

Section of the History of Medicine

President F F Cartwright FFARCS

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Paper

John Hall: Seventeenth-century Physician of Stratford upon Avon¹

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John Hall arrived in Stratford upon Avon in 1600 and practised there until his death in 1635. It is by chance that we know anything about him today, for in 1607 he married Suzanna, Shakespeare's elder daughter. I believe, however, that had communications in that era been better he would be known in his own right, as he was ahead of his time in medical methods as well as having considerable involvement in the affairs of the Midlands.

There is some doubt about his career before 1600. One theory suggests that he was born in 1575, the son of one William Hall, a physician in Bedfordshire, and that he matriculated at Queen's College, Cambridge in 1594. It is not known what subject he read at Cambridge. He went down in 1597 and probably studied medicine at Padua, Montpellier, Leudon or Heidelberg. James Cooke, who was responsible for the publication of his two academic works, tells us that 'Hall was a traveller, acquainted with the French tongue'. Padua is the most likely place since Hall knew William Harvey at Cambridge and held him in high regard. Hall had a patient with urinary problems and virulent gonorrhœa whose symptoms became worse on a visit to London and was treated by Harvey. Hall describes Harvey as 'most learned' and noted down the treatment prescribed.

It is probable that Hall came from Bedfordshire, as William Hall, the Bedfordshire physician, had an assistant, Matthew Morris, to whom he left all his books on alchemy and astronomy, while he left

his anatomical and medical books to his son. A man called Matthew Morris arrived in Stratford in 1600 as John Hall's assistant, married a local girl and settled down. The other possibility is that John Hall was the son of a well-to-do Worcestershire family, who entered Balliol College Oxford in 1592 aged 16 and took his BA in 1595. He then took his MA from St Edmund Hall in 1598, and went to France. There is less supporting evidence for this theory than for the alternative one; there may well by coincidence have been a John Hall at Oxford whilst the one who settled in Stratford was at Cambridge.

In 1600 John Hall purchased and considerably enlarged a house which became known as Hall's Croft, close to the parish church and just outside the borough of Stratford upon Avon. He became established in the town, and built up a practice of about 2500 people, extending as far afield as Burford and Worcester (*see Fig 1*). On 5 June 1607

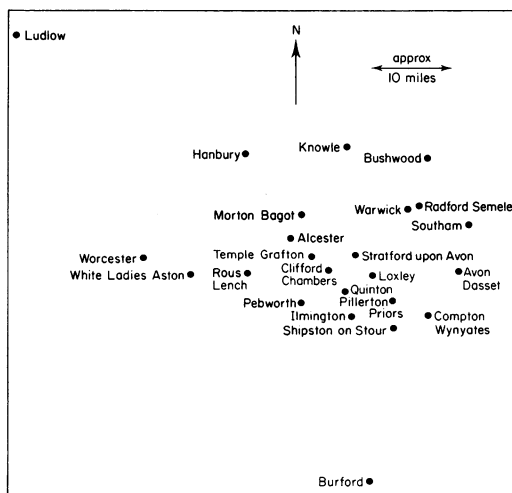


Fig 1 Map to show the extent of John Hall's practice

¹ Submitted for the Student's Essay Prize, presented by Dr F F Cartwright, President of the Section of the History of Medicine during the 1976/1977 session, and selected to be read to the Section

he married Suzanna Shakespeare, who was then 24. Their only child, Elizabeth, was born in February 1608.

In 1616, William Shakespeare died, and the Halls, who were executors of his will, moved to New Place, which had been bought by Shakespeare for £60 in 1597. This house had been built by Hugh Clopton in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. It was described as 'a praty house of brick and tymbar' and was called 'New' as it was the first house in Stratford to be built of brick. It was demolished in the eighteenth century by a selfish owner who did not like the number of people who wished to look at it.

In 1626, on the coronation of Charles I, John Hall was offered a knighthood. This may have been in recognition of his services to the people of the Midlands, but it is rather a remarkable coincidence that it happened in the same year as his daughter Elizabeth married an ardent Royalist, Thomas Nash. However, Hall interpreted it as purely a financial gambit on the part of Charles I, who sold several knighthoods at that time to raise money for the Treasury. Accepting it would also mean spending time at the Court of St James and becoming involved in national politics. He was loath to neglect his Warwickshire practice and declined, for which he was fined £10. It is rather surprising that Suzanna allowed him to decline the knighthood, as she seems to have possessed the Shakespeare family urge to better herself. On 15 April 1628 Hall was elected churchwarden for the borough, having previously been a sidesman and vicar's warden. In 1632 he finally agreed to election as a burgesse, having twice refused office and been fined £5. However, he failed to attend the meetings of the corporation.

In the same year John Hall suffered a serious illness; one wonders whether he ever really recovered as he seems to have been very cantankerous in his last years. His account of his illness in his 'Casebook' provides quite an insight into his attitude to medicine and to God:

'Then, O Lord, which has the power of life and death, and draws from the gates of Death, I confess, without any art or counsel of man, but only from thy goodness and clemency, thou hast saved me from the bitter and deadly symptoms of a deadly fever beyond the expectation of all about me, restoring me as it were from the very jaws of death to former health; for which I praise thy name, O most merciful god, and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, praying thee to give me a most thankful heart for this great favour, for which I have cause to admire thee.

About the 57th year of my age, August 27th to September 29th 1632, I was much debilitated with an immoderate Flux of the Hemorrhoids, yet daily I was constrained to go several places to patients. By riding, a hardness being contracted, the Flux was stayed for fourteen days. After I fell into a most cruel torture of my teeth, and then into a deadly burning fever'.

For several weeks he had resisted Suzanna's pleas that he should consult one of his colleagues. He was finally cured by four weeks of blood letting, various herbal remedies and the application of leeches to the hæmorrhoids.

In 1663 he clashed with the corporation; he was drawn into a dispute concerning the salary of the vicar, who was a friend. Hall also quarrelled with the corporation about his use of the family pew; an argument which was finally solved by asking the Bishop of Worcester to adjudicate. The Bishop, John Thornberry, was a patient of Hall's and came down in his favour. On 9 October, Hall was expelled from the corporation. The event is recorded thus: 'Att this Hall Mr John Hall is displaced from being a Capitall Burgesse by the votes and consente of nineteene of the Company, for breach of order and sundry other misdeameanours contrary to the duty of a Burgesse and for his continual disturbances at our halls'.

However, the town did appreciate him for when he was buried on the 20th November 1635, he was described in the register of deaths as 'medicus peritissimus' – most skilled doctor. He left his goods and money, valued at about £1000, equally to his wife and daughter, and his library to his son-in-law.

Hall and Shakespeare

Knowing this much, it is possible to form some impression of Hall's character. Further, he seems to have been very close to Shakespeare and probably treated him, although there are no records until after 1616. Although Shakespeare was not based in Stratford until 1610, he probably knew his son-in-law very well long before this as the occupants of Stratford do not seem to have considered dashing to and from London as at all arduous or unusual. Hall had a good bass voice, had travelled, knew Latin and spoke French, and was shrewd. One can imagine Shakespeare being pleased for his clever, witty, educated daughter to marry such a man. 'Pericles' was written in the year after their marriage and some believe that Cerimon, the physician, is a verbal portrait of Hall. We must content ourselves with it, as no painted portrait of Hall has been traced.

Hall and Shakespeare probably entered into a number of business deals together. There are records of Shakespeare hoarding large quantities of wheat and malt in the barns attached to New Place, in 1598 (the year of the great famine in London). The shortage was reflected in prices, both in Stratford and London, and Shakespeare made a tidy profit. In 1601 he could afford to spend £320 on a 107 acre estate, north of Stratford. It is likely that later Hall was involved in similar schemes. They were definitely concerned jointly with the question of enclosures around Stratford.

In 1614 they are both recorded as saying 'There will be nothing done at all'. By the end of the year their scepticism was proved quite wrong.

Religion and Politics

Hall was a moderate Puritan at the time when Puritanism was gaining in influence, and in the locality in which the 'Gunpowder Plot' was hatched in 1605. He is said to have wished to have church services in English rather than Latin; he did not, however, join in lobbies to forbid stage plays, which is not surprising. Hall was a friend of the vicar, Thomas Wilson, who took an independent position in the never-ending squabbles, both sacred and secular, between the corporation, the Puritans and the reactionary church-goers. In 1618 there were riots and a publication, entitled 'A Satire to the Cheif Rulers in the Synagogue of Stratford', was circulated against the corporation.

Wife and Daughter

John Hall was not enough of a Puritan to object to his daughter marrying a Royalist; in 1626 Elizabeth married Thomas Nash. Indeed, a friendship must have grown up between them as Hall left his library to Nash. Unfortunately he died soon after and Elizabeth was left childless, although she subsequently married Sir John Barnard. Interest in the Royalist cause was aroused in Suzanna by

Thomas Nash. She became a friend of Queen Henrietta Maria, who is known to have stayed with her in Stratford in 1643. Suzanna is described as 'a comforting caller on the sick with a piety comparable to her husband's'. She inherited her father's wit and was sociable and decisive. John Lane, of Alveston Manor, alleged that she had 'the running of the raynes and had been naught with Rafe Smith'. Sexual defamation of this sort was dealt with by the Ecclesiastical Court, and in July 1613 at Worcester she brought a writ for slander which resulted in Lane being excommunicated.

Stratford upon Avon

Stratford upon Avon is described in Camden's *Brittanica* of 1607 as 'a handsome small market town, which owes all its consequence to two natives of it, John de Stratforde, archbishop of Canterbury, who built the church, and Hugh Clopton, Mayor of London, who, at great expense, laid a stone bridge of fourteene arches across the Avon'. At this time Stratford must have had a population of about 2000. The feature which would strike someone visiting in a time machine, apart from the appalling public health, would be the leafiness. In 1582 there were 1000 elms to mark the borough boundary, and 40 ash trees on corporation property. The parish and borough had significantly different boundaries, and this was the



Fig 2 Back view of Hall's Croft showing where the herbs were grown. (By courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

cause of much trouble. The whole parish was liable to contribute towards the relief of the borough poor, but various moneyed inhabitants of only the parish pleaded exemption. The borough justices did not have jurisdiction in the precincts of the church; and, it was perhaps lucky that Stratford was not an Assize town, for in 1628 the relevant Assize judges could only say that they found the matter 'difficult and doubtful'. The need of the poor was apparent; in 1597 there had been 700 of them and a decree had gone out that 'every man of anye trade or occupation within this town shalle sort himself into one companye or other'. The borough found it equally difficult to find people to serve on the corporation as many desirable citizens in fact lived in the parish. Halls Croft was just outside the borough but the churchyard itself curiously was managed by the corporation and usually let to the vicar for grazing at 4d per annum.

The period when Hall was living in Stratford seems to have been the time when the corporation, and the populace with it, was at its zenith of culture and financial status. Many townspeople held grants of arms, owned land outside the town, and were able to send their sons to university. Despite the cosmopolitan way of life this implies, the families were closely inter-related.

Stratford was more important for trade than manufacturing industry. Richard Quayney (a local surname that abounds in the area today) wrote in

1618 that Stratford was 'auncient in thys trade of malteinge and have ever served to Birmingham, from whence Walles, Salopp, Stafforde, Chess and Lanke all so are served'. The River Avon was important in the development of trade, both because it was navigable to quite large boats as far as Stratford, and because Clopton had bridged it. Many guilds were represented at the markets including those for wickmakers, collarmakers and rope-makers, braziers and pewterers. Malting and the water-mill were vital, and there was a bell-foundry owned by Richard Dankes. Glovers were so important that in 1618 they were made responsible for the paving of the streets, but the clothing industry was insignificant. Stratford was a centre for horse dealing, many vendors bringing their animals down the Fosse Way from Leicester or from Northampton.

Organization of the Practice

Hall seems to have had little professional contact with his peers, but he maintained a large staff of assistants, including Matthew Morris. Probably about twenty people lived at Hall's Croft (Fig 2); the family, the two apothecaries, Richard Court and a Mr Rogers, a gardener to grow herbs and various domestic servants and stable lads. When Hall went any distance to see a patient he would be accompanied by one of the apothecaries and a bodyguard who probably also tended the horses



Fig 3 *The dispensary at Hall's Croft. (By courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)*

while they were away from home.

One of the rooms at Hall's Croft was equipped as a dispensary (Fig 3), but while Hall was familiar with the practical methods involved in administering herbs, it is unlikely that he did much dispensing himself. Unfortunately there are no records in Stratford of the names of any midwives who may have worked with Hall. These ladies were supposed to be approved by the Church, but a few ever bothered to obtain a licence. An interesting difference between physicians and surgeons was that if a physician failed to cure a patient he could claim his fees, while if a surgeon failed he would not be paid and could be sued in a secular court.

Medical Background

The years surrounding Hall's lifetime were ones of great change, both in medical knowledge and in attitudes towards it. We know that Hall was familiar with Harvey's work, and approved of it, which put him in the minority. John Aubrey, who appreciated Harvey, was forced to report:

'I have heard him say, that after his book on the Circulation of the Blood came out, he fell mightily in his practice, and twas believed by the vulgar that he was clack-brained; and all the phisitians were against his opinion all his profession would allow him to be an excellent anatomist, but I never heard any that administered his therapeutique way. I knew several practitioners in this towne (London) that would not have given 3d for one of his bills.'

Leonardo da Vinci (1455–1519) had been the first person in Europe to challenge the fossilized and considerably inaccurate views of Galen which had been upheld by the Church for centuries. Paracelsus (1493–1541) had developed the practical approach to diagnosis and treatment, while Ambroise Paré (1517–1590) had developed artificial limbs, one of which may be seen in the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford. Andreus Vesalius (1514–1546) carried out public dissections and published 'De humani corporis fabrica' which forced on the public the realization that Galen's work must be reappraised. This caused a storm of protest, but did much to release the medical profession from the grip of the Church. At Padua Vesalius taught Fallopio and Fabricius who were later to teach Harvey and probably Hall.

Hall's Writings

Further evidence for Hall's acceptance of the new ideas rather than adherence to the old dogma comes both from the approach shown in the 'Select Observations' and in the 'Casebook'.

It is not clear when Hall started to preserve his notes; they were written in Latin and took such a form that one would imagine that they were intended for publication. Hall himself, however, does not seem to have attempted to go ahead with

the publication. The manuscripts were purchased from Suzanna after his death by a colleague of his, James Cooke of Warwick, who thought it essential to publish them because of their medical interest and value. It is interesting that Cooke lays emphasis on Hall's treatment of scurvy and makes it clear that recognition and successful treatment of this disease was not widespread. Perhaps if either Hall or Cooke had not merely written about it, but had addressed the Royal College of Physicians, founded about a century previously by John Caius, Hall would be famous now, and Captain Cook would have been deprived of some glory.

There are two books; the Casebook and the Select Observations. The title page of the latter is shown in Fig 4, and also a typical entry (Fig 5). The casebook mentions more than 100 different herbs and odd preparations, like powdered nutshell, hen's dung and spider's web. The references to scurvy include the following:

'February 1633, Dr John Thornberry, Bishop of Worcester, was long tormented with a scorbutic wandering gout, falsely imagined by his Physician to be a true gout, as appeared not only by the frequent change of his urine, both in colour and substance, but also lurid spots on his Thighs. He had very unquiet nights from salt and sharp humours, and vapours ascending to his head, and if he did sleep it was with terror, which happened from the sudden slaughter of one of his family, which did much

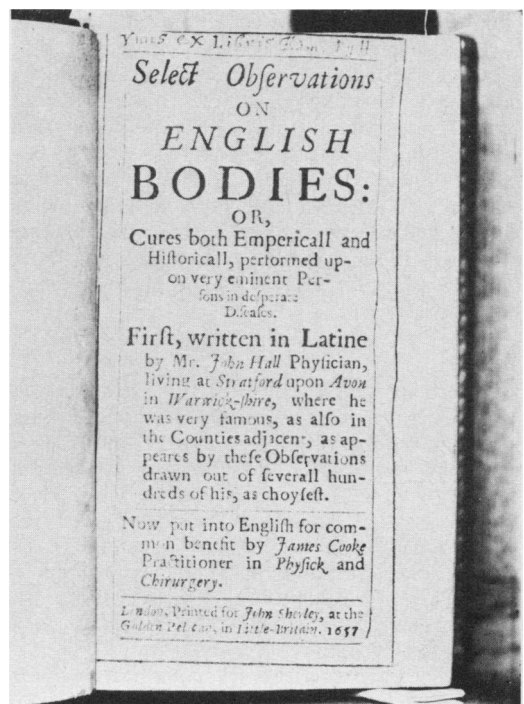


Fig 4 Title page of Hall's 'Select Observations'. (By courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

terrify and perplex his spirits, and afflict him grievously with melancholy.'

(His son had been killed, after causing the arrest and imprisonment of a Roman Catholic priest whose illegal religious beliefs he had betrayed to the authorities.)

'His pain lay sometimes in his knee, other whiles in his foot, without any tumour in the foot, but about the knee and instep there was a great swelling, and after in the feet. I said he might be eased, but never perfectly cured.'

My Lady Brown of Radford also suffered, and is described as being:

'oppressed with these scorbutic symptoms; as with binding of the belly, melancholy, watchfulness and troublesome sleep. She had obstruction of the courses, continuous for a year, and by these obstructions was miserably tormented with wind and swelling of the belly, especially about the spleen, when she broke wind she was eased; she felt a continual beating at the mouth of her stomach, so that it might be felt with the hand, as if there had been some living thing leaping in her belly. All these happened from the death of her daughter, dying in child bed.'

Hall's cures for scurvy include: 'Gelly framed of Hart's Horn, with knuckles of Veal, Partridge, Raisins, Dates and Antiscorbutic Herbs'; 'Juice of Scurvy Grass once or twice a day in wine'; 'A mixture of vegetable juices - watercress, brooklime and scurvy grass'.

It is interesting that Hall did not feel totally able to cure the Bishop, by recommending antiscorbutic herbs. I suspect that 'scorbutic' as used in these extracts, and ascorbic, the acid which is vitamin C, must have the same derivation, which is further proof that it was unequivocally scurvy that Hall was treating in these patients. One tends to associate scurvy with sailors, but must remember that the rich classes in Hall's day ate a diet which was almost exclusively animal protein, and so were prone to vitamin C deficiency. One wonders about the derivation of the saying 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away'.

Patients

Hall certainly had wealthy and titled people in his practice. He records that the Countess of Salisbury 'returned me many thanks and great reward' for curing her son of fever and worms. He treated not only Lady Anne Rainsford, whom he described as 'modest, pious and friendly, devoted to sacred literature and conversant in the French language' but also her husband Sir Henry, and Michael Drayton. Mr Drayton was a frequent visitor of the Rainsfords, a poet whom Anne is said to have inspired, and a friend of Shakespeare.

Another of his patients was Sidney Davenport of Bushwood. On one occasion Hall was unable to attend him immediately because of a corporation meeting, and he sent a messenger to explain this.

Obs. LXVIII

The Lady Rainsford, aged about 62, cruelly tormented with the Stone, Fever, Thirst and pain of the back, was cured as followeth:

℞ Pul. Holland ʒi
Tereb. Cypr. ʒii
Misc. f. Pil.

of which was given ʒi made in 5 pills.

℞ oil Scorpion ʒi Amydd. dulc Zii
with this her back was anointed.

℞ Decoct. comm pro Clyst ʒ xii
Elect. Lenit and Diaphaenica ʒ i
Syr. Ros. sol ʒ ii Misc.

This gave two stools, six hours after it came away was given another, prepared only of the said decoction, red sugar ʒiv and Butter ʒiv.

But note, every third hour she took the following:

℞ Spec Liberant ʒi
Syr. Papav. erratic ʒ f.s. Hypf. q.f.

She rested quietly this night.

℞ Rhab. pul. ʒ ii
Aq. Fumitor ʒ viii
bul. ad quartam Col. adde. Tart. cryst ʒi
Syr. Diaferios ʒ n.f. Haust.

This gave five stools.

The following day she had a Clyster framed only of oil of Linseed.

At bedtime she took this:

℞ Spec. Liberant ʒii c.c. prdep ʒi
Tinctur. coral ʒB

And so in the morning she was well.

Fig 5 A typical entry from Hall's 'Select Observations'

Mr Davenport wrote Hall a long grumbling letter, outlining the seriousness of his illness and discounting Hall's reason for absence by saying that he was sure the corporation ought not to fine Hall for missing a meeting in order to see a patient.

The ordinary citizens of Stratford would have expected to be treated by Hall's assistants. However, there is evidence that he treated many of them himself.

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for allowing me to work at Hall's Croft, for the use of their library, and for their encouragement.

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