

Barber into surgeon

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Introduction

In times and places where there were no hospitals the care of the sick, particularly of the sick poor, was provided by almshouses or 'maisons dieu', where records were kept of the ailments treated and of the medicines used. Monks often showed great skill in curing diseases and performing minor surgical operations. In 1163, however, the Council of Tours under Pope Alexander III advised that the shedding of blood was incompatible with the holy office and that the practice of medicine could be allowed but not surgery. The practice of surgery, therefore, was delegated to barbers, who were associated with monks by reason of their trade, and so in various parts of the country groups or associations of 'barber-surgeons' were formed, in many cases connected with barbers' guilds. The clergy now relinquished for the most part their care of the bodies of their flock and concentrated on saving their souls. As early as the 13th century barbers had not only become well accustomed to performing minor operations, such as bleeding, cauterization, and toothdrawing, but were organized by regulations concerning training and practice.

The Barbers' Company of London

In the first year of the reign of Edward II an ordinance relating to the City of London forbids barbers advertising their surgical ac-

tivities in an objectionable manner:

'De Barbours. Et que nul Barbier ne soit se ose ne si hardy gil meete sank en leur fenestres en apiert ou en view des gentz, mais pryvement le facent porter a Thamise sur peine des deux souldz rendre al oepe des Viscountz.'

In the following year 'Richard le Barber' was presented before the Court of Aldermen as Supervisor or Master of the barbers. His duties, apparently, consisted in exercising control over the activities of those engaged in the trade to see that they did not indulge in unseemly practices. Regulations were made regarding the support of charities, amicable settlement of disputes, and any matters relating to the general welfare of the members and the good conduct of the affairs of the Company. In 1312 a surgeon, Master John of Southwark, was admitted to the freedom, no other City guild being appropriate to his calling. From the year 1376, contrary to previous practice, new Masters were sworn in annually. The master-surgeons now undertook:

'well and truly to serve the people in working their cures, taking of them reasonable recompense . . . to practise truly their trade, and to make faithful oversight of all others, both men and women, occupied in cures or using the art of surgery, presenting their lack both in practice and in medicines, so often as needs be to the aforesaid Mayor and Aldermen. They shall be ready when warned thereto to take charge of the hurt or wounded and to give faithful information to the servants of the City of

such hurt or wounded as are in danger of death . . .'

This supervision of the surgical activities of members of the Barbers' Company naturally caused much resentment and in 1409, at a meeting of the Court of the Company, it was unanimously agreed that the members: 'who are for themselves and their successors barbers of the City of London, should for ever peaceably enjoy the privileges contained in the ordinance without scrutiny of any person of other craft or trade than barbers. And this neither in shavings, cutting, bleeding or other thing in any way pertaining to barbering or to such practice of surgery as is now used or in future to be used within the craft of the said barbers.'

In 1415 the master-surgeons had occasion to report to the Mayor and Aldermen that they had found that inexperienced barbers often took charge of sick and wounded persons:

'whereby the sick were often worse off at their departure than at their incoming, and on account of the unskilfulness of these barbers were oftentimes maimed, to the scandal of the skilled and the manifest harm of the people of our Lord the King.'

To settle the matter, two of 'the ablest, wisest and most discreet of the barbers practising the surgical faculty' were chosen to supervise the operations of those barbers who practised surgery.

The numbers of master-surgeons, practising no other craft, remained low, amounting in 1491 to no more than eight in the City of London. This little Fellowship of Surgeons now came to an amicable agreement with the Barbers Company that they should exercise some supervision and control over those members of the Company who practised surgery, the 'barber-surgeons'. There was no fusion of the two callings; the surgeons did not practise barbering and the barber-surgeons professed to do no surgery save the drawing of teeth. Diplomas giving licence to practise surgery were now granted, one of the earliest bearing the date 1497.

The Guild and the Church

Most of the guilds had some religious associations, groups of those engaged in the same craft meeting together on the occasion of church festivals, for the funerals of their colleagues, and for other services. In 1413 Thomas Arundell, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to the Mayor of London complaining that the barbers 'being without zeal for God' kept their shops open on Sundays. This resulted in fines being imposed by the Company on offending members. In 1422, at the funeral of Henry V, all the City guilds sent representatives, the Barbers walking in the procession bearing four torches. In 1511 by Act of Parliament the licensing of surgeons for the London area was placed in the hands of the Bishop of London and the Dean of St Paul's, this being regarded by the Company as a reflection on their authority. At about this period surgeons were exempt from jury service, but they were still liable to be called upon for other civic duties. In 1525 the Mayor issued orders that the Wardens of the Barber-Surgeons Company should, for the honour of the City:

'Ordain and prepare against the watches to be kept within this City in the night of the vigils of St John the Baptist and St Peter now next coming, four honest and comely persons such as ye will answer for, with bows and arrows cleanly harnessed and arrayed in jackets of white having the arms of this City, to wait and attend upon us in the said watches and to come to Blackwell Hall and there to be, for the not failing hereof as ye tender the honour of this City and also will answer at your perils. Given in the Guildhall of this City the 14th day of June in the 17th year of the reign of our sovereign Lord King Henry VIII.'

The establishment of the Barber-Surgeons' Company

The year 1540 was of the greatest importance in the history of surgery. Then the unincorporated Guild of Surgeons was formally united with the incorporated Company of

Barbers, the consolidation of a group of surgeons with a body practising a similar craft under the name of barber-surgeons together with the actual working barbers, the Barbers' Company. These were all incorporated as the Masters or Governors of the Mystery and Commonalty of Barbers and Surgeons of London. Hans Holbein recorded the event in his painting now hanging in the Court Room of the new Barbers' Hall in Monkwell Square (Fig. 1).

The barbers and surgeons now began to work together to regulate the training by apprenticeship, conduct the examinations to assess the ability of those desiring to become free of the Company, and to keep a strict supervision of the activities of the members to ensure that no infringement of the regulations endangered the high standard of the calling. The affairs were conducted by a Master, three Wardens, and a Court of Assist-

ants. The Master served in this office for one year and had usually served for the previous three years as Warden, having been elected from the Court of Assistants. Meetings were held regularly, monthly or more often as required. Each member paid an annual subscription or quarterage. Fines were exacted for non-compliance on invitation to fill any office. The posts of Clerk and Beadle were salaried; among other duties the Clerk looked after the garden.

Ceremonies and pageantry

Early in the 15th century the river Thames became the chosen highway of fêtes and processions, and the Lord Mayor's Feast was the great civic gala of the year. In the 16th century the Companies began to own their own barges, but until then they were hired. In 1553 the Barber-Surgeons paid twenty-five shillings and eightpence to hire a barge from



FIG. 1 *King Henry VIII and the Barber-Surgeons. Engraving from the painting by Holbein.*



FIG. 2 *Barber-Surgeons' Hall.*

Richard Drewe; a century later they decided to have their own barge built, at a cost of £115. The procedure was for the Aldermen to accompany the Mayor on horseback to the waterside; the newly-elected Mayor then embarked in the barge of his own Company, which was followed by the Batchelors barge, then by the rest in order—the Barber-Surgeons were seventeenth. Considerable sums of money were expended on banners and streamers and the occasion was further marked by charitable gifts to the poor, usually taking the form of clothing. Since the ceremonies lasted a considerable time, refreshments were provided, both in the barge and in the stands that were erected in Cheapside. In 1613 the Grocers' Company spent £900 on the occasion; new gowns were provided for 124 almsmen; 24 dozen white staves for the whifflers; 780 torches; 32 trumpeters; 18 flourishers of long swords; sugar, nutmegs, and ginger were

some of the items mentioned in the account. The Barber-Surgeons were much more moderate in their trappings, but even so the expenditure (which included the purchase of 104 yards of ribbon for the whifflers) on this day formed a large proportion of their annual payments. Another day of ceremony was that on which the new Master and officers were elected. The company held a service in the church of St Olave's, the way being strewn with flowers and herbs by 'maids' who were paid sixpence each. This was followed by a 'Feast' held at the Hall, the arrangements being made by stewards specially elected for this purpose.

Charities and investments

One of the important functions of the Company was to administer bequests. As early as 1470 Robert Ferbras in his will left the rent from two freehold houses to be distributed between 28 poor liverymen or their widows. The bequest of Thomas Bancks in 1595 was for each beneficiary to receive a twopenny loaf, half a stone of beef, and two pence each year. Over the succeeding centuries the charities grew in number and value and hundreds of 'decayed liverymen' or their widows and children received benefits. Less gratifying than these payments, however, were the demands made upon the Company's resources by the monarchs or the City authorities in order to raise funds in times of war or for other national needs. During the whole period of the Tudors and the Stuarts the City Companies furnished one of the chief financial mainstays of the government. Elizabeth I raised a compulsory loan of £20,000 in 1579 for the suppression of the Irish rebellion; Charles I demanded a similar amount for his campaign against the Scots. Another device for raising money was the arrangement by which the Companies acquired the Irish Estates in 1610. The lands of the rebels in

Ulster were escheated and King James I 'permitted' the Governor and Assistants of this New Plantation to purchase them for £60,000. Each of the 12 greater City Companies paid £5,000 and drew lots for their share of the land. Lesser Companies made private arrangements with the main shareholders if they wished to take part in the scheme; the Barber-Surgeons paid £230 and were attached with five other small Companies to the Ironmongers.

The anatomies

The union of the barbers and surgeons changed the character of the Company considerably. Previous to 1540 the main function of the Court of Assistants of the Barbers' Company had been to bind apprentices and supervise their training. Now they added to these activities the arduous one of arranging for demonstrations of human anatomy, for which purpose the Masters and Governors

were granted the bodies of four malefactors each year. The preparations required for these 'anatomies' were elaborate. A suitable place had to be provided; lecturers and assistants had to be chosen; and arrangements made for the transport of the bodies from the place of execution to the Hall. It was not uncommon for scuffles to occur when the bodies were brought, for it seems to have been a popular pastime to endeavour to cheat the surgeons of their subjects. It was reported in the *London Journal* on 5th January 1723 that:

'The Surgeons of this City having had a warrant from the Sheriff for a body of one of the malefactors executed on Monday last and they having received it accordingly, the mobb took it from them and carried it off, but the Surgeons recovered it next morning.'

A week later it was reported in the same paper that several of those who had engaged in this sport had been committed to Bridewell.



FIG. 3 *The Barbers' Company admitting a new Member. From an engraving by T H Ellis (19th century).*

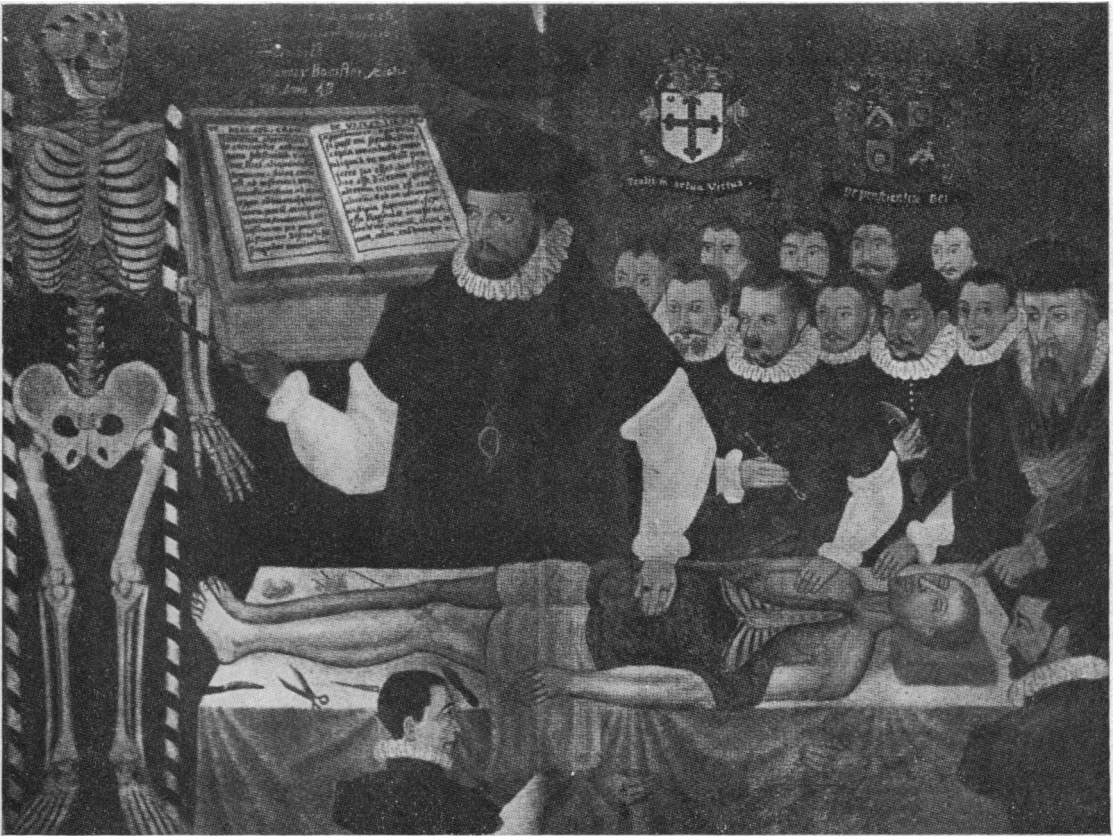


FIG. 4 John Banister delivering the "visceral lecture" in Barber-Surgeons' Hall in Monkwell Street in 1581. The figure in the hat and furred gown is probably the Master of the Company for that year, in which case he is Robert Mudesley, to whom Thomas Vicary bequeathed 'his best single gowne faced with black satten'. From an illustrated manuscript in the Hunterian Collection in the University of Glasgow.

A similar disturbance took place in 1736 when the body of Daniel Malden was chosen for dissection. His exploits earned him a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Early in the year he stole a parcel of linen in Islington, was imprisoned, escaped, was recaptured, and escaped a second time and fled to Flushing. On his return to England he was taken again in Canterbury, brought to Newgate, and managed to find a way out through the sewers but was caught again and hanged at Tyburn on 2nd November

1736. Sheriff's officers guarded the body on the way to the Hall, for which service they were paid two guineas. On the occasion of the demonstration constables guarded the gate and received £1.10.0. Robert Nesbitt was paid £10 for giving the Muscular Lecture; the other lecturers and stewards received £6 and the Clerk and the Beadle had £1.2.6. The hangman was not forgotten and was given a Christmas box of 7/6d. As, apparently, it was considered exhausting either to give the lectures or to attend the 'an-

atomies', dinner was provided, the cook's bill amounting to £16.10.0. and the cost of the wine being £7.9.8. Early in the new year a skeleton was made from Daniel Malden's bones and Mr. Babbidge was paid three guineas for this work. In all, Daniel Malden had cost the Company over £50.

The provision of these anatomy lessons was a most important function of the Company of Barber-Surgeons. Although in 1540 the number of surgeons was so small and their academic status so low that few could be found sufficiently knowledgeable to give instruction to the surgical apprentices, nevertheless towards the end of the two centuries during which the joint Company flourished

the anatomists and surgeons had taken over from the physicians the important role of giving the main lectures. Sir Charles Scarborough, one of the original Fellows of the Royal Society and Physician to Charles II, was appointed Reader of Anatomy at Barber-Surgeons' Hall in 1649 and the Company possesses a fine portrait of him with Edward Arris, painted by Robert Walker in 1650 (Fig. 5).

In 1636, a century after the lectures had been instituted, it was decided to erect a theatre specially for this purpose and Inigo Jones, whose portrait by Sir Anthony Van Dyck is one of the treasures of the Company, was invited to design it.



FIG. 5 *Sir Charles Scarborough with Edward Arris.*

The surgeons become independent

By the year 1744 so important had the surgeons become, so greatly increased in numbers and wealth, that they were resentful of the authority still retained by the barbers over their activities. On 20th December 1744 it is recorded that :

'This day, the gentlemen on the Surgeons' side having made known to this Court their desire of being separated from the gentlemen on the Barbers' side and that each may be made a distinct and independent body free from each other and producing a case intended to be offered to the Honourable House of Commons praying such separation, which being read at this Court:

It was agreed that the following gentlemen on the Barbers' side, viz.

Mr. Warden Negus
William Parker
Luke Maurice
John Truelove
William Haddon

and on the Surgeons' side, viz.

Sergeant Dickins
William Petty
James Dansie
John Freke
Peter Sainthill

be a Committee appointed to meet on Monday next at the King's Arms Tavern in St Paul's Churchyard at one of the clock at noon to receive the proposals from the gentlemen on the Surgeons' side for such separation and that when they had so done that the gentlemen on the Barbers' side, Members of this Court, should lay the same before the Livery on their side by a meeting to be had for that purpose and that a Court of Assistants should be held on the tenth day of January next at which time the gentlemen on the Barbers' side, Members of this Court, shall then report their opinion and assent or dissent to such proposals made.'

In spite of considerable reluctance on the part of the barbers, the committee of the

House of Commons to which the matter had been referred came to the conclusion that the surgeons had made out a good case for separation and the Bill to this effect received Royal assent on 2nd May 1745.

Each side gained something from the separation; but each lost something also. The barbers retained most of the possessions, the silver, pictures, furniture and, most important of all, the Hall and Theatre where the 'anatomies' had been held. They lost much of the prestige which they had gained from being associated with what had now become a professional scientific body. They lost the colour and excitement of the educational programme, the feasts, and the ceremonies. The surgeons gained their freedom and independence, after many struggles to preserve the right to conduct their own affairs. They embarked upon the new chapter in their history with no Hall and no possessions. They lost their control over the teaching of anatomy since they had no suitable place until the year 1752 in which human dissection could be practised or demonstrated. As a result, private individuals such as Frank Nicholls, Joshua Brookes, and William Hunter opened their own 'schools of anatomy'. Perhaps, too, the surgeons lost their enthusiasm for partaking in the traditional activities of the City of London which, as a Livery Company, they had enjoyed for more than two hundred years, for before the end of the century they lost their status as such and it remained for the Royal College of Surgeons to re-emphasize their function as a teaching and examining body, to introduce ceremonies that have become traditional, and to restore the important image of the surgeon.