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PILLS, POTIONS AND PLASTERS

A Country Surgeon at Work in Wedmore,
Somerset from 1686-1706

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Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	Westover's Country 3
Chapter 2	Westover's Family 16
Chapter 3	Westover's Practice: The Patients 26
Chapter 4	Westover's Practice: Medicines, Money and Management 42
Chapter 5	Westover's Hospice and the In-patients 57
Chapter 6	Westover's Land 68
Chapter 7	Westover's Home 81
Chapter 8	Westover and Seventeenth Century Medicine 96
Glossary	Westover's Medicines 109
Bibliography	122

Illustrations and Tables:

- Part of a page from the Casebook
- Map of the Isle of Wedmore in 1887
- Westover Memorial Stone
- Family Tree - the early Westovers
- Family Tree - the Westovers of Porch House
- Family Tree - the Allerton Westovers

- Table - John Westover's Cases
- Porch House and the Hospice about 1898

INTRODUCTION

The Westovers, a comfortably-off family of seventeenth century Wedmore yeomen, lived in Porch House, a square and solid building of Victorian appearance now, which stands in Wedmore's West End. The Victorian facade, however, conceals a sixteenth century house, and, although little of it remains, a few battered relics of the Westover past have come to light, from time to time, in their former home over the last three hundred and a half centuries. A rusty sword, a hastily written surgeon's Casebook of the seventeenth century and some pieces of pargeting are little enough but, where little exists, more can be found.

The Casebook introduces us to two Surgeon Westovers at work in seventeenth century Wedmore, the second of them being its keeper. Writing in his *Wedmore Chronicles* in 1898, Rev SHA Hervey, Vicar of Wedmore from 1876 to 1898, describes him as being concerned with “. . .all the ailments, agues, distempers, distractions, dislocations, fractures, fevers, jaundices, melancholies, pains, swellings, stitches, itches, etc., which the people of this parish and neighbourhood suffered during fifteen years; all the cordials, carminatives, decoctions, electuaries, diet drinks, juleps, marmalades, opiates, pills, potions, sudorifics, cephallicals, pectorals and stomachicalls which they swallowed; all the blisters, plasters, poultices and cataplasms which were applied to them and all the teeth and fees which were extracted from them.” The work of a country surgeon in the seventeenth century will never be better described.

Rather less than a fifth of the Casebook entries were printed in a severely edited form in 1898 by Rev Hervey together with some notes on the Westover family and some Westover wills, but subsequently such casebooks, wherever

Pills, Potions and Plasters.

surviving, have received only spasmodic attention. A detailed analysis of Westover's Casebook is long overdue so that a seventeenth century country surgeon may be seen at his daily work and busy about his affairs; the nature of his practice identified; and the man himself placed in his context, not only in the evolution of medical general practice, but in his community and his home

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Chapter 1.

WESTOVER'S COUNTRY

The Somerset Levels, even now something of a hidden and mysterious land, lie between the Mendip Hills, the Quantocks and the Bristol Channel - 250 square miles of flat, wet moors, only a little above sea level and, in some places, well below it; its flatness broken up by ridges and knolls of harder rock and the unhurried courses of slow-running rivers. The Levels are the heartland of Somerset; their summer pastures, enriched with spillwater, drying out each year after winter floods, supplying the county with its very name in times long gone.

For nearly six thousand years, the people of the Levels went along with this annual progression, lived their lives around it and made a few attempts to control it. These did not really begin until the thirteenth century but, by 1600, only a third of the marshy moorland which formed most of the Levels had been drained by large, open ditches or rhyes and embankments, and most of the area still flooded in winter and still dried up in summer to produce fertile pasture for beef and dairy cattle. The rest was rough, common grazing ground, under water for most of the year. Flooding had been reduced but not eradicated.

The sort of landscape which had emerged from three centuries of drainage and enclosure was one of settlement mainly in villages situated on the islands of higher ground, with a large rhye separating the village from the wet moorlands. It was a dangerous, labour-intensive environment - sea walls collapsed; drainage ditches filled up too fast with clogging vegetation - which could never be left unattended. Each winter the islands were surrounded by water as the sluggish rivers failed to drain away the rainfall from the enclosing

uplands. Sometimes, to make matters worse, at the river mouths the outfalls would be blocked by high tides or onshore winds, occasionally both together.

When this happened, disaster struck hard. The sea walls were breached, the river Brue burst its banks at Burnham in January 1607 and Glastonbury Tor, fourteen miles away, became an island in fact, as it did again during three months of heavy snow in 1615 and again and again and again in the gales and floods of 1627, 1635 and 1638. Later still, the Overseer of the Poor at Mark noted in his Account Book that “. . .on Thursday in the evening being the 16th day of January 1696; the Raine came and continued until Sundaye morning after, and snow on Saterdag the like floudes not in Memorie seen at that Season, with very great loss.” Next year “. . .on the 24th of June. . .began to Raine and a floude.” In November 1703 there were eighteen days of storms, culminating in the hurricane which swept away the Eddystone lighthouse, sunk twelve warships and took the lives of 8000 people in the West Country alone. Of the damage it did in the Levels, the observer at Mark wrote, “The 26th of November at night 1703: a very tempestuous wind which did strip and blow down houses and mills, and churches received hurt, and in the morning, being Saterdag, the sea broak in and drowned the parishes, Paulet, Huntspill, Burnham, Brean, Lympsham and both Brents very much hurt by loss of goods.” This storm so imprinted itself on local memories that, twenty years later, when Daniel Defoe was in the West Country, he was taken to see the place where a ship had come ashore.

Even in better times than these, travel over the Levels was only easy in the summer - and then only relatively so. Thomas Gerard, in 1633, while collecting materials for his description of the county, found the river at Aller so wide that it might, he thought, have been part of the sea and, further on, the moors so covered in water as to look the same. Even that dogged traveller, Celia Fiennes, while on her way from Glastonbury to Taunton in 1698, complained of her struggles “. . .through lanes full of stones and, by the great raines just before, full of wet and dirt. . .” and “. . .over a large common of deep black land. . .”

When Defoe rode that way in the mid-1720s, he described the lower road from Bristol to Bridgwater as “. . .not always passable being subject to floods and dangerous inundations. . . .” Even in recent times, after nearly four more centuries of drainage and improvement, large scale-floods have occurred in 1929, 1960 and 1981.

All in all, the Levels have always been a marginal area, never an easy place in which to live and make a living. In the seventeenth century, living and working conditions were poor for most of the people of the Levels; food was never plentiful and, usually, of poor quality; water was always impure. Illness was, naturally, endemic. There was scurvy and rickets, a proliferation of eye problems, skin diseases and sores; worms, anaemia, stomach pains and dysentery. Tuberculosis, bronchitis and other chest and lung complaints were common among the young and rheumatism and arthritis, endemic in marshy regions, were by no means confined to the elderly. Famine, or at least, shortage was far from uncommon. One harvest in every four or five was a bad one; and, even after a good harvest there was always the gap between the late winter and summer to be bridged. Life expectancy was no more than the mid-thirties; of every ten children born, four failed to reach fifteen; only one girl in three survived to become a mother herself. The disaster which struck the family of Matthew Law, Vicar of Wedmore from 1627 to 1647, as revealed by the parish registers is typical of all too many of the families of the time. Eight children were baptised between 1629 and 1641; between 1640 and 1645, five of them and their mother, died. Such circumstances today would bring prolonged distress and trauma in their wake - the people of the seventeenth century, particularly in hard areas like the Levels, accepted them with a fatalism and lack of sensitivity close to callousness.

Life itself led them so to behave, for most children who survived infancy experienced hard, if not downright cruel, treatment. Over most of the Levels there was in operation a system of mutual exchange, common in most parts of

the country to some degree or another until the late eighteenth century, whereby children were separated from their families when they were about eight or so and sent to neighbours to be trained as servants or to some trade, under the harshest of disciplines. Such separation and severity of upbringing, coupled with the general level of poverty and the hardships of weather and environment in the Levels, combined to produce men and women who were themselves, cold, hard and unfeeling - such attitudes were necessary when death hovered nearby. Deep involvement and close relationships were imprudent.

Difficult though climate and conditions were, a living could be made. Even without any land to live off, survival could be achieved from rights of access to common land to take turf, sedge and rushes, through fishing, fowling, growing teasles, alders and withies - and there was always the moorland grazing in summer when the Levels became an easier land of sluggish rivers, grazing cattle and pollarded willows. It could never be forgotten, though, that things were only kept so because of the constant battle waged by the people of the Levels against invading waters. Over the centuries, they became accustomed to holding on; to surviving one crisis in order to meet the next; organising themselves equally to maintain their defences against inundation and defeat the encroachments of enclosing landlords like the Seymours, whose fences at Godney kept disappearing. Kings were not feared - Charles 1's plans for King's Sedgemoor were brought to naught.

Such toughness, tenacity and independence, if added to the ability to recognise an opportunity when it occurred, are the qualities needed to rise above the common level - if some land and money could be accumulated also. For a family to claw its way to anything more than mere subsistence under medieval conditions could take generations, but once moderate prosperity was achieved, only opportunity was needed. Not all who tried succeeded, but the Westovers of the Isle of Wedmore were one among several Levels families who, when their

time came, put their abilities - and their grimly hoarded reserves of cash - to work.

Before, however, their achievements can be appreciated, some analysis of the community in which they lived should be made. There is no way of knowing accurately what was the population of a place before the Census of 1801, but estimates for most places can be made from a number of sources. When, in 1558, the manor of Wedmore passed into private hands, a survey tells us that it had two hundred houses; if we apply to this figure the mean household size of 4.75 persons suggested by recent population studies for households of the late sixteenth century to the early twentieth century, a population of 950 people is suggested for Wedmore in 1558. This does not include all the hamlets, for many of them were parts of other manors. Nearly a hundred years later, in 1650, a Presentment of Jurors, quoted by Rev Hervey, says that “. . .the Parish of Wedmore consists of about 300 families. . .” and, this, on the same basis of calculation, suggests 1425 people. This figure does include all the hamlets as do calculations based on a count of marriages and baptisms from the parish registers which produce a figure of 1419. It seems safe, therefore, to assume that the Wedmore of the early Westovers had somewhere in the region of 1350 people. The 1801 Census records 2122 inhabitants of the parish.

Society in seventeenth century England was based firmly upon hierarchy, deference to social superiors and clearly marked social divisions. Work done on the social structure of the period suggests that in a community like Wedmore, a tenth of the people could have been classified as yeomen; about a third as husbandmen, with approximately another third as labourers; a fifth as destitute and a final tenth as artisans and tradesmen. The yeoman cultivated his own land, whether freehold or leased for lives; the husbandman cultivated someone else's land. In remote rural communities such estimates are not always clear cut and there was much blurring of status at the edges of groups.

Population growth was not rapid in seventeenth century England, indeed the second half of the century was a period of stagnation and decline. In Wedmore, from 1600 to 1636, the population increased by 92, but the rest of the century saw a decrease of 394. There is, among population historians, a grim concept known as a Crisis Mortality Year, meaning a year in which there were twice as many burials as in other years of the same ten-year period. Wedmore's parish registers reveal nineteen of these dreadful years, twelve of which occurred in the seventeenth century, with nine of them happening between 1636 and 1700. Apart from such calamitous years, there were sixteen other years between 1656 and 1690 when burials outnumbered baptisms. These ominous records are the reality of the chronic illnesses, famines and shortages already referred to and more - there was typhoid and dysentery in most parts of Somerset in 1624, 1625 and 1626; plague in 1661, 1670 and 1671; and small pox in 1678.

A precarious environment, uncaring and insensitive child rearing and a life in which, for most people, little advancement was to be hoped for, is not a prescription for communities without stress, and seventeenth century society in general shows much evidence of it. The Wedmore community was not exempt. Quarter Sessions records provide numerous complaints of violence; the broken limbs and dislocated joints recorded in Westover's Casebook, many of them suffered by women and children, cannot all have been caused by farming and farmyard accidents; and, as we shall see, about one in six of Westover's patients suffered from depression. Drunkenness, too, figures largely in Sessions records a matter of concern all over the country as is clear from the many applications from the better-off for the closure of alehouses. The supernatural, another symptom of a society under stress, was never far away, especially when things went wrong. A case of alleged witchcraft was examined at nearby Glastonbury in 1653, involving all the usual ingredients of dead and ailing animals, sick children, sinister threats and mysterious happenings. Two other Somerset covens were investigated in 1664.

The public nature of daily life, the norm in town or village then, added further stress. Although the household was the basis of life and activity, people did not lead introverted or, even, particularly private lives. They and their behaviour were open to a very high degree of public scrutiny and intervention which was, in part, the product of centuries of public control of farming and commerce based on co-operation. The practice, already mentioned, of inter-family fostering of children, strengthened community ties at the expense of family ones. Everything that happened in a family became known to all and any behaviour likely to be a danger to the social balance attracted attention and action, official or otherwise. In 1618, Joan Edgell of Sand, one of the Wedmore hamlets, who was “. . .not well in the wits whereby it is doubted that she will doe very much mischief. . .” was locked away in the House of Correction at Ilchester against the will of her husband. Marital disputes, too, were within the sphere of public action. In 1631, Isabel Longe of Blackford, very close to Wedmore, complained that her husband, Henry, did not maintain her adequately. Their neighbours, obviously aware of the nature and duration of the dispute, stepped in to compose matters and an agreement was reached between the parties. When Isabel, who does not appear to have been too reasonable a lady, complained again of her husband’s shortcomings, the neighbours arbitrated once more. There were no further reports. Social equilibrium, not privacy - a concept with which people of the seventeenth century would not have been familiar - was all-important, and lack of privacy is but one more cause of stress.

The Church punished sexual misbehaviour - regarded as the most serious challenge to the equilibrium - in every diocese through its Archdeacons’ Courts; Justices of the Peace arranged for the upkeep of illegitimate children and the punishment of their begettors. On 9th April 1621, Sir Edward Rodney and John Maye Esq., sitting in Quarter Sessions at Bridgwater, ordered that “. . .Crispin Leach of Wedmore, husbandman, shall pay sixpence weekly to the overseers of Wedmore after the end of morning prayer to be reserved for a stock to apprentice

the child. Isabell Thorne, the mother, is to keep her child without receiving any allowance, or pay twelve pence weekly. Both parties to give sufficient security for the performance of this order. The said Isabell is to be whipt through the next market so that others may avoid the like offence. As the father is only found so by the confession of the mother no further order is made for him.”

Isabel Thorne lived in Wedmore’s Borough, as did Crispin Leach. She was 27 years old at the time of the order, had already had an illegitimate child in 1619 and was to have three more by 1632. She died, aged 60 and still unmarried, in 1654. It is not easy to assess how much of a deterrent the public whipping, always part of bastardy orders in the first half of the century, really was or, even, how often it was carried out. There were always re-offenders. In Wedmore at this time, the most notable was Isabel Day who presented the parish with seven bastards between 1608 and 1622 and “. . . doth live very idly and is very troublesome to her neighbours. . . .” She was twice whipped and was sent to the Bridewell at Ilchester for a year in 1614.

How big a problem sexual misbehaviour really was is impossible to determine. The incidence of bastardy is easier to measure. Between 1561, when the Wedmore parish registers began, and the end of the seventeenth century, one hundred and fifty-three illegitimate births were recorded, 2.3 per cent. of all registered births in Wedmore during that period. The percentage for each year of the period remains in step with those for twenty-four English parishes collected by the Cambridge Group for Population studies. The problem was not in numbers but in danger to the social equilibrium.

Calculations to arrive at an estimate of the population of a place are relatively easy to make, but, in the absence of contemporary maps and pictures, it is less easy to know what that place looked like. Instead, we must content ourselves with general impressions gained from such descriptions as have survived and, for Wedmore, there are only two, neither contemporary with Westover’s Wedmore.

When Sir Thomas Gresham bought the manor of Wedmore in 1558 from Elizabeth I, the survey then made tells us that it consisted of 200 houses, 10 windmills, 100 dovecotes, 200 gardens (vegetable etc., rather than ornamental), 2000 acres of pasture, 200 acres of woodland and 100 acres of gorse covered common land. In 1791, Rev John Collinson wrote that Wedmore had 25 farmhouses and 9 cottages in The Borough, the centre of the village then as it is now; 93 houses in Wedmore, which was the area around and behind The Borough, roughly to the west and south, with another 59 houses “. . .scattered about the Church. . . .” Of the other 329 houses Collinson counted, 149 farmhouses and 180 cottages spread through the hamlets, the largest single concentration being at Blackford, where there were thirty farmhouses and sixteen cottages.

Smaller than Collinson’s village, leafier than today’s, Westover’s Wedmore was spread much more thinly among its trees, lanes, orchards and fields. West End, where the Westovers lived, is not mentioned by Collinson but, apart from their Porch House, there was at least one other house there in the mid-seventeenth century. The baptism record of Richard Cutler in 1653 tells us that his family lived “. . .west in towne. . . .” The belt of land behind The Borough must have been much wider then with, at the most two or three houses - there were only five in 1898.

By the mid-seventeenth century, Wedmore, along with all other towns and villages in England, had seen many drastic changes: the control of the Church and the discipline of the manor had broken down and the management of village and parish affairs had increasingly become a matter for Vestries elected, at least in theory, by all the householders of the parish. The time at which this transfer of power happened varied widely across the country and depended on local circumstances. In Wedmore, there was little of the old system left as early as 1600 and its affairs were controlled entirely by local men. Generally speaking, during the early seventeenth century, the parish became the major unit

of local organisation and its officials, supervised by the Justices of the Peace, the arbiters of local affairs. The local men who served on the Vestry and filled such offices as Churchwarden, Overseer of the Poor, Surveyor of the Highways were not, as a rule, men of great education, only some of them - or their wives - being able to read and write, but to the people of the parish, particularly the poor or the more unruly, they must have seemed to be the very law itself. They could not avoid office, usually having to take their turn because of the tenements they held.

To summarise then. By 1685, when the second Surgeon Westover began what was to be his last Casebook, Wedmore parish had some twelve to thirteen hundred people, of whom less than a fifth could be described as well-off. Most were often ailing and often underfed, occasionally violent, superstitious and, owing to their goldfish-bowl lives, very stressed. Nonetheless, the community had survived the turmoil of the Reformation and, by Westover's time, the disturbances and rigours of the war between King and Parliament as well as Monmouth's Rebellion.

The War seems not to have disturbed Wedmore very much and it is difficult to make any estimates of how local sympathies were divided. What evidence there is suggests that the people of the Levels in general were rather more Parliamentary than Royalist. A surgeon from Plymouth who visited the area in 1681 wrote in his diary of the radicalism of the inhabitants. Matthew Law, Vicar of Wedmore since 1627, was deprived of his living in 1647 and a Presbyterian, Robert Edwards, put in his place. Edwards remained only until 1650, being followed by Francis James, an even more radical Independent who, in his turn was replaced by Jeremy Horler, who remained until the Restoration. Horler married the widow of George Hodges of the Manor House in 1655, perhaps an indication of Parliamentary leanings in the Hodges family - the Lords of the Manor then. These are the only outward signs in Wedmore of the great upsets that shook the foundations of Church and State, unless one considers the implications of a parish register entry of 24th January 1646 which records the

Pills, Potions and Plaster, 1.

birth and baptism of “Anne, the daughter of Jane Turner. . .”, remarking that the father was “. . .an unknown soldier.”

Monmouth’s Rebellion aroused more widespread reactions in the Wedmore community. A 1985 combination of all known listings of Monmouth rebels includes nearly 6000 names, among them the names of twenty-one Wedmore men who followed the Duke. Nineteen of them were listed by the Hundred Constable as “Absent and in the late Rebellion.” Their names were Robert Barrell or Barrett, Francis Bussell, Edward Buxton, William Carter, John Charrell, John Counsell, Robert Cocks or Cox, Nicholas Feare, Charles Fisher, Richard Holman, William Jenkins, Richard Latcham, George and William Lye or Leigh, John and Thomas Smith, William Taylor and William Walsh. The Constable’s Presentment is the only list in which they appear and it can be assumed that they either died at Sedgemoor or succeeded in remaining concealed until after the General Pardon was issued on 10th March 1686. A search of family reconstructions made from Wedmore parish registers covering the period 1561 to 1700 suggests that ten of the men survived the Rebellion and returned to their homes:- William Carter, Charles Fisher, Richard Holman, William Jenkins, William Lader, Richard Latcham, William Lye, John Smith, Thomas Smith and William Taylor. All of them, except Richard Holman, John Smith and William Taylor, became patients of John Westover between 1686 and his death.

Two other Wedmore men figure more prominently. Francis Fudge was among those excepted from the 1686 General Pardon, although no reason was given. He does not appear in any of the Wedmore Registers, although other members of the Fudge family do. The second man, Robert Thatcher, “. . .a chirurgeon of Wedmore . . .” obviously played a more prominent part than any of the others. He was tried at Wells and listed to remain in custody, his name being later deleted from that list and transferred to those listed for execution for high treason. There is no record of whether this sad event ever took place, but his land was declared forfeit and put up for sale. He cannot be traced in the

parish registers. Two Robert Thatchers appear in the Baptisms Register but neither could have been the rebel. The only burial of a Robert Thatcher recorded is that of one of the two whose baptisms are mentioned above. The Thatcher family was well established in Wedmore and may, even, have provided, at one time, some professional competition for the Westovers.

It is at this point in time that we open the Casebook kept by John Westover the younger, the second Surgeon Westover, for it begins in the year 1685, although the pages covering that year have been torn out. It is a working day-book kept by a busy country surgeon and yeoman, recording all those who sent for him or came to see him, their ailments and the money they paid him; his transactions in cattle, horses, land and crops and all the items of expenditure incurred in the course of his daily business. The Casebook deals with the last fifteen years of Westover's life and is the last of a series which, if all the others had survived, would have revealed the details of a period of seventy years of medical practice in and around Wedmore by John Westover and his father.

Having summarised the contents of the Casebook in this way, it should be said here that no study of the Casebook and the Westovers can be complete without acknowledging the work of Rev SHA Hervey, whose more colourful summary of the Casebook forms part of my introduction, as a historian of Wedmore. Sydenham Henry Augustus Hervey was Vicar of Wedmore from 1876 to 1898. He was the third son of Lord Arthur Charles Hervey, Bishop of Bath and Wells, himself a son of the Earl of Bristol, and was appointed by his father to Wedmore at the age of 30. Mr Hervey, however, was no sinecurist and no mere Victorian nepotist. He was a strong Liberal in a traditionally Conservative area; an energetic restorer of his church; an archaeological excavator; a keen walker, cricketer, tennis player and musician. He transcribed and published Wedmore's parish registers and, in 1881, began the publication of the first of four parts of *The Wedmore Chronicle*, including some of Westover's almost indecipherable Casebook. His writing style was individualistic, racy and

pulled no punches; when writing about the music in his church, he said of organists that they “. . .are not careful enough about how they accompany; they accompany too much, never letting the voices sing a single syllable without them: they accompany too loud, drowning instead of accompanying the singing. . . .” Of one of Westover’s in-patients he wrote “She was no teatotaller. Perhaps it would have been better for her if she had been.”

It was said of him that he often incurred the displeasure of his parishioners but never lost their respect. It was typical of the man that he lived to be a hundred years old - but not in Wedmore. He retired to Surrey, aged fifty-two and devoted the rest of his life to antiquarian and genealogical research.

Chapter 2.

WESTOVER'S FAMILY

Settled around Wedmore at least as early as the reign of Edward IV, and probably much earlier, the Westovers had never been great folk but, by the middle of the sixteenth century, the times were turning in their favour. The medieval discipline of the manor, designed to keep people in their places, had weakened drastically; the Church was losing its hold and was soon to lose its property. The Tudor peace had neutralised the warring nobility, freeing government to become centralised, despotic and interested only in "Great Affairs", allowing the ordinary man more freedom and security than ever before. He did with it exactly what might have been expected of him. He looked after himself. Royal marriages and divorces; pretenders and rebellions; even Fields of the Cloth of Gold, were nothing to him unless they threatened or improved his prospects of survival. Nests were feathered in all corners of the land as and when opportunity offered.

Opportunity came out of the tumult and the turmoil of the Reformation and the subsequent confiscations of Church property at every level. Before 1540, Wedmore and its surrounding hamlets were a tightly controlled pocket of Church-owned manors. The Dean of Wells had Wedmore; the Abbot of Glastonbury had Panborough, Northload, East Theale and Clewer; the Bishop of Bath and Wells had Blackford; and the Dean and Chapter of Wells had Allerton.

In 1547, Edward seymour, Duke of Somerset, the young King's uncle, acquired Wedmore and Mudgeley and, in the following year Blackford. Life at the top, however could sometimes be more insecure than life below and, within six years, Somerset was kneeling at the block for tampering with the royal succession. His newly acquired property reverted to the crown, passing thence into the hands of courtiers and land speculators before being divided into small lots to be sold off at local level. Husbandmen with the enterprise and the capital to seize the opportunities so offered became, at a stroke, yeomen.

The manors of Wedmore and Mudgeley are good examples of the kind of thing that happened. After Somerset's execution in 1553, Mudgeley was acquired by the Earl of Pembroke who, within a month, sold it to Thomas Hodge, a member of the Grocers' Company of London, who in his turn, disposed of the manor two years later to Humphrey Coles of Barton. Between 1560 and 1597 it was in the hands of the Clyfton family, who sold it to Edward Cottington. Three years later Cottington sold Mudgeley to Richard Bridges of Scampton in Lincolnshire. All these men, from the noble earl to Bridges, were speculators, with no interest in the land apart from what they could get for it. In 1605, Bridges broke up the manor into five parts of 67 acres, 43 acres, 60 acres, 70 acres and 150 acres, selling them, respectively, to Nicholas Wykes, a gentleman of Wells, and four husbandmen, John Lithiatt of Mudgeley, William Boulting of Wedmore, John Urch of Mudgeley and Richard Counsell of Mudgeley. The first four paid, between them, £1250 for their land.

The manor of Wedmore followed a similar process, being bought, in 1559, by Sir Thomas Gresham, a wealthy London merchant, Lord Mayor, and founder of the Royal Exchange, who became even wealthier by buying great quantities of Church land and reselling it in small lots. One of these, the Manor House of Wedmore, with some cottages, three orchards, seventy acres of arable

land, three acres of wood and a hundred acres of furze and heath, was sold to Thomas Hodges, a local man, in 1577.

It is typical of the random nature of document survival that exactly what the Westovers managed to acquire at this time, who they bought it from and what they paid for it, remains unknown. Rev Hervey had no knowledge of it, although he mentions seeing a document, undiscovered as yet, at Sand that listed all their land. They seem to have had strong connections with Blackford, and the first Westover will to survive locates one of them, a husbandman, at Stoughton in 1574, so much of their land was probably in that area.

It is likely that they received their name from having lived in Wedmore's West End, 'west over' a brook that used to run in that part of the village. However long they been there, by the beginning of the sixteenth century they were becoming prominent in the Wedmore community. In 1509, a John Westover, the first of his name to be recorded, was among those inhabitants of the parish who signed an indenture with the Dean of Wells to lease some land. On 13th March 1555, another John Westover was a witness to the will of William Wychefield of Allerton. In 1586, as part of the preparations against a threatened Spanish invasion, the pikemen and musketeers of Somerset were mustered in their Hundreds and among those of the Bempstone Hundred assembled at Bridgwater was another John Westover, who was well enough off to have a musket. Certainly established at Wedmore, the Westovers were also to be found in the nearby parishes of Mark and Allerton.

They travelled even further socially, as their wills demonstrate. Nine Westover wills have survived - five of them with detailed inventories of possessions - to be printed in *The Wedmore Chronicle*. This is random survival at work again, for most Somerset wills were lost to enemy action during the Second World War. The first Westover will, although without an inventory, is that of John Westover of Stoughton, described as a husbandman, dated 13th May 1574. This John was the third of his name and had married Joan Clapp on 3rd

July 1567; their daughters, Grace, Joan and Mary being seven, four and one respectively. If this was his first marriage, and there is no indication of a previous one, he was only about thirty-four or -five when he died. His will was a simple one. No cash in hand is mentioned although he had eight pounds owing to him, which he left to be collected and divided between his daughters. Crops in the ground and in store are listed as well as wool and shearings. His livestock included five bullocks; three horses, all mares, and four colts; there were three cows and four calves as well as twenty-sheep and four lambs and a solitary pig. Their animals were not tagged or numbered but had names; there were cows called Lily, Sparkle and Pickle and bullocks called Gallant and Tail. The only household utensils specified were “. . .the Greate Crocke and the greatest panne. . .” which were left to his eldest daughter, Grace, after his wife’s death. The only land mentioned is “. . .the nine acres at Blackford. . .” left “. . .with the croppes for alle the yeares that shall be to come. . .” to his daughter, Joan. His brother, Thomas, received his hackney saddle and fowling net and “. . .the residue of my apparell. . .” except a blue coat which went to a friend, John Starre. Juliana Maine, John Westover’s sister, was left a white pig and her children, “. . .two busshells of wheate in the fielde. . .” After stipulating that his wife should have “. . .the using of all the goodes of my children. . .” until her death, he left twelve pence to the poor box in Wedmore Church.

John of Stoughton was, for his time, a moderately prosperous husbandman. Taking into account the nine acres of land at Blackford and the various wheat crops and livestock mentioned in the will, he probably farmed about twenty acres. He had money owing to him, enough clothing to divide up and his wife and daughters were provided for. No more is known of him.

The next Westover will is that of Joan Westover of Allerton, the widow of the fourth John Westover, who had died in 1573. She was buried on 13th of February 1581, her will being made the same day. She left two pence apiece to the churches of Allerton, Wedmore and Wells and cash sums, varying from ten

to twenty shillings to her sons, William and John and her daughters, Agnes Millard, Joan Bendole and Mary. To the children of Agnes and Joan, she left twenty pence apiece - but did not say how many children there were. Joan and Agnes were given all her clothes and Mary, her executor, received all the rest of her goods. There is no inventory, so no property values and cash sums cannot be totalled, but again moderate prosperity is indicated. It is likely that her son, John, was the musketeer of 1586.

Nearly one hundred years pass and at least seven more Westovers live and die, only lightly recorded, in Wedmore and Allerton before we have the next Westover will. With it it is immediately clear that during this Westover 'dark age', the family had achieved substantial prosperity and status. The seventh John Westover was the first surgeon of the family and his will, dated 8th February 1678, and that of his widow, dated 4th May 1685, show just how much progress had been made.

Surgeon Westover was a man of substance indeed. His will and inventory tell us that his cellar was well filled, his kitchen bright with brass and pewter, his yards well stocked with corn, hay and cattle. His purse held twenty pounds and he was owed twenty more. His live animals, valued at £250, at a time when meat was 2d. or 3d. a pound and animals priced accordingly, were many. His household furniture, linen and other equipment was valued at £184. No total amount of land is mentioned specifically, some twenty-five acres being implied, but he left two parcels of land of nine acres each, one in Ashton and the other in Wedmore, to his grandson, William Rowley. In all, the total value of the seventh John Westover's inventory was £772. 10s., including four cattle leases worth £154. Nothing, not even two pence, was left to the Church or the poor.

Five of his children were alive at his death and they were well provided for. His two youngest daughters, Hannah and Ann, received £100 apiece; Henry, his third and youngest son, was given the Westover windmill with an acre of

land attached and Andrew, the second son, was left the income from two Wedmore tenements. Everything else was left to his eldest son, the eighth John Westover, also a surgeon and the Casebook keeper, with a life interest retained for his wife, Joan.

The seventh John Westover was clearly very comfortably off, but what, exactly, was his social status? Investigations made of inventories from the Archdeaconry of Taunton, it has been said, suggest that a total moveable estate of £450 to £750 placed a man as wealthy while total moveable property worth £200 to £400 provided a place among the lesser gentry. Owners of moveable estate worth £100 to £200 were among the yeomen.

No Westover is anywhere described as a gentleman and, in their later wills, members of both the Wedmore and Allerton branches always describe themselves as yeomen - being surgeons would in any case have prevented gentility. John Westover 7 and his successors were yeomen, not esquires or gentlemen, but substantial householders and among the notables in their parishes. With the seventh John Westover, the Westovers of the Isle of Wedmore reached the peak of their prosperity - none of the later Westovers approached his level of wealth. The will of his son, the eighth John, has not survived, but that of his brother, Henry, who inherited from him, has. The value of his inventory at his death in 1709 was £332. 14s. and wills from the Allerton branch show much the same sort of figure.

Of the seventh John's life, little is recorded; there being only a few documentary references to him. He was baptised on 16th March 1616 and married Joan Coles, daughter of another Wedmore family, on 26th November 1640. Their first child, a daughter named after her mother, was born twelve months later, but died, aged one year. Next came their first son, the eighth John, baptised 16th April 1643, followed by another Joan in 1645. Three sons, Andrew, Henry and William followed in 1647, 1651 and 1653 respectively,

though William died in 1660. Two more daughters, Hannah and Ann, were born in 1655 and 1659. With these two, the family was complete.

John Westover 7 was buried in the south aisle of Wedmore Church, itself a mark of local esteem, near the south door. At some time since his tombstone has been moved and lies today in the south transept of the church. It bears the following inscription:

“Here resteth the body of John Westover Senior of this parish
Chirurgion who departed this life Jan 30 1678

Is this that dark and dismal place
Of which death threatened me,
His strength my body now deface
Not to eternity
Whilst in ye grave my bodye lye
Exalted in my soule,
Soe fixe in Christ with God on high
That nought can me controul,
Of death let this a warning be
Unto suche as pass by,
Expect a sudden change to see,
Repent, for doctors dye.

Here also resteth the bodye of Joane his wife who departed this life
April 18 1692. And also John Westover their son Chyrurgion departed
this life Feb 25 in the 62nd year of his age 1705.”

Inspection of the first letters of each line will reveal the reason for the tortuous and convoluted construction.

One further snippet there is. Obviously John Westover Senior and his family and contemporaries lived through turbulent times, although their sparse records seldom offer any reflection of this. A Quarter Sessions Report of 15th December 1658 tells us, however, that John Westover Senior laid an information

that when he was returning from Brent fair {the Westovers had land there) on 29th September he was attacked “. . .in a dark place of the way. . .” by several men, had his cloak torn and was pulled from his saddle. A witness said that he saw a man strike Westover with a pike staff. The Report tells us that the men were identified but does not give their names. There is no record of Westover’s injuries or of the outcome of the affair nor does the Report offer any reason for the attack.

There are, however, some hints to be found which may suggest one. A few bits of information, when put together, hint at a leaning towards religious, and perhaps, political non-conformity, at least among some of the Westovers - sufficient cause for an assault in those times. Richard Westover of Allerton (d. 1680) was accused, in 1650, at an inn in Taunton, of signing the Covenant; the seventh John Westover left no money to the Church in his will; his son’s Casebook mentions no dealings with Church or clergy except payment of tithes - in which he had no alternative. Rev Hervey made much of these hints in his *Chronicle*, adding a story of Monmouth’s Rebellion, told him by an old inhabitant of Wedmore, of a rebel being hidden by the ladies of Porch House and of a doctor being hanged; and pointing out that the casebook pages for 1685 had been torn out - but he was something of a romantic. He adds also that Andrew Westover, younger brother of the Casebook surgeon, disappears from Wedmore after mid-1686. The hanging tale may have been an echo of Robert Thatcher, who was in the Rebellion and was marked for execution. These snippets do not add up to much - but a hint of dissent among some of the Westovers is possible.

If only a few crumbs of information remain about John Westover Senior, a more substantial record survives of part of the working life of his son, the eighth John, who followed his father as a surgeon. Random survival yet again, for it is certainly against all the odds that one casebook, the last of a series, could survive for nearly three hundred years in Porch House to be deposited, finally, in the County Record Office at Taunton. The casebook answers many questions,

directly and by implication, about the eighth John Westover's life but sheds no light on the most interesting question of all - how and why, after so many generations of husbandmen and yeomen, did the Westover family produce two surgeons in succession?

There is no way of knowing beyond all doubt, but if we are willing to seek inspiration in the prevailing beliefs and philosophies of the time a possible explanation may be found. It was a view widely held in seventeenth century England that it was difficult, if not impossible, to rise in the world by the land alone and that a second occupation or career was desirable for an ambitious man. It may be that this motivation was the one that drove John and Alice, the parents of the seventh John Westover to make their eldest son a surgeon and he, in his turn, to do the same with his. Such an idea would have appealed to a family like the Westovers.

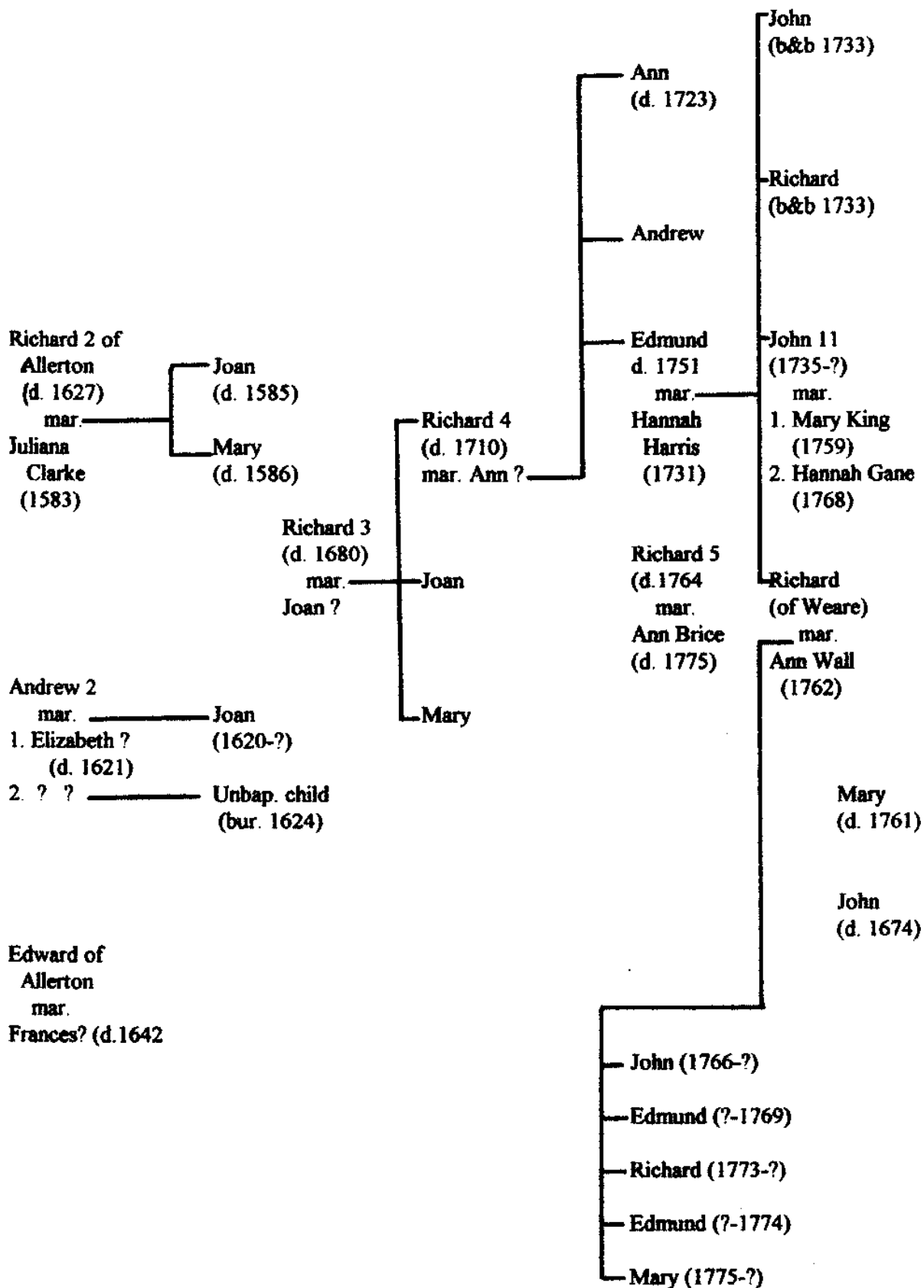
Equally obscure is where and how John Westover 7 received his training, for no evidence of apprenticeship or licensing has been found for him or his son and they were not University educated physicians. The elder John Westover, however must have been apprenticed to someone and that someone must have been reasonably close at hand and known to the family.

Surprising though it may seem, there was no lack of possible masters. Some eight hundred medical practitioners, with a wide range of qualifications, have been identified outside London in the first half of the seventeenth century and many more remain to be found in parish and municipal records, wills and diaries. In Somerset, thirty men are listed as practising medicine between 1542 and 1705 and eight at least were at work between 1630 when the older John would have begun his training and 1678 when he died. Three more could have been working at the same time. Of these eleven men, five were in Bath, two in Bristol, three in Taunton and one in Milborne Port. One of them, John Counsel, was a member of a family to which the Westovers were several times related and was working at Berrow in 1612. One of the Bath men, Tobias Venner, had links

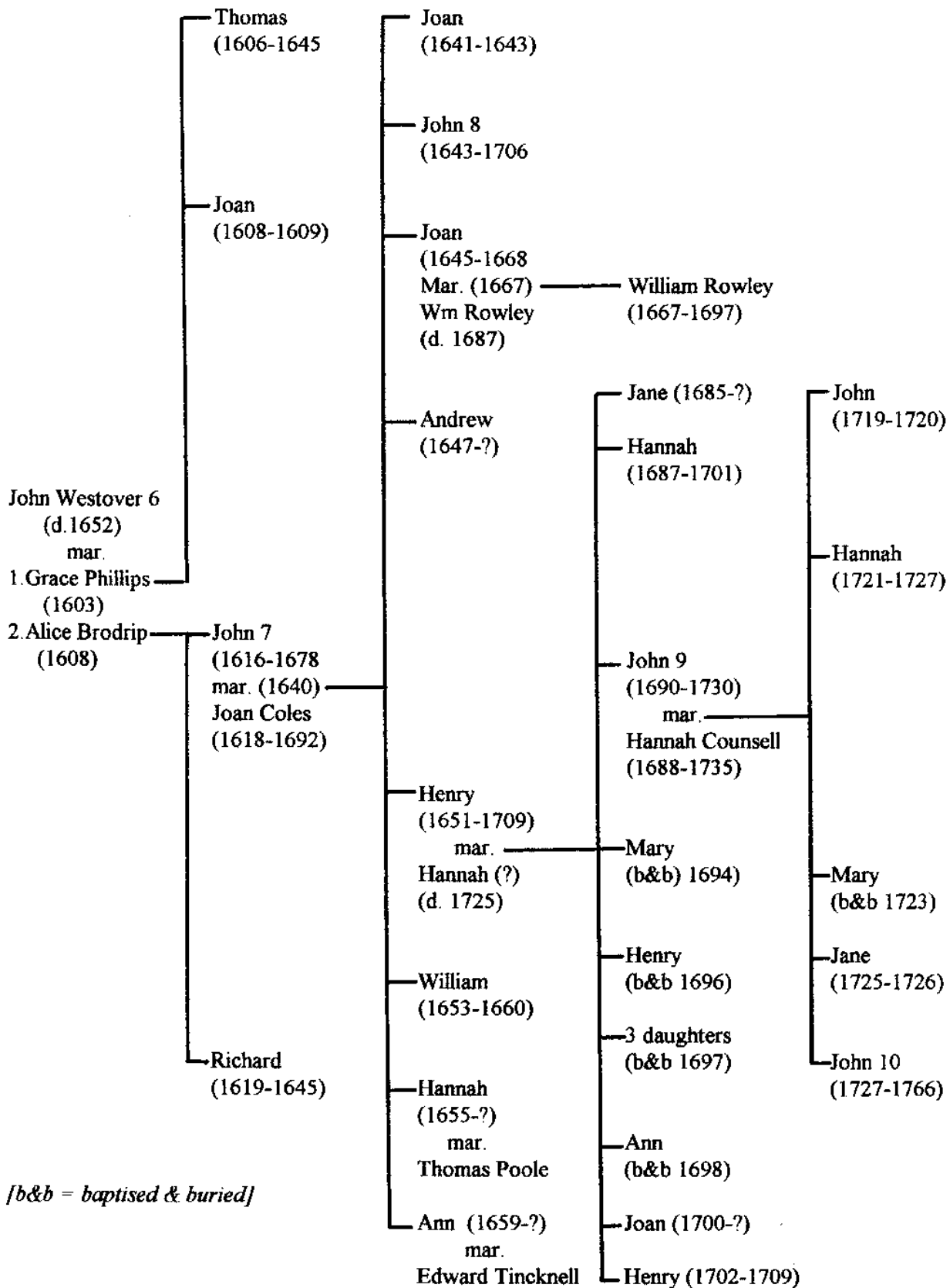
with Bridgwater. The rebellious Surgeon Thatcher himself is recorded as performing an amputation, in company with another surgeon, at Mark in 1667, thus providing another local link with medical training for the Westovers. It would not have been a great problem for the parents of the first Surgeon Westover to find training for their son, or for him to do the same in his turn, or, of course, to provide it himself.

As for the medical scene that the Westovers entered, it is sufficient for the present, before beginning to look at what Westover's Casebook can tell us about his patients, to say that it was confused in the extreme - and leave the details until later.

THE ALLERTON WESTOVERS



THE WESTOVERS OF PORCH HOUSE



[b&b = baptised & buried]

Chapter 3.

WESTOVER'S PRACTICE: THE PATIENTS.

John Westover's Casebook is a long, narrow book, about 15 inches long and 6 inches wide, with two pages to a leaf, each leaf being numbered. It has suffered much damage over the centuries, losing its covers, its first fifteen leaves, odd leaves and parts of leaves throughout, and its last few leaves. The surviving leaves cover a period of fifteen years, from 18th January 1686 to 27th October 1700, with additions to earlier entries added as late as 1704. Four hundred and fifty-two pages remain. Westover was 42 years old when he began it and references in it to ". . .the ould book. . ." remind us that he had kept earlier ones. Indeed, his father before him would have kept his own case records.

The surviving pages of the Casebook contain 1452 entries of lengths varying from one or two lines to a whole page, 1386 of which refer to Westover's medical activities. Examination of these tells us about the illnesses his patients suffered from, the treatments they underwent and what they paid for them, their geographical distribution, the duration and nature of treatments and something about their social class.

Before looking at what Westover did, we will get some more basic statistics out of the way. 1312 persons are named although nearly three-quarters of them are named only once and only one person is named more than ten times. 988 of those mentioned appear as patients; the remainder being servants, messengers, livestock dealers and farmers. Of the 988 patients, 481 were men,

311 were women and there were 183 children. There are thirteen who are not named and whose sex is not known. Between them all they received 1480 treatments. 124 towns, villages, hamlets and farms, extending southward from Bristol to Taunton and from the coast eastward to the modern A37, are named in the Casebook, although 107 patients do not have their place of origin recorded.

Just over 90 per cent. of Westover's patients came from an area within an eight mile radius of Wedmore Church, with nearly a third of the whole from an area within two miles of the Church. Moreover, Westover saw relatively few of his patients at his house. Only 377 occasions are recorded when patients came to Porch House to ask for treatment as compared with 926 when a messenger was sent to him either for medicine or to request a home visit. For those requiring medicine, Westover either provided it on the spot or sent it day or so after. Over three quarters of the home visits were within a four mile radius of Wedmore Church, so Westover's visiting area was only a quarter of the size of his catchment area.

Seventeenth century illnesses usually lasted a long time and needed a good deal of care and attention. Although 233 of Westover's treatments, always referred to by him as "cures", required only a single visit, 113 needed two to four visits; 43 needed five to nine visits; 23 had ten to fourteen visits, while six patients received fifteen or more visits before treatment was completed. Apart from these, there were, from 1680, in-patients needing more intensive treatment, some of whom came from as far away as Devon and who were housed in Westover's hospice, next door to Porch House.

Much the same pattern appears when the duration of treatments is examined. 609 of his patients consulted him once only; another 303 had treatment lasting from one week to a month, while 73 were in his care for one to three months. Of the remainder, 19 were under treatment for three to six months and 12 for more than six months. There were also 31 in-patients under care for periods ranging from one week to fifteen years. Westover's practice had a hard core of 32 families,

mostly in the immediate Wedmore area, with whom he had dealings frequently and over a period of years. These were mainly relations of one sort or another, usually described as 'Cozen', together with some of the local yeomen and lesser gentry.

The Casebook never identifies the social class of patients, but members of certain families - Boultings, Andrews, Prowses, Champions, Hodges, Ivyleafes, Lytheatts and others - are always given the prefix 'Mr', 'Mrs', or, in two cases, 'Captain' and 'Mayor', while others, of lesser status, are referred to by first and last names. 165 people are awarded a prefix; 33 servants were treated and there were 40 Poor Law cases; but in the remaining 1074 cases, social status remains undefined. These were the labourers, husbandmen, smallholders, tradesmen and craftsmen of the Wedmore area. Such a breakdown accords roughly with the estimate made earlier.

The ailments Westover's patients suffered from ranged from abscesses, agues and anaemia to whooping cough, wind and worms and he recorded eighty-one separate complaints. Nine hundred and eight-nine of his cases would have been considered appropriate for a surgeon in Westover's day, being purely external. These included wounds of various kinds, fractures and dislocations, accidents, ulcers, boils and abscesses, fistulae, infected swellings and sores and skin rashes. Three hundred and fifty-four cases, however, were, by the standards of the time, medical problems, being internal, such as agues, stomach pains, anaemia and menstrual problems. That Westover treated all of these indiscriminately makes it clear that he, at least, regarded himself as a general practitioner, whatever the rules of the Royal College of Physicians may have been about the prescription of internal medicines. Finally, he treated some sixty-four people for mental illness of one sort or another.

However he saw himself or, indeed, however others regarded him, a convenient analysis divides his practice into eight groups. The first and largest group of ailments treated by Westover, from which about one in four of his

patients suffered, consisted of a variety of contagious skin diseases, usually referred to as “the Itch” and akin to scabies, in the course of which the skin became covered with tiny eruptions which caused extreme discomfort. The Itch was widespread, affecting men, women and children, rich and poor, young and old, alike. On December 9th 1697, Westover sent ointment for Elizabeth, the nine-month old daughter of George Andrews of The Borough, who had suffered from the Itch “. . . almost from birth. . .”, and on 15th February 1699, he treated a six-week old baby girl from Axbridge who had it. It made its appearance, in August 1697, in the household of Mr Andrews of Weare and, in December 1692, at the Manor House of Allerton.

The next largest group amounted to nearly one sixth of Westover’s practice. The numerous treatments of sores, boils, ulcers, abscesses and inflammations recorded in the Casebook is a further reminder, if one were needed, that rural life for the great majority of seventeenth century people was unhygienic, insanitary and unhealthy. Labourers lived in one- or two-roomed cottages, probably picturesque enough externally, with their ragged thatch and crooked walls, but squalid and wretched inside with their permanently damp earth floors. Roof and walls were not rain proof and oozed dirt and damp in winter. Water had to be carried from the nearest source, whatever it may have been. Their diet, mainly bread, cheese, soup, small beer or cider, and garden greens, was inadequate for healthy living. The smaller husbandmen were little better off and many members of both groups must have looked back nostalgically to the rather better lives they had led when younger and living as a servant in some comfortable yeoman’s household. There were, of course, those who had not been so fortunate and never would be. In circumstances such as these, it is not surprising that sores abounded on faces and limbs, that scratches and bites rapidly became septic and ulcers and abscesses became gangrenous. All of them took a long time to heal. In July 1692, William Tutton of Crickham

came to Westover with heavily ulcerated legs; his treatment lasted from 25th July to 26th September and cost him nearly four pounds.

Some of the Casebook's unidentified sores and ulcers were very severe and may well have been the results of syphilis - never named by Westover. There was widespread reluctance to admit to the pox among both sufferers and healers, perhaps because the patients feared ridicule. Gonorrhoea is mentioned directly only once in the years covered by the Casebook and Westover used the same simple substitution code when recording it as he did in some of his notes about menstrual complaints. Positive conclusions cannot be drawn about this because Westover rarely recorded the details of his treatments in his surgical cases.

Like any other country surgeon, Westover dealt with the results of the accidents and mishaps of a busy farming area, and they account for a substantial thirteen per cent. of his practice. Four people were bitten by “. . . mad dogs. . .” at various times and he sent them or took them “. . . my antidot. . .” without at any time saying what it was or, indeed, appearing to attach much importance to the incidents. We may hope that his antidote was more potent than the touch with the church key long believed to be effective in medieval times and, in particular, that the dogs were angry rather than rabid. Horses, too, caused a fair amount of damage, as Widow Jacobs' five-year old son and James Andrews would have agreed after the one had been bitten in the face by one in 1687 and the other trodden by one in 1700. Cuts and bruises proliferated, from scythes, reaphooks and knives and falls from waggons and horses and blows from windlass handles. William Tutton of Mudgeley was severely bruised when his six-year old son fell onto him from a waggon loaded with peas in August 1699, although nothing is said about the child's condition.

More serious were the injuries suffered by the son of William Millard of Mark. While at the house of Giles Francis at Burtle on 6th December 1697, young Millard was shot in the arm, the pistol ball wounding “. . . him from his

handwrist up after his arm and came out at the point of his elbow. . . .” Westover saw him the next day, at Burtle, and then made nine further visits to him after he had been taken home to his father’s house at Mark, but, unfortunately, the young man died on 10th December, probably from septicaemia. Gunshot wounds were frequently complicated by fragments of clothing and burnt powder being forced into the wounds, which were very difficult to clean even if the ball exited cleanly or was satisfactorily removed. Another gunshot accident, in February 1690, resulted in Thomas Rowley’s servant having his thumb and part of his hand shot away.

Gunpowder itself, quite apart from the guns themselves, was not without its hazards. While mixing gunpowder at Badgworth on 6th March 1694, John Champion and Robert Locke were burned when their mixture exploded. Dressing for both of them required eight or nine visits at a cost of fifty shillings.

Some of the accidents Westover treated were the results of assaults or sports. William Sheppard of Blackford came to Porch House on the 7th of April 1695 with a wound in the mouth which required stitching. Richard Westover of Allerton required several visits from his cousin in July 1700 when his jaw was broken by a blow received at single-stick, the wound ulcerating later. In 1698, Westover reduced Thomas Whorde’s broken shoulder caused while “. . .wrestling with George Tutton. . .” at Wedmore on October 10th.

On 19h July 1695, John Cassell was treated for bruises received “. . .when Mr Tatman and he fell out. . .”; Joshua Cooke’s son had his arm “. . .wounded at Mere Revel. . .”; and in April 1687, William Haine was visited “. . .at Marke when he was stabd. . . .” On 21st March 1694 John Jefferies’ child was “. . .wounded with a stroke of a sticke in the face. . .” and needed to be visited twice. It is impossible to tell what was the result of simple accident and what was assault. Although most of the forty-seven accidents mentioned in the Casebook happened to men, when the incidence of fractures and dislocations is examined, the picture changes, with women and children receiving more than

half the injuries in each case. Seventeenth century daily life in both town and country was violent.

Three of the remaining groups of ailments may be summarised briefly. Of the complaints grouped as diet-related, all are connected with malnutrition and poorly preserved food. Stomach pains, worms and scurvy account for most of this group. Fevers and agues and aches and pains of all kinds are commonplace in marshy areas and it is not surprising that Westover's patients suffered very badly from all of them. Fevers themselves account for most of this group; many of them being bouts of malaria, endemic at this time in the low-lying areas around Bridgwater. Pleurisies, coughs and consumptions make up most of the sixth group, with consumption not figuring quite as largely as might have been expected.

The seventh group deserves a more extended treatment, for it, or rather his interest in it, seems to extend Westover's range beyond what might be expected of a country surgeon in the late seventeenth century. Westover treated a number of cases of mental illness, which led him, eventually, to build a hospice mainly intended for the in-patient care of the mentally disturbed. He treated forty-one people, eleven men and thirty women, for "mellencholey"; six women for hysteria; three men and eight women were "distracted" and five women and one man were described as suffering "fittes of madness".

The symptoms Westover recognised as melancholy are never described in the Casebook but it does not stretch assumption too far to recognise it as modern depression - one of the most common conditions encountered in medical practice today. Melancholy struck, like the Itch, regardless of social class, there being instances of it among Westover's Poor Law patients as well as among the better-off and, particularly in the last group, indications that the tendency towards it ran in families. A number of Isle of Wedmore families - Comers, Bakers, Fishers and Counsells - had members being treated for melancholy at more or less the same time and daughters followed their mothers along that path

several times. Most of Westover's melancholic patients suffered recurrent attacks over periods of some years and treatment for many dated back, at least, to the time covered by the previous Casebook. The first entry for Westover's cousin, Mary Counsell of Blackford, who was treated for melancholy for at least fifteen years, is dated 9th February 1686, when she was aged thirty-one and says that she “. . . had a purge for her ould dystemper of mellancholley. . . .” Her married daughter, Mary Hole of Chilton, began treatment for the same complaint in August 1698, when she was aged twenty-five, and continued, at least, until April 1699.

In recording his cases of mental illness, Westover differentiated between melancholy, distraction, madness and hysteria, which he always described as “. . . a fitte of the mother. . . .”, but his criteria for so doing is not clear. He certainly did not see them as requiring different treatment. For melancholy and distraction he always prescribed a purge of Senna or Rhubarb and what he called “. . . a bottell for the evning. . . .”, clearly a sedative, although never named. His treatment of madness and hysteria followed the same lines, the only difference being that the medicines with which he followed the preliminary purge were more elaborate. They were still designed to soothe and ease.

His descriptions of symptoms provide no help either, for he rarely recorded them. He clearly thought those of melancholy were too well known to be mentioned; he listed none for those patients he described as mad; and when he notes, once only for each, the symptoms of patients suffering from distraction or hysteria it is impossible to see any difference between the garbled raving, singing, laughing and uncontrolled behaviour of the distracted patient and the convulsions and violence of the hysteric.

Although his treatment of the four complaints was always basically the same - soothing and calming the patient and waiting for the next attack, Westover's expectations of future progress seem to have varied. He took for granted that those suffering from melancholy would have recurrent attacks on a

long-term basis, but seems to have thought that hysteria and what he called madness and distraction had limits and could be brought to an end. Only one patient had recurrent episodes of madness and his only long-term patient, John Edwards of Mudgeley - who spent fifteen years in Westover's hospice - never had his condition described at all in the Casebook.

Leaving aside the 609 one-off entries in the Casebook, which are mainly concerned with the provision of purges or girdles for the Itch, about one in six of Westover's patients suffered from mental disturbance of one sort or another, and nearly all his in-patients were so affected.

The last group of ailments treated by Westover is made up of twenty-eight complaints, so disparate as to defy classification. Jaundice, sore throats, dropsy, smallpox, epilepsy, earache and toothache - all requiring medical rather than surgical treatment - serve as examples. Smallpox, although a cause of constant fear at the time, occurs only ten times in the Casebook - probably because, being spread by air to close contacts, its effects were greater in urban than in rural areas.

Before attempting to sum up the nature of Westover's practice as a whole, there is one other group of patients to be considered which cuts across the classification by ailments so far used. The provision of health care for those too poor to pay for it was part of Poor Relief provision in Westover's time and, although regular annual contracts between Vestry and medical practitioners are relatively rare before the eighteenth century, entries about health care for the poor appear in many seventeenth century Poor Law Accounts. It is unfortunate that no Poor Law Accounts for this period have survived for Wedmore itself, but those for the neighbouring parish of Mark begin in 1664 and contain frequent references to professional and amateur medical care from 1671.

Payments for medical care for Poor Law patients to Westover and or his father - up to 1678 it could have been either - occur each year from 1671 until 1696 in the Mark Accounts. The Casebook shows that Westover himself was

involved in the care of the parish poor at Wedmore, Meare, Edington, East Brent, Draycott, South Brent and Yatton. On 29th July 1690, George Fry and William Sims, Overseers of the Poor for East Brent, sent John Borde to Westover for treatment for what seems to have been the early stages of consumption. They promised, as Westover recorded, that “. . .they will give me satisfaction for what I doth for him. . . .” In August 1690, a more formal arrangement was made with the Overseers of Mark for the cure of John Chappell’s lame legs by which Westover was to receive forty shillings plus two shillings and sixpence for each visit to Mark. He made twenty-five visits between 23rd August 1690 and 19th April 1691 and received seventy shillings. This sort of arrangement, usually involving payment of half the basic fee at the beginning of treatment, became the norm in Westover’s Poor Law cases.

He seems to have given value for money, for he spent a good deal of time on his parish patients, most of whom seemed to require many visits; indeed, it seems likely that most of them were in a fairly advanced stage of illness before Westover was ever called in. Parish officials relied heavily on the services of local women who were unqualified but had sick-room experience, an example of which occurs in Mark, in 1678, when Alice Chappell was paid a shilling for treating Anstice Hawkins sores. Most Poor Law Accounts have many such instances.

Parish payments to practitioners were reliable but slow and a hint of Westover’s attitude to his parish paymasters occurs in the Casebook in October 1699 when, in recording the treatment of Mary Jenkins of Blackford for melancholy, he says that “. . .if they” [the Jenkins family] “discharge the debt for the cure I ould have but thirtey shillings the which I desierd her to be privat if the parishe did pay I ould have more.” Not an altogether unfamiliar sentiment.

In all, Westover recorded forty-seven cases involving poor people whose treatments were paid for by the parish. Poor Law work was one of the ways in which seventeenth-century apothecaries and surgeons were able to acquire the

experience to develop as general practitioners, an opportunity open to them because they were much less expensive than University educated physicians.

So far, Westover's work has been discussed in general terms in order to provide an overall picture of his practice and patients, but such generalisation ignores the importance to his practice of those people with whom he had regular dealings over a period of years. One or two brief case-histories will illustrate, despite difficulties caused by gaps in the Casebook itself and Westover's failure to record every visit he made and medicine that he supplied, his dealings with these relatively long-term patients.

The Boulting family of Theale Great House were regular patients of Westover's, and he provided the family, its servants and apprentices with a high standard of service between 1688 and 1700. They were people of importance in the Isle of Wedmore area and beyond and had risen from husbandry to gentility through land bought as a consequence of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. In 1605, William Boulting of Wedmore, described as a husbandman, was one of five men who bought parts of the Manor of Mudgeley from the land speculator, Richard Bridges. Boulting's portion consisted of two houses and sixty acres, for which he paid about £312. They became well established among the gentry of the area; acquiring land at Blackford and, by 1670, building the Great House at Theale. Their tombstones and murals in Wedmore Church cover the period from 1622 to 1774; the family producing a few physicians and clergymen during the eighteenth century.

Westover's Casebook records his dealings with the family of the fourth William Boulting, born in 1657, great-grandson of the founder of the family fortunes, who succeeded his father at Theale Great House in 1678. By this time, the Boultings had acquired a coat-of-arms and the fourth William was described at various times in register entries and memorial tablets as "gentleman", "armiger", and "Esquire". From the end of 1692, Westover refers to him as "Captain" - a title not found in any inscriptions, Rate Lists or parish register

entries. The Casebook shows that he was too regularly at home for the Army or Navy - he may have been in the county militia.

At their first appearance in Westover's last record, in September 1688, the family at Theale Great House consisted of Captain William Boulting himself, aged 31, his younger brother, James, aged 23, and William's two daughters, Hannah and Jane, aged five and three respectively. William's first wife, Elizabeth, had died in May 1686. He remarried before 1690, for a son, another William, was baptised in that year; the first of six children to be born between 1690 and 1704. William's new wife's name was Rebecca.

Most of the treatments Westover provided between 1688 and 1700 were for the Boulting children, were mainly diet related - worms, scurvy, sore mouths - with some fevers, abscesses and rashes and Westover supplied purges and salves without identifying any particular medicine at any time. In September 1694, however, William Junior suffered an inflamed jaw which did not respond readily to treatment and was not cleared up until the middle of 1695, after twenty-three visits and repeated applications of ointments and astringent lotions.

The adults received treatment rather less frequently than the children. James Boulting, the Captain's brother, had dressings for an ulcerated leg in late 1688, but does not appear again - he died in August of the following year. Captain Boulting was bled at more or less six-monthly intervals; but in October 1694 he began a course of dressings for an ulcerated leg, which lasted until July 1695 and, in late 1697, was suffering from stomach pains, for which Westover prescribed more bleeding and a series of Rhubarb purges. Mrs Rebecca Boulting was visited only twice, once to deliver a lotion for conjunctivitis in July 1695 and again to be bled in January 1696.

The family's apprentices and servants had their ailments and illnesses dealt with at their employer's expense. Two servants, John Hill and John Hobbs, were bled in September 1688, John Hill being given a purge and an enema also. In 1690, the Captain's "printis boy" was visited several times to have an

ulcerated hip dressed and, in May 1699, Mrs Boulting's serving-maid was given a purge of senna and an anti-toxin, although no ailment is named.

Over the whole period, Westover recorded seven visits to the Captain, two to Mrs Boulting, nine to servants and twenty-seven to the children, twenty-three of which were for William Junior's ulcerated jaw. Three accountings, for Westover was not paid treatment by treatment, are recorded in October 1692, October 1694 and September 1700 involving a total sum of eight pounds, eight shillings. In addition to the visits, medicines were delivered by Westover himself on seven occasions and sent by messenger on another eight. The last entry concerning the Boultings is dated 5th September 1700. Captain William Boulting died in November 1705, four days after his forty-ninth birthday and three months before Westover himself.

Westover's entries about the Boulting family fail to tell the full story, not only because of the Casebook's missing pages, but because, in the seventeenth century, not all complaints led to the calling in of a professional healer. Households like the Boultings' could supply enough medical knowledge to cope with minor injuries and ailments for medical know-how was much more widely spread across the population than it is today. That being said, however, the Casebook entries portray the Boultings, their children and their servants as being relatively healthy - or perhaps illness-free would be more accurate. It could be, of course, that being gentry, the Boultings called on the services of a physician for any more serious illness they may have had.

After Westover's last visit, the Boultings had two more children, James and Hannah, and they and their brothers and sisters all survived into their teens, four of them, William, Mary, John and Hannah living well into the next century. Mrs Rebecca Boulting herself survived her husband until 1736, when she was buried on 12th December, aged 66. The Boultings were the most socially superior of all Westover's regular patients and his connection with them was solely that of a medical practitioner who came when called for.

Next came the Lytheatts of Mudgeley. Gabriel Lytheatt, a widower, and his five children were regular patients of Westover's between 1687 and 1694 and the family had probably appeared in earlier Casebooks. The Lytheatts were well established in the hamlet of Mudgeley, their earliest parish register entry being made in 1571 and Gabriel Lytheatt, like Captain Boulting, was the grandson of a purchaser of confiscated Church property in 1609. His grandfather, John Lytheatt of Mudgeley, bought two houses and forty-three acres of the manor of Mudgeley from the land speculator, John Bridges, but the family remained solidly yeomen, never - like the Boultings - eventually severing all connection with the land. Westover always referred to Gabriel Lytheatt as "Mr".

When the first entries about them appear in the Casebook in March 1687, the family at Mudgeley was an older one than that at Theale, consisting of Gabriel Lytheatt (40), his sons Gabriel Junior (14) and John (10) and daughters Mary (12) and Edith (7). Mary Lytheatt, Gabriel's wife, had died in December 1686.

Until 1693, the family suffered only the usual fevers and stomach pains and were prescribed only the usual purges, bleedings, julips for the fever, clysters and stomachicals. In December that year, however, both Lytheatt daughters scalded their legs, requiring five visits and, later in the year, the youngest daughter, Mary, began to have epileptic fits. In the first half of 1694, Gabriel Lytheatt Senior was treated for ulcers on his mouth and leg with dressings, cere cloth and astringent water. After September 1694, although he was still receiving treatment, the casebook mentions the Lytheatts of Mudgeley no more. There is one non-medical entry - Gabriel Lytheatt bought some of Westover's clover seed in 1687 - and the Lytheatts, as prosperous yeomen, represent the middle range of Westover's regular patients.

Markedly different from these two are the records of Westover's dealings with one of his cousins, John Pitt, which the casebook continues from earlier years. John Pitt was born at Cocklake in 1654 and married Esther Bennet on 2nd

March 1678, by which time he was a smallholder and sawyer living in Wedmore, though not in The Borough. The Pitts had ten children five boys and five girls, of whom two boys and two girls died before reaching double figures.

The entries about the Pitt family cover the period from March 1687 to August 1701 and are a mixture of medical treatments, farming business and loans of money by Westover to “Cozen” John Pitt. The medical entries deal with the provision of purges for John Pitt’s old complaint of melancholy; gargles and poultices for Esther’s sore throats; medicine for children for worms and, on 2nd January 1691, medicine for Esther after childbirth. More purges were delivered on 7th August 1697 as well as some girdles for the Itch and, on 14th May 1698, medicine for Esther Pitt for “. . .her ould dystemper of madness. . .” at a cost of five pounds. There is no further mention of this, the medical entries continuing with a mundane succession of purges.

Heavily outnumbering the medical entries are others, intermixed with them, about the making of cider, haulage of stone hay and turf for Westover by John Pitt; purchases of timber by Westover and the sale of young apple trees to John Pitt. In addition, there are the notes, on five occasions, of Westover’s loans of money to his cousin. The sums ranged from ten to forty shillings and Cousin John’s settlements were always prompt, although sometimes in kind, as when Westover received, on 14th May 1698, “. . .in part of pay twelve elming boards of tenn foote and a halfe longe and forteen inches broad. . . .” Westover’s relationship with John Pitt and his family was more complex than with the other two families mentioned and had elements of all of his three facets - the surgeon, the farmer and the family friend.

To sum Westover’s practice briefly is far from easy. For whatever reason they came or were sent to him, his patients were drawn from a large area of western mid-Somerset. In his own parish of Wedmore, approximately one in seven of the people who lived there at the time came to see him or called him to visit them at one time or another. His time was spent, and although two-thirds of

his patients dealt with him once only, it must have been fully spent, in visiting patients, seeing them at Porch House, preparing medicines, organising messengers, working at his livestock transactions and overseeing the working of his land. He provided both medical and surgical treatments and dealt with a wide range of the social classes in his catchment area.

Westover was not alone in the Wedmore area in the provision of health care, although he refers to only two other practitioners in his Casebook. A man named Brile is mentioned on 22nd April 1700 in a context which indicates clearly that he was another practitioner and Boulton of Glastonbury is named on 12th June 1698 as causing an inflammation in the Widow Spender's arm after bleeding her "unskillfully". These were obviously names familiar to him for he offers no other information about them. Medical care, as has been seen, was more available in rural areas than was once believed, but no figures are available for Somerset. Research in the neighbouring diocese of Exeter, however, has revealed that, in 1665, there were forty-two "practitioners of physic" registered and that, between 1568 and 1640, the Bishop granted 106 licenses to practise. Many practitioners, of course, never applied for licenses and evidence of their existence will only be found by trawling through parish registers, Poor Law and Churchwardens' Accounts, municipal records, diaries, wills and letters.

Chapter 4.

WESTOVER'S PRACTICE:
MEDICINES, MONEY AND MANAGEMENT.

Because many of Westover's casebook entries are very brief and others mutilated or otherwise incomplete, details of his medicines are not always to be found. More than enough remains, however, to make clear that his treatments, whether surgical or medical, were based on the centuries-old belief that the human body was composed of four kinds of fluid or humour: blood, phlegm, choler or yellow bile and melancholy or black bile. On this basis, different physical and mental characteristics could be explained by different proportions of humours in different individuals - illness, therefore, was the result of the balance of humours being disturbed. To restore the balance of humours, evacuation or counter-irritation by purge, emetic, blood-letting, blistering, making issues, casting stones, sweating or enemas, was necessary. All seventeenth-century healers of whatever type - and their patients - believed in the humoral theory of medicine.

The underlying causes of external symptoms were not understood: all practitioners treated the symptoms they had observed or had related to them by patients, their friends and families, regarding a treatment as a success if it returned the sufferer to a stable condition, able to go about his daily business with relative ease. To achieve this end, such medicines as mercury, digitalis, antimony, ipecac root and opium, despite its addictive qualities, were all in

regular use, as well as older herbal remedies. When a patient was charged for a cure, what was meant was treatment.

Accordingly, the purge, usually of Senna or Rhubarb and often accompanied by jallop, was used to begin every treatment Westover gave - whatever the ailment and whatever course its treatment was to take afterwards. Senna and Rhubarb were not his only purges, an undated note in the Casebook lists meadowort, stibium or salts of antimony and two pills - Allophrangine and Cochios.

Blood-letting was resorted to on eighty-five occasions, seventy-two as part of a course of treatment and thirteen as a prophylactic in the interest of the continued good health of the patient. These last were all done for members of his group of regular and better-off patients - Boultings, Lytheats, Barrows and Canningtons. The Casebook covered a period of fifteen years and Westover treated nine hundred and eighty-eight patients in that time so he was not as heavy a user of the technique as most of his colleagues. He was not even very consistent in his practice, amenorrhea, quinsy and headache being the only ailments for which he always bled. Although Westover mentions leeches on three occasions, he makes no reference to how he carried out the letting blood, never saying whether he opened a vein or used cupping.

Another standard recourse to restore the humours to equilibrium was making an issue. To relieve pressure or swelling elsewhere, perhaps on an inflamed joint, the surgeon created an artificial ulcer, usually by placing a caustic substance, such as potassium hydroxide, in a hole in the middle of a bandage to cause a discharge. Sometimes, scarification was used to create the artificial ulceration. Westover made an issue only four times - once for an ulcerated mouth caused by scurvy and once for melancholy. He named no ailment on the other two occasions.

Casting a state or bringing a patient to a crisis by causing vomiting or, as in a fever, by using medicine or cordial to cause sweating, was used by Westover

on nine occasions. In three cases, no ailment was named, the others included a stroke, a chronic cough, two fevers, severe body pains and distraction.

The largest single group of Westover's patients - those suffering the torments of the Itch - were dealt with on what was almost a self-service basis. They were supplied with “. . . a girdell for the Itch. . .” - a medicated body belt, impregnated with an ointment or lotion with a high sulphur content and which could be renewed or refreshed. That they were made up at Porch House is clear from the many notes Westover made reminding himself to prepare them for a patient by a given date. Patients sent for them or requested them at Westover's home and, in either case, the girdles were delivered, usually by messenger, soon after. They went as far afield as Lymshal, Loxton and Mark in the north and west of Westover's area, to Clewer and Cheddar in the east, and Meare, Wells and Glastonbury in the south. Mr Bower, a gentleman of Wells and a former occupant of Manor Farm at Allerton, ordered three of them to be sent to the Red Lion at Wells to be collected.

When dealing with the results of accidents and wounds, Westover usually mentioned something of the circumstances producing the injury but did not give much detail of his treatments; he “drest” and, much more occasionally, “sticht” wounds and “lanst” infected swellings. We can only assume that after stopping any bleeding, he followed standard practice and used a rolled dressing to keep the wound open to permit drainage. He “redusd” fractures and dislocations and provided “unguent” for sprains and bruises. Seventeenth century fracture treatments, particularly those involving hips or legs, were lengthy and Westover's often required eleven or twelve visits - the patient being immobilised in bed for weeks. He mentions two occasions when he felt it necessary to open a fracture because infection had set in. Dislocations were less serious and time consuming, their reduction requiring only a single visit on every occasion recorded.

He is not much more informative about his methods of dealing with such conditions as ulcer, impostumations, fistulae and tumours, and further confuses

the issue by using all four terms interchangeably. An impostem is an infected swelling but he sometimes referred to these as tumours, using the same term for uninfected swellings. Also, impostems frequently developed into ulcers and, sometimes, into fistulae. A precise analysis is impossible but a rough breakdown of Westover's own references to these conditions shows that he treated sixty-three patients for impostumations, five for fistulae, fifty-five for ulcers, nineteen for tumours and three for boils.

It is surprising that, although Westover mentions lancing a tumour or impostumation on seven occasions and removing an ingrowing toenail to enable him to clear up an ulcer once, he makes no other reference to surgical intervention for any of these conditions, apparently treating them as a matter of course with dressings, after the usual purges, and using ointments, salves and astringents in poultices and plasters with cere cloth, a piece of linen impregnated with wax to exclude the air. His ointments included what he always called a yellow salve, the ingredients of which he never named; another ointment made up from Coralwort, to dry up wounds and ulcers; and an analgesic ointment made from St John's Wort. The astringent lotions Westover used to treat a variety of conditions were commonly made from Field Scabious and a combination of alum and Dandelion. Plasters, poultices and cataplasms were another part of his healing process. A plaster diachylon, made from a mixture of lead, oil and an ointment was one, while another was made from laurel berries. For the less serious cases, Westover used a lotion made from comfrey to reduce swellings.

Many of these conditions, although only briefly described, were serious. In February 1689, Richard Counsell's son at Vole had "...a lame ledg with an ulsur and rotten bone. . ." as did Robert Andrews of Wedmore in September 1700. Probably the most serious was the case of Simon Clarke of Bagley in September 1694. He sent to Westover for treatment and was sent a purge and materials for a clyster. His further treatment required fifteen visits, "...his

scrotum being mortyfied so that his intestinum and rectum did likewise mortyfye.” This and one or two other cases like it may well have been the result of syphilus.

Treatments for this painful group of complaints lasted longer than those for any others except fractures. When William Vowles of Badgworth had an impostumated knee, treatment began on 17th October 1693 and ended, after thirty-two visits, on 7th September 1694, when Westover received his full fee of eight pounds. Sometimes his treatments were cut short. He made five visits to Widow Hicks at Rooksbridge between 16th March 1693 and 15th April to treat an impostumated hip before she decided “. . .to try whatever shee could doe her selfe with her pultis. . . .”

Westover’s heavy dependence on dressings, salves and ointments shows that he was aware that using the knife more often than not made a bad situation worse, for apart from a few tooth extractions and his blood-letting, the only surgery he mentions is one repair of a hare-lip - not often attempted by seventeenth-century surgeons - and two removals of ingrowing toenails.

Much more information is provided, however, about the medicines Westover used in his medical cases than about his surgical techniques although identification of ingredients named in the Casebook is hindered, very often, by inconsistent spelling, idiosyncratic abbreviations and total lack of punctuation, to say nothing of even more individualistic Latinisation.

Whatever the symptoms complained of, Westover began, as in his surgical cases, by prescribing a purge, sometimes an enema or clyster, repeating them at intervals during the treatment, and often recording how well they they worked. For fevers, next to the Itch the commonest complaint he treated, he first bled the patient and then supplied his “. . .julep for the fever. . .”, details nowhere specified, although he sometimes used Sal Prunella, a preparation of fused nitre. Stomach pains were a frequent problem, and here his remedy was unvarying - a julep made from a decoction of mint, Valerian and angelica, four spoonsful of

which were to be taken an hour before meals with four spoonful of a decoction of Cinnamon to be taken twice every fourth or fifth day was the prescription.

Painful and swollen joints - common complaints in the Levels - were dealt with, following the usual purges, by an ointment made from laurel berries, always described as “Ext de bacie lori”, or an “unguent Rossarum”, made from Rosemary. Sometimes he made use of soothing oils irritant plasters, embrocations and liniments.

For coughs and chest complaints, Westover used a decoction made from maidenhair and hyssop seeds and, sometimes an unidentified pulmonary julep. For John Kerle’s son of Westhay, he prescribed a julep combining a decoction of hyssop and Camomile with a pulmonary linctus and “Aqu Bezoar. . .”, this being a general anti-toxin, a catch-all if all else failed. For evenings, in such cases, he supplied storax, a soothing balsam.

For his melancholic and other mentally disturbed patients, his standard prescription was, again after the usual purges, “. . .a bottell to be taken 3 spunfulls evry evning. . .mad of Aqu Valerina, Aqu Fumorie, Ser Cariophil, Ser Guicam, Elec Mith. . . .” The Casebook does not tell us whether he varied this medicine at all during its fifteen-year duration because where he did not specify a particular collection of remedies, he merely used the term “. . .a bottell for the evning. . . .” Westover’s standard evening bottle was a mild sedative - Valerian serving just such a purpose; of the others Fumory cooled the liver; Cariophil, made from the buds and flowers of the clove pink, was a general tonic while the syrup made from Guaiacum or Lignum Vitae and the Electuary Mithridate or Venice Treacle are anti-toxins. Such a cocktail may well have sent the recipient to bed well-prepared for sleep but for those who needed a stronger dose, Westover supplied a mixture based on laudanum and, occasionally opium while for hysteria he had available what he called “a cordiall hystericall”, consisting of Aqu Cinom, Ser Carioph mixed with Theriac Androm. Once more the last item is the catch-all, Theriac Andromach being another name for Venice Treacle.

Sometimes, Oil of Amber was supplied “. . .to anynt the nostrils. . .” and soothe the brain. All these medicinal cocktails had the aim of calming the nerves and inducing a pleasant frame of mind and they were used, with minor variations, for all his mentally ill patients. Indeed, from the frequency of requests for a repeat of the evening bottle, it could be argued that there might even have been a mild addiction problem in the Wedmore area. Many of the treatments for melancholy went on for years and, in one or two families, continued from one generation into the next.

A trawl through his prescriptions shows that Westover used 120 different ingredients for his medicines, ointments, decoctions and distillations. They were a mixture of native herbs, herbs imported from abroad and chemical derivatives, with the first by far the largest group. The first group included Angelica, Borage, Laurel, Camomile, Couch Grass Roots, Dragonwort, Fumitory, French Barley, Cotton Lavender, Hyssop, Knot Grass, Pennyroyal, Parsley, Poppies, Sage, Valerian and Marjorum. Foreign imports used were Spermacetti, Assafoetida, Amber resin, Lignum Vitae, Sassafras and Turmeric. Remedies derived from chemicals included Sal Prunella - a preparation of potassium nitrate, Salts of Antimony, Laudanum and Spirits of Vitriol. Some of his vegetable and herbal remedies were old, even in his time; his camomile tea dates back, at least, to 1265; Fumitory to 1386 and his Aqu Hyssop to around the end of the first millenium. In all, thirty of his medicines dated from before 1400. In his later years, Westover made much use of what he described as “Elixir Proprietall” - a proprietary medicine, the ingredients of which he did not give and which he probably bought, already made up, from an apothecary. He used it for a wide range of ailments, sometimes in combination with other ingredients and sometimes on its own and seems to have regarded it very much as a cure-all.

Apart from two occasions when he bought carnations, clove gillyflowers and hyssop in Wedmore, from Richard Adams' wife and Elizabeth Wall, Westover never mentions any suppliers of ingredients. There must have been

others - herb gardens were commonplace in the seventeenth century and, surely, there must have been one at Porch House. Wells must have supported at least one apothecary. He does, however, record regular purchases, between May 1686 and May 1693, from four suppliers in Bedminster, then a village a few miles south of Bristol, of vials and gallipots in substantial quantities. The gallipots, small glazed earthenware jars as used by apothecaries, were meant for storage, while the vials, originally earthenware but, by Westover's time, always glass, came in various sizes and were used for supplying medicines to patients.

Westover bought mainly from various members of the Powell and George families but once, in March 1689, he bought twelve dozen vials, at sixpence a dozen, from Joan Jones. These entries, together with those about the preparation of girdles for the Itch, make it clear that Westover's medicines were prepared at home.

However exotic some of Westover's medicines may have been, the measures by which he told his patients to swallow them or apply them were about as homespun as they could be. References to "the quantity of a woodnut" or "as much as will lie on a small penny" for powders and solids; a "spunfull" and "a sackglass full" for liquids abound throughout the Casebook.

Although he remained unmarried, Westover was seldom entirely on his own at Porch House even when it came to preparing medicines, dealing visiting patients or taking fees. Until she died in 1692, his mother was available to help, as was his younger brother, Andrew, until he disappears from the Wedmore record after the middle of 1686. Two sisters, Hannah and Ann, lived at Porch House until their respective marriages and Ann continues to be mentioned in connection with the affairs of the practice until 1698. There was, also, Westover's nephew and heir, William Rowley, described by Rev Hervey as his apprentice, although he was never that, until the young man died in 1697.

William Rowley was the son of Westover's eldest sister, Joan, and her husband, William Rowley Senior. William and Joan were married on 16th May

1667, when Joan was 22, and their son was baptised on 25th June 1668. The same day saw his mother's burial.

Exactly how William assisted his uncle is far from obvious. A series of entries dated 8th August 1690 shows that William served an apprenticeship at Felton, near Bristol, completing it in 1688, probably on Lady Day. He would have embarked upon it when thirteen or fourteen and it was probably arranged by his father who was still alive then. There is no mention of the nature of the apprenticeship or the master's name nor is William's name to be found in Bristol's apprenticeship records.

The twenty Casebook entries in which William appears between 1st February 1691 and 26th November 1695 fail to show him in a clear cut medical capacity at any time. He is mentioned in four long lists of disbursements for such matters as taxes, land charges, tithes, travelling expenses to Bristol and Devon to arrange accommodation for in-patients, the purchase of a new buckskin suit and legal fees. Two more entries record him as a witness to promises to pay Westover for treatment and another sees him witnessing an agreement for Westover to buy stone from a local supplier. He attended three fairs and carried out livestock deals but it is unclear whether they were for himself or Westover. Ten further entries have him making fifteen visits; four to deliver medicine, two to collect outstanding fees and nine where the visit is recorded without any indication of its purpose. All of these fifteen visits fall between visits to the same patient by Westover himself. Whatever William Rowley was, he was not a surgeon; if he had been he was grossly under-employed by his uncle. His burial entry on 3rd April 1697, aged twenty-nine, makes the matter clear beyond all doubt, describing him merely as “. . . a young man. . .” and not, as in those of his grandfather and uncle, as “chirurgion”.

William Rowley was, however, a landowner, having inherited land in Wedmore and in Brent from his grandfather and his father, who died in 1687, a year before William finished his apprenticeship at Felton. The likeliest

assumption is that William's father arranged to have him trained to farming and land management so that he would be able to deal efficiently with his inheritances.

Westover cannot have had a great deal of leisure time. Analysis of two hundred and forty entries for the year 1695 - chosen because only one folio is missing for that year and the practice was well established by then - allows some kind of profile to be constructed of Westover's working life.

Just over half the entries involve travelling, fifteen places being mentioned, most of them close to Wedmore. Blackford, Crickham, Sand, Heath House, Ashton, Mudgeley, Bagley and Theale are all within a two-mile radius of Wedmore Church; Cheddar, Mark, Weare, Draycott and Meare are within a four-mile radius; Huntspill and Brent are six miles away. On horseback, at three to four miles an hour, these last were rather more than an hour's ride. Time spent with the patient must be added. About a third of the entries concern preparation and delivery of medicine. A good deal of time was needed for the simple task of keeping records of visits, prescriptions and charges. Westover may have had a portable ink-pot and pen to take with him on his travels - many of the Casebook entries could have been written at the gallop. The Wells physician, Claver Morris, had one. Entries for every year, except 1694, show that Westover took little note of the twelve days of Christmas, continuing his visits and treatments during the whole period.

The analysis emphasises the use made by Westover and his patients of messengers for delivering medicines and requesting visits; highlights Westover's planning of his journeys and shows clearly the number of visits required for most treatments. Men, women and children from all over the visiting area were employed as messengers and Westover always seemed well-informed about who was going where in his district. There may even have been some sort of informal organisation to ensure this. Journeys were planned as circular routes

wherever possible. Visits ranged from five to eighteen. When his farming activities are taken in to consideration, Westover's was a hard-working life.

How successful his efforts were is difficult to say, not least because seventeenth-century people regarded illness and death very differently from ourselves. Westover attempted, as all his colleagues did, to relieve his patients and return them to a stable condition by bleeding, purging, enemas, sweating or emetics. If these failed, and in the long run, they usually did, there was little else he could do. On 10th November 1695 Westover visited Mary Cox of Mudgeley, a poor widow, and reduced her fractured hip. He made seven further visits to her until, on 6th December 1695 she died, probably from septicaemia or pneumonia. On 11th March 1688, John Hatch of nearby Allerton was said to have been unwell since the previous September, had experienced breathing difficulties two days previously and, for a time, was thought by his household, to be dead. He had made some sort of recovery but had a violent headache. Westover did not visit but sent a purge of Senna and jallop “. . .for the casting of the state. . .” to bring about a crisis and see what happened. After sending a further mixture made up of Parsley Water for a stimulant, Opim for a sedative, a soothing draught of Borage for general ease and Venice treacle as an anti-toxin, Westover refers to him no more. The parish registers of Allerton for this period are too incomplete to supply any guidance to John Hatch's survival - or otherwise. In such a case, which looks very like a stroke, Westover would not have expected to do more than ameliorate the outward symptoms, nor would more have been expected. The death of a patient was not regarded as a failure.

Four hundred and ten people with whom Westover had dealings of one sort or another during the Casebook period can be identified from family reconstructions made from Wedmore's seventeenth-century parish registers. Three hundred and thirty-two are patients. Of these, thirty-five can positively be established as having died shortly after or during a period of treatment by Westover. They were not all elderly. Leaving aside eight whose ages cannot be

obtained, two were children under ten; two more were teenagers, eighteen were aged twenty to fifty and five were over fifty.

For his services, successful or unsuccessful in modern terms, Westover had a sliding scale of charges. His fee for a visit varied between the 2s. 6d. he charged his poorer patients and regular customers to five and, occasionally, ten shillings. Whether or not he charged the higher figure seems to have depended, not upon distance or status, but on the frequency of his dealings with the individual in question. His usual fee for a single, straightforward visit was five shillings. For medicines of all sorts his fee ranged from one to two shillings and there seems to have been no extra charge for medicines sent by messenger. The reduction of dislocations and fractures cost from 7s. 6d. to ten shillings plus the cost of whatever further visits were necessary, and these, for fractures, could be expensive. The girdle for the Itch, the most frequently provided of all his remedies, was relatively cheap at 1s. 6d., later rising to two shillings. Bloodletting remained at sixpence throughout the whole period covered by the Casebook, as did tooth extraction.

Even simple treatments could lead to expense. Rose Hays of Glastonbury sent a messenger asking for treatment for an infected cut on her leg. Westover visited her on 29th September 1687, treated the cut and received ten shillings on account. Three or four more visits were made up to 8th December and the final bill, excluding the first ten shillings, came to £1. 15s., which was paid in three instalments.

Westover was often paid in kind or in work done for him. After treating Robert Locker of Badgworth on 6th March 1694 for burns received while mixing gunpowder, Locker told him that “. . . hee ould cut all my goods as long as hee and I did live.” Richard Champion of Blackford paid for the reduction of a fractured arm, on 30th July 1690, with “. . . one feather bed of fifty pounds weight. . . .” On another occasion, John Pople of Cocklake paid, in part, for “. .

.the cure of his childe's soar hand. . .some yealls and one goose.” There are many such transactions throughout the Casebook.

How much did Westover make from all this? There are obvious difficulties in the way of making even an estimation. The casebook entries supply the fees he charged, but a simple total of these is not necessarily the amount he received in any one year. Frequently he accepted a shilling or two less than the amount charged; very often he had to wait two or even three years for payment;

and his group of regular patients usually ran up accounts which were settled, more or less, annually. Payment in kind has already been mentioned.

Westover made every effort to collect moneys owing to him, including in bills for current treatment “ould debt”; keeping a separate “littel booke of ould debts” and, from time to time, recording that had “. . .taken out the most part of this booke to demand it in a short time.” Further, only five of the years covered by the Casebook are complete and unmutilated.

Nevertheless,

Chapter 5.

WESTOVER'S HOSPICE AND THE IN-PATIENTS.

A years after his father's death in 1679, John Westover completed building, about twenty yards from his home, a three-storey, stone house with an outside staircase, to provide for the treatment of patients who, for one reason or another, required a more intensive treatment than could be provided for them at home. The building served this purpose for the whole of the Casebook period and, maybe, continued to do so for a little time after Westover's death. Then, it soon became a barn but it managed to survive three centuries of progressive misuse and dilapidation until it was renovated and converted to residential use in 1964, when it was given its present name of 'Westovers'. According to Rev Hervey, the building was known by locals as 'the madhouse' long after the Westovers died out in Wedmore.

In this building, between 1686 and 1706, thirty-one people, sixteen women and fifteen men, including five Poor Law patients, were accommodated at various times for periods ranging from one to nearly seventeen years. Eight in-patients were recorded as mad, melancholy or distracted; three more had treatment for ulcers, while one was suffering from dropsy and scurvy and needed some teeth extracting; the remaining nineteen had no ailments recorded. Three died while in Westover's care. Usually, no more than three or four were in residence at the same time except in 1689, 1690 and 1692, when there were

seven, six and eight respectively. Three in-patients were from Devon; two from Bristol, the remaining twenty-six all being from Somerset.

Westover's Casebook covering the period of the building of his hospice may have afforded some hint of his reasons for building, but since it has not survived, we can but make some guesses at what they may have been. If seventeenth-century medical theory paid any attention at all to mental illness it merely included its symptoms among the multitudinous manifestations of humoral imbalance, diagnosed them as melancholia or hysteria, and assuaged them with purges, sedation, occupation and quiet in the sufferers' own homes. If, however, raving madness and uncontrolled violence was part of the picture, then restraint would be required - according to social class, by relatives and friends at home, parish officers or, for some, a House of Correction. There was no cure, apart from those pretended by quackery, for mental illness - England's only mental hospital at the time was Bedlam, and even from there, inmates were discharged after a year if no progress was made in that time. Climates of opinion change, however, and the last quarter of the seventeenth century saw a growing tendency to isolate all deviant people, including the mentally ill, from the rest of society. To meet this demand, private madhouses began to appear and some certainly existed well before the end of the century.

It is unlikely that Westover was aware of this when he decided to build his hospice, but it is certain that both he and his father were aware of the difficulties caused in a family by madness. They had become involved with the problem at least as early as 1667, if not earlier, through their acquaintanceship with the Edward family, who were as well established in the area as the Westovers themselves, and the younger John Westover, if not his father, clearly came to recognise that benefit could accrue to their practice by providing purpose-built accommodation for in-patients.

The Edwards family owned seventy acres of land at Mudgeley, one of the hamlets surrounding Wedmore village, and when John Edwards Senior died in

early July 1660, there was nothing in his will to hint that his second son, another John, born about 1645, needed to be treated in any way differently from his brothers and sisters. John Westover Senior was sufficiently well known to the family to be a witness to the will. But, only seven years later, a letter, written by Widow Edwards, listing expenses she had incurred in connection with her husband's death, refers to her payment of “. . .£5 to Mr Wester for keeping and governing John Edwards, my son, being Mr Wester's pay for 16 weeks according to an agreement made with him. . . .” A further payment for the same purpose is recorded. It is not clear whether John Edwards was permanently in the care of John Westover Senior at the time; indeed, his brother's will, dated November 1687, leaves his estate and all his goods to his son, yet another John, “. . .upon condition that he keep my mother and brother John during my mother's life. . . .”

Brother John was certainly in Westover's care in June 1687 but it is likely that he was still at home, with occasional periods in care when his condition worsened, during his father's, brother's and mother's lives and then, when a more distant relative took over the Mudgeley land sometime between 1687 and 1689 and his mother's health began to fail (she died in 1690), he came, finally and for the rest of his life, into Westover's hospice in May 1689. He was in his early forties. He died in March 1706, a month after Westover himself.

In all the many entries concerning Mr John Edwards, as Westover always referred to him, no comment about his treatment, medicine or, even, the nature of his malady, is made and disbursements on his behalf are few. A pair of stockings cost one shilling and fourpence in 1689; his breeches were turned, his coat mended and new shoes bought in 1690; and each year after 1697, the payment on his behalf, of sixpence “. . .being the King's duty for a batchelor. . . .” was made. One exception there is - three and a half yards of rope were bought in 1689 and charged to the family in Westover's accounts for that year.

When he first came into Westover's permanent care, his mother paid twelve pounds a year plus five shillings a week for food - paid half-yearly - which Westover increased in November 1694 to sixteen pounds and six shillings. After Joan Edwards' death, Westover received the payments for the care of her son from Richard Sweet who, as well as acting as an agent for the Edwards family, appears elsewhere in the Casebook making and selling cheese, hauling turf and cutting stone for Westover's new stable.

Twenty-two in-patient entries contain no more than a name, a date of arrival, the costs of 'tabling' as Westover called his charge for food and drink and accommodation and a date of departure. Others are more like a formal memorandum and include a treatment fee, usually five to eight pounds, half to be paid in advance. The entries concerning the Poor Law patients became more complicated and detailed as time went on, reflecting the growing difficulties over payment Westover had with various Poor Law officials. Short or long, the entries never offer any information about the nature of treatments, except cost, and nineteen of them don't even give any indication of the patient's illness. Tabling rates varied from two shillings and sixpence to eight shillings - and men were charged more than women. Some entries included details of purchases made by Westover on behalf of patients - usually the purchase, replacement and repair of clothes and shoes.

The entry about Atherton Holcombe of Shipham, a village about six miles northwest of Wedmore is typical of the first kind. "Atherton Holcumb of Shipham came to cure the 11th of Juley 1689 at seven pounds cure three pounds in hand and the other fower pounds when hee is well of his dystemper of madness and eaight shillings a weacke for his tabling over and beside this The a forsaid seven pounds is promisd to be payd by his wife and Mr Trip of Shipham. August the 11th Then recd from Joan Holcumb thirtey one shillings in full for one munthes tabling of her husbun ending the 8th of August Recd more twenty one shillings for three weackes tabling of Atherton ending the 29th of August

Recd more for one weacke seven shillings in full ending the fifthe of September and then hee went away well.”

Some in-patients obviously led more active lives than others. Mr Richard Prowse of Tiverton had “. . .twoe shillings for hair powder come box and washing balls. . .seven yards of holand. . .a knife and fork. . .a pack of cardes. . .3s. 0d. on Crismas Day. . .” He wrote and received letters, sent presents to his father and borrowed small sums of money. He arrived in Wedmore on 17th November 1691 and was still with Westover in mid-January 1692. He accompanied Westover to Wells at least once and obviously enjoyed his cards - even if his borrowings were to repay his losses.

Elizabeth Jeanes of Catcot, another of the hamlets around Wedmore, was an in-patient from 15th May 1688 until at least 31st January 1690, the costs of her stay being paid by her brother, Nathaniel. Westover was paid in part for the year ending 7th June 1690, but his list of items bought for her continues to the end of January 1690 without any further payments being recorded. The purchases made for her were clothes and materials for clothes. Up to 7th June 1689, she had “2 Bodices 3s. 6d. . .a payer of shoos 2s. 4d. . .a payer of stockings 1s. 0d. . . Apron 1s. 3_d. . .2 yards of Shagg for a cloke. . .yol 3s. 0d. . .more yoland and silke for same 1s. 4_d. . .for making 6d. . .” Shagg was a wosted cloth and yol and yoland was Holland, a linen cloth from Holland. On 31st January 1690, Westover’s list included 1s. 4_d. for the repair of her coat and materials for it and five shillings for “nesisareys”. There is no more of Elizabeth Jeanes in the Casebook but the lack of mention of any half-yearly payments in the surviving entry indicates that she has only disappeared among the missing pages.

The entry for Edmond Prestwick of Bristol, who came to Westover’s hospice on 9th July 1689 is brief and tells its own sad tale. After noting his date of arrival and the payment of ten shillings by his son, the entry goes on to list “The Disbursements for Edmond Prestwick at his burying: for a shroud five

shillings for the careing of him and shrouding fower shillings for making of the grave one shilling For a sotivecate and expenses and wages one shilling and sixpence. . . .” Edmond Prestwick was buried at Wedmore Church on 25th August 1689. Westover gives no hint of the nature of his illness.

Relations between Westover and those who paid the bills for the care of his in-patients were not always amicable. Mr Williams of Fiddington in West Somerset sent his wife to Wedmore on 6th December 1698, agreeing to pay Westover fifteen pounds a year for treatment and five shillings a week for tabling. He agreed further, however, that if his wife was not well by 25th September 1699 he would increase the payment to twenty pounds. The entry continues “. . .Mrs Williams was caried away the 17th of December contrary to my desier when I away from whome at Wells Her sunne left with Jane Ellis fower pounds fifteen shillings in part of satisfaction. . .” and concludes “. . .and fower gould rings I hath of hers in my custordy which wayes the weight of twoe ginneys wan ring 10 graines. . . .” What a pity no more details can be found.

Occasionally, Westover looked after an in-patient whose malady, although never mentioned directly, was insistently obvious. Although Mrs Silver’s stay with Westover was second only to that of John Edwards, her life was nowhere near so restricted and dark as his. On 4th September 1700, Captain Thomas Silver of nearby Stawell sent his wife to table at £20 for the year, and a whole page of cramped handwriting in Westover’s Casebook - by far the longest single entry - was devoted to her. The entries for the first year of her stay tell their own story.

“February 7th [1701] Thomas Hill broght for the Capts wife about 3 quarters of

tobacko in 2 papers and one quart bottell of brandy

14th of February [1701] One bottell of clarrat John Biggs broght befor

Item one quart of brandy more the 8th of March John Biggs broght

Item the 4th of Aprill, one box with raisins and 2 bottells of clarrat and 2 panns

one of anchovies and other of capers

Pills, Potions & Plasters, 5.

May 11th Mr John Silvar, John Biggs and William Bond broght 3 bottells more of the same sort of Clarrat

June 1st John Biggs and Marey Silver broght 2 bottells more of the same wine 2 payer of shoes and twoe small glasses with sumthing in them I know not what Juley 6th John Silvar broght 2 bottells more of the same wine and one bottell of brandey

August 3rd John Biggs broght I suppose one bottell of the same wine in a bascet for he could not hould twoe bottells to be caried out. Leafth her [Mrs Silver] eaighteene pence

August 10th Mr John Silver broght her one bottell of brandey and gave her 2s. 6d. in money, five shillings more she had of him befor. One John Biggs broght more of the wine and then John Biggs tould me that the Captain was in the cuntry and desierd me to come to Stalle to speak with him Friday the 5th of September 1701.”

The Casebook offers no clue as to whether Westover was keeping this kind of record, quite different from any other in-patient record that survives, on his own initiative or on the instructions of Captain Silver and what took place at the interview remains unknown. The results, however, are plain. No more visitors appear, no more brandy, raisins, claret, anchovies, capers or tobacco are brought - just the regular notes of the subsequent half-yearly payments of Westover's charges as they were received. Whatever kind of captain Thomas Silver was, he was frequently away from home, which may have been part of the problem, for only two half-yearly payments for his wife's lodging were made by him personally between September 1700 and mid-705; the remainder being made by Mrs Hester Braye, Edward Woram or Mr Bredeare - names that do not appear in the records of Mrs Silver's first year.

The notes of Mrs Silver's stay after 1st January 1703 is written in a hand different from Westover's - an indication, perhaps, of his failing health. The last recorded payment for Mrs Silver was made on 16th April 1705 and there is no

record of whether she was still in residence when Westover died in February 1706 or of where she went after his death.

Not all of Westover's in-patients had their charges paid by their families. Five were sent by their parish Overseers of the Poor and, although the entries about four of them are brief, the case of Alice Stevens illustrates the difficulties experienced by Westover in his dealings with these officials. She was sent to Westover by Mr John Galton, Overseer of the Poor for the parish of Yatton, in February 1699. She first appears in the Casebook, however, in August 1687 when Westover sent medicine for the fever to her at Puxton, noting that her husband “. . . feared shee was going distrackted. . . .” By the end of the month Westover was supplying his bottells for the evening. The costs of her treatment were paid by her father.

Westover had nothing more to say about Alice Stevens until 1698, but when she reappears, widowed and obviously in reduced circumstances, he remarks that the problem was “. . . her ould dystemper of madness. . . shee had bin my ould patient.” Mr Galton came to Wedmore to negotiate a price for her treatment as an in-patient and, when Westover suggested eight pounds, half payable in advance, requested Westover's attendance at Yatton for further discussions with a meeting of that parish's officials. He went, charged ten shillings for the journey and left medicine for the patient. There was a further meeting on 24th February 1699 and Westover agreed to take Alice Stevens into residence for “. . . eaight pounds cure and six shillings a weacke tabling and to pay mee the six shillings a weacke every monthe or six weackes at the most.” He recorded further that they had not yet paid him for his first visit to Yatton. His payment for the first half of the fee was a mixture of guineas, half-guineas and silver shillings and he was careful to make his usual proviso that if the guineas would not exchange at twenty-two shillings each, the Overseers would make up the difference.

Alive Stevens arrived at Wedmore on 27th February 1699 and remained until 2nd October of that year, when she “. . . was carried whome well. . . .” In fact, Westover had informed the Overseers at Yatton in June that Alice was perfectly well, but, out of sight and out of mind, she was left at Wedmore for three months more, probably because Westover had reduced his weekly tabling charge to 3s. 6d.

On her return to Yatton, the second half of Westover’s annual charge fell due and he added to his bill the ten shillings for his first visit to Yatton on 26th February, for which he had never been paid, and four shillings outstanding for tabling. Finally, having received £7. 10s. from the Overseers of Yatton he sent them a bill for the balance outstanding, £4-16s., but there is no record of payment in the Casebook’s surviving pages. There is, however, a formal memorandum, dated 2nd October 1699, written by Westover into his Casebook, setting out the details of his arrangements with the Yatton Poor Law officials. He took the trouble to have it witnessed by Hannah and Thomas Poole, his sister and brother-in-law and by Ann Wall, his washerwoman. Attached also is a note that “One witness that may testify something towards the same whose name is Samuel that formerly was a servant to Mr Dounside.” Westover’s experience of dealings with parish officials had obviously led him to expect delays in payment and he was preparing for battle on this occasion.

Most of the in-patients stayed for a comparatively short time but one or two made repeat visits. George Vowles of Westbury was brought by his father on 11th July 1689 and left four months later, returning on 10th March 1690 for thirteen days. His third stay began on 18th December 1695 and ended with his death six weeks later, on 30th January 1696. No disbursements are recorded on his behalf and his irregular visits probably depended on his mental state.

Apart from the in-patients, Westover records three other patients whose treatment required that they stayed in Wedmore for its duration, but not in the hospice. In September 1688, John Day’s wife brought her eighteen-month old

daughter, Joan, from Heathouse and was quartered with Widow Bennet in The Borough while the little girl was treated for a complaint Westover fails to name. His fee was thirty-five shillings and, after receiving five as a part payment, he was still awaiting the balance in August 1696. Mr Bickham of Evercreech sent his servant to Wedmore in May 1689 and he was quartered with Richard Adams while his brief treatment for stomach pains continued. He received Westover's basic treatment of purges, cordials and potions for worms at a cost of ten shillings, which was promptly paid, but there is no mention of the length of his stay. The third of the boarded-out patients, in August 1690, was Mary Michael of Huntspill who had an abscess under her arm. Her treatment was brief and Westover received his fee of £1-17-6d. promptly at the end of the following September. There is no mention of tabling charges in any of these cases and Westover probably left this to the people with whom the patients were boarded.

In 1689 and 1690, the hospice was quite busy, with ten residents for most of the time, so it is easy to understand why Mr Bickham's servant and Mary Michael were boarded out. In September 1688, however, there was only one patient, Elizabeth Jeanes, in the hospice, so it is less easy to understand why John Day's wife and baby daughter were so treated - unless it was to do with the age of the little girl. These are the only cases recorded as being dealt with in this way.

The way in which the in-patients came to Westover is an example of the power of contacts and word-of-mouth communication. Most of them were Somerset people and from within Westover's main catchment area except the three from Devon; Peter Eason from West Camel, near Ilminster, and Mary Davis and Edmund Prestwick from Bristol. Connections between Westover and mid-Devon and Bristol, the farthest southern and northern extremes of his greater catchment area, are not far to seek. Mr Richard Prowse of Tiverton, in-patient in 1692, was a connection of the Prowses of Compton Bishop, near Axbridge, for one of whose servants Westover had reduced a fracture in January

1688. In addition, James Stone and Simon Warren, in-patients in 1687 and 1690 respectively, came from Halberton, only three or four miles from Tiverton.

In Bristol, there was Mrs Elinor Kelson who continued to send for medicine for her melancholic state long after the family left Wedmore where they had lived for many years in Plood Street. At least up to 1690, Westover was in regular touch with the Kelsons and his activities would be well known to them and their friends. Connections between Wedmore and every place from which patients came would be impossible to trace but, over a period of years, useful information has a habit of finding its way around. It would, gradually, become known that there was a house where the mentally disturbed could be treated or, for want of a better word, placed, in Wedmore for those who could pay the costs. How unusual this was in the rural West Country at that time is impossible to say, but the distance over which some of Westover's in-patients came speaks for itself. There was a need - Westover's hospice was constantly occupied to the end of his working life - and, even, for a short time, beyond it.

Chapter 7.

WESTOVER'S LAND.

Westover's medical practice obviously occupied most of his time but he still had the land his forebears had left him and, with it, the responsibility of making a proper use of it, maintaining it and, indeed, improving and increasing it. Intermixed with the records of his medical cases are entries which show him at this work.

The Westover wills do not tell us how much land their makers were disposing of and John Westover Junior's will has not survived. He wrote out a list, in 1699, of his land in Wedmore, but more than half of the page was subsequently torn out, leaving only the first five entries. These gave the names and rateable values of nine acres at Brent and for four pastures in Wedmore called Sparkemoore, Kiten Mead, Casell and Casley, all in the southwest of the parish and all identifiable in the Tithe Map and Schedule of 1838. Each of the Wedmore pastures was once a field of ten acres or more but Westover's mutilated list gives no acreages. The Tithe Schedule also lists four other fields with Westover connections, two Westover's Tinings and two Westover's Mill Tinings, amounting, including the Mill, to thirty-two acres in all. The Casebook makes clear that Westover also owned five acres in nearby Allerton. Most of these are suggestions only and, with the exception of the land at Allerton and Brent, it is impossible to say with certainty whether the Westovers ever owned them or any parts of them. In the absence of any surviving seventeenth-century

Poor Law and Churchwardens' Accounts for Wedmore, some early eighteenth century volumes were checked but throw no more light on the problem, showing merely that, in 1702, Westover owned three tenements - Clements Furlong, Goodmeads and Adamses and Martens - without supplying any acreages. The Poor Law Accounts for 1709 and 1710 show Henry Westover, John Westover's heir, with the same three tenements. A document listing Westover and Counsell land, seen by Rev Hervey, has since disappeared. from view.

If we cannot know in detail how much land Westover had, we can, at least, know something of what he did with it. The agricultural entries in the Casebook are about Westover's sales of the produce of his land; his purchases of crops raised by other farmers; the letting of the land at Allerton and Brent; his occasional renting of a field to raise a one-off crop or for grazing; sales and purchases of livestock and occasional renting of animals to others; purchase of land and, never to be forgotten in Somerset, cider-making

The most frequent agricultural transactions mentioned in the Casebook, eighteen of them in all, are Westover's livestock deals, most of them carried on at the various markets in the small towns around the Wedmore area - Axbridge, Bridgwater, Glastonbury and Wells all being mentioned - and at fairs. Westover and his nephew, William Rowley, were regular attenders at these last and fairs at Priddy, Binegar, Shipham, Chear and, of course, Wedmore, are all listed. Fairs and markets were the most important means of trading before the coming of fast transport services and were strictly regulated by local officials such as Wedmore's Port Reeve. All those mentioned were of medieval origin and all, except Shipham, continued to be held into the late nineteenth century.

Westover's entries for 1695 give something of the flavour of these deals, without, unfortunately, revealing anything of the vigorous haggling that undoubtedly took place. At Cheddar fair, on 21st April, Westover sold "...to Mr Robert Ivyleafe of Blackford the twoe cowes, the black limbed and the read

...at tenn pounds and a crowne. At Holeyday fayer, William Rowley sould the read bull at £3.” On 25th April, Westover was at Bridgwater fair where he bought “. . .of Humphrey Isgar of Mark twoe oxen, a black and a read, at 12 pounds Gave to good luck in earnest 2s. 6d The same day bought twoe 2-year age heifers of William Huchens of Brint. . .at fower pounds and 11 shillings One heifer mor of Edward Thatcher at fifty shillings.” Just over a week later, William Rowley bought, on Westover’s behalf, “. . .twoe oxen of George Paine of Farington at thirteen pounds and 12 shillings 6d. At Binegar fair, which occupied the whole of Whitsun week, Westover “. . .sould the read cowe and calfe at Wells market at five pounds five shillings to Mr Clark of Lovington.” The last entry for 1695 simply notes Westover’s purchase, at Bridgwater, of “. . .2 3-year age steares of one Chedsey at £11- 7-6d.

Prices appear to have remained fairly stable over the period covered by the Casebook. Steers were sold for around £7. 10s. A cow for slaughter usually went for just over five pounds and a bull for three pounds. The price of oxen ranged from six to eleven pounds and two three-year old horses went for £8. 10s. Westover often bought cattle for rearing and resale and was quite successful at it, as with the pair of two-year old heifers he bought in 1695 for four pounds and sold a year later for nine. Again, two oxen were bought at Bridgwater for £13- 12s in May 1695 and sold the following February, at Axbridge, for twenty-two pounds. Three of these transactions were carried out by William Rowley and two, in late 1700 and early 1701, by Jane Ellis, of whom more anon. Westover himself seems to have ceased dealing early in 1700, but the last livestock entry in the Casebook is much mutilated, only scattered references to heifers, steers and calves, Shipham Fair, Cock Fair and Lady Day Fair remaining.

All of the deals were made on the basis of a small deposit and a promise to pay the balance. On 6th November 1693, Westover “Sould the 2 fatte steers, the linden and the read, to William Gatum a West Cuntry man at fifteen pounds I am to keepe them untill fortnight before Crismas I recd five shillings

in earnest soe thear is mor to cum when he doth fech them just fortean pounds and fiftean shillings.” William Gatum sent his man, Richard Coles, to collect the steeres on 2nd December, sending the balance of the money with him.

On two occasions, in March and April 1694, Westover noted that he hired out out a cow to be reared for a year. The charge he made was thirteen shillings and, in each case, the hirer was to “. . .return her againe without a calfe in as good a case as he had her,” although one of the cows had a calf when she went. Both cows were rented to Nicholas Sevier in nearby Mark. It may be that Sevier needed to improve his herd for there are only the two examples of this. Another entry records that Westover sent yearlings and calves to graze on the “moor” or summer pasture belonging to James Tucker of Sand for twenty-one weeks at one shilling per week; in his turn, in May 1700, he made one of his fields available to the younger William Adams of Blackford at fourteen pence per week.

Occurring almost as often are Westover’s notes about the management and letting of his land at Allerton and Brent. Although the entries about Allerton mention various acreages at various times, Westover had five acres there, one and a third being orchard, the rest pasture. He rented this land out to a variety of men from Allerton and Mark throughout the whole period covered by the Casebook, always for a year at a time and in varying proportions and at rents between eighteen and twenty shillings per acre for pasture and eight and twelve shillings per acre for the orchard. He visited Allerton mainly in his medical capacity, although he had cousins living there, and paid his taxes regularly to Robert Deane, the Allerton collector and his tithes and church rates to Thomas Blessley. Conscious, no doubt, of his public duty and his status, he also made regular contributions of a shilling or two to the poor of Allerton.

The entries about the nine acres at Brent record only payments for clearing ditches and rhines, repairs to gates and fences, payments of five shillings a year to Thomas Gilling of Brent for “. . .looking to the ground and to keepe me from damidge. . .” and the payment of tithes, church rates, taxes and

grazing tithes. It may be that the land did not belong to Westover at all but was the nine acres inherited in 1678 by William Rowley, Westover's nephew, from his grandfather for all the payments appear in general lists of disbursements made by Westover on his nephew's behalf.

The maintenance and improvement of their land meant much to the Westover's, sensible, as they must have been, that it had been hard-earned over the years. Their attitude was made clear by Henry, John's younger brother and heir, when he said in his will in 1709 that he left his son, another John, ". . .all my lands which I am possessed of. . .upon condition that he shall not sell any part or parcel of the same land. . ." making clear in the next sentence that if John did sell any land then the whole estate would revert to a younger son.

Westover followed family policy - he bought land on two occasions but never sold any. In 1693 he bought ". . .three ackers and one yarde of arable ground. . ." at Wedmore from one his many cousins, Mr Henry Marten of Pennard, for eighteen pounds. The land was freehold and was ". . .to bee settled to mee and my heares and assignes forever. . ." The second purchase, in 1699, also improved the family fortunes for Westover bought the reversion of land in Wedmore, called Goodmead and Adamses, which his father had leased, plus an additional two acres, from Mr John Davis of Wells, the freeholder. The cost was based on eight years purchase at ten pounds per year plus purchase of the quit rent and amounted to ninety-five pounds. The purchase process occupied the whole of 1699 and was completed only on 3rd February 1700, the land again being conveyed ". . .to me, John Westover and my heires forever. . ."

Many agricultural entries were concerned with haulage. They are undated and gathered together, over a period of years, into more or less annual lists of haulage work to be done. Several entries refer to haulage, usually at harvest time, of Westover's crops of barley, beans, wheat and hay. The teams used for this work, sometimes two oxen, at others four oxen and a horse, were often supplied by relatives, among them his brother-in-law, Edward Tincknell, his

cousin, John Pitt, and Matthew Barton, another cousin. Other entries record the haulage of loads of turf for fuel, lime from Wells and reeds from Godney or Meare for thatching. For a full day with four oxen, a horse and two men, Westover paid nine shillings. Sometimes no load was specified and these were probably occasions when Westover was carrying out his obligation as a landowner, under the 1555 Highways Act, to provide, or pay for, a cart and team for four days each year for hauling stone and hardcore from the local quarries to fill the potholes in the parish roads.

The same lists contain entries about ploughing as opposed to haulage - also undated and irregular in appearance. Several men, John Goodgroom, John Binning, William Wall, Humphrey Burns, Will Adams Senior and 'Cozen' Larder receive sums ranging from five to twelve shillings for ploughing half an acre to an acre in preparation for wheat, although in one case beans were to be planted if the ploughing could not be completed in time for wheat to go in.

Oxen were more important than horses for ploughing and haulage and since Westover always hired teams of oxen he did not have any himself. No oxen were mentioned in his father's inventory but a plough team was listed in that of his younger brother, Henry. Westover did keep horses, however, for his own and his nephew's travels around the area. Several entries between 1692 and 17800 refer to the horsing of his mares and, in April and May 1695, some names and descriptions of his horses appear - "...the greate young black mare. . ."; "...the black mare Swanne. . ."; "...the scar[re]dmare. . ."; "...William Rowleys. . ."; and "...the great blacke mare Bonney. . . ."

Also found among the agricultural entries are references to the Westovers' windmill. It was left to Henry Westover, John's younger brother, by their father in 1678, with the proviso that he was not to have any profits from it until after his mother's death (in 1692). By then, according to Rev Hervey, it had not ground for many years. Certainly, there are only three mentions of it in the Casebook, none of them concerned with milling. Two are about the sale or

renting of land, the mill merely being mentioned as an identification point; the last, in 1700, records the sending of some its equipment - a hoist, some pulley wheels and a few wheel-rims - to Westover's cousin William at Mark. It sounds as if the Westover mill was finally closed down by then - no mention of it occurs in Wedmore's early eighteenth century Rate Books. It stood in Wedmore's North Field and its site can be identified on the Tithe Map, along Quab Lane, northwest of Wedmore, where the fieldnames Mill Batch and Westover Mill Tynning appear. On the ground the only evidence of it is a slight mound in the corner of Mill Batch field.

The Westover mill was probably a victim of intense local competition among a number of mills each of them quite small serving a very restricted local area. Wedmore parish itself had five windmills at work at the end of the seventeenth century, with others in surrounding parishes and even as late as the last quarter of the nineteenth century seven mills could be seen working from Ashton Mill on the outskirts of Chapel Allerton. Ashton Mill itself still stands today, kept in good order by the District Council and manned by local volunteers at weekends and holidays. It ceased to work in 1924, having been, for some time, the last working windmill in Somerset. It was certainly at work in Westover's time, for, in November 1657, a Quarter Sessions Report names as a witness to a burglary, John Pitman, who, ". . .while going home early in the morning after he had been helping the miller of Allerton. . ." saw the culprit escaping.

The remaining entries about Westover's farming activities are concerned with his sales of produce. He recorded the sale of barley in 1690 and 1692, the price of a bushel in the latter year being 3d. Both transactions were with Wedmore people. In March 1689, John Clapp of Allerton bought hay for winter feed on two occasions at 1s. 6d. per hundred. Later, in June 1700, Westover recorded the sale, to Ann Wall of Wedmore, of quantities of black wool at one shilling per pound, more wool being sold to her in May 1701. Ann Wall and her husband, William, did various kinds of work for Westover, including brewing,

haymaking and washing, and were also his patients from time to time. Dealings between them were frequent, their accountings consisting of careful balances between their pay for their work for Westover and the costs of their occasional medical treatments.

On 7th April 1693, Westover recorded the sale “. . .to ould Hindrey of Axbridge my teasels, the best sort at thirtey eaight shillings and sixpens the pack; the midlens at eaight pens a thousand.” He received in full five pounds from “ould Hindrey”, who was probably a weaver needing the teasels for scouring his newly woven cloth. A pack of the best teasels would contain nine thousand.

Apart from dealing in the produce of his own land, Westover bought, over a period of ten years, crops of beans, wheat and barley from his cousin William Veale of Sutton. This arrangement ended in 1698 and Westover then rented for the same purpose, until 1702, an acre at Radford belonging to John and Elizabeth Goodgroom.

In November 1697 Westover sold 92 gribbles, or young cider apple trees grown from seed in what he described as “the nursery at Sparkemore”, to Cousin John Pitt at fourpence each. Two years later, he recorded the sale of 95 to John Hosier of Westhay. Westover must have seen an expanding market, however, for, in 1701, he sold no less than 546 gribbles for seven pounds.

Cider is an ancient drink, traditional in the West Country, and particularly in the Levels where corn was always in short supply. Apple trees grew best on the islands of higher land so cider orchards clustered much more thickly round Wedmore in the seventeenth century, when the farm labourer received his five pints for each working day and the scythe mower his ten, than they do today. It is said that everyone in seventeenth-century Somerset drank a quart of cider every day - tea, coffee, chocolate and wine were drinks for the gentry; water was undrinkable - cider was all there was. It enlivened dull diets and anaesthetised dreary and insecure lives. Westover’s father’s inventory lists a Brewhouse with an apple press and assorted butts, hogsheads and barrels and there are several

Casebook entries showing that Westover's servants regularly made cider for friends and relations as well as himself - a better brew, surely, than the second pressings given to farmworkers, only the indifferent quality allowing them to drink such large quantities. The brewing of beer is only mentioned once, as is the purchase of malt.

The men dealt with in these agricultural transactions were, in the main, local to the Isle of Wedmore and its immediate surrounding areas like Nicholas Sevier, Nicholas Salter and Humphrey Isgar of Mark; Cousin George Counsell of Stoughton; John and Richard Fear, butchers, of Wedmore; Robert Ivyleafe of Blackford and George Powell of Glastonbury. One or two came from rather further afield: Mr Melliar being from Pilton, near Shepton Mallet and Robert Hagart from Frome.

One last piece of agricultural business remains - the sale, by Westover, in 1688 and 1689, of clover seeds in quantities ranging from three to one hundred and four pounds to several farmers and landowners of the area - a transaction rather different from the others because it connects Westover directly with seventeenth-century agricultural improvement. In all he disposed of 909 pounds of seed at a price per pound of twopence halfpenny to threepence halfpenny in 1688 and twopence halfpenny to fivepence halfpenny in the following year, making just under five pounds.

Again, most of the men who bought from him - William Browning, John Wiseman, William Sheppherd, Richard Champion, Gabriel Lytheatt, Edward Urch, Robert Yeascomb and George Stone were, as usual, from Wedmore and its surrounding hamlets with a few others from farther afield. There was John Wills of Wookey, Thomas Harding of Highbridge, Thomas Symonds of Brent and Mr Hazell from St Georges. The only woman among the purchasers was Mrs Savage from Mudgeley. Several of the names listed - Browning, Urch, Yeascomb, Savage - appear in later Rate Lists as landowners of some importance and, indeed, the purchasers of Westover's clover seed were of a rather higher social

standing than those he usually dealt with in his other farming business. They were all known to him as patients or parish officials. No more clover sales appear in the surviving Casebook entries but they must be regarded as a contribution to the development of agriculture in the Wedmore area - the amounts Westover made from them can hardly be regarded as his primary motivation.

Although the rebellions, upsets and political changes of the seventeenth century come most readily to mind, innovation and development in agriculture took place to a far greater extent than was at one time thought. In various parts of the country, the century saw fen drainage, disafforestation, enclosures and technical improvement. The greatest change of all, however, was the replacement, by 1700 and everywhere except for a few isolated pockets, of subsistence farming by a market economy.

How long this process took is impossible to say; its take-off point is easier to identify. The population of England doubled during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rising from about two and a half million in the 1520s to approximately five million by 1680, although the rate of increase levelled off after the mid-seventeenth century. Such an increase, over the period of time involved, was slow compared with later population explosions but the increase in demand for food and the consequent rises in its price exerted great pressure on an agricultural system not very capable of dealing with them. Most landowners and yeomen eventually responded, however slowly, to the opportunity offered them to increase their incomes by increasing production, overcoming along the way the main obstacle in the way of improvement - how to achieve the most profitable integration of crops, livestock, tillage and grass. To do this, they had to be able to change from arable to pasture quickly.

Clover helped to solve the problem by allowing the necessary quickly produced pasture because it could be grown in a single year or, combined with selected grass seeds, could provide crops of varying duration. It was introduced

into England, probably from Flanders, in Wiltshire in 1650; became established in various centres in the 1660s and spread rapidly outward from them.

Although the agricultural entries in his Casebook are thin as compared with those relating to his medical practice, Westover is clearly revealed as drawing the rents and profits arising from his land without taking any part in the labour it required. He was a rentier but not one who had lost all touch with the land as had the Boultings. He remained close to the soil by directly involving himself in the management of it and in all the various transactions arising from it. Also revealed is a general picture of farming in the Isle of Wedmore in the late seventeenth century. The numerous entries about ploughwork and haulage show that small, fragmented farms, with fields widely scattered around the area and, often, in more than one parish, were the norm at that time as, indeed, they were to remain until the middle of the present century. With one exception, obviously an emergency, only livestock sales are mentioned in the Casebook and it was one of Westover's regular practices to buy young animals for rearing and resale. Field crops are mentioned in such a way as to make clear that wheat, beans, corn and barley were harvested and hauled to storage for winter fodder and home consumption. Other items mentioned, gribbles, teasels, wool and cider, were merely additional and occasional sources of income. The trading that was done was carried out at local fairs and markets and all but one of the men with whom Westover did business was known to him as living in the Wedmore area. There is no evidence of anything beyond a local market economy at work or of any activity very far beyond the Isle of Wedmore and its immediate surroundings. Farming in the area in the late seventeenth century was at a transition stage between the subsistence farming of Westover's forebears and the total production for the market that was to come. Further development would require improved communications.

Progressive or not, farming depends closely on climate and weather. As far as can be seen from such weather and harvest records as are available, the

first half of the seventeenth century was moderately fortunate, with several short runs of good harvests, the first quarter being relatively untroubled. Droughts in 1607 and 1616; a cold winter in 1615; some short runs of poor harvests, notably in the 1640s, helped to keep the price of wheat rising, although the first famine year of the century did not come until 1649, a very poor harvest being followed, in that year, by an exceptionally severe winter.

The second half of the century continued as it had begun. The climate became gradually more extreme with winters becoming even more severe, and this cycle, often known as the Little Ice Age, was to last until 1850. Summers were often hot and dry. 1662, 1673 and 1674 were famine years. An ice-storm occurred in the West Country in 1671; the rain froze as it fell on 9th, 10th and 11th December, coating everything with a thin film of ice. These conditions reached as far east as Oxford, being so severe that a branch which was measured had five inches of ice on it, increasing its weight from twelve ounces to sixteen pounds. Two years later, during the famine year of 1673, large numbers of sheep and cattle died during nearly continuous wet weather in the early part of the year and poor people in the West Country were obliged to make their bread from the peas and beans they usually stored for cattle food. Drought was recorded in 1667, 1669, 1679, 1681, 1687 and 1689, and the Thames froze for the first of many times in the winter of 1665.

Rainfall observations, made for the first time in England in 1677 in Townley, in Lancashire, show that the annual rainfall for the seventeen years for which figures were kept was 40.83 inches. For the last one hundred years the average rainfall is 32.79 inches.

Hot, dry summers and cold wet winters do not help the production of food in abundance and it is not surprising that, in the second half of the seventeenth century, there were sixteen years in Wedmore when burials outstripped baptisms, or that eight of Wedmore's twelve Crisis Mortality Years occurred. Westover's Casebook offers no hint of any of this. It begins only in

1686 and there would have been no point in commenting on circumstances which had been the norm for over thirty years and which, in any case, for most of the time and for most people, were probably accepted as being little worse than usual. Rising food prices, even when taken alongside improvements in farming, do not profit everyone.

Chapter 7.

WESTOVER'S HOME

Although essential for an analysis of Westover's practice, his Casebook appears to be an unpromising source for information about his home and his life there. Nevertheless, buried among the medicines, ointments and poultices are some fleeting glimpses of him at Porch House in Wedmore's West End. They are very fleeting so it is as well that ten Westover wills, five with inventories, were copied before disaster fell upon Somerset wills during the Second World War, to add to the Casebook's hints. Four of the five surviving inventories were made at Porch House: they are those of John Westover Senior, the first surgeon Westover; his widow, Joan; their youngest son, Henry, and his widow, Hannah. They were made in 1678, 1692, 1709 and 1724 respectively. Unfortunately, the younger John Westover's will and inventory have not survived.

Porch House was built about 1500 and although it was the home of all the seventeenth and eighteenth century Wedmore Westovers, it is not very clear which of their predecessors lived there or who built there originally. None of the early Westovers can be located in any part of Wedmore village itself, being firmly located in the surrounding hamlets of Stoughton, Blackford and Allerton, until the sixth John Westover (d. 1652), after being regularly described in register entries as "of Allerton", begins, about, 1645, to be described as "of Wedmore". This description is quite specifically used in Wedmore's parish registers while they were kept by Rev Matthew Law in the middle of the

seventeenth century and it means neither The Borough, the centre of Wedmore, nor the hamlets surrounding it, but the narrow belt of land lying immediately around The Borough, between it and the hamlets and including West End. John Westover 6 moved from Allerton to a house here.

Porch House was rebuilt, of uncoursed rubble with quoin stones and a thatched roof, by the seventh John Westover - a small part of 'the great rebuilding' of the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries which included quite small farmhouses as well as the manor houses of the better-off. Investigation has shown that very little of the old house of 1500 remains. The porch, which gives the house its name, based upon a much more splendid one at East Brent Manor, and the room over it, were almost certainly added at this time. Two stone figures, believed to be contemporary with those of Wells Cathedral, were also brought from East Brent and can now be seen fixed to the garden wall.

The eighth John Westover says little about building work in his Casebook - if he did do any at Porch House, it must have been before 1686 - only recording, between 1693 and 1695, extensive refurbishments in his yard and stables. He referred to work on Porch House itself only once. On 22nd July 1700, a rather puzzling entry records that he paid his cousin, John Pitt, one shilling "...for the caridge of twoe loades of mortar out of Goodmead and lime for the porch. . . ." Some reed from Meare was brought for the roof at the same time. More than likely he was repairing. Although there is room for doubt about who brought the stone figures from East Brent there is none for the seventh John Westover as the most likely rebuilder of Porch House. He was, after all, the most prosperous of the Westovers.

The inventories of movable property attached, at one time, to wills need to be treated with caution. They are unreliable for market values because the valuations given depend entirely on the ideas of the valuer - and, sometimes, on how much he might have wanted the article in question himself. Further, the

possessions and furniture listed in them cannot be taken as a complete list of all the furniture and other items in the house - only of those belonging to the deceased. They do, however, because they were made on a room by room basis, make it possible to assemble a rough plan of the layout of the house in question and a partial list of each room's contents.

Porch House had six rooms, although each is not listed in every inventory and different names are used from time to time. The Hall was entered directly from the front door and had the Kitchen at its far end, behind the fireplace and chimney - a refinement of the 'new' houses. Kitchens in yeomen's houses before 1500 were usually a separate building. Opening off the Hall, probably on the east side of the house, was the Hall chamber or parlour, sometimes used as a bedroom; with a West chamber, very barely furnished, on the opposite side. Behind the Kitchen, or to one side, was the Kitchen chamber, again containing beds. Above the Hall, reached by stairs, was a room, named in 1678, as 'the New Chamber' and later as 'the Chamber above stairs.' This was the room over the Porch. There was a cellar and outhouses, including a buttery and a brewhouse. The Hall was the main living room of the house and contained the fireplace which had access, on one side or both side, to the kitchen behind. The Hall was stone floored and barely furnished. The earliest inventory (1678) gives no details of furniture in the Hall, supplying a value of only three pounds. Widow Joan's inventory (1692), however, lists a table-board (used with trestles) and a sideboard as well as a cupboard and some 'joined' stools. No chairs are mentioned, although some appear in Hannah Westover's inventory of 1724. Crocks, brass and pewter valued at twenty pounds furnish the sideboard in Henry Westover's inventory of 1709. No wall hangings of any kind are mentioned in any inventory, although there may have been some wood panelling in the Hall. No curtains are mentioned except those belonging to beds.

The Hall chamber, next the Hall, was furnished throughout the period covered by the inventories as a bedroom, containing as the needs of family and

Pills, Potions & Plasters, 7.

servants dictated from time to time, one or two beds and a chest or so. On the opposite side of the Hall, the West chamber, listed only in the first inventory, contained only unspecified items valued at seven pounds.

The Kitchen, behind the Hall fireplace, contained, at one time or another, timber vessels, a brass kettle, vessels and crocks of brass and pewter of various sizes and shapes, pewter dishes and plates, dripping pans and plates and a collection of tools and implements - bellows, fireshovels, spits, tongs, hangers and pothooks - for use in cooking, and a table. The value of John Westover 7's brass and pewter in 1678 was forty pounds. Behind or to one side of the Kitchen, the Kitchen chamber was furnished with some beds and bedding for the use of servants. Underneath Hall and Kitchen was a cellar which stored a collection butts, barrels and hogsheads.

The room above the Porch, entered by a stair from the Hall, held a bed and its fittings, some chests and coffer and a table-board. Only the first two inventories mention this room.

Outside the house, in the yard, were a brewhouse with a cider press and all the equipment for making cider, more hogsheads, and an outer Buttery or storeroom which had only a cupboard for permanent furniture. The New House, mentioned in Widow Joan's inventory in 1692 was her son's hospice, built in 1680 to accommodate his in-patients. No furniture in it belonged to Widow Joan, only some corn, cheese and timber held in store. The building became a barn soon after John Westover 8's death in 1706 and is not listed in the two later inventories.

All the furniture listed in the inventories - and that of all similar houses - was plainly made by local joiners and has not survived to the extent that the more splendid pieces made for wealthier owners and greater houses have, to bring fabulous prices in the United States. The cupboards and chests were all moveable and provided the only storage for clothes and personal belongings. Sometimes the chests provided the only seating in a room. Although the

possession of 'joined' furniture made by a carpenter had become something of a status symbol by the end of the sixteenth century, the Westovers' inventories suggest nothing but complete simplicity of living.

For the majority of people, their most valuable, and most valued, piece of furniture, important enough to be passed on in their wills, was the feather bed and its bedstead. These, the 'best beds', with their curtains for privacy and warmth, their rug, bolster and valance, represented the height of fashion and comfort, entirely suitable for well-to-do yeomen and their wives. John Westover 7's inventory lists two such beds in the Hall chamber and valued the two of them, with their furniture and other goods, at thirty pounds. It was probably one of these that was bequeathed by his widow, Joan, to her son, Andrew, in 1692. Henry Westover left a feather bed each to his daughter, Joan, and son, Henry, in 1709, and the Allerton Westovers were still passing on their best beds in 1763. Reserving the feather beds to themselves, the Westovers would have provided mattresses of flock - wool and shredded cloth mixed - for their servants to lay on their bed boards or cords and, maybe, even for the younger members of their own family. Only the poor slept on straw.

The number of people known to have lived at Porch House at any one time cannot be calculated because the number of servants is not known, but multiple occupancy of beds is obvious. Porch House had its two most populous peaks when the families of John Westover 7 and, later, his son, Henry, lived there, and neither of their inventories listed more than five or six beds of all kinds. Clothing was not itemised in the inventories, merely being summarised as "Clothes and money in pocket". For John Westover 7 and Henry Westover this amount was twenty pounds; for their widows, one much older than the other, five pounds and twenty pounds respectively. Other inventories suggest that the proportion was about half for clothes and half for cash. Clothes are only mentioned in wills themselves when the item in question was to be given to a particular person but the Casebook gives us a brief glimpse of the appearance of

one young man who lived at Porch House in the sixteen nineties. In 1693, a new suit of clothes was made by Mr Corden of Wells for William Rowley, Westover's nephew, then aged twenty-five. The coat and waistcoat were of cloth, colour and type unspecified, although green and brown were popular for country use; both were trimmed with braid and ornamented with buttons of silver-plate. The breeches were of buckskin. The materials for the suit and two shirts cost £3. 15s., but there is no mention of the cost of making them up. Two pairs of shoes cost 6s. 6d. Clothes like feather beds, were regarded as sufficiently valuable to feature in wills, as when John Westover of Stoughton left his "blew coat" to his friend, John Starr, and Widow Joan and her daughter-in-law, Hannah, left their "apparell" to be divided among their daughters. Apart from clothing, gold signet rings, mentioned on two occasions, are the only other items of personal possessions to appear in Westover wills or inventories. Books are never mentioned, not even a Bible.

Cups were never mentioned in inventories unless they were of precious metal and treasured as heirlooms. Those of the Westovers would be lumped together with the rest of the pewter. Cutlery, too, is never mentioned for knives were so commonplace that it would occur to no one to list them and ordinary, everyday spoons - of wood, horn or pewter - were likewise ignored. Forks were not yet a feature of the average English table and spoons were used only for soups and the like. Not surprisingly, linen napkins appear in quantity in the Westover inventories.

Food was prepared in front of or on the open fire with the aid of all the hangers, pothooks, spits, dripping pans, kettles, pots and posnets listed in the inventories. The inglenook fireplace itself is brought vividly to mind by the many references to firedogs, tongs, bellows and fireshovels. Fuel was always inventoried and was not confined to wood and turf - Somerset was a coalmining county - and there are three references in the Casebook to the buying of coal; two from a collier and one ". . . wee feched ourselves. . . ." Checking his coal

consumption in the winter of 1692/3, Westover records the lighting of the collier in the grate the 14th of November 1692. It was ended about 1st of July 1693. . . . soe in alle the colle lasted 33 weackes. . . .”

No baking equipment is listed in any inventory, but the rule of commonplace usage operates - Porch House cannot have been without bread. The firestove or oven beside the Hall fireplace is mentioned in a Casebook entry at the end of April 1686 when some new hinges, weighing three and a half pounds, were made for its door - some indication of its size.

The Casebook and inventories together show that the Westovers regularly ate a good deal of beef, pork, mutton, veal, ham, liver, tongue and bacon, cheese, beans and peas. Beef and mutton cost twopence to twopence halfpenny per pound and pork twopence farthing and was usually bought from Thomas Hill or John and Michael Feare, all of Wedmore. Westover usually bought his meat in quantities of thirty to sixty pounds in the autumn and then salted it; very occasionally, smaller quantities were bought such as a shoulder of mutton or a leg, usually at a cost of about tenpence.

There is no mention anywhere in the Casebook of wine and this may be a question of social class. Claver Morris and his landowning and clerical associates in Wells were drinkers - no business meeting being complete without it - and it is hard to believe that the Westovers were not. Their drink was cider - with some ale.

Cheese was often given to Westover as payment in kind, but he also bought large quantities to store. When he bought four hundreds of cheese from Richard Sweet, on 17th August 1697, at twenty-two shillings per hundred, he put away eight cheeses “. . . to try how much they may shrink. . .” finding that eight and a half pounds was lost by the following March. The same spirit of scientific enquiry found him, in April 1695, weighing a pot of lard when full so that he would be able to find the quantity it had held when it was empty

The perishable foodstuffs - fruit, eggs, vegetables, butter and milk - can be assumed to be included in the general inventory heading of "Provisions in the house." These would all be locally produced. Soap, too, would be included under the catch-all heading. Although purchases of soap - usually from Bridgwater - are recorded in the Casebook there is no indication of whether this was the personal toilet variety or the coarser kind used for the household wash; nor do the numerous applications from itinerant tradesmen to Quarter Sessions for licences to buy and sell soap shed any light on the question. Soap for toilet purposes was imported and expensive and it is impossible to say how far out into the rural communities it travelled. For most people of the Westovers' social class cleanliness would be a matter of several washings of the hands and face each day, the rest of the body being rubbed down from time to time with a damp cloth - the personal cleanliness routine followed by Samuel Pepys some years earlier. If everyone smells, who takes offence?

The wills and inventories establish the Westovers' social status; the casebook reveals the eighth John Westover as a cautious and competent surgeon, typical of his time. We know nothing, at this point, of the man himself and what kind of life he lived at home when he was not seeing patients, making up medicines or bargaining over his livestock.

Westover never married and it would be easy to assume his consequent loneliness at Porch House. Even a cursory investigation of dates, however, shows that he did not, in fact, lack for company. After his father died in 1678, Westover shared Porch House with his mother, Joan, until she herself died, aged 74, in 1692 - his father's will had stipulated that he would not receive the house and land until his mother's death. His mother was also executor of his father's will and received all her husband's goods and chattels after all other bequests had been made. A widow Joan Westover may have been; a poor and powerless one existing on her son's bounty she was not. On her death, her inventory totalled £160. 3s. 6d.

Until their marriages, in 1667, 1677, 1678 and 1681 respectively, his sister Joan, brother Henry and sisters Hannah and Ann also lived at Porch House, as did his brother Andrew until he disappeared from the Wedmore scene after 1686. From 1688 to 1697, after completing his apprenticeship at Felton, William Rowley also lived there. Only after his nephew's death did Westover live alone at Porch House for the last eight years of his life.

Of all his immediate family, Westover's youngest sister, Ann, and her husband, Edward Tincknell are mentioned most often in the Casebook. Westover lent them money, brewed cider for them, attended to their medical needs and occasionally provided his sister with money to attend fairs. Sister Ann received fees on his behalf on many occasions and Edward Tincknell hauled loads of various kinds for Westover. More importantly, when he was Overseer of the Poor in 1695, Tincknell saw to it that Westover was paid up to date for his work for Wedmore's Poor Law patients.

By contrast, Westover's other sister, Hannah, is mentioned only twice - once as a messenger with medicine and once as a witness to a memorandum of Westover's arrangements with the Overseer of the Poor at Yatton for the treatment of Alice Stevens, a Poor Law patient suffering from distraction and madness. Her husband, Thomas Poole of Westhay, appears more often - but only as a borrower of money. On five occasions between 1692 and 1694, Westover recorded loans to him of amounts varying from one to six pounds, but never recorded, as was his usual practice, the repayments. Indeed, on one occasion, Westover felt it necessary to formalise the situation and write out in his Casebook a memorandum of the loan for Poole to sign. The first entry of a loan to Poole refers to an earlier loan of three pounds which, from the context, had not been repaid. Apart from these loans, there are no other business transactions with the Pooles, nothing bought from them or sold to them and Westover provided no medical care for the family.

This is scanty evidence and it is impossible to say what Westover's relations with his closest kin really were and which of them were frequent visitors to Porch House and which were not. Clearly, he was closer to his Ann than to Hannah but it would be too much to suggest a family quarrel although such things were by no means unknown among the Westovers, as some of their wills suggest. Westover's cousin, Richard of Allerton, whose will was proved on 5th April 1710, left all his houses, lands and goods, after payment of debts, to his son, another Richard, on condition that he did not allow his widow, Ann, to remain in his house at Allerton for more than ten days after his death. That he did not intend his injunction to be ignored was made plain by his nomination of a cousin, Richard Blessley, to inherit all should it not be carried out. Again, in February 1694, Hannah Westover, widow of Henry, cut off her son, John, with the proverbial shilling, leaving all her goods and chattels, worth £87. 19s. to her daughter, Joan. Feelings could run as high among the Westovers as in any other family.

There is no indication of anything but the most cordial relationship between Westover and his nephew and ward, William Rowley. Many entries make it clear that Westover frequently went to a great deal of trouble to smooth William's path in his dealings with his land; and that he trusted him with livestock deals and negotiations with patients and their families.

What Westover's relations with his immediate family were, his extended family must not be forgotten. Apart from his sisters' families and his brother, Henry, and his family, there were numerous other relatives, always referred to in the Casebook by the title of "Cozen". Fifty-one people are distinguished in this way, scattered over twenty-one of the villages and hamlets of mid-Somerset. There were Counsells at Huntspill, Cocklake, Stoughton, Stoughton Cross, Theale and Blackford; Barrows at Portbury as well as Wedmore; Tincknells, Ganes and Blessleys at Allerton and more Tincknells at South Wick in Mark. In Wedmore itself there were yet more Tincknells as well as Larders, Coles and

Pitts; Stones and Vowleses were at Panborough, while Blackford had its Ivyleafes and Coles. There were more Westovers at Allerton, Mark, Crickham and Westhay. Matthew Taunton of Loxton, Jane Cooke of Lympsham, William and Giles Francis of Burtle, Crossman of Brent, John Reynolds of Badgworth, the Porches of Westhay and Meare, the Veales of Sutton, Ann Champion and John Sturges, whose villages are not known, complete the list. Such a network of relationships is what may be expected when any family has been established in one area for as many generations as had the Westovers, but too much should not be read into Westover's willingness to acknowledge his cousins. Their names come from the Casebook and the Casebook records Westover's patients and business contacts; investigations into family links in seventeenth-century England suggest strongly that such contacts were maintained more for political and commercial reasons than for family fondness.

Also, there were always servants. The same studies suggest that the English, at this time, had more servants than the French, that they made up about thirteen per cent. of the population and that rather more than a quarter of all households had them. A boy or girl, born in a cottage, would enter service any time after the age of ten years and would stay in service until marriage. This would, more often than not, be to another servant, and the whole process could take fifteen to twenty years, during which time most servants lived in a succession of masters' homes. While in service, he or she would never go hungry, but poverty often awaited if marriage necessitated the husband's employment as a day labourer. Most servants were hired at a regular time, usually Lady Day, for one year, and seldom stayed in one place more than one or two years. Westover mentions the names of servants employed by others quite often but names his own on only two occasions.

Peter Ham, described as “. . .my mann. . .”, had a bottle of cough medicine for his mother on 17th November 1698 - the only occasion on which he is mentioned. Jane Ellis, however, who first appears in 1693 delivering medicine

for Westover was a much more important figure, being treated as a trusted employee. She accompanied Westover's sister, Ann, to Bristol, collected and carried money for Westover, occasionally bought livestock for him and was loaned money by him to carry on small business ventures for herself. In 1701, Westover notes that he owed Jane Ellis eight pounds, paid her three pounds, ten shillings to buy a cow for him and went on to acknowledge in his note that, since she had already bought a calf on his behalf for ten shillings, his debt to her stood at five pounds. The rest of the entries about her record her indebtedness to Westover for various quantities of goosefeathers, the cost of these being deducted from her indebtedness until it was exhausted. More than likely she was making feather pillows and bolsters. In 1704, Westover gave her ten shillings to pay a debt of his to Ann Howe's sister. It seems as though Westover always felt the need of a trusted assistant in his various activities for Jane Ellis came into his life when William Rowley left it, just as William joined him when his sisters left to marry and his mother died.

Unfortunately, neither the Wedmore nor the Allerton parish registers shed any light on Jane Ellis, although there was a family of Ellises in Wedmore in the mid-seventeenth century and others at Binegar and Mark. She was in Westover's service at least from 1693 to 1704 and may have remained with him until his death, more than an ordinary servant and more than likely his housekeeper.

Although his servants receive scant mention in his Casebook, Westover is far more free with the names of various men who did building and other work for him at Porch House and the hospice. Charles Aster is the first of these, on 25th April 1687, when, as already mentioned, he made hinges for the oven doors. The remaining entries about work at Porch House occur between 1693 and 1695 and show that Westover carried out a complete renovation of his yard and outhouses. In February 1693, he bought sixty-two feet of timber from Simon Smeathes of Crickham for five shillings and, in July, another eight hundred feet from William Carter and Edward Banwell. In the following October, Henry

Chappell, a carpenter of Wells, was paid thirty-three shillings for a “. . . fortnights woke for his selfe and one mann and for a leven days for another man when they mad the racks and hainged the gates. . .” for the stable and yard. Henry Chappell and his men were fed whilst working at a cost of sixteen shillings and sixpence for the fortnight with another shilling to be shared between them. They were also supplied with cider. Part of the same job was the purchase, from Roger Cluse, of “. . .nails and other iren woke. . .” for five shillings. Iron bars for the stable doors cost another five shillings and were brought from Wells and fitted by Nicholas Thomas. The doors were completed when Henry Boulting was paid eightpence for bolts and keys.

Work on the stable and waggon-house continued into 1694. In February, Richard Sweet, who seems to have been something of a local jack-of-all-trades, cut stone for the stable windows; George Venn of Blackford supplied nails of various sizes in October and had the cost offset against his debt for an earlier treatment of his ulcerated leg. The yard was resurfaced with stone bought in November 1694 from George Palmer of Heathouse at a cost of four pounds, nineteen shillings; the entry making it clear that the stone was extracted, not from a permanent quarry, but from two or three small, ad hoc excavations which were opened up, the necessary stone extracted, and then filled when thought to be growing too large. The same method was still in use in the area in the late nineteenth century to supply stone and hardcore for the repair of parish roads.

Work on the yards and outhouses continued until July 1695, the last entry recording the purchase of elm board for cladding the gables of the new waggon-house.

The family wills and inventories and the Casebook, together with such studies as are available and relevant, have combined to present something of a picture of the kind of life lived by the Westovers of Porch House - but nothing emerges about the eighth John Westover himself. He never offers, in his Casebook, any personal comment or observation of any kind; nor is any made in

the wills and inventories. Yet, something of the man does appear, however dimly and an attempt may be made, first, to assess his level of education.

His records were tersely worded and roughly written but his expenses were meticulously totalled to the farthing. “Ould debts” were never overlooked and, where less than the stated fee was accepted in full settlement, the context makes it clear that he did so only to ensure a speedy settlement. Brisk, business-like and hard-headed, his educational status was high only in comparison with that of the majority of people among whom he lived. He wrote an untidy, sprawling hand, crossed out much and made many blots; confined the majority of his notes to short sentences, used a great many stock phrases and led himself into some confusion when describing more than usually complicated transactions. His use of the Latinised names of his ingredients implies the learning of them as technical terms rather than a knowledge of Latin.

We can only guess at where he received his education. There may have been a village school in Wedmore long before the one mentioned in a Churchwarden’s Account Book for 1707. There had been a grammar school at Wells, within easy reach, since the twelfth century and it is possible that Westover may have spent some time there. His technical education would have been received from his father or from an apprenticeship with another surgeon.

It is with his spelling, however, that Surgeon Westover comes to life. He wrote as he spoke, as all his contemporaries did and his spelling reflects a strong Somerset accent. “Fower” for four is usual, as is “woke” for work, and he always wrote “ledg” and “pidg” for leg and pig. His oaks were “wokes” and his weeks “weackes”. Iron was variously “iern”, “iren” or, once, “ireen”. Probably his most individualistic renderings, in an age of individualistic spellings, were “sotivecate” for certificate and “indigerents” for ingredients, a word he had much difficulty with but used often.

Involved, certainly, with patients and farming business, the eighth John Westover appears to have lacked any other involvement in his community.

Unlike his cousins in Wedmore, Mark and Allerton, who served their turns as Overseers of the Poor, Surveyors of the Highways and Churchwardens, Westover, through his Casebook, never mentions such matters - as he surely would have done had he been so involved. He paid his tithes and church rates - not having much alternative - but had no dealings, medically or otherwise, with the occupants of Wedmore Vicarage. This may have been on religious grounds - there is, as we have seen, a hint of Nonconformism about the Westovers and there were Anabaptists in Wedmore as early as 1656. We shall never know.

The Wedmore Westovers continued to live at Porch House until 1766, when the last John Westover died unmarried and Porch House and the Westover lands passed, first, to Westover's cousin, John Counsell, also of West End, and, then successively, to his son George, daughter Hannah and grand-daughter Mary. Hannah's husband, William Singer, was a stocking-maker who, according to Rev Hervey, found that his wife's properties brought in ". . . more than the stockings did. . ." and gave up his work ". . . to become a gentleman. . . ." None of the Counsells lived at Porch House, members of the Banwell family being tenants from 1766 until the house was sold.

Today, only their house, an acrostic memorial in Wedmore Church, some tombstones in All Churchyard, a few field names in Wedmore and Chapel Allerton - and the Casebook - remain.

Chapter 8.

WESTOVER AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MEDICINE.

There was nothing that could remotely be described as a medical profession in the seventeenth century. Instead, a large number of miscellaneous providers of medical treatment - ranging from physicians, surgeons, apothecaries and midwives (both male and female) to itinerant magical healers and the 'wise' men and women of villages - competed with one another to treat the symptoms suffered by their patients. Alongside the skills of this varied range of medical practitioners there was also treatment at home and by friends. The medical knowledge of the time, though elementary, was widespread; most homes had their own store of herbal remedies and most wives and mothers were expected to treat their sick at home, without recourse to surgeon, physician or apothecary, turning to them only if the patient failed to improve. They, and those who relied on the charms of the local wise woman were no worse off than those able to pay for more learned advice as the unnecessary severity of the treatment meted out to Charles II in his last days and the sequence of deaths at the French Court in the early eighteenth century demonstrate.

Nevertheless, medical advances were made during the seventeenth century - William Harvey's work concerning the circulation of the blood; Richard Lower's first blood transfusion; Thomas Willis's description of the brain and public dissections of human bodies are examples. A time, however, in which large numbers of people, including Richard Wiseman, the King's

physician, continued to accept the centuries-old belief that the monarch's touch could cure a gangrenous tubercular condition of the lymph glands (scrofula or the King's Evil) can hardly be said to have placed its faith in science rather than in superstition and magic. Charles II is said to have touched, between 1660 and 1682, more than ninety thousand sufferers from scrofula at his twice-weekly touching sessions and his cousin, Louis XIV, practised touching regularly. With such numbers it is not too surprising that there were some successes, particularly since touching was also carried out by some commoner- the best known example being Valentine Greatorex, an Irishman who had some successes. To the seventeenth-century patient, all remedies were the same - whether supplied by apothecary or magical healer.

In circumstances such as these, anyone, whatever his training and whatever title he gave himself, could set up in general practice outside London and remain unaffected by attempts at control and regulation by Universities, Church or London College. There was no rigid division into mutually exclusive groups of physicians, apothecaries and surgeons, each with its area of activity, although the so-called "Quacks' Charter" of 1542 had attempted, without success, to restrict surgeons and apothecaries to treating "...outward sores. . ." and symptoms. Only the relatively small group of University physicians who regarded themselves as learned, had any pretensions to professional status, the rest being regarded as tradesmen and craftsmen at best and mountebanks at worst. Even the physician lacked the omnipotent control of the treatment of illness enjoyed by their counterparts today.

This is the background against which and by the end of the century, the development of general practice was beginning. The members of that large body of country general practitioners to which John Westover and his father belonged, were, by then, just beginning to become recognisable as professional men, with some claim to a body of professional knowledge. Two hundred years were to pass, however, before, in the nineteenth century, provincial general practitioners

were to rebel against the restrictive practices and ineffective regulations of the London Colleges and successfully establish a unified and nationally recognised medical profession.

As part of the frequent attempts, beginning early in the fifteenth century, at controlling this confusion, a Medical Act of 1512 prohibited anyone, unless a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge, from practising as a physician or surgeon unless licensed by the appropriate diocesan Bishop, usually through his Archdeacon. Records of the issue of these licenses have provided the bases for many modern studies of the availability of medical services and it is unfortunate that only a few of those issued in the Bath and Wells diocese have survived, so we cannot know how many licenses were issued in Somerset in the seventeenth century, whether the Westovers were licensed or not and how well served the Wedmore area was. To find some standard for comparison it is necessary to look at the neighbouring diocese of Exeter, where licensing records have survived in greater numbers - if not for the precise period of interest.

Between 1568 and 1640, one hundred and six licenses were issued for Devon and Cornwall; eighty-one for surgery, twelve for medicine and surgery and thirteen for medicine alone. At Great Torrington in Devon, a place of similar size to Wedmore in the seventeenth century and having a similar population, of about 2000, at the 1801 Census, there were, by 1701, two general practitioners at work, a surgeon and an apothecary, as well as some 'wise' women and visiting quacks. When, in 1665, the Bishop of Exeter had a survey made of physicians practising in his diocese, forty two were listed; twenty-six of them without any qualifications at all. Despite this, by the end of the seventeenth century, the title of 'doctor' was beginning to be used regularly and indiscriminately by patients - Westover and his father were so described in the Poor Law Accounts of Mark parish from 1673.

Influences came to bear during the seventeenth century which greatly encouraged the development of general medical practice, but it may well be that

they would not have operated as effectively as they did without a rancorous and noisy quarrel, at the beginning of the century, among the physicians, surgeons and apothecaries of the normally sedate city of Exeter.

Thomas Edwards and John Woolton both practised medicine in Exeter but their training and experience were very different. John Woolton, born about 1565, was the son of a former Bishop of Exeter and had eleven years of formal education at Oxford, taking his MA in 1588 and becoming a Fellow of All Souls. He was licensed to practise medicine in 1593, became MD in the following year and, by 1603, was one of the five leading physicians in Exeter.

Thomas Edwards, although a gentleman's son, followed a different path to practice. Apprenticed, about 1533, to William Trivett, an apothecary who later became Mayor of Exeter, Edwards spent much time accompanying a physician, Francis Prampergo, on his visits, making up the medicines Prampergo prescribed. After finishing his apprenticeship in 1562, Edwards went to Oxford to brush up his Latin, returning to Exeter and setting up as an apothecary, working mostly for a Spanish physician, Francis Byrna. About 1597, Edwards began to practice medicine on his own and was licensed to do so by the College of Physicians and the Dean of Exeter. He made much use of the new mineral drugs, became successful and was elected Sheriff of Exeter in 1600.

At Christmas 1603, after having lost an influential patient, Sir William Courtney, to Edwards, Woolton wrote a letter to Edwards accusing him of administering mineral remedies to Sir William without the right to do so, viciously attacking Edwards' reputation and saying that he was not qualified to carry out any medical treatments at all. He then circulated the letter among local practitioners and gentry. Tempers rose high and Edwards accused Woolton and some others of criminal libel.

The case went to court and dragged on for three and a half years, local gentry and apothecaries testifying in favour of Edwards, while Woolton, who appears to have become isolated, produced no physicians on his side. In

November 1607, Lord Chief Justice Coke, sitting in Star Chamber Court, found Woolton guilty of criminal libel. He was fined £500 plus £170 damages; was to stand in the market-place with the interrogatories in the case (all twelve feet of them) round his neck until the next Assizes; and was to remain imprisoned until that time. Others named in the case, who had circulated Woolton's letter among themselves, were fined £40 and £10 damages each. Not surprisingly, after his punishment, Woolton retired to his North Devon estate. The case, although it probably had its roots in personal antipathy, was really about who could practise medicine and, in particular, by what methods; Coke's decision allowed apothecaries and surgeons to practise medicine outside of London.

With the decision as a base, three main factors worked to promote the development of general medical practice during the rest of the seventeenth century. New mineral based remedies, such as antimony and mercury, based on the work of Paracelsus at Basle and Strasbourg, had begun to enter England in the previous century, but were opposed by the College of Physicians which remained wedded to the classical theories of Galen. Mineral based medicines were taken up, therefore, by apothecaries and surgeons, who were able to extend their medical knowledge of them by trial and error.

Later still, the trend was reinforced by an influx into practice at home of ex-Naval surgeons, whose experience had been gained in voyages overseas. While thousands of miles from home it had been impossible for them to maintain rigid divisions between surgery and physic and essential for them to develop their skills and knowledge empirically when dealing with tropical diseases little known to the traditional textbooks. Indeed, many of these men, after leaving the sea, made their own contributions to medical science through published works.

Lastly, but not least of these facilitating factors, was the tendency, already remarked on, of parish Poor Law officials, charged with the health care of the poor, to employ surgeons and apothecaries, rather than the more expensive

and exclusive University trained physicians for the work, so allowing them gain further valuable experience.

It was against this background of the slow development of the general medical practitioner that the two John Westovers plied their craft. That they were part of the developing tradition of general practitioners, the younger Westover's Casebook makes clear for he performed minor operations, bled his patients, reduced fractures and dislocations, dealt with the results of accidents as well as prescribing, making up and supplying medicines, some of which included the newer, mineral based ingredients, for a wide range of ailments. While more than half of his practice consisted of treating the 'outward sores' of the 1542 Act, fifty-three other ailments are mentioned in his Casebook including fevers and agues, rheumatism, stomach pains, menstrual disorders, coughs, consumptions, pleurisies and asthma, dropsies and jaundice. In addition, Westover's minor specialism in mental illness and depression, from which maladies nearly a tenth of his patients suffered, takes him well beyond the general run of country surgeons. There is no doubt that the Westovers, however remote they may have been from centres of medical science, were part of the seventeenth century development of general practice and were among the many in all parts of the country who had begun to provide the base on which the general practitioner of today stands.

Blurred though the demarcation lines between physicians, apothecaries and surgeons had become by Westover's time, considerable differences of life-style can be found between physician and apothecary/surgeon and, even, between one apothecary/surgeon and another.

A near contemporary of Westover's was the physician, Claver Morris of Wells (1659-1727). He was the son of the Rector of Caundle Bishop in Dorset and, therefore, a gentleman born. He studied at New Hall, Oxford, graduating BA in 1679 and MA in 1682; became an Extra-Licentiate of the College of Physicians in 1683, took his MB in 1685 with the MD following in 1691. In

Pills, Potions & Plasters, 8.

1686, after his first marriage and a short period of practice in Winchester, he came to Wells to practice as a physician, became a Commissioner for Land Tax in 1706; Commissioner for Sewers in 1709; was elected to the Company of Mercers and became a Burgess of Wells in 1717. The highspot of his public career was reached in 1720 when he was appointed one of the Commissioners for the Enclosures at Baltonsbury and Glastonbury Moor. He married well three times, each of his wives substantially increasing his worldly wealth. In 1685, Grace Green, his first wife, brought him two houses worth £1000 and £4000 respectively; his second, wife, Elizabeth Jeans left him a property at West Pennard and his third wife, Molly Bragge brought with her a marriage portion of £3000.

Claver Morris was buried in Wells Cathedral behind the High Altar; his memorial tablet, with bust, being now in the Cloisters.

Morris practised more in the style of a consultant and did not operate, or apply dressings himself. He visited patients more rarely than seeing them in his own home and prescribed medicines to be made up by an apothecary. His fees were higher than Westover's for, though he charged only 2s. 6d. to the poor for a consultation and five shillings to tradespeople, his fee for the same services for substantial citizens was 10s. 6d. and one guinea to the clergy and gentry. For country visits he charged much more than Westover. A journey of seventeen miles, made in his coach, from Wells to Frome, was charged at thirty shillings for the visit alone and for a journey into Gloucestershire for a consultation his fee was seventeen guineas. His income from his practice alone, between 1686 and 1710 was £100 to £150 per year and, from 1710 to 1720, it rose to around £300 a year. He was also a landowner.

Claver Morris was a substantial citizen of Wells, well thought of by his fellows and he practised at a higher social level than Westover, most of his patients belonging to the middle and upper levels of West Country society. His birth and education allowed such people to feel more at home with him than with

the apothecary or surgeon whose social level approximated more to that of the skilled craftsman; while his clerical and university background gave him as much in common with the clergy of Wells as his landowning and public interests did with the gentry.

Leaving the physicians to one side, differences of experience, training and education could be as great between men who described themselves as surgeons as those between physicians and surgeons. Contemporary with both Westover and Claver Morris was the naval surgeon, James Yonge of Plymouth (1647-1721). He was the son of a Plymouth apothecary and surgeon and was educated at the local Grammar School until he became eleven. At that time, his father's ill health caused him to be apprenticed to a naval surgeon, Sylvester Richmond, for eight years, his first voyage beginning on 16th February 1658.

England and Spain were at war and Yonge's early voyages, until peace was made in 1660, were mostly spent on convoy escort duties. Further voyages in the naval service took him to the siege of Algiers with Sandwich; to Lisbon to bring back Catherine of Braganza to marry Charles II and to Tangier, which she brought as part of her dowry. He was paid off in May 1662 and went to London where he had further training with an apothecary friend of Richmond's, gaining experience in mixing medicines. Richmond retired sometime before 1633 and James was bound to his father, with whom his relations were bad, for another eight years. His later voyages, between 1663 and 1670, were nearly all to Newfoundland with the annual cod fishing fleet, although some took him again to the Mediterranean; while during the Second Dutch War he was a prisoner in Holland from 1665 to 1667. Such a career developed his self-reliance as well as providing him with valuable experience as a surgeon through having to deal with a wide range of injuries and ailments. It also allowed him to accumulate the capital with which to finance his entry into practice at home in Plymouth.

After 1670, James Yonge went to sea no more but began his own practice in Plymouth, marrying in 1672. His naval contacts continued to stand him in

good stead and he was appointed Surgeon in charge of care for sailors wounded in the Dutch Wars by Thomas Pearce, Surgeon-General to the Navy, whose friendship he had gained. Although later appointed Deputy Surgeon General at Plymouth he remained in private practice.

In 1678, James Yonge made what was to be the first of several extended stays in London where he renewed old acquaintanceships with members of various scientific and medical groups, attended their meetings and began to contribute papers. The real purpose of his visit, however, was to advance his career in the Navy by obtaining the post of Surgeon at the Plymouth Citadel but his canvassing was unsuccessful. Another visit, with the same aim but equally unsuccessful in its achievement, came in the summer of 1681, when he extended his return journey to Oxford and Bristol. While in Bristol, he and his friends made an excursion into Somerset, visiting the small towns of Axbridge and Bridgwater, only a few miles from Wedmore. His journey between the two towns was, as he said, “. . . over the moras ground, which was now dry and hard.” During all this time he was continuing his publication of papers on medical subjects.

By 1684, although he remained unsuccessful in improving his position in the Navy, Yonge's private practice was flourishing and he had patients in many parts of Devon and Cornwall. Minor public offices were also beginning to come his way. In 1685, when Monmouth made his bid for the throne, James Yonge was appointed Surgeon to Lord Bath's Regiment of Foot and, from this time on his career prospered exceedingly. He became Receiver of Plymouth in 1686; Surgeon of Plymouth Dockyard in 1693; Alderman in 1694 and, in 1695, Mayor of Plymouth.

Well established in private practice - he had 443 patients in 1702 and two apprentices - with a senior Naval post and influential friends in London who were in touch with his research and publications, James Yonge was elected to the Royal Society in 1702, while enjoying another extended stay in London. At the

same time, after special examination, he became an Extra-Licentiate of the College of Physicians. In 1708, he was elected a Governor of the newly established Plymouth Workhouse, his last public appointment before his death in 1721.

The almost complete absence of references to fees in Yonge's *Diary* implies the keeping of a separate Accounts Book, but those payments he did mention show that he was much more highly rewarded than was Westover and, possibly, even, than Claver Morris. In 1679 he received £120 from smallpox treatments alone while other notes show that he charged £25 for a course of phlebotomies; £10 for four days of treatment for a man wounded in a duel and £40 for a similar case where treatment lasted for twelve days. For each of three long-term patients he received £80 each year; from Lady Day 1698 to Lady Day 1699 he received sums varying from £30 to £50 for curing fistulae and for an ulcer treatment lasting for four years he was paid £200.

Westover and James Yonge both received their training as apprentices but any resemblance between them ends there. James Yonge was more widely experienced than Westover; better educated and more scientifically minded. He introduced to surgery the flap technique for dealing with amputations and was well read in medical literature. In his later years his status resembled more that of the consultant physician of today and he was accepted as an equal by the founders and Fellows of the Royal Society.

Compared with the lives of Claver Morris and James Yonge, Westover's was insular and introverted although, in the absence of any biographical material to support the Casebook, the comparison, just possibly, may be unfair. Had he been involved in any public business, however, it is certain that his Casebook would have contained some hint of it; references occur frequently to non-medical aspects of his working days. Even these, though, are close to the parish pump for there is no mention of him ever travelling beyond the working area, no comment on current events, not even the odd remark about the people he dealt

with. He took no risks with the knife and introduced no new surgical techniques - at least, not during the last twenty years of his life.

Seventeenth-century surgery in general was not quite so cautious and offered several curative operations; lithotomy, the removal of stones from the bladder being the best known. Samuel Pepys was successfully “cut for the stone” on 26 March 1658, reluctantly and with a full knowledge of the odds against him, but badly needing relief from occasional excruciating pain. Grateful for his survival, he celebrated the date as a special anniversary each year for the rest of his life.

Another widely used technique was trephination or, depending upon the instrument used, trepanation - the removal of a disc of bone about an inch in diameter from the skull - carried out to release pressures on the brain caused by tumours or infections resulting from head injuries. An ancient procedure, the operation was used by the early Egyptians and traces of it have been found in Neanderthal skulls. Prince Rupert, Charles II's cousin, underwent trephination in 1667. As young soldier he had suffered a minor scalp wound in a skirmish in 1643 and, while it appeared to have caused him no immediate trouble, unless his well-known irascibility was a symptom, a blow to the top of his head from a falling block while at sea in 1664 brought a latent infection into action, causing severe headaches. The operation was successful - Prince Rupert lived fifteen more years, as irritable as ever, and died, aged sixty-two, in 1682.

Cataracts could be dealt with by ‘couching’ - displacing the lens downwards without removal - depriving the patient of peripheral vision and most of the ability to focus and allowing only inadequate binocular vision with ‘bottle-glass’ spectacles.

Some external or visible cancers could be removed, seldom successfully, and Caesarian sections were possible if the mother was near to death. The only anaesthetics available were alcohol, which did no more than make the patient

drowsy, and opium, which caused complete loss of consciousness - and death, if the surgeon was careless. In all these operations, the surgeon relied on his speed to minimise shock - Pepys's lithotomy was completed in one minute.

Westover's Casebook offers no information about patient reaction to illness and treatment. and, to have some idea of this, it is necessary to look to other sources. Diaries and letters of the time fill the gap and reveal their writers and their families as being much concerned with their state of health and offering many expressions of gratitude for the continuance of good health. Their writers, of course, were not representative of seventeenth-century society as a whole. Illness was and is unpleasant and, in the seventeenth century, so were most of the remedies. Purges, scarifications, clysters, vomits, making issues, blistering, bleeding, mercury treatments were not experiences after which patients felt better, although they may have felt relief of another kind when they were over. In addition treatments such as scarification and bleeding were dangerous - Westover treated at least one patient for a blood-letting that went wrong. To make matters worse, many of the draughts, diet drinks, tinctures, juleps and elixirs tasted vile, although one of Westover's remedies for coughs, a marmalade of quinces sounds pleasant. Francis Bacon, philosopher and statesman who died in 1626, cannot have been alone in his opinion that the remedy was worse than the disease.

The healer-patient relationship was different from that of today because the healers of the time, whatever their description, had not the same power over the treatment of illness as that given to today's healers by modern medical science. Further, the professional healer was not then the only solution to the problem of illness; the commonest kind of treatment was self-treatment or treatment by relations and friends and, only if this failed to produce the desired result, was a professional healer called in. Patients did not expect complete remedies for their illness, merely to be made less inconvenienced by it. Death, when it occurred, was not blamed on the healer. Patients took responsibility for

their own ailments and disorders and their acceptance of humoral principles allowed them to believe that sensible behaviour would produce health. His own health was a matter of absorbing interest to Samuel Pepys: there are over a thousand references to it in his diaries covering the period 1660 to 1669, most of them concerned with measures and regimes to be adopted to ensure future good health.

Illness in seventeenth-century England was dealt with at home, so it had a social element. Visiting the sick, even when there was a risk of infection, was a social duty so there were what must, to the patient, have seemed like crowds of family, friends and neighbours passing through the sick room. Birth, illness, death were all social concerns and households were expected to be disrupted by any of them. Illness which required a patient to take to his bed for more than a few days - a fractured leg for example - required special services from husbands, wives and servants. Such upheavals lie behind all the Casebook entries recording a long series of visits to a patient.

Important though the feelings of patients were, it is John Westover's practice which is revealed by the Casebook. It shows us a very much grass roots country surgeon taking on all types of disorders and ailments at a time when general practice was at a very early stage of its development. He worked at craftsman level; had no interests beyond his practice and community and was not a writer of learned papers. He was not multi-lingual and pioneered no new surgical techniques; his hospice was not unique neither was his attitude towards mental illness. He was cautious and conventional practitioner, rather at odds with his Latin, possessed of a sufficient understanding of anatomy but sparing of the knife. His Casebook is one of many which were kept all over England recording the mundane medical treatment of ordinary people; remarkable only for its survival and the insights it supplies.

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