

**A medical roll of honour : physicians and surgeons who remained in London during the Great Plague / by S.D. Clippingdale.**

**Contributors**

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Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
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## A MEDICAL ROLL OF HONOUR.

PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS WHO REMAINED IN LONDON  
DURING THE GREAT PLAGUE.

BY

S. D. CLIPPINGDALE, M.D., F.R.C.S.

WHEN the Great Plague of 1665 occurred in London, there was a general stampede of all who could leave the city. The exodus included those to whom the distressed inhabitants naturally turned for help, namely, the clergy and the doctors; and the panic-stricken and plague-stricken inhabitants were left largely in the hands of irregular practitioners in both professions. The medical refugees included men of high reputation and great wealth; among them one, at least, whose name is a household word in the annals of medicine. All the officers of the College of Physicians, led by their president, fled; to find, on their return, that their college had been broken into and the college coffers emptied.

How many medical men remained at their posts is not accurately known. There were not many. Apparently not more than twenty-five. Not a large number to minister to the medical needs of a population estimated at 240,000 and in a time of pestilence. No list has been preserved of this small band of heroes. A study of contemporary literature, however, and an examination of valuable manuscripts in the Guildhall Library, most kindly transcribed by Mr. Edward M. Borrajo, the City Librarian, has enabled the compilation of the following list, which, however, cannot pretend to be more than an approach to completeness:

### I.—PHYSICIANS.

In the compilation of the following biographical notes, Monk's valuable "Roll of the Royal College of Physicians" has been largely drawn upon:

*Allen, Thomas*, is mentioned by Pepys as being in London during April, 1666, when the Plague was still raging severely. Dr. Allen was educated at the University



of Cambridge (Trinity and Caius Colleges) where he took the degrees of M.B., 1654, and M.D., 1659. He became a member of the Royal College of Physicians in 1659, a Fellow in 1671, and Censor in 1674-79, and 1682. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society and Physician to Bethlehem Hospital. He died of "dropsy" in 1684.

*Baber, Sir John*, resided in King Street, Covent Garden. He was the son of Mr. John Baber, Recorder of Wells, Somerset, and was born April 18th, 1625. He studied first at Winchester and then at Christ Church, Oxford. After graduating M.B. (1646) at Oxford, he travelled abroad and took his M.D. (1648) at the University of Angers. On returning to London he joined the Royal College of Physicians, becoming a Fellow in 1657 and Censor in 1660. He was appointed Physician-in-Ordinary to Charles II, and knighted by that monarch, March 19th, 1660. He died in 1703. Sir John Baber's presence in London during the plague year is established by entries in *Pepys's Diary*.

*Barwick (or Berwick), Peter*, resided in St. Paul's Churchyard, until his house was destroyed by the fire of 1666, when he removed to Westminster. He was the son of Mr. George Barwick, of Withurslack, Westmorland, and was born there in 1619. He was educated at Sedbergh Grammar School, and then at the University of Cambridge (St. John's College), where he took the degrees of B.A. (1642), M.A. (1647), and M.D. (1655). He joined the Royal College of Physicians in 1655, became a Fellow two years later, and was Censor in 1674-84 and 1687. This good man seems to have been noted for his loyalty, his piety, and his charity. He was with Charles I at the battle of Worcester, remained steadfast to the Royal cause during the Commonwealth, and at the restoration was appointed a Physician-in-Ordinary to Charles II. He is mentioned by Dr. Hodges in *Loimologia* as one of those who remained in London during the plague year. During the whole of that year he never missed attending daily service at St. Paul's Cathedral. His practice was to rise at 6, walk over to the Cathedral for prayers, and then return to his house to see gratuitously all sick poor who came to seek his aid. He seems to have stimulated the Cathedral clergy to their duty, for one of the canons writing to the Dean, states that Dr. Barwick had been inquiring as to the celebration of the Holy Communion, which appears to have fallen into abeyance, possibly from the fear of spreading contagion. In old age he became completely blind and suffered severely from stone. He died in his 84th year and was buried in the crypt of St. Faith beneath St. Paul's Cathedral. He married the widow of an eminent merchant, and left a daughter who became the wife of Sir Ralph Dutton, Bart., of Sherborne.

*Brooks, Humphrey*, lived in Leadenhall Street. He was a Londoner by birth, and was educated at the Merchant Taylors' School. He subsequently went to Oxford (St. John's College), and took there the degrees of B.A. (1640), M.B. (1646), and M.D. (1649). He was admitted a member of the Royal College of Physicians in 1640, and



chosen a Fellow in 1674. He was Censor in 1675-80-81-84 and 1692, and "Consiliarius" in 1693. He died "very rich" at the age of 76, and was buried in the Church of St. Andrew Undershaft. He was the author of a work entitled, *A Conservatory of Health, Comprised in a Plain and Practical Discourse upon the Six Particulars Necessary for Man's Life* (London, 1650, 12mo). His presence in London during the plague is vouched for by his contemporary, Dr. Hodges.

*Burnett, Alexander*, of Fenchurch Street, was M.D.Camb. 1648, and F.R.C.P.Lond. 1648. Dr. Burnett, while engaged (in company with Dr. Glover, Dr. O'Dowd and two other physicians) in making an autopsy upon a person who had died of the plague became himself infected and died August 25th, 1665. All present at this fatal *post-mortem* examination caught the virus and died, some the same day, the rest the day following. Dr. Burnett was ordinary medical attendant to Pepys, the celebrated diarist. Pepys says the plague was first brought into the city itself (it had begun in the western suburbs) by the doctor's own manservant. Under date ~~August~~ 10th, 1665, he writes: "To my great trouble hear the plague has come into the city, but where should it begin but in my good friend and neighbour's Dr. Burnett in Fenchurch Street, which in both points troubles me greatly." Dr. Burnett seems to have taken the necessary precautions for protecting his neighbours, for under date ~~August~~ 11th Pepys writes: "I saw poor Burnett's door shut, but he hath, I hear, gained great goodwill among his neighbours, for he discovered it himself, and caused himself to be shut up of his own accord, which was very handsome." Referring to Dr. Burnett's death, Pepys has the following entry: "Aug. 25.—This day I am told that Dr. Burnett, my physician, is this morning dead of the plague, which is strange, his man dying so long ago, and his house this month opened again. Now himself gone! Poor unfortunate man!" Pepys was evidently not aware that Burnett had contracted the disease at a *post-mortem* examination and not from his servant.

*Conyers, William*, was born in 1622. He received his early education at the Merchant Taylors' School, and then proceeded to Oxford (St. John's College), where he graduated M.D. in 1653. He was admitted a member of the Royal College of Physicians in 1656, and settled to practice in London. "He was," says Dr. Monk, "one of the few physicians who remained in London during the Great Plague, devoted himself to the duties of his position and the succour of the sufferers from that disease, to which he himself fell a victim."

*Coysh, Elisha*.—It is doubtful whether this physician should receive a place in this list. He had a house in the City and another at Highgate. When the plague broke out he left the former and retired to the latter, where he received such patients as could afford to reach him there. Dr. Coysh was M.D.Oxon. (1657), and F.R.C.P.Lond. (1673). He died in 1685.

June

June.



*Glisson, Francis*, resided in New Street, St. Bride's, Fleet Street. He was the son of Mr. William Glisson of Rampisham, Dorset, where he was born in 1597. He entered the University of Cambridge (Caius College) in 1617, and graduated B.A. in 1620, M.A. in 1624, and M.D. in 1634. He became a member of the College of Physicians in 1634 and was elected a Fellow in 1635. He was Gulstonian Lecturer in 1655, Censor in 1656, and President in 1667-8-9. In 1636 he was appointed Regius Professor of Physic in the University of Cambridge. In 1648 he was residing in Colchester, and during the siege of that town was one of those selected to make terms with Lord Fairfax. He returned to Cambridge, but his salary as Regius Professor falling much into arrear (he received no stipend for about five years), he came to London and obtained an Order in Council, dated March 7th, 1654, for payment of the sum due to him. He did not return to Cambridge, but remained in London and joined a small body of scientific men which became the nucleus of the Royal Society. He published at least two important works, one in 1650, on Ricketts, the first description of that disease issued in this country; the other, in 1654, on the Liver, in which "Glisson's capsule" is first described. He died October 14th, 1677, and was buried in St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street. His services during the Plague are gratefully referred to by Dr. Hodges in his work *Loimologia*.

*Glover, John*, was born in America, and studied at the University of Harvard, where he graduated in arts. He then came to this country, and graduated M.D. (1654) at the University of Aberdeen. He settled in London, and became an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in 1664. He was one of those who met his death (August 25th, 1665) at the *post-mortem* examination in which Dr. Burnett and others took part.

*Hodges, Nathaniel*, resided in Watling Street. This remarkable man was the son of the Vicar of Kensington, and was born at the old Kensington Vicarage, September 13th, 1629. He was educated first at Westminster School. He entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1646, but in 1648 he was transferred by the Parliamentary Visitors to Christ Church, Oxford, where he completed his university career, and where he graduated B.A. in 1651, M.A. in 1654, and M.D. in 1659. Settling in London, he was admitted a "Candidate" of the Royal College of Physicians in 1659 and a Fellow in 1672. He was Censor in 1682, and Harveian Orator in 1683. During his Censorship he presented to the College a fire-engine. During the plague, his daily routine, taken from his autobiography, is thus described in the *National Dictionary of Biography*:

He rose early, and took an antipestilential lectuary as large as a nutmeg. After transacting household affairs, he entered his consulting room. Crowds of patients were always waiting, and for three hours he would examine them and prescribed, finding some who were already ill and others who were only afflicted by fear. When he had seen all he breakfasted, and visited patients at their homes. On entering a house he had a disinfectant burnt on a hot coal, and, if hot or out of breath, rested till at his



ease, then put a lozenge into his mouth, and proceeded to examine the patient. After spending some hours in this way he returned home, and drank a glass of sack, dining soon after off roast meat and pickles or other relish, condiments of all sorts being cheap and abundant in the city during the epidemic. He drank more wine at dinner. Afterwards he saw more patients at his own house, and paid more visits, returning home between eight and nine o'clock. He spent the evening at home, never smoking tobacco, of which he was a professed enemy, but drinking old sack till he felt thoroughly cheerful. After this he generally slept well. Twice during the epidemic he felt as if the plague had infected him, but after increased draughts of sack he felt well in a few hours, and escaped without serious sickness.

Dr. Hodges's valuable services to his fellow-citizens do not seem to have met with the recognition they deserved. He was constantly harassed by want of money, and was frequently in debt. From the Corporation he received two gifts of £100 each (Guildhall Library MS. 270). Nevertheless, his poverty increased, and it seems incredible that this faithful public servant was allowed to end his days in a debtor's gaol. Yet such was the case. Dr. Hodges died in the Fleet Prison on January 10th, 1688. He was buried in St. Stephen's, Wallbrook, where a handsome monument has been erected to his memory. Dr. Hodges wrote several works on the plague, the most important of which is *Loimologia, or an Historical Account of the Plague in London in 1665*, published in Latin by the author in 1672, and translated into English by Dr. John Quincey in 1720. Readers of Harrison Ainsworth's novels will recollect that it was Dr. Hodges who attended the grocer's daughter in *Old St. Paul's*.

*O'Dowd, Dr.*, was one of those who, with Drs. Burnett, Glover, and others, met his death in making a *post-mortem* examination on a person who had died of the plague on August 25th, 1665. He received his M.D. degree from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Further particulars of him have not been obtained.

*Paget, Nathan*, was the son of the Rev. Thomas Paget, Rector of Stockport, but born (1615) in Manchester. He went first to the University of Edinburgh, where he graduated M.A., then studied medicine at Leyden, where he graduated M.D. in 1639; returning to this country, he settled in practice in London. He became an Extra-Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians in 1640, a "Candidate" in 1643, a Fellow in 1646, Censor in 1655-7-9-67-8, and Harveian Orator in 1664. He died in 1677. He is mentioned by his contemporary, Hodges, as one of the few physicians in London during the plague. He was an intimate friend of Milton, and married a cousin of the poet's third wife, Elizabeth Minshull.

*Peck, Samuel*.—Particulars of this physician are wanting. He is not mentioned in Munk's "Roll of the College of Physicians," nor in the lists of graduates of any British university. He probably graduated abroad. He is mentioned, however, more than once in the City archives as "Dr. Samuell Pecke, Dr. in Phisicke," and the following entry shows that he resided in London, and did meritorious



work during the plague year: "Bolton, Mayor, 26 February, 1666.—Upon the humble desire of Doctor Peck, who did especial service in visiting and prescribing physic to the poor infected in the late visitation of the plague within this city and liberties, it is ordered by this Court that Mr. Chamberlain shall pay unto him the sum of fifty pounds in recompense of the said service." (From MS. 295 in the Guildhall Library.) Peck had further sums from the Corporation, amounting in all to £100.

*Wharton, Thomas*, resided in Aldersgate Street. He was descended from an ancient North of England family, and was the only son of Mr. John Wharton of Winston, co. Durham, where he was born in 1614. He studied at both the Universities of Oxford (Trinity) and Cambridge (Pembroke). He did not, however, at the time receive a degree from either, but subsequently—namely, in 1647—by virtue of letters patent issued by the Parliamentary General, Sir Thomas Fairfax, he received the degree of M.D. from the University of Oxford. Meanwhile he had been up in London studying physic under Dr. Bathurst, Physician to Oliver Cromwell. Having obtained his degree, he was admitted a Member of the Royal College of Physicians in 1648, and a Fellow in 1650, and held the post of Censor for the years 1658–61–6–7–8–73. When the plague broke out he set himself seriously to determine whether he should remain in London or flee. He decided to remain, being induced to that course, it is said, out of consideration for the large number of poor people who attended his clinic at St. Thomas's Hospital, of which he was then Physician. To St. Thomas's Hospital, also, the Government sent all the Foot Guards as soon as they were seized with the plague. For his services to the troops Wharton was promised the first vacant post as Physician-in-ordinary to the King; but when the vacancy arose he was put off with an augmentation in his coat of arms, for which he had to pay Sir William Dugdale, the Herald, £10.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Wharton died in 1673, and was buried in the Church of St. Michael Bassishaw, where a marble tablet bears an eloquent testimonial to his worth and work. Dr. Wharton was the author of *Adenographia* (in which "Wharton's duct" is first described), published in London in 1646, and again in Amsterdam in 1659.

*Witherley, Sir Thomas*, was a member of the University of Cambridge, and received his M.D. degree there in 1655. He became a Fellow of the College of Physicians in 1677, Censor in 1683, and President in 1684–5–6–7. He was Physician in Ordinary to King Charles II. He died March 23rd, 1693. For his services during the plague he received two sums of £100 each from the City Corporation (Guildhall Library, MS. 270).

## II.—SURGEONS.

Most of the books of the Barber-Surgeons Company were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. The courteous Clerk

<sup>1</sup> BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, November 2nd, 1907.

of the Company, Mr. F. C. Lingard, however, has kindly furnished what particulars he could collect, and these, with certain details from the Guildhall MSS., has enabled the following brief notes to be prepared of Surgeons known to have been in London during the plague:

*Fife, John*, cannot be traced in the books of the Barber-Surgeons Company, but he is stated to have received from the City Corporation the sum of £40 for his attention to the sick poor (February 22nd, 1666).

*Gray, Thomas*, having been apprenticed first to Mr. John Hancock and then to Mr. William Hunt, was admitted "Chirurgion" October 12th, 1652. For his services to the Plague patients he received from the City the sum of £30. He seems to have fallen a victim to his duties, for the Corporation granted to his widow a sum of £70.

*Hannan, Edward*, having been apprenticed to Mathew Alsopp, was admitted a "Chirurgion" December 2nd, 1652. For his services during the Plague the Corporation voted him the sum of £30, and he dying, apparently from the distemper, his widow received in 1666 also a sum of £30.

*Higgs, Edward*, having been apprenticed to Mr. Doxology (*sic*) Saunders, was admitted a "Chirurgion" April 14th, 1629. For his services in "dressing the poore visited of the plague," the City Corporation voted him at various times sums amounting in all to £90.



THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF BOSTON  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT  
TO THE PRESENT TIME  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY  
OF THE BARR

THE FIRST VOLUME  
CONTAINING THE HISTORY  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT  
TO THE YEAR 1780  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY  
OF THE BARR

THE SECOND VOLUME  
CONTAINING THE HISTORY  
FROM THE YEAR 1780  
TO THE PRESENT TIME  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY  
OF THE BARR