Health and Disease In The 18th Century **Dennis Tyerman** **March 2007**

Introduction

The whole population, wherever they lived or whatever their status, knew that at some time in their lives sickness and disability would affect them. Illness and death were a constant preoccupation and medicine in the 18C had no answer to the epidemics which, with grim regularity, ravaged the country.

Epidemic diseases affected both rich and poor and although the germ theory of infection was not recognised the concept of contagion was well understood by everyone. Plague had disappeared in the late 17C and smallpox with its 10-20% mortality rate became the most feared of the frequent epidemics. Epidemics of diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles and whooping cough took their toll on children, and influenza and typhus and diseases associated with insanitary, overcrowded living conditions affected the whole population.

Medicines main aim was to expel toxins from the body by purging, vomiting, bleeding and sweating in order to restore the body's 'humoral balance', the theory being derived from much earlier Greek, Roman and Arabic authorities. There was very little to choose between 'respectable' medicine and 'quack' cures because the main active and effective ingredients were present in both. Many therapeutic substances were used including herbal and chemical constituents but many such remedies were experimental rather than based on scientific evidence. Laudanum (opium) was recognised as a painkiller albeit with dangerous addictive properties. Cinchona bark (quinine) was known to be effective for 'ague' (malaria) and salicin (aspirin) and digitalis were recognised as useful drugs. Rhubarb, senna and aloes were used as purgatives. Zinc oxide, magnesium sulphate, iron tartrate, antimony, arsenic and mercury were all included in the pharmacopoeia.

How diseases and their treatment affected the lives of people in the 18C can be gathered from many sources. Books, newspapers of the day and parish records will provide information on the effects of disease on communities, but to obtain details of personal experiences of disease and its treatment, examination of personal letters, journals and diaries of the period is necessary.

One such local diarist was Ralph Jackson, a Cleveland landowner and businessman, and although not a native of Great Ayton he had many very close associations with the village. His sister Rachel was married to Commodore William Wilson of Ayton Hall and his sister, Esther, also lived in the village. He spent a great deal of time in Ayton and had many aquaintances there. He frequently attended All Saints church where he had his infant son buried in the churchyard.

Ralph kept his diaries from the age of 14, when he was apprenticed to a merchant in Newcastle, until his death in 1790 at the age of 55. The entries concerning health and disease represent just a small fraction of the contents of the diaries but they give an insight into the practice of medicine in the 18C. Being wealthy he had the advantage of being able to afford the best available medical attention but his experience of diseases and their treatment would be common to many.

Self –Medication

As a young apprentice Ralph suffered the usual common minor ailments and only occasionally had recourse to professional treatment. For the most part he relied on home remedies or bought simple medicines from the local apothecary. (Appendix I) To treat a cold he took a 'Treakell posset' which was simply treacle, curdled in hot milk, with spices added, and to treat a cough he took 'Clinton's Snuff' which was thought to have antiseptic properties.

Honey made up into a 'Stowry' was the treatment for a sore throat and whenever he was 'costive' (constipated) he would take a dose of 'Globe Salts' (Glauber's Salts). He drank considerable quantities of 'tar water' which was regarded as a panacea for all ills. The tar, which was derived from pinewood, was bactericidal and when diluted in water was also used as an antiseptic mouthwash. When Ralph did require the services of a doctor he was usually prescribed 'Physick', a purgative, or a 'Vomit' and his comment after being prescribed the purgative was usually ' it wrought very well'. Ralph made several purchases from 'Dr Stoddart's shop', the local surgeon-apothecary, (Appendix II), and for his employer, William Jefferson, he purchased a 'Scurvey Bottle'. On the occasion that Mr Jefferson was bled by Dr Stoddart he was sent out to buy '1 ½ yards of Filleting for binding the arm'. He bought laudanum (opium) several times to send to his sister, Dorothy in Richmond, there being no restrictions on its

purchase or use. Tonics containing the extracts of dried roots of tropical plants such as sarsparilla and sassafras and syrups of orange-flower water and brandy (syrup of capillaire) were also bought at the apothecarys.

In 1756 Ralph completed his apprenticeship and hosted a farewell dinner at an inn in Newcastle for his friends. The entry in his diary for the following day read; 'I had a very indifferent night last night in the Heart Burn tho' I was not in Liquer'. For some reason he did not associate his overnight discomfort in any way with his consumption the previous evening of a meal comprising pheasant, hare, veal steaks and apple pie!

Quack Medicine

Legislation had been enacted during the 16C which permitted apothecaries to give medical advice provided that they only charged for the drugs they dispensed, but over time this privelege was abused and by the 18C charlatans were peddling spurious medicines. The legislation had become known as the 'Quacks Charter' (the word quack comes from the Dutch meaning 'to prattle'). Many of these 'quack doctors' assumed bogus qualifications and became very rich often by skilled advertising. Some of their nostrums contained effective constituents but many were worthless and some positively harmful. However they found a public willing to try any treatment which it thought might provide a cure for its ills. Ralph was perfectly at ease, as were most people, using quack medicines.Whilst in Newcastle his mother had sent him 'four of Uncle Ward's pills'. Uncle Ward was Joshua Ward, his mother's brother who was one of the most notorious quacks in the country. (Appendix III) He had no qualms about using 'Uncle Josh's pills' taking his 'White Drop for Scurvy' , his 'Sack Drop' and his 'Pill and Drop' at various times. His mother also had great faith in her brother's preparations and on one occasion , for the 'Cholick', she took three of Ward's pills 'which operated smartly both ways'. She also took 25 grains of Wards 'Sweating Powders and received great benefit'. All of Ward's proprietary medicines contained highly toxic chemicals which induced violent sweating and purging as the body tried to rid itself of the toxic compounds. Ralph did not confine his self medication solely to his uncles preparations; he was quite content to take 'half a paper of Dr James Powder for Fever', a popular quack remedy of the time and which was still used up to the early 20C. For an unspecified illness he dosed himself with another well known remedy 'Mr Pittam's Nervus Drops'. After Joshua Ward died Ralph recorded that 'many other of my late

Uncle Josh Ward's Medicines are now published in a 6 penny pamphlet by Jno. Page to whom my Uncle gave a Book of Receipts' . Quack doctors travelled the country selling their often toxic nostrums and no town with a market or fair was immune. Ralph visited the local market in Guisborough 'and saw many performances on the Slack Wire and Slack Rope by Dr Bartons Man'. Dr Barton was a well known travelling quack doctor and he would use the acrobat to draw the crowd before trying to sell his potions.

Surgery

Venesection or 'breathing a vein' had been the most common surgical practice for some 2000 years and it was only in the late 19C that the practice was questioned. Blood was taken from a larger vein, usually the forearm, using a lancet or 'fleam'. The blood was collected in a specially graduated 'bleeding bowl' so that the physician could examine and measure it. Virtually every known illness was treated by bleeding, it being believed that the condition was due to an excessive build up of blood. The patient in fact derived absolutely no benefit from the procedure whatsoever.

Ralph had experience of the procedure at second- hand whilst still young. When living in Guisborough he had seen his uncle bled by Dr Proddy, the local surgeon-apothecary, because he was 'very costive' (constipated). The same Dr Proddy relieved an aquaintance of Ralph's, Captain Longbotham, of 'five jills of blood' – some 1 ¼ pints, for an unspecified illness. When Ralph's mother was ill she was treated by Dr Francis Wayne of Stokesley, the family doctor. He had ordered her to be bled 'finding her complaint to be an Inflammatory Fever'. On the third occasion she was bled Ralph noted 'very inflamed blood again' and on further bleeding the blood was described as 'very sizy'. It would have been interesting to know what 'inflamed and sizy blood' looked like. Unsurprisingly Mrs Jackson was described as being 'freer from pain…but is very weak'. In all she was treated on seven occasions for her 'Inflammatory Fever' for which treatment Dr Wayne charged seven guineas. Ralph records just one abortive, personal experience of being bled. When, finding himself 'Chilly and Feverish', he had 'Mr Hubbock, a Stokesley Apothecary attempt to bleed me but as he miscarried did not venture again'.

A modification of the bleeding procedure was that of 'scarification'. Here blood was let from superficial veins on the surface of the skin using a lancet. A glass cup which had been heated to create a vacuum was placed over the

scarified area in order to draw out the blood. This 'cupping' procedure was also used to create a blister and was usually performed on the back or neck. The blister would then be lanced the aim being to remove toxins from the body. Ralph's niece, Hannah Wilson, of Ayton Hall, 'had a blister laid on her left side', her doctor treating her for consumption. After Ralph's wife miscarried in 1780 he noted ' I laid a blister on my Wife's left arm, which is intended to be kept open sometime'. In the same year he himself had blisters applied to his back and to the inside of both thighs when he was suffering from a chest complaint.

In addition to venesection and cupping the local surgeon-apothecaries' other services would include lancing boils, dressing wounds, setting bones and treating venereal diseases. In November 1787 Ralph recorded that his sister, Esther Jackson, had been thrown from her horse whilst riding in Ayton and 'Mr Deason, Surgeon of Stokesley, was procured to reduce her left shoulder joint, which had been dislocated by her fall'. Major surgery was rarely undertaken because of the risk of blood loss and post -operative infection. The chest or abdominal cavity were almost never opened and any surgery was confined to bladder, breast or testicles. Amputations for war time injuries were however frequently performed and trepanning of the skull to relieve pressure was occasionally successful. Ralph's father was reported to have been ' very ill of the Gravel or Stone' and he died just a few days later. His uncle Ralph also suffered from the condition; 'My Uncle had a severe fit of the Gravil, from five-o-clock till twelve, when he voided a stone much like a Pepper Corn'. This would have been very painful even though the stone was modest in size. Surgical removal of bladder stones was much more traumatic and hazardous and Ralph refers to the surgical procedure 'cutting for the stone' or lithotomy. The operation was crude, risky, humiliating and the treatment of last resort. The patients were trussed, ankles tied to hands, a cut made in the muscle of the perineum and the stone removed, if possible, with forceps. The mortality rate was high, somewhere between 20-40%, mainly due to blood loss or infection. A distinguished diarist from an earlier age, Samuel Pepys, underwent the operation and survived after having a bladder-stone the size of a tennis-ball successfully removed. The Lord of the Manor of Ingleby Arncliffe was less fortunate. Ralph noted in May 1785 'our late worthy neighbr', Mr Mauleverer dyed at Leeds on the 27th ult. where he went for the assistance of Mr Hayes an 'eminent' surgeon there, under whose knife, cutting for the Stone, it is said he departed'.

By the end of the 18C surgical techniques had improved immeasurably mainly due to the advent of private anatomy schools. In 1752, whilst still in Newcastle, Ralph made the following entry in his diary 'the unfortunate Owen MacDonald executed for the murder of Robert Parker Cooper and his body given to the surgeons to be anatomised'. Dissection of cadavers was a means of doctors gaining surgical skills and aquiring greater knowledge of the anatomy of the body. Since Tudor times the bodies of four hanged criminals per year were permitted to be taken for dissection and this was seen as an additional punishment for the hanged criminal. Charles II increased the number of bodies to be dissected to six and an Act of 1752 liberalised the practice further with even more bodies being taken if particularly heinous crimes had been committed. There was widespread public revulsion at dissection and surgeons and anatomy schools had great difficulty in obtaining cadavers and as a consequence the trade in illegally acquired corpses developed.

Obstetrics

Ralph married rather late in life at the age of 40. He clearly had thoughts of marriage at a much earlier date but his proposal of marriage to one of the Mauleverer girls, of Ingleby Arncliffe, had been rejected. He eventually married Mary Lewin, the daughter of an East India Company captain of Greenwich. Mary was 20 years old when they married in November 1776 and she came north to set up home. It would be imperative for Ralph to have an heir and within a year in Ocober 1777 there was the following entry; 'I was wakened by my Wife in pain…at five my Sister called the Nurse (Widow Ann Cornforth of Stokesley) who had been here in waiting near three weeks, at six-o-Clock my Sister Wilson was called on; at seven my two eldest Niece Wilsons, Mr and Mrs James were called…my Dear Woman's pains encreased till a Quarter before seven-o Clock in the Evening, at which time Dr Wayne delivered her of a Boy, our first born…she had a severe Labour'. Only well-to-do families would call on the services of a doctor to attend the birth but it would be usual for the women of the house to be in attendance in the early stages of labour. For ordinary people the local midwife (Appendix IV) would be in charge throughout and only in extreme emergencies might the services of a medical practitioner be sought because of the expense. Nine days later the entry read; 'my Wife and Son go on purely (poorly)'. All did not go well and in February it was noted; 'the little Boy showing signs of Rupture'; and in March; 'Dr Wayne …did my little boy up in a Truss'. March saw the child deteriorate even further; 'I reached Ayton before five; when finding my dear little Boy very ill, I soon sent to Sir William Foulis for Dr Wayne…he was soon back with us and ordered a Clyster (enema) but at half -past eight the Child was seized with a Convulsion-Fit and expired'. By the time Ralph's first child was interred in Great Ayton churchyard his wife was already three

months pregnant. Their second son, William Ward Jackson, was born in October 1778 and his wife's 'labour was not so severe as on the first'. Young William was weaned at 14 weeks and Ralph wrote; 'My Wife had a Neighbour's Child (7 weeks old) my Tenant John Foster's Son, draw her Breasts yesterday and fore part of this day, and in the afternoon rubed them with Camphirated Brandy, Oyle and Benjuice to scale her milk; our little Boy promising, from appearances, to do well without the Breast'.

Mary Lewin Jackson, their daughter, was born in November 1779 but there were no details of the pregnancy or labour in the diaries. In April of the following year it was noted that 'my Wife took our little Girl from the Breast of her Nurse Eliz. Scott'. It was common practice amongst the gentry to put a child out to be wet-nursed which increased the possibility of another pregnancy sooner than would have normally been possible. In May 1780 the last entry concerning childbirth was made; 'at about Five-o-Clock this morning my Wyfe miscarryed, being about two Months with the Foetus which was very perfect'. Pregnancy and childbirth in the 18C, for both mother and child, were decidedly hazardous.

Just under a year later Mary died of 'consumption'; thus in her short married life she had experienced four pregnancies in three and a half years which resulted in only two surviving children but importantly Ralph had his heir.

Smallpox

Inevitably smallpox featured prominently in the diaries, the disease being of particular concern to the parents of young children who were generally the principal victims. Details of the disease were recorded concerning not only Ralph's immediate family but also those of his relatives and friends. The first entry in 1758 relates to the family of his cousin, John James of West Auckland, whose four small daughters were 'inoculated' by Dr Dunn; ' none of the smallpox appearing on any of the children'. The procedure in that instance was a failure which must have caused concern. The 'inoculation' referred to was an entirely different procedure to vaccination which would only be introduced some fifty years later by Edward Jenner. Inoculation was first introduced into Europe at the beginning of the 18C but the procedure had far earlier origins in India and China. It involved taking a small amount of pus from the pustule of an infective smallpox patient and introducing it into the skin of a non-immune individual producing a mild form of the disease and a lasting immunity. The procedure was not without risk as the inoculated patients would themselves be infectious, which could then infect others and occasionally the inoculation could produce a fatal disease in the patient.

The children of Ralph's sister, Rachel, were inoculated in 1763 and Ralph recorded that 'Dr Wayne took some matter from a Girl child in Yarm today to inoculate my three nieces Wilson for the small Pox'. He followed the childrens' progress and a week later noted that 'the children are all sick today', and a further week on that 'the children have all passed the height and are well'. Ten years later Dr Wayne inoculated the Wilson's 22 month old son, William. Ralph himself 'went with the Doctor to take matter from Jane, Daughter of Mark Carrick of Ayton, who has had the Small Pox by inoculation'. For the ensuing ten days Ralph assiduously details the increasing fever and the appearance of the smallpox pustules. The child was 'carried into the Air several times which always reduced the Fever'. It would appear that it was the convention to purge the child after inoculation; 'Wm Wilson took his first Physick since he had the small Pox'.

An outbreak of smallpox in Ormesby in October 1781 prompted Ralph to consider inoculations for his own children and he invited Dr Wayne to 'see my little Folks previous to their preparation for the small Pox Inoculation'. There is no indication what that 'preparation' involved but one week later Dr Wayne duly 'Inoculated for the small Pox, my two dear Children'. (His son, William Ward Jackson was three years old and daughter, Mary Lewin Jackson was a year younger.) The Matter or pus was taken from a child at Gisbro' yesterday, Thomas, the son of Thomas and Hannah Harding, a labourer, 9 years old'. The day after the inoculations Ralph 'removed the Plasters from my Childrens arms' and within a week the arms of both of his children were inflamed and the little girl was feverish. A day later Ralph recorded that 'my little woman has some Spots and my dear Boy's Fever is very high with a great Rash all over his body. In the ensuing week the symptoms developed in both children and it was noted that 'my little Man has not so much Fever and several small Pox appear faintly on his Face and Body' His daughter's condition appeared to be more advanced as she had '14 Pustules appear on her Face and many on her Arms, Legs and Body from Fifty or Sixty on all…. a promising appearance'. The boy's response seems to have been slower than his sister's, wheras the girl's pustules were drying up by the 14th day and was well, his son's condition 'seems to be at its height, he has about 60 on his surfaces'. As was the practice the children were dosed with a few Grains of Rhubarb, five

doses in all, over a period of a month. This purging was to remove what were imagined to be residual toxins remaining in the body after the inoculation.

The practice of inoculation got off to a slow start in England and was mainly taken up by the upper classes who had both the time and the money. Servants would also be inoculated so as not to present a potential hazard to the family for whom they worked. The poor were less likely to be inoculated but some doctors provided their service free. Jenners introduction of vaccination, using the cow-pox virus, was a much safer procedure and eventually superceded inoculation.

Other Infectious Diseases

Infectious diseases other than smallpox plagued the population and there was one which played a significant role in Ralph Jackson's own life. Tuberculosis was no respector of persons and took the lives of rich and poor. The word tuberculosis is not used in any of the entries in the diaries, the term most frequently used being 'consumption'. The first time it appears is in 1758 when Ralph was living in Guisborough and he commented that 'Mrs Fox died this morning at Six reduced to a mere Skeleton by a long Consumption'. It came close to home when in 1769 his niece, Hannah Wilson of Ayton Hall, underwent treatment (the inevitable bleeding) from Dr Wayne who feared that 'she is in consumption'. Ralph was clearly concerned as his closing comment on the event was 'she will be 11 if she live to next May'. It came even closer to home in 1781 when his wife was diagnosed, by the same Dr Wayne, as having 'a Slow Fever, with a tendency to Intermit'. Her condition deteriorated over the next month, Ralph reporting 'my Wife's cough increases and my Dear Woman, being much indisposed, is visibly weaker each day'. He was so concerned that he called for a second opinion from Dr Hunter, a physician from York, and his diagnosis was that 'her Symptoms… proceed a Consumptive habit'. Mary Lewin Jackson died of tuberculosis aged 25. In Ralph's last two references to tuberculosis he noted that the tenant of one of his farms, Joseph Cornforth, 'had died of a Pulmonery Consumption' and he recalled having 'called on Mr and Mrs Challoner at Gisbro', they having recently returned from near a twelve months absence to Weymouth, their eldest daughter having thought to be in danger of Consumption'. Ralph writes of influenza almost as though it was a new phenomenon. In the April of 1762 he noted that 'I was ill of the Epidemic disorder called by the Physicians the Influenza… I was confined to the house at Guisbro' above a week, never was there more general disorder, it went through the whole Island among All ranks affecting chiefly the Lungs, the King (Geo: the 3rd) was severely handled by it, but few people died of it '.

During the summer of 1781 Ralph documents the effects of whooping-cough on his children. His son's cough developed over a period of a week and Ralph wrote that he 'was of the Opinion it may be the Chin-Cough…many Children of Ayton are, and two months past been so affected, (William Richardson, Tanner of Langbuargh lost his son William in it lately.) but it appears that many People are ill of it, who have had the Hooping or Chin-Cough when they were young'. His daughter Mary also contracted the infection: 'my little Girl's Cough increases and she does not discharge her Stomach of Phlegm so easy as her Brother has done in this illness'. The children continued to suffer during the ensuing weeks and even seven weeks later he reported that 'my Children Cough, and they both throw up, Wm. Does it easier'.

John Reid, Ralph's cousin, was reported to be 'very ill in a sore leg, the inflammation is called Saint Anthony's Fire'. This was erysipelas, a serious streptococcal infection of the skin and deeper tissues, which was caused by the organism entering the skin through a small wound or sore. The infection occasionally could prove fatal. Two of Ralph's acquaintances suffered from 'the Flux' or the 'Bloody Flux', which was probably dysentery. John Jefferson, a Staithes shipowner 'died of a Diarrhoea or Flux' and his own doctor, Dr Wayne was reported to be ' in a dangerous state of the Bloody Flux'. Ralph himself noted that on one occasion 'I have voided much blood lately by stool'. However this may or may not have been dysentery as he had complained of having 'Pyles' and commented later that 'I am so sore with the Piles that I cannot ride'.

'Putrid fever' is referred to twice in the diaries. This was the term frequently used for typhus, a Rickettsial disease which is transmitted by the bite of an infected body-louse. Personal hygiene in the 18C often left much to be desired and infestations with fleas and lice were common amongst all classes of society. Epidemics of typhus were frequent and were responsible for large nunbers of deaths. Ralph's young nephew, George Wilson, was 'pronounced to be in a Putrid fever, and he has not been well for several days'. As there were no more reports on George he presumably recovered from his infection. Another of Ralph's relatives, brother-in-law Frederick Lewin was also known to have recovered from typhus as his diary entry read: 'Frederick arrived at Normanby from Greenwich by Sea. Frederick is a most emaciated Creature owing to a putrid fever he had last April'. Typhus remained a major cause of death until

well into the 19C and combined with tuberculosis, was responsible for a third of all deaths. Various other infections are given just brief mentions. Measles, usually considered to be a disease of childhood is referred to with the sufferer being an adult. Mrs Taylorson, the wife of a clergyman in Stokesley, was said to be 'laying at this time dangerously ill of the measles'. Croup, a viral or bacterial infection of the throat giving rise to a barking cough was referred to as 'roup', the local term for the condition. Mentions are also made of jaundice, 'swelled chaps' (possibly mumps) , rheumatic fever and inflammation of the lungs.

Dentistry

Dentistry was not a recognised profession in the 18C and country people would have diseased teeth treated in the home or removed by the village blacksmith or local barber. Great Ayton had a barber, as reference is made to one by Ralph in 1769; 'I took Chas Johnson (the Ayton Barber) with me shooting'. Mr Johnson was evidently of sufficiently high standing to accompany Ralph on a shooting trip; there is no evidence to indicate whether he was a barber-surgeon or a barber and wig-maker but it would seem highly unlikely that there would be sufficient custom for a wig-maker in Ayton.

Ralph's own experiences with early dentistry were singularly unfortunate. Whilst still an apprentice he was treated by 'Surgeon Perrot's apprentice, Edw. Scorer' who extracted 'a greater part of a tooth' leaving Ralph 'ill of a Tooth Ach' for several days. Whilst living in Guisborough he 'rode to Skelton to take Mr Bisset's advice about My Teeth, he attempted to burn the Nerve it being hollow'. There was no comment as to whether this treatment was successful or not. Several years later he was confined to the house 'on account of the pain in my Teeth' and treated this with 'the Bark' which gave him some relief. The bark referred to was 'Jesuit's Bark' (quinine), which was used to treat fevers and infections in addition to malaria. Dental hygiene in England at the time was almost non-existent and Ralph's experiences with dental treatment would have been common to most people as British dentistry lagged behind that practised on the Continent.

Scurvy

Ralph's brother-in-law, Commodore Wilson, entertained many interesting dinner guests over the years. On returning from a trip to China in 1760 and docking in London, 'Dr Linn of Portsmouth' was entertained on board Wilson's vessel the 'Pitt'. Ralph recorded this event in his journal, being present at the dinner whilst on a visit to London to see his relatives. 'Dr Linn' was in fact Dr Robert Lind, MD, a former Royal Naval surgeon and subsequently Head of the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar in Portsmouth. Lind, whilst at sea, had conducted experiments with various foodstuffs in order to find a cure for scurvy and in 1783 had written a 'Treatise on Scurvy' in which he concluded that the juice of citrus fruits was the most effective cure for scurvy. (He was not aware at the time that the active constituent of the fruit juice was ascorbic acid, vitamin C.) It is easy to understand why William Wilson would have been keen to have Dr Lind as his dinner guest because of his own intimate connection with the problem of scurvy on long sea voyages as an East India Company captain.

Unfortunately Ralph does not record any of the conversation at that dinner but scurvy is mentioned on several occasions in diary entries. Scurvy did not just afflict mariners. In northern European countries, when fruit or fresh green vegetables were unavailable during the winter months or during failed harvests, vitamin C deficiency did occur amongst the general population. Lack of the vitamin causes degeneration of the connective tissue resulting in bleeding gums, bleeding into muscles and joints, loss of teeth, failure of wounds to heal and physical weakness. When his cousin, John Reid, died, scurvy was one of the contributory factors and Ralph self-medicated for an unspecified illness with 'Uncle Josh Ward's White Drop for the Scurvy'. It is unlikely that in any of these instances food shortage would have been a factor but a dietary deficiency is a possibility. It is more likely that 'scurvy' was used as a catch-all diagnosis.

Mental Illnesses

Mental illness was mentioned infrequently in the journals but it would have been a topic of conversation amongst the public because of King George's periodic episodes of mental disturbance in the late 18C. Generally there was a division of responsibility for the mentally ill between the family and the community. Distinctions were made between 'idiots and lunatics', insensitive terms but they had specific meanings. Idiots were seen as naturally damaged individuals whereas lunatics were only temporarily deranged, there being the possibility of recovery. Idiots or 'innocents' were usually cared for within the family but often they were a severe drain on the family's

finances. Sometimes they were boarded out or 'tabled' with another family. Ralph mentions the situation of Mrs Henry Walker Yeoman of Whitby, the wife of a business aquaintance. She had died 'at Wm Newburns of Eston, at whose house she was lodged, being insane several years'. It is possible that Mrs Yeoman was being 'tabled' at friends or relatives.

Lunatics were mainly adults and they became a community responsibility because of the possibility of violence and the threat to social order and therefore restraint dominated policy. Sometimes 'watchers' would be employed by the parish, but commital to gaol or the workhouse was usually the last resort as this involved expense for the parish. Ralph recorded that the Rev Henry Vane represented his brother in a transaction to repay a debt of £200 because 'Lyonel Vane Esq. had been proved a Lunatick'. Wealthy families would have been able to pay for care for their relatives in some private asylum or institution but it would be 1808 before legislation was introduced to provide County Asylums for the general population.

Ralph's final illness

In common with everyone else Ralph suffered the usual transient illnesses, minor ailments and accidents. However in later life he began to record that he had developed certain chest problems which in time would shorten his life. In 1780 he required treatment for 'Peripneumony' (pneumonia) and throughout that decade complained that his 'Asthmatick Cough' was proving troublesome. How clearly asthma was understood and effectively treated is not known but his chest condition continued to deteriorate. In August 1789 he recorded that he had 'a severe Fitt of the Asthma' and that 'my Lungs expectorate freely'. Despite his deteriorating health he continued to take an interest in estate affairs and even on the day before his last diary entry he was working in the garden. The final entry read 'I am very feeble, my Cough troublesome day and night'. Ralph Jackson died on the 16th of February,1790 at the age of 55.

Summary

Posterity is indebted to Ralph Jackson for the detailed chronicles of the age in which he lived merely to recount the medical experiences of a privileged individual and his equally privileged contemporaries is to present a somewhat distorted picture. However their experiences of disease and its treatment would have been recognised, and possibly experienced by numerous ordinary people. It is concievable that the latter were better served by their simple home remedies rather than being subjected to the pseudo-scientific quackery inflicted on the well-to-do by the 18C medical profession. (Appendix V). To concentrate exclusively on the medical experiences of Ralph presents a restricted impression and in reality there was much more to the man. Although he lived in a quiet corner of Yorkshire he was a cultured man, fully conversant with what was going on in the world. He commented frequently on both national and international affairs and had a wide circle of influential friends and acquaintances, the names of whom, the Chaloners, Turners, Peases, Pennymans, Foulis, Phipps and Lascelles are still well known today. He took his civic duties very seriously, served as a Justice of the Peace for several years and took a keen iterest in local politics. In keeping with many of the gentry of the day he was aware of the advances in science and technology and attended lectures on astronomy, electricity and microscopy. He had financial interests in new industrial projects, visiting amongst others 'the new allom works erecting just south of Rosbury Toping'. He possessed a large library and his taste in reading ranged from religious books to Fielding's 'Tom Jones'.

He knew the locality well, having ridden on horseback many hundreds of miles in the area. He had visited many of the rapidly developing towns in Yorkshire and Lancashire and journeyed to London, where he had relatives and friends, on several occasions. Whilst there he visited the theatre and the opera and experienced all that London society offered. He met and married his wife in Greenwich before setting up home in Cleveland. He was a sociable man and in his 'salad' days he liked nothing more than joining his friends at the 'Cock' in Guisborough for a convivial evening, and in his more mature years he was a keen member of Sir Charles Turner's 'Society' at Kirklevington. He dined and conversed with many eminent men of the day including Dr Robert Lind and Sir Joseph Banks and Omiah, the Tahitian whom Banks had brought to England following his voyage with Cook. In 1771 Ralph dined with Captain Cook and his wife at Ayton Hall, the home of his brother-in-law. This was probably Cook's only visit to his boyhood home after he had become famous. Ralph had heard John Wesley preach twice and his comment after he had heard him preach in Guisborough was 'he preached extemporary half an hour, an excellent and affecting Discourse'. Ralph was a regular churchgoer in both Guisborough and at All Saints in Great Ayton where he was a close aquaintance of the Rev Hastwell, curate of Ayton.

He took great delight in all outdoor pursuits, coursing for hares and shooting game. Latterly, with his Normanby estate bordering the Tees and the coast, he and his family indulged in sea-bathing, something of a novelty in the 18C, and he liked nothing better than a trek up Roseberry Topping with his family and friends. His overiding interest was in his family, both his immediate and extended family, and he wrote as extensively of their successes as he did of their setbacks in life. His sister wrote after his death 'so good a man…an upright well spent life…an honest man.'

Appendix I
Great Ayton's Apothecary

Although Great Ayton was a relatively small village in the 18C it had an apothecary. The exact location of his business is not known but the existence of the apothecary became known because of the prominent part he played in the conviction of a murderer. Mr Alstone, apothecary, gave evidence at the trial of William Smith, a farmer from Great Broughton who was indicted for the murder of three members of his wife's family, William, Thomas and Anne Harper.

Smith's trial took place at York Castle on Monday 13th August, 1753 before Mr Serjeant Eyre. In evidence Mr Alstone said that Smith had entered his shop in great haste and asked for an ounce of white arsenic, purportedly for use as rat-poison, and as he had bought arsenic on a previous occasion for the same purpose he was sold the arsenic.(It was later said in evidence that this quantity of arsenic was sufficient to kill one hundred men.) It transpired that Smith had put the arsenic into flour used to make an Easter cake with the intention of killing his in-laws so that he might inherit his father-in-laws farm. He also admitted that he had tried to poison some oatmeal several weeks earlier. Smith was not suspected of the murders until he absconded and attempted to flee to Ireland via Liverpool but being conscience-stricken he returned to his father's home in Ingleby Greenhow.

Warrants for his arrest had been issued by Justices of the Peace, Thomas Skottowe and John Beckwith. Smith confessed to the murders to the Constables who arrested him and later to the magistrates.

Smith pleaded not guilty at his trial but the evidence against him was overwhelming and he was sentenced to be hanged and 'his body to be delivered to the Surgeons to be dissected and Anatomised'.

It was owing to these tragic and bizarre circumstances that information concerning Ayton's apothecary came to light. Whether Mr Alstone was allowed to continue in his business of providing simple remedies to local people or whether the notoriety and publicity surrounding the trial affected his ability to continue normally is not known.

Appendix II
The Medical Hierarchy

Even where professional medical services were limited there were always those willing to care for the sick, either for payment or out of charity. These 'irregular practitioners' were often resented by the professionals but it meant that some form of medical attention was available even for the very poor. Villages had their 'nurses' and 'wise women' who would treat patients with herbal remedies, and healing skills would have been handed down orally and remedies preserved in the family recipe book. Self-medication was a necessity as the services of a trained doctor would be too expensive for most people and only in the direst emergency would a doctor be called. At the bottom of the 'professional' medical pecking order was the apothecary or druggist. He was regarded as being 'in trade' and therefore of low status. An apothecary would qualify by being apprenticed to a qualified master for seven years from the age of fourteen. It was essentially a practical training, preparing potions, spreading plasters, rolling pills, tending leeches and book-keeping. The apothecary dispensed the medicine prescribed by the physician but frequently he would prescribe without reference to the physician which led to friction. Of necessity country apothecarys prescribed their own medicines.

Next in the medical hierarchy was the surgeon. He came below the physician because his craft was manual rather than intellectual and at an earlier time the surgeons and barbers were closely linked. Surgery was rudimentary with wound dressing, bone setting and blood letting being the main activities. Also in the province of the surgeon were extraction of teeth, treating hernias, venereal disease and skin conditions. Many surgeons gained experience in the army and navy. With no knowledge of asepsis even simple operations were hazardous and little internal surgery was performed, but as surgical techniques improved so too did the status of the surgeon. Although surgeons and

apothecarys were separate occupations, throughout the 18C the two came to combine their skills and the surgeon-apothecary became the forerunner of the modern general practitioner.

At the top of the medical hierarchy were the physicians who were university trained. They were not noted for their application of science, their medical knowledge being derived from outdated classical sources. Diagnoses were made by taking a detailed history and by observing certain clinical signs but usually propriety dictated that the patient was not physically examined. On the basis of his observations the physician would write out a prescription for the apothecary to make up. They practised mainly in the cities and fashionable towns and their reputation often depended largely on their bedside manner. Because the Royal College of Physicians acted as an exclusive club English medicine stagnated during the 18C.

The first Medical Register of 1783 showed that throughout the country there were 3,120 qualified practitioners (barber-surgeons and bone-setters were omitted). Of these 363 were physicians, 2,164 surgeon-apothecaries, 79 apothecaries and 64 surgeons. The physicians were concentrated in the cities and the surgeon-apothecaries gravitated to the market towns usually in single-handed practices. The esablishment of 29 County hospitals after 1750 provided career openings for aspiring medical practitioners and with more successful scientific treatments medicine as a profession became more socially acceptable leading to better incomes and higher social status.

Appendix III
Joshua Ward

Joshua 'Spot' Ward was the son of William Ward an alum manufacturer in North Yorkshire. With money from his father Joshua had set up a drysalters business in London dealing in chemicals, dyes, oils and drugs. After a period in exile in France for allegedly supporting the Jacobite cause he was pardoned and returned to London where he established himself as a quack doctor. Whilst abroad he had acquired some knowledge of the preparation of medicines and with vigorous advertising in newspapers his prescriptions attracted wide attention. His most notorious medicine was his 'Pill and Drop' which acted as both a purgative and an emetic. It was described by one distinguished physician as such a violent medicine that to administer it would be classed as malpractice and a newspaper article described it as 'a convenient means of inconspicuous suicide'. A piece of doggerel of the time ran :
'Before you take his Drop or Pill
Take leave of your friends and make your will'.

Despite the virulent attacks in the Press and the antipathy of the medical fraternity, Ward prospered and became extemely rich. He became a respected philanthropist, a royal protege and endowed four London 'hospitals' for the sick poor. His medicines were so highly approved that they became designated treatment in the Royal Navy. Ward acquired the nickname 'Spot' because of a prominent birthmark on the right side of his face. He never married and died in 1761 leaving a large fortune. Neither Ralph Jackson, his mother or any of his sisters were beneficiaries in Joshua's will.

Composition of Ward's Medicines.

The composition of Ward's medicines remained secret until two years after his death.
'Emetic Pill': Antimony, Dragons Blood, (A poisonous, red plant resin), Wine.
'White Drop: Nitric Acid, Sal Ammoniac, Mercury.
'Sweating Powder' I: Ipecacuana, Liquorice, Opium, Nitre, Vitriolated Tartar.
'Dropsy Purging Powder': Jalap, Cream of Tartar, Bole Armenic.

Appendix IV
Midwifery

The village would have its midwife and she would be a woman of good character and able to pay the licence fee. She would be licenced and authorised by the local bishop, the licensing indicating only a mark of respectability rather than any profound medical skills. The local midwives were experienced and managed normal deliveries but lacked the instruments to cope with difficult births.

Doctors saw career opportunities in obstetrics and the 'man-midwife' superseded the traditional midwife, particularly in the more prosperous families. As the number of 'man-midwives' increased so did the rivalry with the midwives and respectable village midwives suffered a loss in patients and income as well as a loss in status. However patient loyalty ensured that local midwives continued to be employed.

Appendix V
Medical Conditions and Treatments Referred to in the Diaries

Medical Conditions
Gout, Ague, Tooth Ache, Heart Burn, Palsy, St Anthony's Fire, Gravel, Stone, Flux, Boils, Inflammation of the Lungs, Pleurisy, Constipation, Rheumatism, Nervous Fever, Convulsions, Asthma, Scurvy, Croup, Swelled Chaps, Chyle, Consumption, Piles, Rheumatic Fever, Influenza, Inflammation of the Bowels, Gouty Tumours, Colic, Jaundice, Migraine, Putrid Fever, Smallpox, Rupture, Measles, Peripneumony, Slow Fever, Apoplexy, Pulmonary Consumption, Chin-Cough.

Treatments
Clinton's Snuff, Physic, Scurvy Bottle, Smelling Bottle, Hartshorn and Salvolatile, Treacle Posset, Syrup of Capitalary, Mr Pittam's Nervous Drops, Globe Salts, Honey Stowry, Jos Ward's Pill and Drop, Tar Water, Laudanum, Jos Ward's Sweat, Camomile, Grated Rhubarb, Winter Savoury Tea, Tincture of Myrrh, Julep and Heartburn Cakes, Cinchona Bark, Dr James Powder, Camphorated Oil, Brandy and Benjuice.

References

The Ralph Jackson Diaries. www.historic-cleveland.com
A Social History of Medicine. Joan Lane
Routledge 2001
The Knife Man. Wendy Moore
Bantam Press 2005
Disease, Medicine and Society in England, 1550—1860 Roy Porter
CUP 2002