given, and, since the extant parish registers for West Monkton do not begin until 1710, we cannot identify her further. Their children — Ursula, Alice, Catherine and Joan, Thomas, John and Philip — were mentioned (Brown 1889, 98; Humphreys 1905, 366, 489, 493), but Henry must have been born shortly before his father's death, without a new will being made to include him. Henry was sent to school at nearby Bradford on Tone, where his schoolmaster was Henry Salway (Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 611), who does not appear to have been a graduate and cannot be further identified. However, the fact that Henry was admitted to Christ's College indicates that he was probably a decent Latinist by the time he left Salway's tuition (Rackham 1927, 103). No Cambridge graduates, who might have recommended Christ's to Henry, can be identified among the local clergy in the Taunton area (names in Weaver 1889, 315, 376, 404, 453, checked against Venn 1922–7), and the Christ's statutes made no provision for medical study, but, as we shall see, there was something of a medical-studies culture at Christ's in Atherton's time (Rook 1971a, 51–2).

Henry Atherton was admitted to Christ's on 22 June 1664, aged fifteen, as a pensioner (Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 611). This meant that his family paid his fees, freeing him from the menial chores required of sizars (who essentially worked their way through a university education) but giving him more modest accommodation than fellow commoners (the sons of wealthy gentlemen and aristocrats who had sets of rooms and dined with the college Fellows on high table; Venn 1913, 128–34). Atherton's tutor was John Covel, then a young Fellow interested in medicine but later chaplain to the British Ambassador at Constantinople, chaplain to Princess Mary at The Hague, and eventually Master of Christ's College. Covel had been a sizar to Henry Wyvill in the 1650s; Wyvill would graduate MD in 1662 and become an honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in 1664 (Bent 1893, xxvi–xxxiii, 99–287; Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 517, 559–61; *ODNB* f).

The most important of Atherton's contemporaries at Christ's, in terms of his later career, was Francis Robartes, admitted as a fellow commoner, aged thirteen, in May 1663. Francis was the sixth son of John Robartes, second Baron Robartes of Truro, later Viscount Bodmin, first Earl of Radnor, and eventually Lord President of the Privy Council. Francis' three older half-brothers — John, Robert and Hender — had been pupils at Christ's of Henry More in the late 1640s and early 1650s (Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 520, 533, 602–3; *ODNB* m, n). More was frequently consulted by Lord Radnor concerning Christ's graduates suitable for ecclesiastical and other kinds of patronage in his gift (Nicolson 1992, 216, 237, 298, 347, 400, 505; Ward 2000, 376), so it is no surprise that Atherton's *The Christian Physician* was dedicated to Radnor. Francis Robartes had two tutors at Christ's: Thomas Burnet, an advocate of Cartesian natural

philosophy who was later Master of the Charterhouse (Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 569–70; *ODNB* d) and John Carr, who had held an MD degree since 1657 and would be elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in 1670 (Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 507–8).

The Cambridge University statutes of 1570 required six years' study for the degree of Bachelor of Medicine and another five years for the degree of Doctor of Medicine (Heywood 1840, 293–4). Although a preliminary degree in Arts was not required, most Cambridge medical graduates began their university careers with an Arts degree (Allen 1946, 121–2). Atherton graduated Bachelor of Arts in 1668 (Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 611). The Arts course will have given him valuable training and experience in 'disputing' — the oral and partially extempore defence of a thesis in Latin that was required for all Cambridge degrees (Lewis 2011, 78–97). Having graduated BA, he will have been allowed to attend the university lectures in medicine outside Christ's College. The Cambridge medical curriculum officially required the teaching of the ancient Greek medical writers Hippocrates and Galen (Heywood 1840, 290; Rolleston 1932, 9; Allen 1946, 122). Galenic medicine was based on the principle of maintaining or restoring the proper balance of the four humours — blood, phlegm, yellow bile or choler, and black bile or melancholy — naturally present in the human body and reflecting combinations of the four Aristotelian qualities: hot, cold, dry and wet. The Galenic physician's clinical role was to listen with great care to the patient's account of his or her health history, as well as to the narrative of the particular illness or condition for which treatment was being sought; physical examination was kept to a minimum. The Galenist prescribed treatment individually tailored to the humoral complexion of the patient. Galenic treatments — purging, bleeding and 'cupping' to produce weeping blisters, all intended to assist the body in expelling the particular excessive humour regarded as the source of illness — were generally quite unpleasant, even painful. These treatments were administered by a barber-surgeon or prepared by an apothecary under the learned physician's supervision (Wear 2000, 37–40).

The seventeenth century was also a period when genuine scientific advances in medicine, such as William Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood — a discovery accepted by Atherton — were being made (Atherton 1683, 28–9; Frank 1980, 2–20). Paracelsian medicine had begun to influence traditional Galenism by introducing new remedies made from chemicals rather than the traditional herbal prescriptions (Debus 1965, 137–74; Arber 1986, 256–63; Wear 2000, 353–433; Webster 2002, 273–82). At the Royal Society, in London, experiments involving transfusions and injections were being practised on animals, and recipes for medicines were avidly traded among the virtuosi (Hunter 1996; Wear 2000, 386). It is entirely possible that chemical medicine, new experimental discoveries and Cartesian medical theory were taught informally within the flexible confines of the official Cambridge curriculum (Allen 1946, 122).

The Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge from 1636 to 1677 was Francis Glisson, an experimental physician who wrote important works on the liver and digestive organs as well as on the 'new' disease of rickets, which had become widespread in seventeenth-century England. Glisson was a founder member of the Royal Society in 1660 and became president of the Royal College of Physicians in 1667. During the early years of his professorship, Glisson had gathered around him a lively group of students interested in the new experimental philosophy, but by the 1660s his work was mainly in London (Rolleston 1932, 48, 127, 151–5; Walker 1971, 35–47; Frank 1973, 208–10, 241; *ODNB* h). Deputies lectured for him: John Carr of Christ's, whom we have met as second tutor to Francis Robartes, deputised for a decade

before 1671, and Robert Brady, later master of Gonville and Caius College, also deputised during this period, eventually succeeding Glisson as Regius Professor in 1677. Carr left no writings, and Brady's only medical writing was a letter of 1679 to his friend the famous physician Thomas Sydenham, advocating the use of quinine to treat malaria (then prevalent in England) and suggesting that rheumatic patients might not benefit from the frequency and severity of bleeding required by traditional Galenic therapeutics (Sydenham 1680, 1-5; Venn 1901, 142-6; Rolleston 1932, 127, 155-8; Robb-Smith 1974, 349-52; Wear 2000, 461-3; *ODNB* c, p). Despite the paucity of evidence for the content of Carr and Brady's lectures, we can say that they were likely to have been strongly theoretical.

When Atherton proceeded MB in 1669 (Peile 1910-13, vol. 1, 611), he will have been able to discuss classical medicine in a learned fashion and had perhaps become aware of some new developments in medical thinking. Theoretically, he will also have been required to have seen two anatomical dissections, but without taking part. Dissections had been neglected during the 1640s, and there seems to be no extant evidence for the frequency of dissections at Cambridge during the 1660s (Heywood 1840, 293-4; Allen 1946, 123; Valadez 1974, 409-15). He is likely to have acquired some clinical practice before taking his MD degree by attaching himself to a practising physician in Cambridge or Oxford (Frank 1973, 242; Robb-Smith 1974, 329), but no record of such an association is extant.

Atherton was incorporated MA at Oxford on 15 June 1673 (Oxford MS NEP/Supra/Reg Bd; Peile 1910-13, vol. 1, 611). During the 1650s and 1660s, there had been a very lively community of experimentalists at Oxford; members of the Experimental Philosophy Club at Wadham College formed the core of the Royal Society when it was founded in 1660. Their interests certainly included medicine, but this group had begun to disperse by the early 1670s (Webster 2002, 129-44; Frank 1980, 43-89, 286; Hunter 2009, 92-7). Atherton very likely went to Oxford in order to undertake some advanced study in herbal pharmacology, his interest in which would be confirmed by his discussion of medicinal plants in *The Christian Physician*. Atherton's tutor John Covel 'was well skilled in botany and in drugs' and had doubtless encouraged Atherton to study the therapeutic properties of plants. From 1670, the year after Atherton proceeded MB, Covel was chaplain to the British Ambassador at Constantinople, and he compiled manuscript notebooks about the local flora of the Levant and its medicinal properties (BL Add. MS 57495; Peile 1910-13, vol. 1, 559; Frank 1973, 243). Without Covel in Cambridge, Atherton will have needed to continue his studies elsewhere, and Oxford provided two unrivalled resources. First, whilst the Physic Garden at Cambridge was not established until 1762, the Oxford University Physic Garden (later renamed the Botanic Garden) had been founded in 1632 by Sir Henry Danvers, first Earl of Danby. By the 1670s, there were some 3,000 plants with medicinal properties, grown under the direction of the curator, Jacob Bobart the younger. During the early 1670s, the Professor of Botany in the University, Robert Morison, read lectures at a table placed in the middle of the Physic Garden, illustrating his points by direct reference to the appropriate plants, although he restricted his teaching to the structures of plants and did not discuss their medicinal use (Günther 1912, 1-13; Allen 1946, 128-9; Webster 1986, 711-17; *ODNB* a, b, 1). Second, there was a flourishing guild of apothecaries, members of which were elected and admitted by the Chancellor of Oxford University. A cluster of apothecaries' shops in the High Street near University College, a few minutes' walk from the Physic Garden, will have provided Atherton with practical demonstrations of the making of the medicines that he later prescribed for his patients in Newcastle (Whittet 1964, 256-8; Chapman 2009, 26-30).

Atherton returned to Cambridge and proceeded MD in 1674 (Peile, 1910-13, vol. 1, 611). He will have needed to have been in Cambridge several times to participate in the disputations leading to his higher degree: he was required to act twice as respondent, proposing and defending a thesis, and once as opponent, attacking an argument proposed by a student proceeding MB (Heywood 1840, 294; Hall 2009, 2, 7-8, 21, 23, 25). From 30 June 1673, there is a published single sheet containing the two theses, in the form of Latin verse, which Atherton defended as respondent in the academic Act at the annual Public Commencement (Atherton 1673; Hall 2009, 169). The title of the first poem can be translated 'The analysis of the pulse is more useful in medicine than the inspection of the urine'. As an academically-trained Galenist, Atherton was here asserting his superiority to the empiric — an uneducated medical practitioner who prescribed cures according to practical and traditional experience. The Galenist set much store by the pulse, taken repeatedly as part of an individual assessment of the patient's total state of health, while the empiric was likely to base his rapid diagnosis on the urine, perhaps even that of a patient he had not seen (Günther 1925, 25-32, 72; Beier 1987, 40-1; Wear 2000, 120-1). The second poem — 'Coughing, together with production of matter [either] mucous or corrupt, is not always a symptom of problems of the lungs' — also sought to establish the superiority of the Galenic physician (who analysed a patient's complete humoral complexion) to the empiric, who usually identified a symptom like coughing with the disease or pathological condition itself and simply tried to treat the symptom (Wear 2000, 130-3).

Atherton's Cambridge MD carried with it a licence to practise every branch of medicine anywhere in England and Wales. Cambridge MDs (and those of Oxford, who had equal status and privileges) were thus at the apex of the medical profession in terms of prestige and flexibility in professional practice, but they made up only a small proportion of medical practitioners. Licences to practise medicine could be obtained in several other ways (Heywood 1840, 294; Roberts 1962, 364-5; Wear 2000, 25-8). The Royal College of Physicians exercised tight control over physicians practising in London, and granted licences to country doctors who were able to pass a rigorous examination (Harley 1994, 402-3). The archbishops of Canterbury and York also granted medical licences which required a lesser degree of academic medical competence but which allowed their holders to practise anywhere in their respective provinces (Lambeth (no date), 2-3; Harley 1994, 404-5). Diocesan bishops issued licences to physicians, surgeons, apothecaries and midwives, although these licences may have been better indicators of their holders' good character and religious conformity than of their medical education and skill (Lambeth (no date), 2; Harley 1994, 399, 407-9; Mortimer 2004, 56-62). In incorporated towns — like Newcastle — which had established guilds of barber-surgeons and apothecaries, qualification usually followed the normal seven-year pattern of training for apprentices and journeymen, who eventually became masters (Whittet 1964, 245-7). Finally, there were a large number of unlicensed medical practitioners, ranging from the skilled bone-setter (who might not be able to perform any other surgical operation) down to the parson's wife or the village herb woman who prepared traditional herbal remedies and dispensed them for charity's sake to their neighbours. Academically-trained physicians were inclined to look down on the empirics — a catch-all term describing several levels of licensed and unlicensed practitioners who treated symptoms, often quite successfully, rather than making an educated Galenic assessment of a patient's humoral complexion (Cook 1986, 28-69; Beier 1987, 8-50; Nagy 1988; Wear 2000, 435-42).

'DR. ATHERTON, PHYSICIAN IN CAERMARTHEN'

Joseph Foster, in *Alumni Oxonienses*, followed by John Peile in his *Biographical Register of Christ's College, Cambridge*, and John and J. A. Venn in *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, indicated that Atherton first practised physic in Truro (Foster 1891, vol. 1, 40; Peile 1910-13, vol. 1, 611; Venn 1922-7, vol. 1, 51). However, I have found no trace of Atherton's family life or medical practice in Truro and would suggest that Foster mistakenly deduced that Atherton had been there from the dedication of his book *The Christian Physician* to Lord Radnor, one of whose titles was Baron Truro. Atherton appears to have practised physic in Carmarthen between 1675 — when his daughter Grace was baptised on 17 January at St Peter's church (Green 1923, 38) — and 1680, when his broadsheet — to be discussed below — was published.

While practising in Carmarthen, Atherton may well have known William Thomas, Bishop of St David's from 1678 to 1683. Early in his episcopate, Thomas began rebuilding the bishop's palace at Abergwili, very near Carmarthen, which had been the residence of the bishops of St Davids since the reign of Henry VIII. Thomas also attempted to move cathedral services from St Davids (a tiny village) to Carmarthen (a market town) (*ODNB* q; Lloyd, Orbach and Scourfield 2006, 113-14). Atherton's book, *The Christian Physician*, was published by William Leach at the sign of the Crown in Cornhill, London, in 1683. In 1678 and 1679, Leach had also published books by Thomas (Atherton 1683, title page; Arber 1903-6, vol. 1, 308, 328; Plomer 1922, 186). In the dedication of *The Christian Physician*, Atherton said that 'a great Prelate of this Realm' had given 'himself the trouble to peruse' his writings and 'recommen[ed] them as worthy of publicke view' (Atherton 1683, part I, dedication). Whilst it is only a conjecture that it was Thomas who urged Atherton to publish his work and who recommended Leach as a bookseller, Atherton's use of Leach may suggest his respect for his diocesan during his time in Carmarthen. Thomas' sermon to the House of Lords, preached on a public fast day on the text 'I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish' (Luke 13:5) (Thomas 1678), certainly resonates with Atherton's central message of the need for repentance. Thomas' *Apology for the Church of England*, of 1679, against the cavils of Dissenting separatists (Thomas 1679), coincides with Atherton's view of the excellency of the established church.

In 1680, a curious broadsheet was published entitled *A Miraculous Proof of the Resurrection: or, The Life to come Demonstrated*, relating the story of Anna Atherton, '[a]s it came from her Brother Dr. Atherton, Physician in Caermarthen'. The broadsheet recounted the story of the author's sister, a normally healthy girl of about fourteen who fell ill with an ague in November 1669, making her thin, pale and exceedingly devout. She was thought to have died on 14 February 1670, but some slight warmth from her body forestalled her burial and she awoke from a coma six days later. She then told her mother that she had been at 'Heaven Gate' and that the angel who had carried her home was standing at the foot of her bed. She correctly named several persons who had died during the period of her trance, including one whose death was not yet known to the Atherton household. She said that she had seen them admitted to heaven, but that there was a 'Vicious Person, [who] came as far as the Gate, but was sent back again another way'. Upon her recovery, Anna lived for about two years in 'perfect Health', giving wholesome religious instruction to her many visitors. The specific conclusion which Atherton, as a physician, drew from the episode was that "'Tis then necessary all Persons be kept 48 hours before burial, lest they should be buried alive' (Atherton 1680a; 1680b).

The sharing of Atherton's story brings him into the circle around Henry More who collected paranormal stories as proof of the existence of spirits and therefore of God. As More said (paraphrasing James I's 'No bishop, no king'), 'No Spirit, no God' (More 1653, 164; Crocker 2003, 127-42). Atherton's apparent intention in publishing the story was to prove the Resurrection and divine judgement on human souls by means of a miracle. Two manuscript copies of the narrative are contained in a file of paranormal stories sent to John Sharp, a Christ's College contemporary of Atherton and a protégé of More, who became Archbishop of York in 1691 (Gloucester MS D3549/6/2/4; ODNB o). The first copy is signed 'Doctor Henry Atherton Physition in Carmarthin'. The second copy was sent to Sharp by Mr Shafto of Newcastle in 1703, three years after Atherton's death. Presumably this was the younger Leonard Shafto, morning lecturer at All Saints' church in Pilgrim Street from 1698 to 1731 and the son of another Leonard Shafto who had held the same position from 1671 to 1676 (Bourne 1736, 108; Brand 1789, vol. 1, 388-9; Mackenzie 1827, vol. 1, 317). On 10 August 1695, the anonymous owner of the copy of *The Christian Physician* now held at the Wellcome Library in London had a conversation about this story with Atherton, suggesting that it might be sent to William Turner, a Sussex vicar who was then compiling *A Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences*. Atherton said he was considering having *The Christian Physician* reprinted with the story appended to the end of the book, so his friend 'desisted'; nevertheless, the story of Anna Atherton was included in Turner's *Compleat History*, so he must somehow have obtained the broadsheet (Atherton 1683, Wellcome Library EPB/B 11458/B, back flyleaf; Turner 1697, part II, 34; ODNB r).

TOWN'S PHYSICIAN OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

Atherton was appointed Town's Physician of Newcastle upon Tyne on 17 August 1682 by 'the Mayor, Aldermen, Sheriff and the rest of the Common Council'. His duties were to 'reside and abide among' the burgesses and to serve them 'upon all occasions'. He was also to 'be Carefull, Diligent and Observant in and about the poor people that are or shall be sick or have occasion for him'. He was not to be absent from Newcastle for more than 'One or Two Nights' without licence from the mayor, and he was to be paid an annual stipend of £40. The record of his appointment notes that the burgesses had already 'received many large experiences of ... [his] knowledge and ability', so perhaps Atherton had moved to Newcastle from Carmarthen soon after the publication of his broadsheet in 1680 (TWAM MS L/PA/1529, 160).

A network linking Newcastle with Christ's College provides a likely explanation for Atherton's move to Newcastle. His predecessor as Town's Physician, Richard Luck, had died in 1670, but Luck's son William was admitted to Christ's under the tutor Thomas Lynford in 1675. Lynford had been Atherton's contemporary at Christ's and was a close friend of Atherton's tutor, John Covell (BL Add. MS 22910, 229; Peile 1910-13, vol. 2, 7). Lynford, Covell and the young William Luck had all gone up to Christ's from Bury St Edmunds Grammar School, where Edward Leedes, another Christ's man, was headmaster from 1663 to 1707 (Hervey 1908, xix, 90, 236, 244; Peile 1910-13, vol. 1, 481, 559; vol. 2, 7, 60). Further, quite a few boys from the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle, went up to Christ's during the seventeenth century, especially during 1635-45 and 1662-9, the two periods when Amor Oxley, a Christ's graduate, was headmaster (Peile 1910-13, vol. 1, 305; Brodie 1924, 41; Laws 1925, 85-95, 105-13, 119-29, 133; Stevens 1955, xviii, 30). Anyone in this Newcastle-Christ's network might have told Atherton of the vacancy and/or recommended him to the Newcastle city fathers.

The earliest town physicians in Europe were appointed by Italian cities in times of plague, and their first occurrence in England was also associated with outbreaks of plague. For the Tudor and Stuart periods, they were also sometimes found on a more permanent basis, but such provision was far from universal. Newcastle was among the vanguard of incorporated towns paying a physician to serve in that capacity (Leonard 1900, 201-2; Levy 1943, 51; Pelling 1998, 88; Wallis 2006, 7, 17). The post of Town's Physician had been established in Newcastle in 1599, apparently as a response to plague, but seven years earlier a surgeon, John Coulson, had been paid 40s, 'his accustomed fee for helping to cure [i.e., treat] the maimed poor folk', by the mayor (Welford 1887, 132). Atherton's predecessors as Town's Physician included Robert Smith (occurs 1599, died 1603), Robert Henryson (occurs 1623-32, died 1637), Samuel Rand (appointed 1637, deprived 1643, reinstated 1652, died 1654), George Tunstall (appointed 1660, resigned 1664) and Richard Luck (appointed 1664, died 1670). The post was left vacant after the death of Atherton's successor, Robert Grey, in 1701 (Brand 1789, vol. 2, 363; MacKenzie 1827, vol. 1, 627; Welford 1887, 251, 260, 300, 309, 425; Dodds 1923, 23-4, 96, 134, 166-7).

Before we look at the principles guiding Atherton's practice of medicine, we need to get some sense of the medical context within which he worked. As Town's Physician, Atherton was not a hospital doctor. The Holy Jesus Hospital, built in 1681, the year before Atherton's appointment as Town's Physician, was not a medical establishment, but an almshouse for poor Freemen, Freemen's widows, and their unmarried sons and daughters (Bourne 1736, 137; Brand 1789, vol. 1, 352-5; Mackenzie 1827, vol. 1, 528-30). Still, Atherton will have visited the inmates of Holy Jesus Hospital in a medical capacity. We have noticed that an academically-qualified physician did not carry out surgical procedures himself, so the Newcastle guild of Barber-Chirurgeons, and Wax and Tallow Chandlers (Embleton 1892), originally formed in the fifteenth century, is certainly of interest. An 'ordinary' of 1671 forming the guild into a body politic mentions cures and the dressing of patients, confirming that medical care was provided by barber-surgeons belonging to the guild (Mackenzie 1827, vol. 1, 690). The freemen's Alphabet Book of 1710 shows twenty-six men admitted to the guild between 1684 and 1698, and Guild Book II mentions another eight between 1699 and 1701, so it was clearly flourishing during Atherton's time as Town's Physician (Dodds 1923, 104-18, 121-37, 196). Likewise, he will have needed skilled apothecaries to make up his herbal medicines. The medieval Spicers' Company, which included the apothecaries in Newcastle, had become part of the Company of Merchant Adventurers in 1547, so apothecaries are difficult to distinguish from the other trades represented in that company (Boyle and Dendy 1895, 215, 217; 1899, 299; Whittet 1964, 246, 263-7).

As an educated Galenic physician, Atherton's preference will have been to have treated his patients in a highly-personalised and individual way, assessing their humoral complexions and recommending a dietary, pharmaceutical and surgical regime tailored to their particular needs. As Town's Physician, however, the pressure on his services will perhaps have been too great for him always to have taken this kind of time-consuming care of his patients. During the seventeenth century, Newcastle's population increased from roughly 10,000 to 16,000, largely as a result of prosperity brought by the coal trade. The availability of cheap coal for local consumption brought a tendency towards respiratory problems in the town, so perhaps Atherton was frequently called upon to treat chest complaints (Wear 2000, 163; Pincus 2009, 62). Whilst plague had disappeared from England after the great epidemic of 1665, infectious diseases — smallpox, measles, meningitis, diphtheria and a variety of unidentified fevers —

presented the greatest public health challenges in the later seventeenth century. Few people survived long enough to suffer the degenerative conditions of old age (Porter 1988, 2; Dobson 1997, 417; Wear 2000, 11–18).

THE CHRISTIAN PHYSICIAN

As we have seen, *The Christian Physician* of 1683 was dedicated to Lord Radnor. In 1679, Radnor had become Lord President of the Privy Council and was therefore a powerful patron, despite the unpopularity caused by his arrogant and morose personality (ODNB n). He was closely associated with the Finch and Conway families, who also frequently consulted Henry More on matters of patronage. Anne, Lady Conway — More's 'heroine pupil' — was the beloved half-sister of Sir John Finch, a Christ's man who was British Ambassador to Constantinople from 1674 to 1677, and who had earlier trained as a physician at Padua (Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 492–3; Hutton 2004, 36–52; ODNB e, g). John Covel's chaplaincy to Finch suggests a further avenue for the recommendation of Atherton to Radnor's patronage (Peile 1910–13, vol. 1, 559; ODNB f). This was an aristocratic circle with lively intellectual interests in philosophy, theology and science, and Radnor, like Atherton, seems to have been something of a lay theologian. A pamphlet attributed to him, *A Discourse of the Vanity of the Creature*, resonates with Atherton's dismissal of all things earthly in comparison with the eternal values of heaven (Robartes 1673). An elegy on Radnor's death speaks of the Earl's 'Devotion and Philosophy', which 'Had their due Hours allotted 'em by thee: / State-craft did ne'r barr-out Divinity' (Anon. 1685).

Atherton's main purpose in writing *The Christian Physician* was to rebut atheism. A panegyric verse — 'On the Christian Physician', addressed to his 'Very much Esteemed Friend. Dr. HENRY ATHERTON, of NEWCASTLE' — was contributed by John Drake, 'Bachelor of Physick', a pupil of Thomas Lynford at Christ's College, who had graduated MB in 1681. The poem begins, 'Let now no more in natures widest Round / Be such a Prodigy as Atheist found' (Atherton 1683, page following preface; Peile 1910–13, vol. 2, 62). Atherton's book was specifically directed against the 'speculative Atheist' who scoffed at Christian beliefs and the loose living of the 'practical atheist' who behaved as if morality was not subject to divine judgement. Atherton cited and drew heavily upon Sir Charles Wolseley's *The Unreasonableness of Atheism*. Wolseley had been a Cromwellian courtier but had gained credibility with Anglican divines following the Restoration for his 'rational' approach to refuting the 'speculative atheist' (Wolseley 1669; Atherton 1683, part I, preface, 1–5, 9, 42; part II, 295; Spurr 1988, 567, 571–3, 577; ODNB u).

The influence of the Cambridge Platonist philosophers at Christ's College, Henry More and Ralph Cudworth (Lewis 2011, 9–36), is clear in *The Christian Physician*. The Cambridge Platonists were a loosely-knit philosophical-theological circle who attempted to accommodate Platonic ideas to a version of Christianity which followed an irenic middle way between Calvinist Puritanism and Laudian High Churchmanship. They stressed, as Atherton did, the superiority of ethical behaviour to doctrinal purity (Atherton 1683, part I, preface, 4–5). They based their arguments for the existence of God, and of 'eternal and immutable' moral principles, in natural religion — the theological principles at which any human being might arrive through the use of reason. Atherton followed them in this, drawing repeatedly on More's *An Antidote against Atheisme* (More 1653; Atherton 1683, part I, 1–54), although he did not cite More specifically. Atherton wanted to confront contemporary atheists with the

kind of modern argumentation on which they prided themselves, so he employed the Cartesian method of establishing clear and distinct principles and building up a persuasive argument in small, sure stages. This surely reflects the teaching of Descartes's philosophy, introduced at Christ's by More (Atherton 1683, preface; Gabbey 1982, 171–2). Atherton's refutation of 'Hobbianism' resonates with More's and Cudworth's long battle against what they perceived to be the atheist materialism of Thomas Hobbes (Atherton 1683, preface; Mintz 1962, 80–107).

An important aspect of God's providential care of mankind was the provision of medicines found in plants, minerals and animals, the basic ingredients of the traditional *Materia Medica* (Atherton 1683, part I, 47–51). The medicinal properties of plants could be known according to the doctrine of signatures, whereby the similarity of the shapes of plants to those of human organs was indicative of their use in healing (More 1653, 64–8; Arber 1986, 247–55; Wear 2000, 96–8; Bennett 2007; Pearce 2008, 51–2). Atherton cited, amongst others, the use of lungwort to treat afflictions of the lungs, of polypody of the oak to treat cirrhosis of the spleen, of figwort roots to cure scrofula, of sarsaparilla to calm the nerves, of rhubarb to purge excessive bile, of mushrooms to disperse phlegm, of black hellebore to ease melancholy, and of stoned fruit and berries to expel kidney stones (Atherton 1683, part I, 51–4). He believed that God invited men into the continuing study of plants. But whilst their healing properties were constant, God, in his absolute sovereignty, sometimes prevented their efficacy in order to inflict sickness as a sharp warning to the sinner to reform (Atherton 1683, part I, 53–9).

Atherton's approach to medicine was learned and traditional. He stressed the 'depth of Judgment, Learning and Experience' and the 'great Skil in Natural Philosophy, Anatomy, Botanism, Chymistry, the *Materia Medica*, Pathological and Practical parts of Physick' which were 'required to make a competent Physician' (Atherton 1683, part I, 63). He spoke respectfully of the classical Greek medical writers Hippocrates and Galen, of the eleventh-century Persian Avicenna and the twelfth-century Spanish Muslim Averroes. But he also praised 'a more modern Hippocrates both of this Age and Nation', a reference to the famous clinician Thomas Sydenham — 'the English Hippocrates' — who had introduced important innovations in the diagnosis of infectious and other diseases during the 1660s (Atherton 1683, part I, preface, 65; Cunningham 1989; *ODNB* p). The medical practitioner distrusted by Atherton was the empiric, who was more likely to kill his patients than heal them, particularly by prescribing opium for every respiratory complaint (Atherton 1683, part I, 60–71). The learned physician, by contrast, exercised a gift of God for the benefit of mankind, and it was a grave mistake to be fatalistic about illness and not to call for the physician's services (Atherton 1683, part I, 68–9, 71–3). The Christian physician must prepare himself to be a healer by living 'a Holy and Vertuous Life', 'purg'd from Vice and Wickedness' (Atherton 1683, part I, 73–9). Quoting Lord Chief Justice Matthew Hale, Atherton urged the fear of God as the necessary prerequisite to the reception of divine guidance, and he directed the physician to begin each day and each visit to a patient with prayer for the humility and Christian obedience which would make him an effective healer (Hale 1676, 45; Atherton 1683, part I, 75–6, 90–2).

The second part of *The Christian Physician* set out a programme for developing the holiness of life which would enable the physician to become that effective healer. This part was dedicated to Letitia Isabella, Countess of Radnor, the wife of Atherton's patron, whom he styled 'the Patroness and Protectrix of all that is Pious and Vertuous' (Atherton 1683, part II, dedication). It was largely a patchwork of popular Anglican devotional texts. Atherton drew on the Anglican classics *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* by Jeremy Taylor (Taylor 1650; 1651;

Atherton 1683, part II, preface, 289). The work Atherton mined most frequently was *The Whole Duty of Man*, an immensely popular practical guide to Christian morality and self-examination (Allestree 1658; Atherton 1683, part II, preface, 36, 53-5, 286-9; Elmen 1951-2; 1991, Spurr 1991, 281-4). Atherton recommended *Of the Daily Practice of Piety*, the composition of an anonymous royalist who had suffered imprisonment during the Civil Wars (Anon. 1660; Atherton 1683, part II, preface, 289), and he made considerable use of *The Devout Christian*, a book of private and family prayers by Symon Patrick, who became Bishop of Ely after the Glorious Revolution (Patrick 1673; Atherton 1683, part II, 289). For a description of hell, Atherton quoted from the royalist poet Abraham Cowley's biblical epic *Davideis* (Cowley 1672, 5-6; Atherton 1683, part II, 168-9). Atherton set out a programme for pious self-purgation, requiring private and family prayers and a weekly half-day of prayer and fasting with abject confession of one's own sinfulness (Atherton 1683, part II, 19-89). He constantly urged his physician-reader to contemplate his own death, in readiness for the day of judgement; an eternity of hell for unrepentant sinners was an established fact in his divinity.

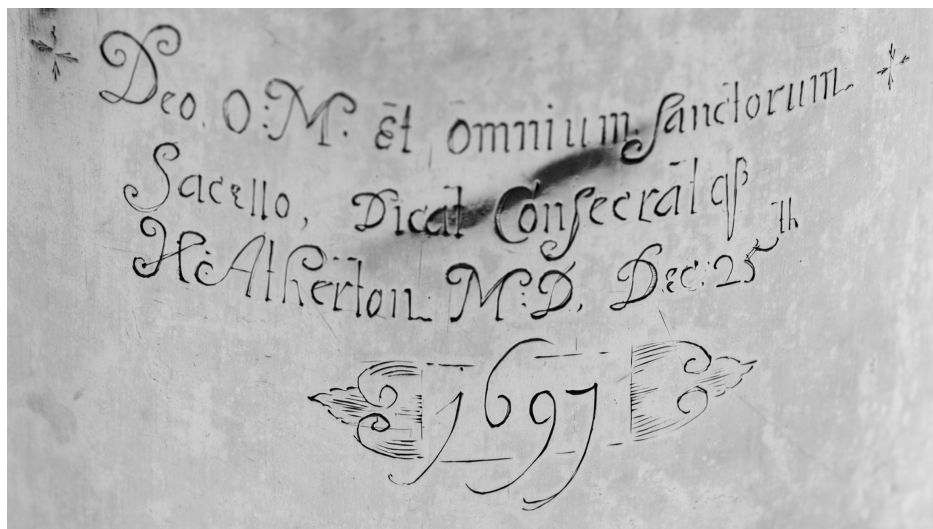


Fig. 1 The silver Communion flagon, made by Thomas Hewitson, which Henry Atherton gave to All Saints' Church, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, on Christmas Day 1697. Photo: Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. © Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.



Fig. 2 (right) A detail of the cast angel thumb-plate on the Communion flagon. Photo: Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. © Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.

Fig. 3 (below) The inscription on the Communion flagon. Photo: Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. © Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums



The Restoration Anglican quest for holiness was strongly linked with conformity to the established Church of England. When Atherton made his will in 1699, he directed that his children, Thomas and Jane, were to 'be brought up in the fear & admonition of the Lord, according to the principles of the Church of England, the best & purest establish'd church in the world' (Durham MS DPRI/1/1701/A5/1). *The Christian Physician* contained directions for disciplined attendance and worship at one's parish church. The devout medical practitioner should prepare carefully for divine service, pay close attention to the liturgy and make firm liturgical responses, make notes on the sermon, prepare rigorously to receive the sacrament and take Communion frequently (Atherton 1683, part II, 93-8, 103-6). Atherton's devotion to the sacrament of Holy Communion and to his parish church of All Saints', Pilgrim Street, can be seen in his gift of a silver flagon (figs. 1 and 2) for use at the altar. It is inscribed 'Deo O. M. & Omnium Sanctorum Sacello. Dicat Consecratq; H. Atherton, M.D. Dec'r 25, 1697'. The Latin inscription (fig. 3) can be loosely translated: 'H. Atherton, MD, declares and consecrates [this flagon] for God, the best and greatest, and to the chapel of All Saints, December 25 1697'. The flagon was made by the Newcastle silversmith Thomas Hewitson (Bourne 1736, 91; Anon. 1899, 16-17, 82) (figs 1-3).

DR HENRY ATHERTON OF PILGRIM STREET

Henry Atherton's will indicated that he lived in Pilgrim Street in a house with a garden and that he owned more than one house in the street (Durham MS DPRI/1/1701/A5/1). Sadly, the location of these properties is unknown; they were doubtless less grand than Alderman Fenwick's House but were located close to it (Heslop, Jobling and McCombie 2001, 5-7). Atherton's wife's name was Elizabeth (Durham MS DPRI/1/1701/A5/1), but she cannot be further identified. The will did not mention his daughter Grace, baptised in Carmarthen in 1675, so it seems likely that she had already died. Three of Atherton's children were buried in the 1680s: an unnamed infant at St Nicholas' church on 3 April 1683 (St Nicholas, 177); a daughter Ann at either All Saints' or St Nicholas' on 16 October 1686 (All Saints, 45; St Nicholas, 181); and a daughter Judeth at All Saints' on 8 April 1689 (All Saints, 91). A living daughter, Jane, was not yet twenty-four years old in 1699, and a son Thomas, born in 1685, would live to the age of sixty-four. Atherton's will directed that income from his properties in Newcastle and Somerset was to be used for Thomas to 'have Liberal Education in the Schools & University' (Durham MS DPRI/1/1701/A5/1; Peile 1910-13, vol. 2, 154).

Thomas was educated in Newcastle at the Royal Grammar School, under Thomas Rudd, before going up to Christ's College as a sizar under the tutor Henry Cooke, a Northumberland man, in 1702. Thomas later became a long-serving Fellow of Christ's, assisting his father's old tutor, John Covel, then Master of the college, as a highly efficient administrator (Peile 1910-13, vol. 2, 130, 154). At Christ's, Thomas was tutor to Henry Bourne, the Newcastle tailor's son who returned from Cambridge to become curate of All Saints' in 1722 and who wrote *The History of Newcastle upon Tyne: Or, the Ancient and Present State of that Town*, published by his widow and children three years after his death in 1733 (Bourne 1736, 91, 107; Peile, 1910-13, vol. 2, 193). Thomas resigned his Christ's Fellowship in 1732 on being presented to the college living of Little Canfield, Essex, which he held until his death in 1749 (Bourne 1736, 91; Peile 1910-13, vol. 2, 154).

Atherton appointed, as 'Guardians or Trustees' for Jane and Thomas in Newcastle, his 'Dear Wife, Dr Thomas Wharton of Durham, Mr Leonard Shafto, Mr John Wilkinson of

St Andrewes, & Mr William Ramsay' (Durham MS DPRI/1/1701/A5/1). Thomas Wharton was the son of the celebrated anatomist, also Thomas Wharton, who had discovered the physiological function of glands. The son (Atherton's friend) both practised medicine and was an ordained priest in Durham, and he and his wife Mary (a doctor's daughter) became the ancestors of a long line of distinguished physicians (*ODNB* t). We have met Leonard Shafto, the morning lecturer at All Saints', as the correspondent who sent Archbishop Sharp a manuscript copy of the story of Anna Atherton. John Wilkinson of St Andrews was a barber-surgeon, and the father of William Wilkinson, curate of St Andrew's, Newgate, from 1724 to 1739, and of St Nicholas' from 1739 to 1756. As a student at Christ's College, William Wilkinson was tutored by Thomas Atherton from 1720 to 1724 (Bourne 1736, 47; Brand 1789, vol. 1, 194, 318; Peile 1910–13, vol. 2, 197; Stevens 1955, 45). William Ramsey might have been the goldsmith, plumber or boothman (i.e., corn merchant) of that name (Dodds 1923, 102, 113, 117, 127, 187). The witnesses to Atherton's will were George Cuthbertson, a boothman (Boyle and Dendy 1899, 315, 320, 322, 335, 348; Dodds 1923, 108), Thomas Hutchinson, a cordwainer, felt maker or boothman (Boyle and Dendy 1899, 294, 317, 322, 327; Dodds 1923, 73–4, 95, 108, 162), and Allan Bateman, another boothman (Boyle and Dendy 1899, 314). William Jenison, yet another boothman, was Atherton's 'good friend' (Boyle and Dendy 1899, 302; Dodds 1923, 71, 91, 142, 161). All of these Newcastle surnames occur with sufficient frequency among the records of Freemen and Merchant Adventurers to make it clear that Atherton was firmly embedded in the mercantile society of the town.

In the years surrounding the Glorious Revolution of 1688, Newcastle upon Tyne experienced its share of the turmoil affecting the whole country. The town's charter was surrendered to the crown in 1684, several supporters of James, Duke of York (James II from 1685), were given personal Freedoms of the town between 1684 and 1688, and a loyal address was sent to the king on the birth in 1688 of the Prince of Wales, who was later known as 'The Old Pretender'. But Lord Lumley secured Newcastle for William of Orange on 5 December 1688, a statue of James II was destroyed and dumped in the Tyne the following May, and the Common Council revoked the Jacobite personal Freedoms on 23 September 1689. In 1690, the town's militia was embodied and remained on alert for Jacobite invasions, although a proposed landing in 1696 was probably never more than a vague Jacobite intention (Bourne 1736, 244; Brand 1789, vol. 2, 501–2; Mackenzie 1827, vol. 1, 48; Dodds 1923, xi, 104; Horsley 1971, 8–9; Howell 1980, 26–30; Furdell 1998, 91–3; *ODNB* j; Pincus 2009, 265–6).

An instance of disaffection towards the Williamite regime can be found in John March, Vicar of Newcastle. The annual commemoration of the death of Charles I on 30 January was suppressed by order of the House of Lords in 1689, but March kept the anniversary and preached a sermon strongly supporting the doctrine of passive obedience — the High Church Anglican view that authority must be obeyed even if it involved suffering. He named neither James II nor William and Mary, but his hearers assumed that he was preaching against the Revolution, a suspicion that was confirmed the next day when he refused either to preach or to allow any other clergyman to preach at St Nicholas' church on the official day of thanksgiving for the Revolution. The *Homily against Rebellion* was read instead, provoking James Welwood — a Scottish physician practising in Newcastle and later a semi-official spokesman for the Williamite regime — to engage March in a bitter correspondence which Welwood published in April of that year. In 1690, March refused to pray for William and Mary by name; his ambiguity in praying simply for the king and queen was punished by a threat from the mayor to stop his salary. March did eventually take the oath of allegiance to William and

Mary, but with reservations (BL MS Lansdowne 841, 54–7; Welwood 1689; March 1699; Bourne 1736, 74–6; Brand 1789, vol. 1, 307–8; Mackenzie 1827, vol. 1, 282–3, 288; Laws 1925, 108–10; Stevens 1955, 31; Furdell 1998; *ODNB* k, s).

This was the political setting for a quarrel between Atherton and Thomas Knaggs, afternoon lecturer at All Saints' from 1687 to 1697. The quarrel was occasioned by Atherton's adherence to the doctrine of passive obedience, while Knaggs seems to have approved of active resistance to popish tyranny (Brand 1789, vol. 1, 389; Mackenzie 1827, vol. 1, 317). Atherton's will recorded that Knaggs had done a 'great injustice' to him and to his wife (Durham MS DPRI/1/1701/A5/1), surely a reference to a judgement against the Athertons in the court of King's Bench on 21 November 1693: Atherton was fined £50 and his wife Elizabeth was fined 200 marks (£133 6½d) for 'words against the government' (Luttrell 1857, 228; Cooper 1857; *Notes and Queries*, 76 (1857), 476). Knaggs was also chaplain to Ford Grey, first Earl of Tankerville, who had been involved in both the Rye House Plot and Monmouth's Rebellion and who became a Privy Councillor to William III in 1695 (Brand 1789, vol. 1, 389; Mackenzie 1827, vol. 1, 317; *ODNB* i). In 1695 and 1696, Knaggs preached two fiercely Williamite and anti-Catholic sermons at All Saints', and published them, advertising his chaplaincy to Tankerville on the title pages (Knaggs 1695; 1696). With Knaggs' patron in high favour with King William, a prosecution for slander could hardly be attempted, but Atherton's will indicated that he thought it likely that a Jacobite invasion would succeed, creating an opportunity to prosecute Knaggs. However, to show that he died 'in perfect charity with my Greatest Enemy', Atherton forbade his heirs to bring a prosecution, on pain of forfeiture of their legacies (Durham MS DPRI/1/1701/A5/1).

Atherton's will gives us a final view of his religious beliefs. He commended his 'Soul into the hands of my good & most Gracious God, who created me, and my dearest & most Merciful Saviour Jesus Christ, who redeemed me by his most precious blood, by which through the Sanctification of his Most holy Spirit, I hope to attain to the Resurrection of the Just, & Everlasting life.' He committed his body to 'Christian & decent, (but not expensive) burial' (Durham MS DPRI/1/1701/A5/1). Atherton died, aged fifty, and was buried at St Nicholas' church on 22 January 1700 (St Nicholas, 209), in a grave which cannot now be located. His final thoughts were inevitably concerned with eternity, but his life was full of historical interest. Henry Atherton — member of Christ's College, Cambridge; learned physician; Restoration lay theologian; devoted public servant, royalist verging towards Jacobitism — must surely take a prominent place in the history of seventeenth-century Newcastle.

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| h) Glisson, Francis (1599–1677); | s) Welwood, James (1652–1727); |
| i) Grey, Ford (1655–1701); | t) Wharton, Thomas (1614–73); |
| j) Lumley, Richard (1650–1721); | u) Wolseley [ouseley], sir Charles (1630–1714). |
| k) March, John (1640–92); | |
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