THE BARBER-SURGEONS OF YORK

by

MARGARET C. BARNET

OF THE two views which one may take of medieval York perhaps the most popular is that of a great and important city, the capital of the North, the base for operations against the Scots, the seat of the Archbishop; a town owing much to the prosperity of the wool trade, to which ships came from all over Europe. It was a beautiful place with the towers and spires of the many ecclesiastical buildings new and bright in the clear light. In addition to the Minster, there were St. Mary's Abbey, monasteries, friaries, forty churches, and the walls and bars which were kept in good repair. Houses in the narrow streets were plastered externally, often decorated with pargetting and fine barge-boarding. The bustling streets, the pageants, soldiers and officials, the frequent royal visits, parliaments held in York, all combine to make a cheerful picture.

But there is another view of York and it is an equally true one. It is of the city at times when trade was bad, when there was much unemployment, or at times of great and recurring epidemics. For if medieval York was a fine place to live in with its beautiful buildings, its orchards and gardens, and the two rivers flowing through it, it was also a place to die in.

York in the middle ages was a death trap. Deaths always exceeded births, but the population of about 10,000 (estimated probably inaccurately by several people using different methods but usually arriving at the same total) was kept up by the immigration of people into the city from villages nearby or from further afield. It was a notoriously dirty and smelly place. In fact, one king said it was the worst in his kingdom. A royal visit was often a blessing since the council would attempt a thorough cleansing and banish the pigs—those inefficient and inadequate scavengers—from the streets. There were no drains, usually only a central gutter in the street down which water and refuse were expected to flow. Whilst it was forbidden to throw rubbish into the Ouse, the number of references to fines imposed make it obvious that it was the common receptacle for what was described as 'nastiness'. Nightsoil and manure were put outside the houses and then carted away to recognized sites such as Toft Green to be sold later by manure merchants to the farmers. Garbage was supposed to be buried in recognized places in each ward. On Ouse Bridge there was 'Le Newe Privy' or 'Novae Latrinae' whose attendant was paid 4*d.* per week. All water had to be carried from the river or drawn from the innumerable wells which were undoubtedly contaminated.

The streets were narrower than today and darker because of the projecting upper stories. Only the rich had glass in their windows; the rest used wooden shutters. Behind the houses in closes and yards there were often stables and sheds for the cattle brought in from the strays. Many householders kept pigs and hens.

Merry England was a hard time for the common man. It was hard to achieve mastery in a craft and hard to save in times of inflation. They worked long hours in their dark, damp houses. It was a period poor in household goods, with little beauty or comfort. It was a short life with poor health and frequent bereavements; and large families to bring up on a diet consisting largely of potage, bread, fresh or salted fish and ale. This last, at ½*d.* per gallon, was probably less lethal than water from the wells. They worked hard and played hard. Their entertainments were bear-baiting, bull-baiting, football, and above all tippling at the ale-house. Watching occasional executions in the Pavement or hangings were extra excitements; and so in a different way were the Mystery Plays.

Epidemics took a frightening toll of life. One outbreak of plague resulted in the deaths of a quarter of the population. There are glimpses in the Civic Records of York in 1548–58, one of its darkest decades. It shows poverty and disease, decline of the wool trade, with a rise in the number of the unemployed and the unemployable, the beggars, the sick, and the aged. York was one of the cities which recognized the duty of providing work for the unemployed and charity for the impotent, so it devised its own systems of relief. In addition to the great St. Leonard's Hospital, there were twenty smaller hospitals or 'maisons-dieu' in which to house the sick, the old and the infirm—an estimated 500 beds.

This was the background against which the health services and medical treatment were carried out in York by the physicians and barber-surgeons with the civic authority in overriding control.

The York Company of Barber-Surgeons was a craft gild. That is to say, it was an association of skilled workers dwelling in the same town and following the same occupation. It consisted of three classes of members—Masters, journeymen and apprentices. It had three main functions. First, social, with the annual feast; second, religious, performing its own mystery play, and also maintaining a 'light' in a chapel prior to the Reformation. Third, it controlled conditions of work and wages, and endeavoured to maintain the standard of work. In addition it often acted as a friendly society for the relief of distress amongst its members. It was highly organized like a modern trade union but its powers were subject to the authority of the municipal governing body. Membership was compulsory; it was a closed shop. Under strictly controlled conditions it trained apprentices, providing technical instruction, bed and board, and often clothing.

The gild was small in comparison with the great companies engaged in various branches of the wool trade. However, it is possible to learn quite a lot about its activities. York is particularly fortunate in its wealth of civic and ecclesiastical records which often present an almost unbroken series from the twelfth century. The Freeman's Rolls began in 1272 and are virtually complete.[1] As it was, with certain exceptions, impossible to practise a craft without becoming free it will be realized that the majority of names of barber-surgeons have been preserved. It is not possible to determine the exact number of barber-surgeons who served York's population of approximately 10,000 at any particular time. The Lay Poll Tax Returns for York in 1381 do give some indication.[2] Here, listed under parishes, are the names of all lay persons over fifteen years, except beggars, who had to pay the shilling tax. Although

the rolls for a few parishes are indecipherable or lost, eighteen barber-surgeons and one physician are named.

As a small company, the barber-surgeons could not afford their own hall, but together with some other small gilds they were able to use St. Anthony's Hall for their meetings. A note in Drake's 'Eboracum' gives a list of these gilds and the rents they paid.

The Ordinances of the Gild provide considerable information about the organization, activities and aims of its members. 'The Ordinances of the Ancient Ordinary of the Barbers and Surgeons of York' dated 1486 are preserved in the Corporation House Books.[3] Another copy together with later additions and revisions are contained in documents in the British Museum. These are bound together (Egerton MSS. 2572) with a note which states that they came into the possession of Mr. F. N. Alexander in 1817 and the Museum purchased them from Mr. W. H. Richardson in April 1881.[4] The Ordinances begin by stating:

> This book made in the year of our Lord God 1486. In the second year of the reign of King Henry VII, being mayer of this city William Chymney searchers that year Adam Sigswick, George Kylede.

Then follows the oath of the barber-surgeons:

> Ye shall swear to be trusty and true unto our Sovreign Lord, and to this City of York and also to the science of Barbers and Surgeons within the same. And after all good ordinances, statutes, usages and customs heretofore made and used in the same art or science, ye shall keep, support and maintain at all times to your power, and the secrets and counsel of the same art, ye shall truely keep and layne, so help you God, and by the contents of this Book.

The Arms and Motto of the gild are described, and there is a series of life-like portraits of most of the monarchs from Henry VII to George III. The various clauses are then listed, followed by revisions and later additions. There are lists of the signatures of barber surgeons pledging the Corporation to keep the rules of the Company; lists of names of masters and their apprentices 1600–1672, and another series 1643–1784. It is about this last date when the gild gradually faded out of existence. Other papers bound in this volume are described later.

The annual meeting of the gild was always held on the Monday after the Feast of St. John The Baptist (24 June). The Officers, 'Searchers', rendered their accounts or paid a fine of 6*s*. 8*d*. Then followed the election of the officers for the coming year. They were handed their silver Badges of Office. One of these is in the Wellcome Museum, whilst that of the Senior Searcher is in the possession of the York Medical Society. Only a freeman of York could practise in the City. He could only set up in business if approved by the searchers. If he defied them they might take down his sign (the red and white striped pole with a bleeding dish hanging on the end), which hung outside the house, and hand it over to the Lord Mayor who would impose a suitable fine. Occasionally a stranger i.e. someone who was not a freeman might be permitted to practise: 'All aliantes (sic) and strangers practising the art and science of physic or surgery within the City to pay 6*s*. 8*d*. a year to the searchers'. This is interesting as it suggests that the Gild of Barber-Surgeons of York exercised some

control over physicians who might not practise unless they joined the company or paid a fee.

All barbers and surgeons were liable to be inspected at any time by the searchers and they had to agree, if requested, to follow their recommendations as to treatment. The next clause would seem to follow most appropriately: 'For using indecent words to the searchers—fine 3*s.* 4*d.*' They might not treat another member's patient except in an emergency. The barber-surgeons cannot have been noted for their observation of religious duties as it was necessary to insert a clause forbidding them from frequenting taverns during the times of services on Sundays. The searchers were to visit public houses to find any erring brethren. Subscriptions to the gild were twelve shillings on admission together with five shillings towards the stock and the cost of a dinner for the company. Annual subscriptions were a shilling. Attendance at ordinary meetings was compulsory or a fine of 3*s.* 4*d.* might be claimed, and members who arrived without their gowns were fined sixpence. It was stressed that they should always attend the funeral of a brother surgeon.

It is obvious that one of the aims of the gild and the Corporation was to maintain the standard of work. After 1614 another official was appointed each year. He was called the Master of Anatomy. He took charge of the dissecting instruments and gave lectures on surgery or anatomy, on pain of a fine of 6*s.* 8*d.* Since 1540 the gild had been granted each year the bodies of condemned malefactors and it was the duty of the Master to ensure that these cadavers were available. One can assume that anatomical demonstrations would coincide with the holding of Assizes in the city. The Master of Anatomy would appoint one of the licensed surgeons to demonstrate in front of the company. He was fined five shillings if he refused or could not do it. Then the Master himself had to take over or be fined 3*s.* 4*d.* himself. Within a month of being elected every surgeon had to give a lecture to the company after being ordered to do so, and being given reasonable notice. If he refused he could be suspended or fined twenty shillings.

In the Corporation House Book of 1615 there is a note recording the fact that Francis Brigham, Barber-Surgeon, was considered to lack sufficient skill in his art. It was agreed that he was not to meddle with any cures except under the supervision of a skilful licensed surgeon.

It was decreed that apprenticeship was for a minimum of seven years. The Master had to pay thirty-five shillings to the clerk of the company for registering the indentures, and he must always take a freeman's son as his first pupil. Thomas Barrett defied this rule and was fined 33*s.* 4*d.* in 1603. Apprentices might not practise surgery or the drawing of teeth except under the supervision of their master. If they stole any article worth more than sixpence from their master, they were to be expelled from the company for ever. A master could not take on an apprentice without the approval of the searchers.

Lists of apprentices show that some barber-surgeons had more than one apprentice at a time.[6] Sometimes they would have two or three, but they were usually at different stages in their training. Records of fees for an apprenticeship are not readily available for the barber-surgeons, but they would probably be similar to those charged by apothecaries in the city. By the eighteenth century these had reached £20—£105.

Occasionally no fee was charged: 'No consideration' or 'Consideration—faithful service'. Usually the arrangements included the provision of clothing, washing, and of course food. Sometimes a parish, or the Corporation, would apprentice a poor boy to a barber-surgeon, and the terms might stipulate that the young man should remain with his master for a year or two after completing his training:

> James Hardy, a poor boy of Trinity Goodramgate apprenticed to Richard Galloway barber-surgeon until he is 23 years of age.
> John Pybus late a Blue Coat Boy of the Charity School on Foss Bridge apprenticed to Francis Jackson barber-surgeon.

Of course there were always the unsatisfactory apprentices. Some were simply discharged, others were discharged by agreement. Some ran away for a few months but returned to complete their training. One ran away and joined the army. Another was committed to Wakefield House of Correction, and had to serve his time all over again. Occasionally one has the impression that it might be the master himself who was unsatisfactory; such as the two barber-surgeons who both lost two apprentices by desertion.

Much of the training of the apprentices must have been by watching and assisting their masters. They would also study books, diagrams and charts. Papers in the Egerton MS. include articles on the humours; the phases of the moon; the relationship between blood-letting, the moon and the signs of the zodiac. There are charts indicating suitable dates for bleeding for various complaints. There is a drawing of a naked man with signs of the zodiac ascribed to various parts of the body; and a 'Homo Venorum' with arrows pointing to his bleeding points, and labels indicating the complaints which can thereby be relieved. One learns that to bleed from the veins under the tongue will relieve quinsy; from the veins in the 'neckhole' will relieve wind. Blood taken from veins on the outer side of the ankle cures sciatica; but if removed from under the ankle it relieves the distressing symptoms of 'emorandes'—presumably haemorrhoids. There is a circular calendar with concentric circles showing days, months, signs of the zodiac and a movable pointer pivoted on a piece of thread.

It is not possible to state definitely whether these papers and charts were used for instruction in York. One can, however, ascribe a local origin to a poem written for the guidance of the young student. It is undoubtedly written in the local dialect.

> To knaw the vaynes to let blode in
> Thou that wyle lett gude men blode
> And vaynes with all your lives fade,
> Some vaynes use thee
> And many other let thee be.
> Therefore now will I them show
> And tell thou them upon a row
> And where they lie, ever ilke ane
> And for what thing they shall be tane.
> Ilke a man hath and three
> Lythe and I shall tell them thee
> Some er abowne, and some beneath.
> Lythe, and then shalt know them ethe.
> Behind the ears find thou twa . . .

The poem then enumerates the veins as follows:

2 behind the ears
2 at the temples
1 in the centre of the forehead
1 under the nose
2—one on each side of the nose by the eye
2 in the neckholes
2 in each lip
2 under the tongue
5 in each arm
1 in the right hand
1 in the left hand
1 inside each ankle
1 outside each ankle
1 in the woman's bowers

It is possible to obtain some information about payments for treatment from various sources. Most of this comes from Corporation House Books.[5,13] Many of the fees appear to be for the treatment of poor persons unable to pay for themselves. In these cases the Corporation assumed financial responsibility.[7]

1691—40 shillings for curing Elizabeth Heild's bad leg.
1605—20 shillings to Will Lawrence barber-surgeon curing a woman hurt by a fall of stone.
1585—Agreed that Mr. Maskewe shall have thirty shillings for the curing of Catherine Myers otherwise known as Fond Kate.
1585—Johnson the joiner's wife hath a dangerous disease. Mr. Maskewe to take charge of her.

A few weeks later there is a rather ambiguous note:

Mr. Maskewe to be paid thirty shillings for the curing of Johnson's wife that is now deceased.

The Corporation apparently considered that it would be prudent to take precautions when making arrangements with this gentleman in future:

1588—Mr. Maskewe shall have twenty shillings for healing one Robert Foster a poor man being visited with a dangerous disease. 6*s*. 8*d*. now and the rest of the money when the patient is fully cured.

Sometimes it was agreed that a barber-surgeon should be asked what his fees would be:

1594—Agreed that a surgeon shall see James Horner to see if he can be cured or no and what the charge will be.
1703—Mr. Francis Shorston to be bargained with to cutt of the leg of Henry . . . late a soldier, if the operation require it, or to apply such remedy as he thinks proper to cure him.

Occasionally a surgeon would keep a patient in his home whilst treating him. Mr. Gale, surgeon, was paid £4 for curing John Walker's son of a fistula and for keeping him for two years. Patients would sometimes apply for help during illness:

1601—William Nelson having a sore leg which is to be cut by the surgeons applies to the Lord Mayor, the Lord Lieutenant, and Lord President of the Council to give the surgeons 40*s*. 0*d*. for their treatment and towards his help whilst ill. The Lord Mayor requests a report from the surgeon.

A different method of obtaining funds was recommended in 1593. Francis Greathead, labourer, whose leg had been broken was given permission to collect money by begging in churches in order to pay his surgeon.

There are many examples of patients suffering from some chronic condition which was not improving, being recommended to go elsewhere for treatment. If unable to afford the costs they would apply to the Corporation for aid.

> 1615—John Wilkinson is given payment to go to London to seek a remedy for his sore leg.
> 1602—Robert Bell who has a sore leg is advised to take the hot baths in Buxton. His request for a passport and financial help is granted. The overseers of his parish to hand him 5*s.* 0*d.* but not until the morning of his journey.

The problem of curing Scrofula or King's Evil exercised the Corporation. The traditional method was 'touching' by the king or queen. On many occasions they paid the expenses of sending a child to London with an escort.

> 1602—The churchwardens of Trinity, Goodramgate shall give Marie Hall a poor girl diseased of the Queen's Evil who is to go to London to the Queen 5*s.* 0*d.* for her journey and a passport.
> 1675—Humphrey Jones to have four nobles to take his son to London to be touched for the Evil. (Probably knowing the man, the City Chamberlain took the precaution of adding: 'but not to have it until he starts his journey.')
> 1688—Alderman Wood is desired to speak to John Loft the carrier to make an arrangement with him as cheap as he can for the carrying of Judith Gibbons and her child and one Dorothy Browne to London to be touched for the Evil.

Royal visits could mean a considerable saving of money in this respect if in no other way. All the local people suffering from the Evil were rounded up and brought to the king. On 11 August 1617 King James visited York. He attended service in the Minster and afterwards he 'touched' seventy persons. King Charles spent about a month in the city in 1639. On the Good Friday, and on the following Tuesday and Wednesday he performed the elaborate ritual of touching a hundred people each time.

'Scald Head' that rather vague term which seems to refer to ringworm and similar infections was common in York. Apparently orthodox medicine was ineffective for the House Books record many occasions when children were sent to some woman such as the Widow Simpson for treatment which usually cost ten shillings.

Mention has been made of a number of people who could not pay for medical attention. Instead of paying various barber-surgeons, the Corporation decided, in 1614, to appoint a city surgeon who was to treat and give medicine to any sick person sent to him by the Lord Mayor or Aldermen. The first holder of this office was Thomas Barrett who was paid £3 6*s.* 8*d.* a year. After his death in 1623 he was succeeded by George Turner. John Newsome followed at a yearly fee of £8 6*s.* 8*d.* and exemption from paying taxes. The appointment was on occasions the centre of squabbles when the Corporation had one of their not infrequent periods of economizing and cutting the costs. Joseph Leech resigned in May 1664 when his salary was reduced to £5. This may have been a manoeuvre to get rid of him, for a month later Richard Anderton became City Surgeon at a salary of £10. An interesting city surgeon was Francis Drake, perhaps better known as the great historian of York. He was appointed in 1727. He held the post until 1745 when on 20 December he refused

to take the Oath of Loyalty to the Government. Suspecting him of secret Jacobite sympathies, the Corporation therefore considered that he was not a proper person to continue in the service of the city. (*Corporation House Books*, Vol. 35 p. 35). After the York County Hospital was founded in 1740 the Corporation had high hopes that it would no longer be necessary for them to pay for the services of a city surgeon, as the sick poor if recommended by a subscriber would be cared for by the hospital. They decided to subscribe £15 (the city surgeon's salary) but this was not accepted by the governors of the hospital. One of their objections was that the sick poor of York would absorb the resources of the hospital and so exclude county patients from obtaining benefit. The original subscription was then increased by the offer of yearly donations of £3 from the Lord Mayor and four Aldermen. In addition the Corporation agreed piously to 'encourage the great work of this hospital'. Whilst the governors doubtless received the good wishes they did not accept the financial arrangements. Therefore the post of city surgeon continued until it was abolished by the Muncipal Corporation Reform Act of 1835.

It was not possible to practise one's craft in York without becoming a freeman of the city. There were, however, several loopholes in the regulations and these were a constant source of irritation to officers of the gilds and to the civic authorities. There were the 'Liberties' of York Castle, Marygate, the Minster, St. Leonard's Hospital and Davygate. Property in these districts belonged to the Crown, the Archbishop and the Abbot of St. Mary's, and were outside the civic jurisdiction. The inhabitants of these Liberties exercised trading and other privileges without being enfranchised. In 1598 there was a complaint by the searchers that William Padmore, who was not a member of the Company of Barber-Surgeons nor a freeman of York, was practising surgery in the city. Padmore said that he was allowed to do so by virtue of a licence granted by the Archbishop. The Corporation would not accept this and ordered him to pay a daily fine of two shillings as long as he practised 'without quitting himself by law'. Padmore was a determined and obstinate man for he refused to pay the fine or take up his freedom. He was sent to prison which apparently gave him time to reflect, for three months later he became a freeman of the city at a cost of £6 13*s*. 4*d*.

A careful man would sometimes take the double precaution of having the right to practise as a surgeon, by virtue of enfranchisement in the city and also having the Archbishop's licence. In 1727 William Hall, surgeon, who was already a freeman, received the Archbishop's licence to practise. His application included a testimonial from the vicar of St. Denys' Church and from five people whom he had cured.

Officials of the gild had the right to 'search' all aliens and strangers coming to the city to practise surgery. Occasionally a surgeon who was not a member of the gild or a freeman but who had some special skill would be given permission to practise.

> 1608—John Grai, a traveller a chirurgeon supposed to be especially skillful as he himself asserted in restoring sight within nine days even after twenty years blindness, and also in curing ruptures, hair-scurff and the worm is permitted to practise his profession in those matters during the pleasure of the corporation.

In the same year the Corporation paid two pounds to a travelling French surgeon for curing William Clark of a cancer of the mouth. The profession of John Grai might almost have been classified as that of a mountebank. These gentlemen were frequent

visitors to York. In 1679 the House Book noted fines obtained from mountebanks and doctors were to be divided between the Barber-Surgeons Company, and the Mayor and Commonalty. A strict watch was kept to prevent any unqualified persons practising surgery: 'Received of Lances Hobbes for his wife dealing in surgery, presented by the surgeons—6*d*.'—1586.

Another even more unorthodox source of medical help is recorded in the Tudor Parish Documents of the Diocese of York. One can imagine the irritation and embarrassment felt by ecclesiastical and civic authorities, and licensed barber-surgeons to learn that a woman was treating sick people, claiming that her source of help and guidance was the fairies![12]

Ray Wilson who was a blacksmith and also skilled as a bonesetter was granted his freedom in order to practise both trades in York. There was an interesting rule in the Ordinances of the Barber-Surgeons which stated that people must always consult a licensed surgeon first for treatment, with the exception of bone-setters.

In 1572 the House Books refer to a woman practising surgery:

> And forso much as it apereth that Isabell Warwicke has skill in the scyens of Surgery and hath done good, therein, it is therefore agreed that she, upon her good behaviour, shall use the same without lett of any of the surgeons of the city.

Whilst it might be said that the Corporation showed a commendable attitude to women in the profession, it must be pointed out that permission for men to practise did not include a clause about good behavior.

The physicians were fewer in number but the names of several have been recorded in the Freeman's Lists and elsewhere. The earliest one is 'Master Benedict The Physician of York'. His existence is revealed by the fact that his daughter, Preciosa, aged fourteen years, sued in court about the year 1210.[9] It has been suggested that Benedict may have been a Jew. A number of the early physicians appear to be of foreign origin:

Johannes Crespyn de Cambray	Free in 1337
Mr. Johannes de Golda	Free in 1396
Johannes, fil de Hugo de Metice	Free in 1398
Graciamus de Aguero in Hispania	Free in 1502
Adrianus Breme	Free in 1518

It is tempting, but probably erroneous, to imagine that York's first woman doctor might have been 'Ann The Medica' who was on the staff of St. Leonard's Hospital in the thirteenth century. She is certainly differentiated from the housekeeper, the nursing brothers and sisters and servants who cared for the sick in the infirmary.[10]

Reference to the Marriage Registers show that many a newly-qualified barber-surgeon followed the traditional step of marrying his master's daughter.[8] Another method of acquiring a good business was by marrying the widow of a barber-surgeon.

There are several families whose names keep recurring in the lists of barber-surgeons: Ward, Deane, Day, Hall, Brigham. The Leech family is perhaps the most interesting. In this case the occupation gave the family its surname. It was a prolific family living mainly in the Parish of St. Michael-le-Belfry. They are however, rather

exasperating to trace through lists and registers as there appears to have been a lack of originality in the choice of names. Joseph and Jasper occur with monotonous regularity, and they tended to marry girls called Ann or Elizabeth. Many of the family pursued other occupations of course, but it is possible to trace a line of barber-surgeons in one case from Christopher Leech (1530), for seven generations to 1721. There were also collateral branches of the family who were following the same craft at the same time.

The Gild was responsible for one of the plays in the great cycle of York Mystery Plays, which were performed by the City Gilds on open stages in the streets on Corpus Christi Day.[14] They had to choose from among their members 'Good players, well arayed and openly spekying.' In Lent the Lord Mayor called four of 'the most connying discrete and able players within this Citie, to serche, name, and examen all the plairs and pagentes.' The Barber-surgeons presented 'The Baptism of Jesus'. In the last speech by John the Baptist there is a reference to the leech who comes to salve men of their sores. This makes one think that the author may have written the play expressly for this gild.

There is not much information about diagnosis and treatment of conditions. Doubtless much time would be spent in blood-letting, setting fractures, amputations, removal of tumours, etc. There are many references to bad legs, sore legs or lameness, and mortifying feet. Of the infectious diseases syphilis caused considerable concern, not only for treatment but because of the risk of spreading infection.[5,13]

> 1577—Agreed that Robert Black Surgeon shall be gotten to cure . . . Wallis a poor man with the French Pocks. Charges to be paid by the Chamberlain.

In the following year Francis Devell and John Leech surgeons were ordered to examine a young baker, Christopher Helmsley, to determine whether he was really infected with Morbus Gallicus. The searchers of the Baker's Gild had declared that he was so infected and therefore unfit to work.

Often a condition is described in vague general terms such as 'a dangerous disease'. Illegible writing makes it impossible to learn the nature of the illness of the unknown man in 1587 but it was obviously feared to be serious.:

> Agreed that Mr. Mansell shall have ten shillings allowed to him for his travail and pains taken in making a search of the bed of a stranger lately sick at Mr. Blackame's house, supposed to have been visited by a dangerous disease which by his diligence was quickly known to be . . . God be thanked.

Terrible epidemics of smallpox, sweating sickness and plague, struck York with appalling results from time to time. The barber-surgeons and the civic authority must have been almost overwhelmed by the task of treating patients, burying the dead, arranging food supplies and nursing services, and preventing the spread of the disease. There are very detailed accounts of their work and the way in which they tackled the problems.

There was always the risk of a dissatisfied patient suing his medical attendant. There was a physician who followed the rather dangerous custom of contracting to cure his patient. In this case the latter was a canon of Guisborough. The doctor was

taken to law when the patient's leg turned putrid and corrupt.

In 1393 John de Cartwell a barber-surgeon of York suffered from the stone. A colleague John Catlough agreed to treat him. Before doing so he took the precaution of appearing before the Lord Mayor and Council to declare that whilst willing to treat Cartwell he insisted on being protected against any claims should he fail to achieve a cure.

It is pleasant however to be able to record the experience of a distinguished patient who must have been satisfied by the treatment he received. In 1346 there was a battle between the English and the Scots at Neville's Cross near Durham. King David of Scotland was severely wounded by an arrow penetrating his cheek. He was captured and taken off to Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland. Two York barber-surgeons were sent to do what they could for him. It is a tribute to their skill that, after a delay of some days, the wound was healed and he lived for a further twenty years.

> Payments to William de Bolton and Hugo de Kilvington, barber-surgeons, going from York to the Castle of Bamburgh to heal the said David de Brus who lay there having been wounded with an arrow at the said battle and to extract the arrow and to heal him with dispatch—£6. (Entry in the account of John Wodehouse, Clerk to the Exchequer—1346).

Another satisfied patient was the ailing sixth Earl of Northumberland. He rewarded his medical attendant Stephen Thornton with the leases of some of the Percy lands and tenements in York.

From the thirteenth century onwards there are names of hundreds of barber-surgeons, leeches, physicians, apothecaries, tooth-drawers, men-midwives—a host of medical men and a few women who treated the citizens of York. The majority are just names with the bare facts of their existence—birth, marriage, death, apprenticeship and enfranchisement. Of others there are scraps of information. One came to York as a Protestant refugee from France and was allowed to practise freely. At the same time Thomas Vavaseur and Roger Lee who were prominent amongst the Roman Catholics in the city were penalized for their religious convictions. Some members of the gild served as members of the city council and a few as Chamberlain or Sheriff of York. Some became men of substance and their families prospered. Others were overcome by troubles. Joseph Leech who had been Sheriff was 'so reduced to poverty and in such great distress' in later life that the corporation granted him an annuity of £10 in 1721.

Wills, besides giving inventories of possessions and tools of their trade, sometimes reveal glimpses of the interests or hobbies of the deceased.[11] In 1552 Thomas Wilson, barber-surgeon, who must have been a sportsman left his brother his 'best jacket, shooting gloves and shafts'. Richard de Dalton, a barber-surgeon who died in 1392, was a generous and kindly man. He thanked his executors and left them money for their pains. To his friends and fellow surgeons he gave silver spoons, furniture and instruments. Their wives were also remembered. He does not appear to have been married, so his servant Ann got his household goods including a silver spoon, a salt, some dishes and pots (one cracked), a mattress, four sheets, two blankets and the feather quilt. He bequeathed money to paupers and lepers and the paralysed. A final rather charming touch was twenty shillings to entertain his colleagues, when he hoped that they would drink to his memory.

In the eighteenth century the corporation still looked to the gilds to enforce enfranchisement. Some, including the barber-surgeons, did not find it easy. Often they were quite willing to admit non-freemen into their ranks, even when warned not to do so. They continued to control the enrolment of apprentices and qualified members. The searchers still sought out abuses and imposed fines. As late as 1784 the gild revised its Ordinances. However, its days were numbered and it was obviously of diminishing importance. Medical services were expanding in the city. The County Hospital was founded in 1740, and the York Lunatic Asylum in 1777. Dr. Thomas Withers had been conducting a dispensary service privately for some years before the York Dispensary opened its doors in 1788, to give treatment to the sick poor and to visit them in their homes.

After five hundred years of useful work the York Gild of Barber-Surgeons faded away, leaving no organization to control medical affairs, maintain standards and supervise the training of apprentices. Sometimes there would be a public dissection of the body of a notorious felon; and occasionally a physician or surgeon would give a series of lectures to a small group of pupils. Later an Association of Surgeon Apothecaries was founded, but it dealt mainly with ethical matters. In 1834 a medical school opened. Two years earlier the York Medical Society had been founded to unite all the medical men in the city and to promote medical knowledge. Although there had been a gap there were tenuous links with the old gild. The Senior Searcher's badge of office was retained, some of the rules were the same, and at least one of the members of the society was the son of a barber-surgeon of the old gild.

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