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**William Cullen's Exemplary Retirement:  
The Art of Ageing in Enlightenment Scotland**



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*Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

School of Critical Studies

College of Arts

University of Glasgow

2017

***Cover image:***

John Kay (1742—1826), 'William Cullen, 1710–1790. Chemist and physician.', etching on paper, 1838, copyright: National Galleries of Scotland.

## Abstract

*This thesis looks at the subject of old age and retirement in the later years of the Scottish Enlightenment. These subjects are examined in relation to the final years of the physician and natural philosopher, Professor William Cullen (1710–1790). The Cullen Consultation Correspondence digital database (<http://cullenproject.ac.uk/>) is used to examine letters between the doctor and some of his elderly patients and a study of the botanical materia medica prescribed for this patient group is made. There follows an examination of Cullen's personal retirement project, his improved farm and designed landscape at Ormiston Hill in West Lothian. The thesis examines the double meaning of the word 'retirement', both in its eighteenth-century sense as a retirement from active life, and its modern sense as the concern of old age. Even if Cullen's notion of old age and retirement represented the concerns of an elite, it carried with it a broader social and moral responsibility. I show how Cullen and his peers sought to develop a programme of improvement which included how to live 'a good life'.*



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The third group of people to thank are those who kindly made me very welcome at Ormiston Hill – Jane Deane, John Thomas and Charles Young – and the specialists I was privileged to bring with me: Iain Milne, Christopher Dingwall, David Shuttleton and Henry

Noltie. Cullen's connection with that small patch of land south-east of Kirknewton has never been forgotten by the people who live there.

I would also like to mention the staff of the libraries I have been fortunate to work in – particularly the libraries of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (the Sibbald Library), the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow and the National Library of Scotland. Thank you to all the staff of these libraries, thank you for the companionship I have found with fellow researchers, and thank you to the morale-sustaining coffee shop staff of the NLS.

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died while I have been working on this thesis. It represents a part of other people's lives as well as one's own.

And thank you most of all to my husband, Charley Dodds, to whom this thesis is gratefully dedicated.



## **Author's Declaration**

I certify:

- (i) that this thesis has been composed by me, and
- (ii) either that the work is my own, or, where I have been a member of a research group, that I have made a substantial contribution to the work, such contribution being clearly indicated, and
- (iii) that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

**Jane Anne Corrie**



## Glossary

### Institutions and/or Manuscript Collections

**CCC** *Cullen Consultation Correspondence* on-line database (University of Glasgow and Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh 2014) <http://cullenproject.ac.uk/>[Jan 2017]

**EU Sp Coll** University of Edinburgh: Special Collections

**GU Sp Coll** University of Glasgow Library: Special Collections

**NRS** National Records of Scotland

**NLS** National Library of Scotland (Special Collections NLS)

**RBGE** Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (Archive Library RBGE)

**RCPE** Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh (Sibbald Library Archive RCPE)

### References frequently used in thesis

Abbreviation: **OED (2016)**

Full reference: *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2016: <http://www.oed.com/>

Abbreviation: **ODNB (2004)**

Full reference: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Abbreviation: ***Stat. Acc. Kirknewton***

Full reference: Sinclair, Sir John, *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, Kirknewton, Edinburgh, vol. 9, Edinburgh: William Creech, 1793, p. 415. University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow (1999). The Statistical Accounts of Scotland online service: <http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/link/osa-vol9-p415-parish-edinburgh-kirknewton> [Jan 2017]

Abbreviation: ***New Stat. Acc. Kirknewton***

Full reference: J. Gordon, ed., *The New Statistical Account of Scotland by the ministers of the respective parishes, under the superintendence of a committee of the Society for the Benefit of the Sons and Daughters of the Clergy*. Kirknewton, Edinburgh, vol. 1, Edinburgh: Blackwoods and Sons, 1845, p. 433. University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow (1999). The Statistical Accounts of Scotland online service:  
<http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/link/nsa-vol1-p433-parish-edinburgh-kirknewton>  
 [Jan 2017]

Abbreviation: **John Thomson et al., *An Account...***

John Thomson, *An Account of the Life, Lectures and Writings of William Cullen*, 2 vols, vol. 1 first published in 1832, vol. 2 commenced by John Thomson and William Thomson, concluded by David Craigie, edited by Allen Thomson (Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. vol. 1 together with 1<sup>st</sup> edn. vol 2, 1859).

Note concerning **materia medica**

This term can be a) a description of substances used therapeutically, b) a subject taught at university and c) the title of a publication. In this text *materia medica*, uncapitalised, not in quotation marks and not italicised is used to mean both a) and b). The words *Materia Medica* indicate the title of a publication. Also note a version of the term, in a different Latin case, used for an earlier unauthorised publication of Cullen's lectures on the subject: *Catalogus Materiae Medicae* ed. Anon (London: 1761).

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## Introduction

Hoc erat in votis; modus agri non ita magnus,

Hortus ubi et tecto, vicinus iugis aquae fons,

Et paulum silvae super his foret

Horace, *Satire* II, vi, 1–4.

*This used to be the height of my wishes: a small piece of land, with a garden, a stream of running water near the house, and little wood besides.*<sup>1</sup>

In truth Sir, he is so much taken up with experiments in agriculture, that he has no time to think of his patients. – During the time we were nursing a sick potatoe [sic], no less than seven patients slipped through his fingers, and about a month ago, he was a whole hour in debating whether he should save a turnip-rooted cabbage, or the life of a first rate speaker of the House of Commons. He at last decided in favour of the cabbage, which soon recovered, but the gentleman died.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, ed. by Derek Matravers (London: Wordsworth Edition, 1996), p. 218. 1<sup>st</sup> edn: *Les Confessions et Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, 4 vols (Switzerland and Paris: 1782-1783).

<sup>2</sup> From the musical farce *No Cure: Or the Pharmacopolist* (1794) by Alexander Hunter (physician) and John Croft (wine merchant). Cited in Michael Brown, *Performing Medicine: Medical Culture and Identity in Provincial England, c. 1760–1850* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 69.

### **William Cullen towards the end of his life: some impressions of ‘Old Spasm’**

The last few years of the life of William Cullen, pre-eminent physician of the Scottish Enlightenment, were full of activity. Up until a few weeks before he died in 1790, Cullen continued to give lectures in the practice of medicine at the University of Edinburgh. He also continued his large and long-sustained correspondence with private patients. He completed his final, authoritative *Materia Medica* and saw it published in 1789.<sup>3</sup> Back in 1778, at the age of 68, he had purchased a small estate at Ormiston Hill, near the village of Kirknewton in West Lothian. Here he intended to create an improved farm and designed landscape.<sup>4</sup> He divided his time, during these final years, between his homes in Mint Close, near the Royal Infirmary and the University, in the heart of the Old Town of Edinburgh, and the breezy environs of Ormiston Hill, the site of his intended retirement project. This thesis will study these last years, Cullen’s ideas about old age, and the nature of his retirement at Ormiston Hill.

Cullen’s publisher Charles Elliott had his disagreements with Cullen, but even he expressed admiration for the doctor’s work ethic in old age. In 1784 he wrote to his fellow publisher Thomas Cadell: ‘I am sadly retarded for copy by the Doctor, but I cannot help excusing him. If ever man was a slave, he is one to the fullest degree. He makes it a rule that nothing interferes with his class, but the rest of the day he cannot call a moment his own.’<sup>5</sup> When not visiting his estate, Cullen continued to be a ‘well-kent’ figure among the closes and wynds of the Old Town of Edinburgh. His ageing figure, walking through

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<sup>3</sup> William Cullen, *A Treatise of the Materia Medica*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Charles Elliot, 1789).

<sup>4</sup> See figs. 1, 2 and 3.

<sup>5</sup> Letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 1784. John Murray archive (NLS), cited in Warren McDougall, ‘Charles Elliot’s Medical Publications and the International Book Trade’, in *Science and Medicine in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Charles W. Withers and Paul Wood (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2002), p. 215.

the city, was captured in cartoons by two different artists.<sup>6</sup> There are a number of images of Cullen from the pen of John Kay, well known as a recorder of Edinburgh citizens (famous and not so famous) of the time.<sup>7</sup> In his final drawing of Cullen, the elderly doctor is depicted in profile, walking past in an attitude typifying both old age and scholarly pursuits.<sup>8</sup> He is rather gaunt and spare with a fixed stoop, looking at the ground with an air of abstraction. A second caricature is by Isaac Cruickshank, father to the more famous George Cruickshank. His drawing of Cullen, though similar in content and context to Kay's, is rather different in tone. Here we see an unkempt individual creeping with the difficulty of age around an equally scruffy city. The artist was looking with Kay's close observation, but he was not looking with Kay's more kindly eye. The nickname 'Old Spasm' circulated among Edinburgh medical students during the last years of Cullen's life. It relates to his renowned expertise as a 'nerve doctor' and perhaps particularly to the circumstances of his disagreement with his former pupil John Brown, concerning the co-existence of 'atony' and 'spasm' in the same vessels of the body at the same time.<sup>9</sup> The Cullen Consultation Correspondence (CCC) also demonstrates Cullen's fondness for treating private patients with spasm inducing electrical shocks between the years 1776–

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<sup>6</sup> Among other images these two cartoons, and the portrait by David Martin, were discussed by Patricia Andrew in her talk, 'The Image of Dr. William Cullen' given at the symposium *William Cullen and the Medical Enlightenment* (RCPE: Edinburgh, April 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Paton, *A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings by the late John Kay, miniature painter, Edinburgh, with biographical sketches and illustrative anecdotes, in Two Volumes* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1877), vol. 1, p. 253.

<sup>8</sup> This typifying process is explored by Ludmilla Jordanova in *Defining Features: Scientific and Medical Portraits, 1660–2000* (London: pub. in assoc. with the National Portrait Gallery by Reaktion Books, 2000); and also by Christopher Lawrence in 'Medical Minds, Surgical Bodies', in *Science Incarnate: Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge* ed. by Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 156–202.

<sup>9</sup> This disagreement and its consequences will be discussed further in Chapters One and Four.

1786.<sup>10</sup> These two images of ‘Old Spasm’ are in striking contrast to the oil portrait of Cullen delineated in his prime, painted by David Martin in 1776 (only two years before he purchased the estate at Ormiston Hill), which hangs today in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Patricia Andrew has demonstrated that this portrait signals not just the attributes of a physician, but those of a significant scholar, a philosopher of the arts and of the sciences.

If these are some of the pictorial views of Cullen in old age, he himself provides an expression of his ideals in relation to old age in a memorial oration delivered when he was only 47 years of age, for his friend and colleague Dr John Clerk, who died at the age of 68 in 1757.<sup>11</sup> Cullen empathises with the many aspects of Dr Clerk’s career that had been echoed by his own experience, such as his early training as an apothecary and the importance of the support and patronage of a particular individual (in Dr Clerk’s case Dr Archibald Pitcairn). Significantly he also sympathises here with Dr Clerk’s failure to bring a scholarly work to publication due to the pressures of his other professional commitments. Concluding by highlighting the importance of ‘the preservation of health’, Cullen praises Dr Clerk’s success in overcoming his own infirmities. The language he uses is exactly that of his consultation correspondence, but the moment has a self-reflexive quality and a Stoical bent that was part of Cullen’s public persona too:

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<sup>10</sup> For Cullen’s use of electric shock treatment see discussion in relation to his patient Mr Bethune in Chapter One. Cullen’s other nickname among students was reported at an earlier date to be ‘the Oraclete’. See ‘Letter of Thomas Ismay, student of Medicine at Edinburgh 1771, to his Father’, *University of Edinburgh Journal*, 8 (1936–37), p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> The oration was delivered at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh and is cited at length in John Thomson, *An Account of the Life, Lectures and Writings of William Cullen*, 2 vols, vol. 1 first published in 1832, vol. 2 commenced by John Thomson and William Thomson, concluded by David Craigie, ed. by Allen Thomson (Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. vol. 1 together with 1<sup>st</sup> edn. vol 2, 1859). From this point on this reference will be abbreviated to John Thomson et al., *An Account*. Cullen’s oration will be discussed further in Chapter One.

...[Dr Clerk] had the art to protract his life for many years longer to a good old age.

This required a constant and skillful attention, and was conducted with singular judgment. His regimen might indeed sometimes encroach upon his own pleasures, but it hardly ever interfered with the duties of life.

Dr Clerk died quite suddenly, with a volume of the works of Horace upon his knees.<sup>12</sup>

### **William Cullen's fame**

The death of William Cullen himself is lamented in a poem by John Armstrong, published in *The Bee*, an Edinburgh periodical.<sup>13</sup> The poem concludes with the lines:

Now, full of years, his strength decay'd,  
Cullen from public life retir'd;  
But fame pursued him to the shade  
And, crown'd with honours, he expir'd.  
Now to thy lov'd and honoured name  
Shall Gratitude its tribute raise;  
And, ever dear to future fame,  
Thy works shall consecrate thy praise.

---

<sup>12</sup> The book was open at the passage beginning 'Sit mihi quod nunc est, etiam minus...' This was translated by Sir William Temple as 'Let me yet possess, so I may live / Whate'er of life remains, unto myself'. See Horace, *Letters*, Book 1, Letter 18 in Sir William Temple, 'Essay: Upon the Garden of Epicurus; or of gardening in the year 1685', *The Works of Sir William Temple Bart.*, 2 vols (London: , I, 189. Churchill, Goodwin, Knapton, Smith, Tooke, Round, Tonson, Lloyd, Meres, Woodward and Clay, 1720), vol. 1, p. 189. Connections between Cullen and Horace are examined further in Chapters Two and Three.

<sup>13</sup> This John Armstrong is not the author of *The Art of Preserving Health*, who died in 1779. The author is more likely to be John Armstrong (1771–1797), journalist and poet, who was born in Leith and graduated MA from the University of Edinburgh in 1792. After pursuing a moderately successful career in London as an author and journalist, his health deteriorated and he returned to Scotland, where he died aged only 26 years. See T. F. Henderson, reviewed Grant P. Cerny, *ODNB* (2004). The poem is cited in full in Appendix Four. Churchill, Goodwin, Knapton, Smith, Tooke, Round, Tonson, Lloyd, Meres, Woodward and Clay

Three important factors ensured that William Cullen's fame, extravagantly celebrated in this poem, endured in the minds of the general public as well as a scholarly one. The first was the two-volume *Account of the Life, Lectures and Writings of William Cullen* by John Thomson and colleagues, which was first published in full in 1859.<sup>14</sup> This large work of complex authorship offers an explication and analysis of Cullen's work that is unusual in its depth and detail, though sometimes baffling in its arrangement. It is primarily due to the existence of Thomson's *Account* that Cullen's name has always featured strongly in the secondary literature of the history of science, and the history of medicine during the Enlightenment period. The second factor ensuring Cullen's lasting fame was the high posthumous reputation he enjoyed in the United States of America. Former students, who had crossed the Atlantic to study with him in Edinburgh, returned as lifelong advocates for Cullen's teaching and medical practice. Particularly significant in this respect was Benjamin Rush (1745–1814), who was himself one of the most important figures in the setting up of university-based medical teaching in the United States of America.<sup>15</sup> Though Rush later rejected nosology as a way of understanding disease processes he was a lifelong enthusiast for Cullen's power and effectiveness as a teacher. He mourned him thus:

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<sup>14</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...* Thomson also compiled and edited a version of William Cullen's *Works*. See *Works of William Cullen, MD*, ed. by John Thomson, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood; London: T and G Underwood, 1827).

<sup>15</sup> Rush was one of many students from America attracted to Edinburgh before, after and even during the Revolutionary War. See information in J. Bell Whitfield Jnr, 'Some American students of that "Shining Oracle of Physic"', Dr William Cullen of Edinburgh, 1755–1766', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 94, 3 (June 1950), 275–281.

Who can think of the talents, virtues and services of Dr Cullen, without believing that the Creator of the world delights in the happiness of his creatures, and that his tender mercies are over all his works.<sup>16</sup>

Rush was also one of the 'Founding Fathers' of the American state itself, and through him Cullen's significance has been stitched into the much-studied story of the birth of the nation. Among American scholars of the Scottish Enlightenment, Cullen's fame has never declined.<sup>17</sup> Another element in Cullen's established fame in America was the development around the time of his death (1790) of Dublin and Philadelphia as centres for publication and book printing, particularly for reprints of established works.<sup>18</sup> Cullen's *First Lines of the Practice of Physic* and the final edition of his *Materia Medica* remained best-sellers for many years.<sup>19</sup> Such works were among a number that retained their popularity among an educated public who often lived very far from the nearest trained doctor. This public was slower than the increasingly professional medical establishment (both sides of the Atlantic) to reject Cullen's works as old fashioned. A third factor in the survival of Cullen's fame was the sheer length of his life. He died in what was either his 78th or his 80th year in 1790, being able to continue with his professional activities until

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Rush, *An Eulogium in Honor of the Late Dr William Cullen* (Philadelphia: T. Dobson, 1790).

<sup>17</sup> See J. M. O'Donnell, 'Cullen's influence on American medicine', *William Cullen and the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Medical World* eds. A. Doig, J. P. S. Ferguson, I. A. Milne and R. Passmore, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 234–46.

<sup>18</sup> Cullen's nearest rival as a scientific/medical best-seller in America was the author and publisher William Smellie, who was one of Cullen's most vociferous critics towards the end of his life. The availability of books by Scottish medical authors in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries has been studied by Richard Sher in *The Enlightenment and the Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and by McDougall in 'Charles Elliot's Medical Publications' eds Withers and Wood, pp. 215–54.

<sup>19</sup> William Cullen, *First Lines of the Practice of Physic* (London and Edinburgh 1777–1784); William Cullen, *A Treatise of the Materia Medica* (London: Charles Elliot, 1789). According to W. F. Bynum the former was 'instantly accorded classic status'. See W. F. Bynum, 'William Cullen (1710–1790), chemist and physician', *ODNB* (2004).

the last few weeks of his life.<sup>20</sup> Yet his career as a teaching physician did not peak until well into his maturity. He did not secure a major post in Edinburgh University (a more prestigious and developed centre for medical teaching than Glasgow at the time) until 1755. In this year, with the vital support of the Third Duke of Argyll, he accepted the position of Joint Professor (with Andrew Plummer) of Chemistry and Medicine at the University. He was 45 years of age, with a lengthy and very varied career behind him already. Furthermore, his first authorised published book did not appear until 1769, when the *Synopsis Nosologiae Methodicae* was published.<sup>21</sup> It was only through long years of sustained teaching, further publication and 'clinical' practice, that Cullen was able to become what he certainly was at his death, the most famous teaching physician in the world.

### **Old age and retirement in an historical and contemporary perspective**

The subject of this thesis is the last few years of Cullen's life and work, from 1778 when he purchased his estate, until 1790 when he died. My study recognizes that studies of old age, of decline and of endings are vastly outnumbered by studies of origins, of beginnings, of causes and of sources, despite the fact that within the last few years there has developed a large and growing awareness of the enormous demographic shift taking place in our own times. This shift will bring about a huge increase in both the numbers of elderly people in the developed and the developing world and a change in the proportion

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<sup>20</sup> See discussion of Cullen's exact birth date in opening section of Chapter One.

<sup>21</sup> That is to say, the first to be sanctioned by the author. An unauthorized version of Cullen's lectures on materia medica, the *Catalogus Materiae Medicae*, was published in London by two of Cullen's students in 1761. See later discussion in section 'William Cullen and materia medica', Chapter Two.

of the population as a whole that these numbers will represent. This ageing population is a global event, without precedent in human history.<sup>22</sup>

To look to the past as a way of dealing with the present and the future can have ugly historical precedents. But the current growth in the study and shared conversation of ‘medical humanities’ is a timely acknowledgement that science does not have all the answers. Maybe the best claim that can be made for the humanities is that, with the advantage of hindsight, they know better how to frame certain questions. What did patients and therapists in the past recognize as the good life and how did this differ or not differ from what we look for today? How do you cope with a life that may be long in years, but also long in morbidity and disability? How can individuals help themselves? And (very pertinent to this study), what is it the task of the medical expert to know?

In search of an answer to these sorts of questions, it may seem strange to look among the medical personnel of late eighteenth-century Scotland. The 1994 film *The Madness of King George*, though it dealt with specific and unusual circumstances, nevertheless gave an accurate picture of medical care by physicians in Great Britain at this time.<sup>23</sup> The limited understanding of disease processes, the obsessive attention to excreta, the pain involved in cupping, and the amount of philosophical and theoretical chat at the bedside were all very usual among the later Georgians. In this sense ‘Farmer George’ was at one with his people, or rather with those elements of the population who

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<sup>22</sup> Between 2015 and 2030, the number of people in the world aged 60 years or over is projected to grow by 56%, from 901 million to 1.4 billion, and by 2050, the global population of older persons is projected to more than double its size in 2015, reaching nearly 2.1 billion. *World Population Ageing 2015*, report (New York: United Nations, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> *The Madness of King George*, film (1994). Directed by Nicholas Hytner and adapted by Alan Bennett from his own play of the same title.

could afford the expensive attentions of a physician. But it will be the contention of this study that the intensely practical civic humanism of eighteenth-century Scotland, with its roots in moderate Presbyterianism and classical humanism, was exemplified by William Cullen in his life and in his person, as well as in his teaching and his care of his patients. A closer examination of the last few years of his life may have something to teach us, about attitudes as well as about historical particulars.

The paucity of studies that address the issue of old age in the eighteenth century has been augmented in recent years by a small group of scholars, primarily from the perspective of social history. These include Devoney Looser, Susannah R. Ottaway, Lynn Botelho, Pat Thane and Pat Rogers.<sup>24</sup> Devoney Looser cites Pat Rogers in her online review of Susannah Ottaway's book as commenting:

For a long time our image of the eighteenth century was dominated by males of advancing years – yet hardly anybody studied old age as it was lived and recorded in the period. The category of 'age', and more specifically 'old age', remained unmarked — and sometimes even unremarked — in our scholarship, not unlike the category 'gender' did until second-wave feminist literary critics insisted that it be attended to in its own right.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750–1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). Also see Susannah R. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Pat Rogers, 'Introduction' to special issue 'Aging and Identity: An Eighteenth-Century Perspective', *Journal of Aging and Identity* 4, 2 (1999), 55; and *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, ed. by Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane (Harlow: UK: Pearson Education, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Devoney Looser, 'Old Age as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis', a review of Susannah Ottaway (ibid) in *Eighteenth Century Theory and Interpretation*, in suppl. to vol. 46, (2005), available on-line only: <http://ecti.english.illinois.edu/volume-46-2005-supplement/>. [Dec 2017]

A more recent author, who looks at old age from a different perspective, is Helen Small.<sup>26</sup> Her standpoint is to use different kinds of philosophical context to view a selected and very varied small group of literary works. She discusses the possible reasons why old age is such an oddly neglected focus of attention, in philosophy, literature and in life. As Small asserts, 'to think differently about old age is to think differently about life itself'. Small also points out that where old age does figure in literature the focus is on the tragic and on the male.<sup>27</sup> Her aim in this book is to pick up from where Simone de Beauvoir left the subject in her 1970 essay *La Vieillesse*.<sup>28</sup>

This study will build on the work of the authors mentioned above with a focus on a particular time, a particular location and on the advice and achievement of one particular ageing, male professor. Inevitably this focus is narrower than that of the social historian, primarily engaging with the situation of what is best described as an elite. Cullen himself discussed the process of growing elderly with his often ageing patients, his usually younger students, and his increasingly wide readership. Interesting observations are made by Cullen's intellectual peers and colleagues Adam Smith and David Hume. Both Ottoway and Thane comment on the reflections of these two philosophers on ideas regarding the ageing process in the eighteenth century. For example, the following, by David Hume, makes connections with the 'stadial' theories explored by both philosophers:

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<sup>26</sup> Helen Small, *The Long Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Female old age does figure in the Bible, when considered as a literary text. The Bible also holds many narratives regarding (often tragic) elderly men. Its influence is not discussed by Small but it should be a consideration when looking at the old age of men and women in eighteenth-century Scotland.

<sup>28</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *La Vieillesse* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1970). The misleading title of the first translation into English may be connected with the comparative neglect of this important work in the critical literature. See Simone de Beauvoir, trans. Patrick O'Brien, *The Coming of Age* (London: André Deutsch, 1972).

Are the actions of the same person much diversified in the different periods of his life, from infancy to old age? This affords room for many general observations concerning the gradual change of our sentiments and inclinations, and the different maxims, which prevail in the different ages of human creatures. Even the characters, which are peculiar to each individual, have a uniformity in their influence; otherwise our acquaintance with the persons and our observation of their conduct, could never teach us their dispositions, or serve to direct our behaviour with regard to them.<sup>29</sup>

We cannot map the conversations of Smith with Hume and Cullen (both of whom were a decade or so older than Smith) though all three were known to meet regularly in Edinburgh.<sup>30</sup> But we will note, in examining documents from Cullen's consultation correspondence, the resonance of words important in the thinking of both his colleagues – for example: 'habit', 'custom', 'sensibility', 'luxury', 'observation', 'passion' and 'fact'. I hope to demonstrate that the philosophical approach Cullen shared with his colleagues gives a very particular Scottish dimension to his achievement, which existed in creative tension with the many forces which pulled the other way.<sup>31</sup> A late-Augustan North Briton he may have been, but the fundamentals of his teaching, his moral philosophy in fact, was Scots.

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<sup>29</sup> David Hume 'Of Liberty and Necessity', in ed. Tom Beauchamp *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: a Critical Edition* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) p66. 1<sup>st</sup> edn: London: A. Millar, 1777. Hume is also recorded as being of the opinion that being 65 years old was quite old enough. Iain Gordon Brown, *pers. comm.*

<sup>30</sup> When Cullen and Hume were in their 60s, Smith was in his 50s. David Hume, 1711–1779, Adam Smith, 1723–1790.

<sup>31</sup> This is not to exclude other important figures such as Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) and Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), but to acknowledge the particularly close relationship of the three under discussion here. See 'Envoi' to concluding chapter of this thesis.

The achievement of Hume and Smith has loomed very large in the critical literature concerning the Scottish Enlightenment since this particular ‘enlightenment’ first came under academic scrutiny in Britain some 60 years ago. Joined now perhaps by James Hutton and Joseph Black, Hume and Smith still dominate Edinburgh’s memory of itself at these times. As the history of medicine developed as a discipline in parallel with studies of the Scottish Enlightenment, a number of historians looked more closely at the resonance of philosophical ideas in Cullen’s teaching. Important contributions have been made by Christopher Lawrence, Rosalie Stott, Michael Barfoot and more recently, Neil Vickers.<sup>32</sup> These authors make considerable use, in their commentaries, of Cullen’s clinical lectures to students published after his death in 1797, but circulated in various manuscript forms among students before then.<sup>33</sup> These contributions represent scholarly excavations beyond John Thomson’s biography and beyond Cullen’s own publications. In my examination of Cullen’s correspondence to his patients I hope to demonstrate that a further level of analysis is now available.

### **The historical evidence relating to Cullen’s situation**

Due to the careful archiving of documents compiled during the writing of the Thomson biography, there are a number of Cullen-related manuscript documents held in the

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher Lawrence, ‘Cullen, Brown and the Poverty of Essentialism’, *Medical History*, suppl. 8 (1988), 1–21; Rosalie Stott, ‘Health and Virtue: or how to keep out of harm’s way. Lectures on pathology and therapeutics by William Cullen’, *Medical History*, 2, 31 (April 1987), 123–42; Michael Barfoot, ‘Dr William Cullen and Mr Adam Smith: A Case of Hypochondriasis’, *Proceedings of The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 21, 2 (1991), 204–14; Neil Vickers, ‘Aspects of Character, Self and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment’, in eds. Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), pp. 145–61.

<sup>33</sup> See for example, *Clinical Lectures, Delivered in the Years 1765 and 1766, by William Cullen, M.D. Taken in Short-hand by a Gentleman Who Attended*, ed. by Anon (London: Mr. Lee and Mr. Hurst, Paternoster-Row, 1797).

Special Collections of the University of Glasgow, many of them not cited either by Thomson et al. or by other authors after 1859.<sup>34</sup> A selection from these documents will be examined in the context of the existing secondary literature, and of the literature available to Cullen and his contemporaries. This study will also take advantage of the online archive, created by a research team directed by David Shuttleton at the School of Critical Studies in the University of Glasgow, of Cullen's consultation correspondence. This digital archive (launched online in May 2015) was created from high-resolution photographs of the letters, which are held in bound volumes in the Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh (RCPE). These letters are primarily a three-cornered discussion between Cullen, his patients and their own doctors. There are also letters from friends and relatives of the patients in the archive. The compiled documents, which include 5,603 letters reporting on 2,499 'patient cases', have been digitally photographed, transcribed and their contents databased for publication online.<sup>35</sup> The letters have also been processed for further analysis, using 'XML' type software, developed for this purpose at the University of Glasgow.

A further aim of this thesis will be to examine the material remains of Cullen's retirement project at Ormiston Hill and the texts and images that relate to these remains. Some of my central research questions will be to ask: what evidence exists for understanding Cullen's intentions during his years of semi-retirement, how were his

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<sup>34</sup> For a full account of how the Cullen manuscript archive has been assembled see David Shuttleton, 'An Account of William Cullen: John Thomson and the Making of a Medical Biography', in *Scottish Medicine and Literary Culture, 1720–1830*, ed. by Megan Coyer and David E. Shuttleton (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), p. 240.

<sup>35</sup> See Cullen Consultation Correspondence (CCC) online database (University of Glasgow and Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, 2014) funded by AHRC; *The Cullen Project: the Consultation Letters of Dr William Cullen (1710-1790) at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, <http://cullenproject.ac.uk/20> [Jan. 2017].

intentions and his achievement related to his social and cultural environment and how did his retirement project relate to his medical teaching?

### **Why these topics of investigation – and why now?**

Research for this thesis developed from my initial visit to the site of William Cullen's estate at Ormiston Hill in West Lothian in 2011. To acquire such a piece of land and to look forward to developing it (as Cullen certainly did) seemed to be a gesture both commonplace for his age and status, but also one freighted with significance in relation to his medical persona. The acquisition of land by a man of professional or commercial background is often an act of socio-cultural and sometimes political positioning, a means of 'buying into' the landed gentry. Cullen seemed to be very much looking to the future as he worked on his land and buildings during the last 12 years of his life. It is possible and worthwhile to unpick this significant gesture and to make connections from it to a larger story of what it might signify in Georgian Scotland. What does it tell us of the expectations of old age among three distinct groups of people: Cullen's peers, his students and his patients? The online CCC promises to be a rich historical resource, which until the launch of the web-site in May 2015, had been difficult to access physically.

Having arrived at a promising subject for research, I started to think about my own particular reasons for undertaking it in a particular time and place. It raised questions about my own historiographical view-point and the reverberations of this subject today. Historiographically, we are situated at a time when the arts-based 'history of medicine' is giving way to the discipline, or rather group of disciplines known as 'medical humanities' – which are themselves influenced by current developments in the fast growing field of 'digital humanities'. This group of disciplines encompasses a very broad range of approaches to the study of the history of medicine, now seen as closely connected to the

more patient-focused history of health care. Medical humanities are also now included in the curriculum for teaching students of medicine.<sup>36</sup> Just how wide and diverse an approach has been developed is demonstrated by the list of topics covered in a recent major publication: the affective body, biomedicine, blindness, breath, disability, early modern medical practice, fatness, the genome, language, madness, narrative, race, systems biology, performance, the postcolonial, public health, touch, twins, voice and wonder.<sup>37</sup> Both the support and the funding of the Wellcome Trust have been influential in these rapid and interesting changes, through the funding of university posts, conferences, exhibitions, projects and publications. But in some ways it can seem as if the socio-cultural study of the history of medicine, as initiated in the earlier work of Foucault and followed through with such astonishing productivity by Roy Porter and the cluster of scholars based at the Wellcome Institute and U.C.L. is now rather subsumed in the proliferation of disciplines that make up medical humanities. This proliferation is different in the different centres of activity, which include London, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Manchester, Durham and Newcastle.

My own subject position as a mature student in her 60s, with a husband 15 years older, was germane to my research. Contemporary attitudes to old age and retirement are themselves very much in transition – for example in regard to the setting of an official date for retirement, often taken to be the date of commencement of the state retirement pension. As individuals between 50 and 60 years of age move towards this date (until

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<sup>36</sup> The arts-based study of the history of medicine itself is closely connected with the study of medical ethics, for students of medicine, first developed in Scotland at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow in the late 1970s.

<sup>37</sup> *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities*, ed. by Anne Whitehead and Angela Woods, assoc. eds, Sarah Atkinson, Jane MacNaughton and Jennifer Richards (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

recently 60 years of age for women), the moment of retirement recedes before them due to changes in UK government policy. There is a growing debate about whether retirement is necessary for those who are fit and willing to work and the state is waking up to the cost of supporting a growing cohort of the population living so much longer than ever before. But what of the many who are not fit and able, but facing years of coping with the life-cramping nature of disability and multiple illnesses? This debate was already under-way in 2012, when my researches for this thesis began - but now it is much louder. And what about the 'unfair' voting power of this ever expanding demographic? It can be argued that since the financial crash of 2008, the old have been supported through the ensuing economic depression at the expense of the young. My own demographic position is within that of the 'baby-boomers', who received so much in the way of support from the state when they were young, and some of whom were able to buy their own homes and benefit from this investment in a way that is a very distant prospect for the young of today. Suddenly it seems that the interests of the young are pitched directly against the interests of the old as never before, or at least since the 'invention of teenager' in the late 1950s. Novelists, playwrights, artists and composers have long recognized this situation of course, but now it is a much debated subject by politicians and the media.

It is a curiously unpleasant feeling to suspect oneself of being newly surplus to the requirements of wider society. And for those of us who have been lucky in avoiding the exigencies of politics, fate, or genetics in our life so far, it is also a shock. One finds oneself in a place that can best be described as 'liminal', a point of transition between two states. Cullen was particularly unfortunate in the cascade of circumstances that beset his very final years. But perhaps the elderly, even such as Cullen, have always been

liminal. Except to the gerontologist, the sociologist and a growing handful of social historians, until recently they have also been curiously invisible to scholarship.

Having recognized that old age and retirement are contested issues in our own time, the Scottish focus of my researches involves another issue that is also very 'live' today: how did the relationship between England and Scotland play out in Cullen's late career – and how is this relationship developing today? In fact the debate about the political union between England and Scotland today is possibly more heated than it has been at any time since the 'Wilkes and Liberty' furore of the 1760s. The words 'North Britain', much associated with this commotion, were used to refer to Scotland in the second half of the eighteenth century. Significantly, the words do not appear to be used until the Jacobite rising of 1745 was some years in the past, and it is interesting to speculate whether the term 'North British' was used most frequently of the Scots, or by the Scots. What is clear is that self-identification as 'British', as well as or instead of 'Scots', was a widespread impulse in Cullen's peer group during the Scottish Enlightenment at the time of his own ascendancy. Also many of his correspondents addressed their letters to him 'North Britain'. It was part of the process of individual and societal improvement to strive to eliminate 'Scotticisms' – and to show enthusiastic support for English aspects of British culture. As the 'post-'45' settlement stabilised, Scots looked beyond their established patterns of travel and exchange with various European states, to opportunities afforded by their increasingly wealthy, more powerful and (after 1763) peaceful neighbour, England. By the mid-century an ever-growing number of well-educated Scots were heading south looking for jobs, and transport connections by water and over-land, though still difficult, were starting to improve. Scotland was not big

enough or economically developed enough, and too much in the grip of the London-based patronage system, to find room for this tidal surge of talent and opportunism.<sup>38</sup>

But apart from a decade or so of powerful anti-Scots sentiment (particularly in London) around the middle of the century, it seems doubtful whether the majority of the power brokers of the British polity ever knew or cared as much about what England thought of Scotland, half as much as Scots cared about the view from London. It would be easy to say ‘it was ever thus’ and to assume that the same is true of the independence debate today. But in fact this debate is taking place on both sides of the Scottish/English border and being amplified by new media all around the world. It is not only people who live in Scotland who are thinking hard about what it means to be British.<sup>39</sup>

### **A plan for research: chapter by chapter**

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into four main chapters. Chapter One (‘Old Age’) will begin by examining some documentary evidence relating to his own old age and his published comments on old age. The chapter will explore Cullen’s use of a more eighteenth-century, classically-rooted vocabulary, including such words as ‘valetudinary’, ‘hypochondriac’, ‘regimen’ and ‘hygiene’. Evidence of his attitude to old age will be discussed with reference to three unpublished manuscripts, and also in

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<sup>38</sup> Linda Colley puts figures to this ‘surge’ in relation to medical personnel: from 1750–1850 Oxford and Cambridge University produced some 500 doctors – universities in Scotland produced 10,000. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 123.

<sup>39</sup> The point remains true, though of course the question of Brexit has cast these debates about identity in a new light.

relation to Sir John Sinclair's account of old age in his *Code of Health*.<sup>40</sup> Finally, the chapter will discuss the case histories of three of Cullen's elderly patients, using information newly available through the online CCC Project.

Chapter Two ('Medical Gardening') explores the different aspects of Cullen's understanding of plant-based knowledge – and how this impacted on his advice to his elderly patients. The teaching of plant-based materia medica will be explained and the legacy of Cullen's publications on the subject will be investigated. Also the detail and variety of his experience with plants in his early career (which was unusual for a senior teaching physician) will be described. The particular plant-based medicines, or 'botanicals' used by the three patients examined in the last chapter will be identified – and the method used to carry out this study explained. Comparisons and contrasts with the approach of Cullen's colleague Professor John Hope will be made, which will include a discussion of eighteenth-century 'cameralism'. Finally Cullen's correspondence concerning the elderly Dr Samuel Johnson will be discussed – with a particular focus on Johnson's use of botanicals in the last few months of his life.

Chapter Three ('A Neo-classical Retirement') will look closely at a letter about his 'retirement project' from Cullen to his friend and colleague William Hunter in London. This letter contains indications of how Cullen himself viewed his project and how he thought the world might view it. It also gives some detail about what he intended to do with his newly purchased small estate. Following the pointers of this letter, this chapter and the next investigate two Edinburgh-based 'virtuosi' who, like Cullen, were only just

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<sup>40</sup> Sir John Sinclair, *The Code of Health and Longevity; or A concise view of the Principles calculated for the Preservation of Health and the attainment of Long Life. Being an attempt to prove the practicability of condensing within a narrow compass the most material information hitherto accumulated, regarding the most useful arts and sciences or any particular branch thereof* (Edinburgh: D Ramsay and Son; London: Archibald Constable, T. Cadell, W. Davies, and J. Murray, 1807).

within the socio-cultural circles to which they aspired. These individuals are Allan Ramsay, the painter, and James Craig, the architect. In ways that have not been fully explored before, Cullen can be seen to share the North British, Augustan ideals that so dominated and shaped the city of Edinburgh during the years he dominated its university. Cullen's reference in his letter to William Shenstone's garden at the Leasowes is also investigated.

Where previous chapters have examined the intellectual and biographical context of Cullen's retirement project, Chapter Four ('Ormiston Hill') turns to the site itself. There are three major sources of information available: the first being what can be seen on the site today, the second being detail presented by John Thomson in his *Account* of Cullen's life, and the third being the comprehensive write-up of the parish given by the Rev. Alexander Lockhart Simpson in the *New Statistical Account* of Kirknewton published in 1845.<sup>41</sup> One particular aspect of Cullen's project will be singled out for closer examination: the tablets inscribed with verse from Horace placed at the top and bottom of his estate. His plans for an 'Horation' retreat will be set alongside the parallel and exactly contemporary activities of the Scottish artist, Allan Ramsay, researching and digging at the very site of Horace's villa in Italy. I will then examine some comments from visitors to the estate during Cullen's lifetime. Finally I will survey some other estates in eighteenth-century Scotland created by other high achieving professional men.

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<sup>41</sup> J. Gordon, ed., *The New Statistical Account of Scotland / by the ministers of the respective parishes, under the superintendence of a committee of the Society for the Benefit of the Sons and Daughters of the Clergy*, Kirknewton, Edinburgh (Edinburgh: Blackwoods and Sons, 1845), I, 433. Available at University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, (1999) The Statistical Accounts of Scotland online service: <http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/link/nsa-vol1-p433-parish-edinburgh-kirknewton>. From this point on this reference will be abbreviated *New Stat. Acc. Kirknewton*.

## A review of the Cullen-related literature

The scholarly literature relating to the study of the life and works of William Cullen is dominated by two works. The first is *An Account of the Life Lectures and Writings of William Cullen* by John Thomson et al., mentioned earlier, and the second is the collection of essays about Cullen's life and works published in 1993 following the 1990 Edinburgh symposium and exhibition to mark the bicentenary of his death in 1790.<sup>42</sup> Each of these works was the achievement of a group of medical men and research academics. The next major development in Cullen studies was also to be a group effort, namely the aforementioned launch of the digitally accessible CCC by the University of Glasgow and the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in May 2015. It would appear that the nineteenth, the twentieth and the twenty-first century has each produced a major response to Cullen that could be considered appropriate to the times.

As the study and practice of medicine became professionalized in the nineteenth century, in the context of a better understanding of physiology and disease processes, the achievements of the eighteenth-century physicians became neglected, even often derided. In this respect the publication of John Thomson's lengthy and respectful biography in 1859 was unusual. Thanks to the existence of the Thomson volumes and (as previously mentioned) Cullen's fame in the United States of America, Cullen continued to secure more than just a footnote in the histories of medical discoveries and breakthroughs and of medical institutions that dominated the history of medicine for the next 100 years.

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<sup>42</sup> ed. by Doig et al.

However from the mid-twentieth century on, under the strong influence of Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault and Roy Porter, the systems-based science, and the 'market place'-related activities of eighteenth-century teachers and practitioners like Cullen came under a different and less hostile scrutiny, and the study of social history of medicine in eighteenth-century Britain flourished, with centres of excellence in the Universities of Edinburgh, Leeds, and University College London. The important role of the Wellcome Institute in London and the America-based Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society (ECSSS) in furthering these studies should also be acknowledged. The 1993 Cullen Symposium in Edinburgh had the effect of both pulling the scholarship of the previous three decades together, and of moving that scholarship on.<sup>43</sup> Before this date and in the order of their initial significant contribution to Cullen-related studies, the following authors have a substantial presence in the literature: J. B. Morrell (1971), Arthur Donovan (1975), Christopher Lawrence (1979), Georges Rousseau (1980), W. F. Bynum (1981), Rosalie Stott (1987), J. V. Golinsky (1988), Charles Withers (1989) and Lisa Rosner (1991).<sup>44</sup> As author, editor and director of the ECSSS, Richard Sher has contributed since the 1980s to studies of eighteenth-century Scotland in many fields, including the Cullen-

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<sup>43</sup> This was observed by Mike Barfoot in his introduction to a facsimile edition of Thomson's biography of Cullen. See M. Barfoot, 'Introduction', in John Thomson et al., *An Account of the Life, Lectures and Writings of William Cullen M.D.*, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1832–1859; repr. Bristol: Thoemess Press, 1997), pp. v–viii.

<sup>44</sup> J. B. Morrell, 'The University of Edinburgh in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century: Its Scientific Eminence and Academic Structure', *Isis*, 62, 2 (Summer 1971), 158–71; A. L. Donovan, *Philosophical Chemistry in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Doctrines and Discoveries of William Cullen and Joseph Black* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975); Christopher Lawrence, 'The Nervous System and Society in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*, ed. by Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1979), pp. 19–40; G. S. Rousseau, 'Psychology', in *The Ferment of Knowledge: Studies in the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Science*, ed. by G. S. Rousseau and R. Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 143–210; W. F. Bynum and V. Nutton, eds, 'Theories of Fever from Antiquity to the Enlightenment', *Medical History*, suppl. 1 (1981); Stott, 'Health and Virtue', pp. 123–42; J. V. Golinsky, 'Utility and Audience in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Chemistry: Case Studies of William Cullen and Joseph Priestley', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 21, 1 (1988), 1–31; Charles W. J. Withers, 'William Cullen's Agricultural Lectures and Writings and the Development of Agricultural Science in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *The Agricultural History Review*, 2, 37 (1989), 144–56; Lisa Rosner, *Medical Education in the Age of Improvement: Edinburgh students and apprentices 1760–1826* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

related literature.<sup>45</sup> At the Cullen anniversary event in Edinburgh in 1990, W. F. Bynum, J. R. R. Christie, Mike Barfoot, Guenter Risse and Roger Emerson also made important additions to Cullen studies in papers that were published in 1993.<sup>46</sup> To the present day most of the scholars already mentioned have continued to contribute to the ongoing discussion. However, it would seem, looking back on the scatter of important Cullen-related research over the last 50 years, that 1985–1995 was something of a golden era for Cullen studies. Since 2000, Paul Wood, Wayne Wild, Georgette Taylor and Matthew Eddy have become important additions to the list.<sup>47</sup> Along with contributions from the supervisors of the Cullen Consultation Project (Jennifer Bann, David Shuttleton and Mark Herraghty), two authors have made more recent contributions, namely Jeffrey Wolf and Jane Rendall. Jeffrey Wolf's PhD thesis on Cullen of 2015 looks at a broad range of Cullen's medical teachings and theories and repositions him as a more marginal and challenging figure in the Edinburgh medical establishment than he has often been portrayed. Jane Rendall's two articles on William Cullen discuss Cullen's last years, looking at the significance for his family of his dying in debt and how the painful situation

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<sup>45</sup> For example, see Deborah C. Brunton, 'The Transfer of Medical Education: Teaching at the Edinburgh and Philadelphia Medical Schools', in *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. by Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 242ff; also Andrew Hook, 'Philadelphia, Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment', same volume, p. 227ff.

<sup>46</sup> W. F. Bynum, 'Cullen and the nervous system', J. R. R. Christie, 'William Cullen and the practice of chemistry'; Mike Barfoot 'Philosophy and method in Cullen's teaching', G. B. Risse, 'Cullen as clinician: organization and strategies of an eighteenth century medical practice', R. L. Emerson, 'Medical men, politicians and the medical schools at Glasgow and Edinburgh', all in *William Cullen*, ed. by Doig et al., pp. 152-163, 98-110, 110-133, 133-152, 186-216.

<sup>47</sup> See Withers and Wood, *Science and Medicine*, pp. 1, 79, 327. Both editors are authors of the 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' to this book and Charles Withers and Roger Emerson contribute the chapter 'Science and Enlightenment in Glasgow, 1690–1802'; Wayne Wild, *Medicine-by-post: The changing voice of illness in eighteenth-century British consultation letters and literature*, Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine, Clio Medica 79 (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp.175–243; Georgette Taylor, 'Unification Achieved: William Cullen's Theory of Heat and Phlogiston as an example of his Philosophical Chemistry', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 39, 4 (Dec. 2006), 477–501; Matthew Eddy, *The Language of Mineralogy: John Walker, Chemistry and the Edinburgh Medical School 1750–1800* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2008).

that resulted played out over many years.<sup>48</sup> Rendall also highlights a hitherto little known literary work, *Home: A Novel*, written by Cullen's daughter Margaret, written in the shadow of these sad family circumstances.<sup>49</sup> This author follows Mike Barfoot, L. S. Jacyna and Christopher Lawrence in alerting Cullen scholars to the fact that the Thomson biography is influenced by the particular agenda of the medical authors involved, and is sometimes unreliable.<sup>50</sup> The preface by Mike Barfoot to a 1997 edition of John Thomson's *Account* includes a useful discussion of Cullen scholarship to this date.<sup>51</sup> He details very clearly some of the shortcomings of Thomson et al. as biography and as a record of Cullen's writing and teaching, but he also emphasizes the value and scale of the achievement of this group of authors. Concluding the Preface he makes the following observation:

By working on the *Life*, perhaps Thomson hit upon a personal system for organizing the perceptions of his [Cullen's] changing medical life. He certainly set standards for medical biography which were rarely equalled and never surpassed... Above all [he] wrote to convey Cullen's 'ardour in the culture of philosophy'.<sup>52</sup> How many young men embarking on a career in medicine read Thomson's biography and were inspired by the example of Cullen the man? We

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<sup>48</sup> Jeffrey Charles Wolf, 'Our Master & Father at the Head of Physick: The Learned Medicine of William Cullen' (doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2015); Jane Rendall, 'The reputation of William Cullen (1710–1790): Family, politics, and the biography of an "ornate physician"', *Scottish Historical Review*, 93, 2, (2014), 262–85; Jane Rendall, 'Family Politics and Reform in Margaret Cullen's *Home: A Novel* (1802)', in *Women in Eighteenth Century Scotland: Intimate, Intellectual and Public Lives*, ed. by Katie Barclay and Deborah Simonton (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), p. 75ff.

<sup>50</sup> Christopher Lawrence, 'The Edinburgh Medical School and the End of the Old Thing, 1790–1830', *History of Universities*, 7 (1988), 259–86; Barfoot, 'Introduction', in Thomson et al., *An Account...* ; (repr. 1997), pp. v–viii. L. S. Jacyna, *Philosophic Whigs: Medicine, Science and Citizenship in Edinburgh, 1789–1848* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 111ff.

<sup>51</sup> Barfoot, 'Introduction', in ed. by Thomson et al. *An Account...*, (repr. 1997), pp. v–viii.

<sup>52</sup> Barfoot's reference: *The of Works William Cullen*, ed. by Thomson, vol. 1, p. 399.

will never know. Nevertheless, we can be reasonably confident that they read the *Life* as a work of medical ethics, history, and metaphysics as well as biography.

It is a pity and at odds with the reason for producing them in the first place (the scarcity of the originals), that the volumes in which this important preface appears are now out of print and quite difficult to access.<sup>53</sup>

I have also found the recent work of Michael Brown on the medical personnel and medical-related institutions of the City of York illuminating for the contrasts and similarities that can be drawn with Cullen's situation in Edinburgh.<sup>54</sup> Although a provincial centre rather than a capital city, York had both a strong sense of its own civic dignity, history and importance and a similar sense to Edinburgh of having to work very hard to keep up with metropolitan London. Its physicians were similarly concerned to defend and develop their gentlemanly status and they sometimes took on the care of an estate to this end. Brown situates their teaching and practice within their broader social, cultural setting, in a way I hope to do in this study of Cullen's final years.<sup>55</sup> There are other works by the authors so far mentioned that have been identified as useful for the development of this current investigation, though not directly concerned with the life and achievement of William Cullen. Three important examples of such are *New Medical Challenges during the Scottish Enlightenment*, by Guenter Risse, *Nervous Acts: Essays On Literature, Culture and Sensibility*, by Georges Rousseau and the previously mentioned *Science Incarnate: Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge* edited by Christopher

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<sup>53</sup> There are now various online editions but a number of these have been copied poorly.

<sup>54</sup> Brown, *Performing Medicine*.

<sup>55</sup> Brown names certain estates and doctors but does not give very much further detail.

Lawrence and Steven Shapin.<sup>56</sup> When considering the particular issues of old age and retirement in relation to Cullen it has been helpful to place their approach alongside authors such as Devoney Looser and Pat Rogers (mentioned earlier), who engage with these specific topics.

Finally, although the work of Roy Porter has only been alluded to briefly, his achievement as an editor, author and (very often) co-author is remarkable. In an immensely long list of publications he explored many aspects of health care in eighteenth-century Britain. His focus is frequently London, and his view as often from the patient's as from the doctor's perspective. The doctors Porter discusses are situated in their social, cultural and commercial environment as well as their intellectual milieu. Although he does not himself write at length about Cullen, works such as *Medicine and the Five Senses*, *William Hunter and the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Medical World* and *Literature and Medicine During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* are cited very frequently in the Cullen-related literature.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

To bring this introductory chapter to a close, and to pull some threads together, it is useful to highlight the significance of a particular individual in relation to our three-cornered enquiry into William Cullen, old age and retirement. This individual is Sir John

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<sup>56</sup> Guenter Risse, *New Medical Challenges during the Scottish Enlightenment* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005); G. S. Rousseau, *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility* (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

<sup>57</sup> See W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds, *Medicine and the Five Senses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); eds. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter, *William Hunter and the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Medical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Marie Mulvey Roberts and Roy Porter, eds, *Literature and Medicine during the Eighteenth Century*, from the 'Wellcome Institute series in the History of Medicine' (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).

Sinclair – the ‘indefatigable Sir John’ as he was styled (to his own delight) by ‘[my] old and much respected friend’, Abbé Gregoire, Bishop of Blois. The remark was written in a book gifted to the author, Sir John, ‘recently’ and was reported by Sir John himself in his own selection from a life-time of correspondence, published in 1831.<sup>58</sup> This publication carries testimony to Sir John’s own affection for William Cullen, though the only letter that is cited between them concerns the delicate matter of an unnamed student Sir John requests Cullen to recommend – a request Cullen politely but firmly declines.<sup>59</sup> There are a number of ‘Sinclairs’ in the CCC, including one or two in the far north-east of Scotland who may well be relatives, but no direct correspondence between the two men. But demonstrating, or being unable to demonstrate particular lines of personal connection is not so germane to this thesis as the fact that Sinclair is the source for two very important kinds of documentary evidence; *The Statistical Account for Scotland* (and its successor the *New Statistical Account*) provide invaluable evidence of Cullen’s achievements at Ormiston Hill.<sup>60</sup> And Sinclair’s *Code of Health* is a summarisation of both the historic and the contemporary ‘literature’ of old age. Both these sources are examined in the next chapter, where I also address the potential anomaly of using sources that post-date the death of Cullen (1790).

The following is taken from an exchange of letters between Sir John and the philosopher Dr Adam Ferguson in 1803:

Here are three of us born the same year, viz. 1723. There is little difference in our appearance, only that I am the least weather-beaten of the three. I have had the

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<sup>58</sup> See ‘Advertisement’ by Sir John Sinclair in his *Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. Sir John Sinclair Bart.*, 2 vols (London: Colburn and Bentley 1831), vol. 1, p. vi.

<sup>59</sup> Sinclair, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 483.

<sup>60</sup> For full references to both *Accounts* see Glossary, p. 17.

advantage of exemption from toil, and they, till of late have had the advantage of sobriety. But there is another twelve years older than we are, having been born in 1712. A peasant of this parish. His sobriety you need not doubt. The world, for ought he has seen of it, may not be twelve miles broad or long; but he has been distinguished through life for vivacity, is veridic, open spoken, and quoted for bon mots. He was of good aspect and stature, but is now blind, and much shrunk, goes through all his usual haunts without any assistance or guide, is even offended by being offered any. 'I see as well as you do of a dark night', he said to me, 'and why may not I find my way as well as you do? They tell me I have lived long, but it is just a gliff'.<sup>62</sup> I have often thought to get our minister to answer all your queries respecting this person, but you know the consequences of procrastination after fourscore...

Sinclair's reply includes the following:

I am happy to find, that you preserve good health, and retain such vigour of mind, and powers of reflection...Remember Ulysses's prescription to his father Laertes, 'Warm baths, good food, soft sleep, and generous wine, These are the rights of age, and should be thine'  
As I continue to collect as much information as possible regarding longevity, I should be glad to have the questions on the subject answered regarding the old man in your neighbourhood...<sup>63</sup>

In this exchange, Ferguson, aged 80, is writing about two other 80-year olds, and an individual aged 92 to the 49-year old Sir John, who recalls and records the

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<sup>62</sup> 'Anything that lasts for only a short time'; one of the meanings of this Scots word cited in the on-line Dictionary of Scots Language. See <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/gliff> [Jan 2017].

<sup>63</sup> For both letters see Sinclair, *Correspondence*, vol. I, 429.

correspondence aged 76. Like Cullen, Adam Ferguson developed his own 'improved farm' at Bankhead. Sinclair's final remark regarding 'more information please' is in accord with the push of both his earlier *Statistical Account*, and the *Code* – to gather information via an elite, about the population as a whole.



Fig. 1

William Cullen's house on his estate at Ormiston Hill. North-west facing elevation.

Photo: Iain Milne.



Fig. 2

Looking south to the Pentland Hills from the south-west corner of Cullen's estate.

Photo: Iain Milne.



Fig. 3

William Cullen's house, called here 'Ormiston Hill', and the course of the Gogar burn through the dingle can be seen south-west of Kirknewton. Individual sub-let small farms on Cullen's land were situated at 'the Latch', 'Burnbrae' and 'Stoneyrig'. Detail from Knox, *Map of Edinburghshire* (Edinburgh: 1812).

Image in public domain:

<http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/link/osa-vol9-p415-parish-edinburgh-kirknewton>



## Chapter One: Old Age

### Mapping old age in Enlightenment Scotland

Cullen's estate at Ormiston Hill might have been located on a cold, windy, and north-west-facing hill in Midlothian (a place that his contemporaries found eccentric) but in a broader socio-cultural sense it was an effective gesture of 'positioning', both topographically and socially.<sup>1</sup> It was an important demonstration of his identity as a North British gentleman scholar, who can be recognized retrospectively as being of a late-Augustan ilk. But a chosen retirement project in later life is a privilege. Cullen's own old age may have been presented as 'exemplary,' particularly by the acquisition of his estate, but how typical was it for the period, for the location and for his socio-economic peer group? Intriguingly, as Jane Rendall and David Shuttleton have commented, although his biographer John Thomson gives the date of Cullen's birth as 1710, according to his daughter Robina, Cullen himself claimed to have been born in 1713.<sup>2</sup> If his birthdate was 1710, Cullen would have died in 1790 at the age of 80, but if it was 1713 his age would have been 77. Maisie Steven mentions in her commentary on Sinclair's *Old Statistical Account* that it was common practice for individuals who would have been elderly at the time the *Account* was compiled to calculate their age in relation to significant past events.

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<sup>1</sup> Cullen's house and his estate is oriented a little north of north-west. The Pentland Hills run from Edinburgh in the north-east to an area to the west of the village of Dolphinton in the south-west. They 'face' north-west and south-east. For convenience I will use 'north-west' and 'south-east' when referring to the aspect of Cullen's garden, farm and buildings.

<sup>2</sup> See John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 1. Also Rendall, 'The Reputation of William Cullen', 262–285. More detail on the age dispute is given within David E. Shuttleton's critique of the Thomson biography 'An Account of William Cullen: John Thomson and the Making of Medical Biography', in eds. Coyer and Shuttleton, p. 258.

Perhaps Cullen was old enough himself to be subject to such lack of precision, although this would be unusual in a highly educated man.<sup>3</sup>

Susannah Ottaway, in her 2004 study of old age in England in the eighteenth century, describes the increased general social awareness of the stages of life and the precise age of individuals as an aspect of bureaucratic processes that became more complex and far reaching during the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> As a newly flourishing part of the British state, from the mid-century on, Scotland became more subject to such processes. More efficient political and economic control from a distant metropolitan centre required better mapping of land, of goods and of people. And this desire of the state for improved understanding was met within Cullen's milieu with a 'systems-based' perception of both human and scientific phenomena. A statutory requirement for such taxonomic mapping came together (happily for certain individuals in mid-eighteenth-century Scotland) with a strong intellectual inclination to classify.<sup>5</sup> The results are as varied as Cullen's complex nosology of patients' symptoms and a new enthusiasm in academic Scotland for the easy-to-understand plant taxonomies of Carl Linnaeus.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Maisie Steven, *Parish Life in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: A Review of the Old Statistical Account* (Dalkeith, Scotland: Scottish Cultural Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 2002), p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, p. 278.

<sup>5</sup> John Thomson notes that it was Cullen's role to act as the classifier of others' observations, and that 'for these purposes he had fallen on good days'. John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 678.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Withers has explored the significance of geography and topography in the thought and achievement of eighteenth-century Scotland in a number of publications, including *Geography, Science and National Identity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Nigel Leask and Matthew Eddy have looked at the very different figures of Robert Burns and the Rev. John Walker with a similar historico-geographical analysis. See Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Eddy, *Language of Mineralogy*.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientists and historians of science have respected ideas of progress and ‘getting there first’, more than they have appreciated the search for broader knowledge and the relationships between things of the taxonomically minded natural scientists of the eighteenth century. It has taken the twentieth century, arts-based development of the history of medicine (in part inspired by Michel Foucault), and more recently still, ‘medical humanities’, to look again at the achievement of some contributors to the Scottish Enlightenment who have tended to be damned with faint praise (or damned with not even that), because their model of progress was not evolutionary. Prominent among such figures are both William Cullen and his professional Edinburgh colleague the physician and botanist John Hope (1725–1786).<sup>7</sup> The classifiers and systematisers were also sometimes reluctant to publish because they considered that their understanding of a topic was never perfect and finished, but always in a process of improving. Cullen articulated this reluctance extremely well on a number of occasions, but overcame it and published at times very successfully. Because Hope failed to publish much of significance, he has been retrospectively dismissed, until very recently, as a botanist of minor achievement.

### **1789: William Cullen’s final days and his final letter to a patient**

This section will look closer at the circumstances of William Cullen’s own old age and will then examine the very last letter he sent to one of his corresponding patients. This particular patient is not elderly, but Cullen’s approach illustrates how a significant proportion of his correspondents behaved and were regarded ‘as if’ they were elderly.

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<sup>7</sup> See especially Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2009).

Towards the close of 1789 William Cullen's own health was failing. His biographer John Thomson notes that he heard Cullen teaching just once, giving the introductory lecture to his well-established course of lectures on the theory of physic, at the beginning of the university academic year. Thomson did not attend any further lectures as it was clear that Cullen was very frail – and (understandably, as an impecunious student) he did not wish to risk payment for a course of lectures that might not be completed.<sup>8</sup> Thomson goes on, in a later section of his *Account* of Cullen's life, to record the sequence of events that followed. On 30<sup>th</sup> December 1789 Cullen announced his resignation from teaching at the university, a gesture which precipitated a cascade of appreciation from his peers and students (including such luminaries as Benjamin Rush), that can only have been gratifying, if Cullen had been well enough to understand.<sup>9</sup> By 9<sup>th</sup> January 1790 he was requiring constant attendance by his physician son Henry and his family, and on 5<sup>th</sup> February Cullen died at his Edinburgh home in Mint Close. At his particular request his body was carried to Kirknewton, where he was buried in the parish kirkyard on 10<sup>th</sup> February.

Cullen's colleagues noticed increasing symptoms of 'palsy' in his last months, but as a cause of death this is disputed by Thomson – who was himself a surgeon of considerable repute. Thomson writes that the actual cause of Cullen's death will never be known, as the one person who could possibly provide a definitive answer, Cullen's son Henry, died himself eight months later.<sup>10</sup> Irony is too strong a word, but this was certainly a quirk of fate for one who always insisted (often against his colleagues) on the usefulness of the post mortem procedure – if only for discovering the physician's mistakes.

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<sup>8</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 658.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 682.

On 26<sup>th</sup> Dec 1789, just four days before his letter of resignation to the university, Cullen dictated directions in a letter regarding the care of a Mr William Charteris.<sup>11</sup> At this time Cullen himself was either 77 or 80 years of age. This letter proved to be the very last signed by Cullen himself to be sent out to his corresponding patients and their professional or familial carers. His son, the aforementioned Henry Cullen, took over aspects of the correspondence during the last weeks of his father's life. This letter was dictated to an amanuensis and copied for Cullen's records on James Watt's copying machine, the original being sent to its destination.<sup>12</sup> Cullen was one of the first recipients of this machine (1780) which used fine paper dampened with water and a simple roller press to copy documents written with special ink. These copies were easily legible through the thin paper. They were dried, filed and eventually bound back-to-front. This process replaced both the time-consuming and possibly cumulatively expensive copying of letters 'out' for filing, and the filing of (sometimes illegible) first drafts. Cullen used this machine until his death in 1790 and the copies of documents made have survived the intervening years remarkably well, fading occasionally at the top edge.

To return to the substance of the letter: within it Cullen advises on adjustments to Mr Charteris' regimen that would be helpful in controlling and living with what he diagnoses as 'Spasmodic Asthma'. Possibly addressing a physician or surgeon local to the patient's home (any covering letter has not been retained), the full transcription of the copied text begins, with no formal greeting:

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<sup>11</sup> Letter to Mr Charteris, CCC CASE ID: 2363. Even 'in extremis', it would seem that Cullen's work ethic required that he remained active over the Christmas period. As recently as the 1950s, it was common practice in Scotland to attend one's place of work over Christmas – even to attend over part of Christmas day itself. Christmas-time was only recognized widely as a holiday in Scotland in the early 1960s, when England demanded 'time off' to share the New Year-related celebrations long prioritized in Scotland.

<sup>12</sup> More detail about this machine, how Cullen used it and how significant a step in recording patient data it represented is given in David Shuttleton, "'...to whom it will be extremely Usefull": Dr William Cullen's adoption of James Watt's copying machine', *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 46, 127–33. A variation of the model Cullen used can be viewed in the Library of the Heriot-Watt University.

We have considered his the whole cir/cumstances of his case with all possible / attention and have no doubt about the nature / of it. We consider it as a disposition to [a?] / Spasmodic Asthma, but we think it has / proceeded to no violent degree, and although / we cannot promise against some returns / if it, we hope they can be rendered both / less frequent and more easy, when they come.

The tone is calm and authoritative, though the use of 'we' is perhaps deceptive. It is possible – and in accordance with practice of the time (especially among wealthier patients), that the opinion of one of Cullen's colleagues has also been sought.

Alternatively Cullen could be writing with reference to his son and assistant Henry.

Unfortunately, given the significance of this letter in Cullen's professional and personal life, it exists in isolation. There are no links to other letters to demonstrate aspects of a 'case' and there is no indication of who Mr Charteris is, or how old he might be. A possible candidate is William Charteris, a merchant of Glasgow who married in 1809. If it is this individual (and not a member of the Charteris family associated with the Earl of Wemyss) he is likely to have been fairly young at the time of Cullen's 1789 letter, though a warning from Cullen concerning drinking too much wine indicates adult years. In the body of the letter Cullen gives careful, detailed and quite elaborate advice concerning the use of 'Pectoral Pills', the avoidance of cold and moist conditions, exercise on foot, by horse and in a carriage, and a light diet as well as the restrained use of alcohol. 'Pectoral pills' were probably pills more commonly known as 'Rufus's Pills' (though not named as such by Cullen in the correspondence). The active ingredient was *Aloe socotra*, as it was known at the time, that is to say one of a number of possible *Aloe* species.

There is one aspect of Cullen's advice to this gentleman that is very much in accord with his oft-repeated advice to more elderly patients: get outside and take

exercise but do not get chilled. He particularises his advice to this individual in the following way:

...it is not upon the medicine that we depend, but upon the regimen.../ His first care and Study must be / to avoid cold and moisture. He ought always / to be well clothed, and should never lay aside any accustomed Cloathing. He ought particularly to take care to keep his feet and legs / always warm and dry, and for that / purpose to wear thick Shoes and / warm Stockings, and even by these / precautions he ought never to walk / out upon damp and moist ground.

Following advice about avoiding walking fast or uphill Cullen continues:

...the exercise that I think will be of most service will be his going in / a Single horse Chaise. In this he / may have a great deal of exercise with / out any hazard of fatigue or cold, and / when the weather and his breathing is / suitable to it, he may find much benefit by frequently employing it.

Riding around in an open chaise would hardly accord with present day notions of exercise, but there are a multitude of precedents for such advice in the classical and neo-classical medical literature, all of which can be traced back to the Hippocratic Corpus itself.<sup>13</sup> Of course the element of fresh air would be important for someone with 'Spasmodic Asthma'. But this is as much, if not more, an exercise to soothe and cheer the mind as it is to benefit the body. Samuel Johnson's words 'if I had no duties, and no reference to futurity, I would spend my life driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman' come to mind.<sup>14</sup> Johnson himself suffered most of his life from asthma type

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Hippocrates (d. 370 B.C.), *Airs Waters and Places* and his *Aphorisms*.

<sup>14</sup> James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D*, 2 vols (London: Henry Baldwin for Charles Dilly, 1791, vol. 2, p. 282.

symptoms. If one could afford it, such activity, in reasonable conditions, must have been delightful. And a light chaise could access paths and roads that in a heavy lurching carriage would be far more uncomfortable to traverse.<sup>15</sup>

He ends his letter with the words:

I am very certain that these / Observations and regulations will be of / Service, but  
every report from Mr Charteris [s] / Own observation or experience should be /  
Duly attended to, and [illeg: our?] advise shall be / Finally adjusted to his  
constitution as / well as we possibly can. / William Cullen / Edinburgh 26<sup>th</sup>.

December 1789

This extract shows Cullen using 'I' as well as 'we'. Is this deliberate, or a slip? If the latter, it is a minor indication that he himself may have been functioning at something less than full capacity as he dictated. But the letter ends, and with it the whole of Cullen's consultation correspondence draws to a close, by highlighting the value of the patient's own understanding of his own constitution. This gesture, giving the patient agency in the therapeutic situation, is very characteristic of Cullen's stance towards his corresponding patients.

Looking at the whole text of this letter, it does read as if the recipient of Cullen's advice may be elderly, though we are reasonably sure he is not. In fact Cullen's invariable attention to specifics of the patient's situation in the particulars of his own advice is no less marked in his letters to elderly patients, as it is here, in his letter to a younger correspondent. This will be demonstrated in the examination of three case histories in correspondence relating to specific elderly patients later in this chapter.

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<sup>15</sup> The 'post-chaise' to which Johnson refers is four wheeled, perhaps better suited to the more frequently turnpiked roads of England.

**Old age discussed in Cullen's published work: his views expressed in *First Lines on the Practice of Physic* <sup>16</sup>**

The elderly as a distinct group are seldom separated out for comment in Cullen's published works. Looking for the words 'old', 'elderly' and 'aged' a simple digital word-count of Thomson's two-volume version of *Cullen's Works* and of his two-volume biography of William Cullen entitled *An Account*, gives the following results: Volume One of Cullen's *Works* reveals no mentions of the words 'old', 'elderly' and 'aged', Volume Two reveals three mentions of 'old', three of 'elderly' and none of 'aged'. Volume One of Thomson's biography, *An Account* has three mentions of 'old' plus a eulogy on the death of Cullen's elderly colleague, Dr Grant, but gives no mention of 'elderly' or 'aged'. Volume Two of the biography gives no mention of 'old' or 'elderly' but four mentions of 'aged' as the author describes the loss of friends and relatives suffered by Cullen in his last years and his final complete withdrawal to his retreat at Ormiston Hill after the death of his wife Anna in 1786. Rather more information is revealed if words more appropriate to Cullen's milieu are used –in particular words such as 'hypochondriac', 'hypochondria', 'valetudinary' and 'valetudinarian'. Even these words are found rather more often in Cullen's unpublished manuscripts than they are in his published works.

There is however an extended comment on the nature of old age in Cullen's widely read and influential work *First Lines*...<sup>17</sup>

In youth the mind is cheerful, active, rash and movable; but as life advances, the mind by degrees becomes more serious, slow, cautious, and steady; till at length;

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<sup>16</sup> The discussion here refers to the excerpts from Cullen's *First Lines of Practical Physic*, as presented in *The Works of William Cullen, MD*, ed. John Thomson, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, London: T. and G. Underwood, 1827), vol. 2, pp. 388–398.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. vol. 2, pp. 388–398.

old age, the gloomy, timid, distrustful and obstinate state of melancholic temperaments is more exquisitely formed. In producing these changes, it is true the moral causes have a share; but it is at the same time obvious, that the temperament of the body determines the operation of these moral causes, sooner or later, and in a greater or lesser degree, to have their effects. The sanguine temperament retains longer the character of youth, while the melancholic temperament brings on more early the manners of old age.

According to Cullen, melancholia advances the approach of old age. His analysis of the situation is partly 'humour-based', on the classical model. He sees old age as both prone to and the cause of a situation of 'cold dryness'.<sup>18</sup> But this rather down-beat passage from *First Lines* is at odds with Cullen's attitude to his patients and their professional and non-professional carers in much of his consultation correspondence. Even when corresponding with local medical professionals in letters which are not likely to be read by the patient (though there are few of these) he maintains a positive and optimistic attitude, sometimes in seemingly hopeless circumstances, as his letters concerning Mr David Bethune (to be examined later in this chapter) will show.

A later statement in this passage in Cullen's *First Lines* links old age with his subtle understanding of the term 'hypochondria'. Here he connects this term with the broadly used term 'vapours', explaining that vapours, like hysteria, can affect both men and women. The attendant doctor must be careful to distinguish the hypochondriac version of vapours from the dyspeptic (i.e. related primarily to the digestive system). Hypochondriac vapours are associated very specifically with old age and are marked by a

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<sup>18</sup> A frequently repeated maxim of the Hippocratic-Galenic literature – for example in Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* (c.400 B.C.).

‘melancholic temperament’ and a ‘firm and rigid habit’. He discusses the varied efficacy in both situations of tonics, spa waters of the chalybeate (iron rich) variety, cold bathing and warm bathing, tea and coffee, exercise, and encouraging the patient not to think themselves into a rut through the use of exercise and appropriate amusements.

He also discusses the use of ‘placebo’ medication where the patient is known to find a change of medication (and often of physician too) in itself therapeutic. Cullen was the first of the European professoriate to use this term, which he borrowed from theology, to denote giving the patient something harmless. The modern sense of the word, particularly in relation to clinical trials, has changed to mean giving the patient something that is medically inert.<sup>19</sup> Kerr, Milne and Kapchuck in their paper, which looks at Cullen’s hitherto unrecognized role in the uptake of this important medical term, comment: ‘In place of invisible metaphysics, rationalists like Cullen focused on the doctor’s empirical role as the interpreter of the patient’s nervous sympathies. In this view, pleasing the patient was neither flattery nor fraud, but a real therapeutic objective.’

Following his comments on the use of placebos Cullen waxes stern about the fixed and difficult to treat nature of hypochondria being particularly associated with situations of wealth and idleness. He singles out for particular attention the hypochondriac patient (elderly or otherwise) who persists in application to the study of a single subject. What he calls ‘one research’ may be good for science but can seriously undermine the constitution of an individual. Furthermore Cullen suggests in this passage that the presence of hypochondria can bring about old age prematurely. Even more remarkable is the claim that, in the absence of hypochondria, old age is, in fact, avoidable. In 1660

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<sup>19</sup> See C. E. Kerr, I. Milne and T. J. Kaptchuk, ‘William Cullen and a missing mind–body link in the early history of placebos’, *The James Lind Library* (2007): [www.jameslindlibrary.org](http://www.jameslindlibrary.org) [Jan. 2016]

Robert Boyle drew up a 24 point wish-list for science at the founding of the Royal Academy in London. At the head of this list (which at the time seemed full of improbabilities but which has approached realization over the centuries, point by point), was the wish that, until recently, has proved the most difficult to realise, a wish for the ‘the Prolongation of Life’<sup>20</sup>. In his *First Lines* Cullen states that the ‘hypochondriac vapours’ associated with old age are both difficult to treat and more to do with the mind than the body’. He sees being old as a matter of attitude – and while attitudes in the elderly have a tendency to be fixed, with appropriate professional advice and the co-operation of the patient, they can in fact be changed. The quality of life can be improved and life itself can be prolonged.

### **Hypochondria, valetudinarianism, the non-naturals, regimen, hygiene and nerves**

Both texts examined so far, Cullen’s last letter concerning a ‘corresponding’ patient’ and his published interpretation of the ‘hypochondriac’ elements of old age, use a vocabulary related to the ‘non-naturals’. As defined by the historian Michael Barfoot, the list of non-naturals comprises: 1) air, 2) food and drink, 3) sleeping and wakefulness, 4) evacuation and repletion, 5) passions of the mind and 6) rest and exercise.<sup>21</sup> An understanding of non-naturals was derived from a humoural understanding of the mind–body, as this body functioned in its environment. Advice about fine-tuning the non-naturals to a particular individual in particular circumstances was given through the detail of a written ‘regimen’.

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<sup>20</sup> List found among personal documents belonging to Robert Boyle held at the Royal Society in London: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/7798012/Robert-Boyles-prophetic-scientific-predictions-from-the-17th-century-go-on-display-at-the-Royal-Society.html> [Jan 2017]

<sup>21</sup> Barfoot, ‘Dr William Cullen and Mr Adam Smith’, 204-14. This essay explores the subtleties of hypochondria in relation to both Smith and Cullen’s understanding of Smith’s life-long delicate health. Adam Smith lived from 1723–1790.

This regimen related to a set of understandings and attitudes shared by the professional and the educated non-professional, known as ‘hygiene’ or ‘hygienics’. The meaning of these words today relates primarily to standards of cleanliness, which represents a narrowing of their original meaning and place in classical and all neo-classical cultures, where the ‘Art’ or ‘Goddess’ of Health presided over some or all of the ‘non-naturals’.

The letter concerning Mr Charteris contains elements of hygiene and regimen-related advice. The drawing up of a regimen required a physician’s skill and training to compile, but an appreciation of the importance of the non-naturals provided a lasting framework of understanding connecting the scholarly physician with his educated patients. This framework existed in some form wherever Greco-Roman culture reached, over the course of nearly two and a half millennia. The fact that this was a shared discourse even during the second half of the eighteenth century is indicated by the popularity, during the years of Cullen’s Edinburgh ascendancy, of the Georgic poem *The Preservation of Health* (1744) by Scots-born, Edinburgh-educated, John Armstrong.<sup>22</sup> This book is one of very few volumes of poetry to be found listed in *Cullen’s Catalogue*, the sale list of books owned by Cullen, printed in Edinburgh soon after his death.<sup>23</sup> The *Catalogue* is important evidence in relation to Cullen’s final years because, alongside the development of Ormiston Hill, it is another aspect to his intellectual ‘positioning’.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Hippocratic-Galenic ideas were revived and ‘modernised’ by a group of medical men, very prominent among whom was William Cullen. Key to Cullen’s modernising influence was his linking of these old ideas

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<sup>22</sup> Ed. by Adam Budd (2011).

<sup>23</sup> This leather-bound list was produced shortly after William Cullen’s death to facilitate the sale of his medical library. *Cullen’s Catalogue* (on spine), *A Catalogue of Medical Books* (title page), editing and publishing details not given. The book is to be found in the archive of the Sibbald Library, RCPE-SN 6.3.

with his own understanding of the significance of what he referred to as ‘nerves’ in the care of the patient and his advice regarding his or her well-being. His understanding of how nerves function and why they are important was very particular to himself and not hugely popular among his fellow physicians.<sup>24</sup> However, the connection of nerves to ‘sensibility’ and sensibility to ‘sentiment’ was an aspect of the Enlightenment that found much resonance in Scotland, in philosophical and literary circles, both of which overlapped with the medical circle in which Cullen was a very important player.<sup>25</sup> Nerves and nervous theory were also popular subjects with Cullen’s students for the very fact that they seemed rather esoteric and theory-based. But they were popular too with his corresponding patients, many of whom were being advised by the diaspora of Cullen’s qualified students. After all, it is a very badge of sensibility to be described or spoken of as ‘nervous’. But though Cullen in some senses shared a common vocabulary with his corresponding patients and used this to good therapeutic effect, he did not approve of his patients theorising about their own situation using a professional medical vocabulary. Knowing one’s own constitution, being able to report clearly on which treatments were effective, and following considered and sensible medical advice was enough.

Particular influences on Cullen can be discerned in his teaching about nerves, though it is important to note that this teaching was by no means stable throughout his career. These influences include George Cheyne, the physician and best-selling author of

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<sup>24</sup> Cullen’s understanding of the physiology and function of nerves was also very different to our own; it was more mechanical, fluid-related and Newtonian. Though latterly, as the case history of Mr Bethune (later described in this chapter) will demonstrate, Cullen shared and possibly helped to create, the late eighteenth-century fascination with the link between nerves and electricity.

<sup>25</sup> This subject is associated with a large scholarly literature. See particularly G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); eds Mulvey Roberts and Porter (1993) and eds Ahnert and Manning. Christopher Lawrence offers a Scottish perspective on the subject in his chapter ‘The nervous system and society’, in eds. Barnes and Shapin, pp. 19–40.

the *English Malady*.<sup>26</sup> Closer to home was Cullen's predecessor in teaching medicine at the University of Edinburgh, Robert Whytt (aka Robert Whyte).<sup>27</sup> Whytt, who lived from 1714 to 1766, was a shorter-lived near contemporary of Cullen's, but a medical teacher at Edinburgh who belonged to an earlier generation.

To return to the 'non-naturals': crucially, Cullen's use of them as a shared idiom with his patients was the last time in Britain that these ideas of such ancient provenance were endorsed enthusiastically by the formal medical establishment. The other side of the long wars with France saw the influential Edinburgh School of Medicine rejecting Cullen's conversation with his patients for a far more top-down, disease-focused approach – where medical knowledge and advice was corralled away from the patient, within the purlieu of the professionally trained medical 'expert'.<sup>28</sup> It is this model of professional medicine, which, ironically, Cullen did so much to create (in America as well as Scotland), that has prevailed in the west until very recently.

However, through the various 'alternative therapies' that first became popular in America towards the end of the twentieth century, a more holistic understanding of the

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<sup>26</sup> George Cheyne, *Essay on Health and Long Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: George Strahan and Bath: J. Leake, 1724) and *The English Malady; or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds, as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal and Hysterical Distempers* (Dublin: 1733). See commentary on Cheyne in David Shuttleton, *My Own Crazy Carcase: The Life and Works of Dr George Cheyne* (doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1993); also Anita Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression in the Enlightenment: The Life and Times of George Cheyne* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2000). Supporting Cheyne's understanding of nerves was the particular influence of the anatomist Thomas Willis' *Cerebri Anatome* (London: Thomas Roycroft, 1664) and the pervasive philosophical influence of John Locke. Connections between Cullen and Cheyne have been explored in Wild, *Medicine by Post*, pp. 113–243.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Whytt, *On Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysterical Diseases, to which are prefixed some Remarks on the Sympathy of the Nerves* (Edinburgh: 1764). Cullen also articulates his theories concerning nerves by differentiating them from those of Haller and Boerhaave. The influence on him of these two great medical teachers is discussed in detail both by Thomson (John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 217) and Wolf *Our Master & Father*, p. 37. Also the significant arc of influence between Cheyne, Whytt and Cullen is detailed by Vickers in 'Aspects of Character', eds. Ahnert and Manning, pp. 145–161

<sup>28</sup> See Harold J. Cook, 'Medicine in Western Europe', *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine* ed. by Mark Jackson (Oxford University Press: 2011), pp. 190–207 (p. 200).

relationship of mind to body and of health to disease has been rediscovered. Holism, an understanding of plant-based *materia medica* and a non-professionally dependent self-reliance were able to return to Britain from America in the late twentieth century. It was publications such as Cullen's own *Materia Medica* (1789) and his contemporary William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (first published earlier in 1769), both of which remained lastingly popular in America throughout the nineteenth century, that helped to make this possible.<sup>29</sup> There is another parallel story to be told about Cullen's continued influence, through the vitalistic elements of his teaching and practice, on surviving therapies marginal to mainstream practice in Europe and America, such as hydrotherapy, treatment with electricity, and mesmerism.<sup>30</sup> Although this is beyond the scope of my thesis, there is yet another story to be told as to whether Brunonian theory and practice was developed in England and Scotland, then widely circulated in Italy and Germany 'contra Cullen' – or in emulation of his teaching.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: W. Strahan, T. Cadell; Edinburgh A. Kincaid, W. Creech and J. Balfour 1772). Also see Thomas Neville Bonner, *Becoming a Physician: Medical Education in Britain, France, Germany and the U.S.A., 1750–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 31–42.

<sup>30</sup> See Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Cullen identified all disease processes as belonging to his four part 'nosology': pyrexiae, neuroses, cachexiae and locales. His student John Brown developed a binary system. This system was indebted to Cullen's own notions of 'excitability', or the lack of it being a key factor in treating disease, but was simplified still further by Brown to suggest that all disease processes could be classified according to whether the patient's system needed stimulating or sedating. Cullen's painstakingly developed *Materia Medica* was scorned by Brown for treatment with either alcohol (for sedation) or opium (for stimulation, though the stimulating effect of opium was widely contested). The very widespread use of laudanum at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century was related to the fact that this mixture 'covered both bases' and was an extremely effective, though addictive, source of pain relief. In the closing years of his career William Cullen was unfortunate enough to be blamed by his students for not being Brunonian enough – and by his peers for being the cause of John Brown. See *Brunonianism in Britain and Europe*, ed. by W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1988); Risse, *New Medical Challenges*, p. 105; Lawrence 'Cullen, Brown and the Poverty of Essentialism', 1–21, and Wolf, Appendix 1C, p. 279.

### Old age as it figures in three of Cullen's unpublished manuscripts

Although William Cullen himself failed to publish within the marketable and historically grounded 'preservation of health' genre of literature, among his unpublished papers are a number of documents that deal with this subject and illuminate his theories about and attitude to old age. The first of these is a longer version of the *Oration on the Death of Dr Clerk* already mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis.<sup>32</sup> The second is a drafted essay entitled *On the Preservation of Health*, and the third a lengthy letter to a patient suffering from hypochondria.<sup>33</sup> Authors who have previously engaged with these manuscripts include Guenter Risse, Rosalie Stott and most recently Jeffrey Wolf.<sup>34</sup>

The first and second of these documents can be seen to highlight what would have been recognized in Cullen's time as the concerns of the 'valetudinarian'. This term changed its meaning during the nineteenth and twentieth century to mean an elderly person who was very fussy about his or her health, fearful of illness and self-absorbed. In Cullen's time the term was not so pejorative, but indicated more the careful and responsible observance of practices likely to maximize one's chances of avoiding disease and maintaining good health. The situation of the valetudinarian individual denoted a sophisticated degree of understanding of his or her situation and was a state of mind to aspire to, to emulate and even to boast about. Furthermore, although valetudinarianism was particularly important for the elderly, it was by no means an attitude confined to this age group.

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<sup>32</sup> The *Oration* is cited in John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1 p. 525, and a longer version of the text is held in the University of Glasgow Special Collections. See GU Sp Coll: MS Cullen 302.

<sup>33</sup> GU Sp Coll: MS Cullen 406 and MS Cullen 405.

<sup>34</sup> Risse, *New Medical Challenges*, p. 135; Stott, 123-142 and Wolf, p. 214.

'Hypochondria' has changed its meaning too and, as with 'valetudinarian', the later meaning has a more negative overtone. Hypochondria, or 'hyp' as it was often abbreviated in Cullen's time (though never, as far as I know, by Cullen himself) was a sensitivity to one's condition that could result in the suspicion of imaginary diseases and a low spirited, melancholic attitude. But the sensitivity that lay behind 'hyp' was itself to be admired and, in particular circumstances, also emulated in this 'age of sensibility'. An instance of such emulation was the way in which the dress of the suicidal 'Young Werther' was copied by young men in the many European countries the book reached. This led to fears of copycat suicides, though there appears to be only one such that has been verified, that of a young girl who drowned herself in the River Ilm in 1778 with a copy of Goethe's book in her pocket.<sup>35</sup> What linked hypochondria and valetudinarianism (as understood in the later eighteenth century) was the chronic nature of these conditions and the delicate balance that had to be struck, with the help of one's physician, when developing and maintaining strategies to manage the situation. Carefulness and forethought were important but must not tip over into obsessive concern, nor trespass on the particular expertise of the physician, which could be acquired only through learning, training and experience. It was a balancing act, even (where critical illness did not intervene) a sort of dance between doctor and patient.

It was of course also a potentially lucrative situation for the physician if a patient with the status and vulnerability of a valetudinarian could be secured for a series of paid consultations. But the not uncommon situation, where valetudinarianism was combined with a measure of hypochondria, called for an even greater level of skill on the part of the physician and care on the part of the patient. It would appear that being old

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<sup>35</sup> See the 'Introduction' by the editor, David Constantine, to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn 1774 (Oxford: Oxford University Paperback, repr, 2012; 1<sup>st</sup> edn 1774), p. 28.

or elderly could often have been a factor in the situation of those self-described or described by their medical attendants as valetudinarian and/or hypochondriac. But looking at the CCC the two words are by no means always associated with old age.

The idea behind Cullen's advice to his elderly patients (and to individuals we could almost say behave 'as if they are old') is what Plato referred to as 'Enkreteia' – 'self control' or 'self governance'.<sup>36</sup> Cullen's retirement project at Ormiston Hill can be seen as an attempt, a decade after his *Oration on the Death of Dr Clerk*, to exemplify the qualities he admired, and here very clearly described, in his colleague and friend.<sup>37</sup> Another passage from the *Oration* reads:

In the business of a physician there is nowhere an occasion for a more nice exercise of skill, than in that most valuable branch of the profession, the art of avoiding diseases. Dr Clerk was originally of a delicate habit of body, and very early threatened with several diseases. Though subsequent diseases had made violent attacks on him, and even threatened immediate danger, he had the art to protract his life for many years longer to a good old age. This required a constant and skillful attention and was conducted with singular judgement...<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> There is an arc of connection here, from Plato's 'Enkreteia' (*The Republic*, c. 380 B.C.), through Cullen's *Oration*, to the re-articulation of this idea for the twentieth century by Michel Foucault. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 4 vols, *The Care of the Self* (Paris: 1984), vol. 3, pp. 45–53. David Shuttleton drew attention to these connections in a lecture given to a conference in Paris in 2013 ('Scotland, Europe and Empire in the Age of Adam Smith and Beyond'). There is a reconsideration of the place of the *History of Sexuality* in Foucault's oeuvre as a whole in *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body*, eds. Colin Jones and Roy Porter (London & New York: Routledge, 1994). See particularly Nikolas Rose, 'Medical History and the Present', p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> The *Oration* was ridiculed in a pseudonymous publication, *A Funeral Oration in Honour of Miss Jeanny Muir, a Celebrated Lady of Pleasure by her Dear Friend and Successor 'Miss Betty Montgomery'* (Amsterdam: 1760).

<sup>38</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 525.

This is a statement (in a different mode to a different audience) of the idea expressed in *The Death of Dr Levet*, the poem by Samuel Johnson to be examined in the next chapter; to look after yourself and live long is the best advertisement for your profession you can have. The physician himself has the same ‘agency’ as the patient – only more so as he also has the expertise, the understanding and the moral authority to do the right thing.

The second document to be considered, the unpublished volume entitled *An Essay on the Preservation of Health*, picks up themes identified in the *Oration* and (as Thomson describes) was distinguished by the attention of Cullen’s one-time student Benjamin Rush, who urged Cullen to develop the draft work for publication.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Cullen states within the document that there may be ‘room for [my] labour as no considerable attempt has of late been made on this subject’. But he missed the moment. William Buchan and James McKenzie first published their popular works on the subject in 1758 and 1769.<sup>40</sup> And John Armstrong’s poem, *The Art of Preserving Health*, as influential as any textbook on the subject, remained popular from when it was first published in 1744, to the 14<sup>th</sup> edition in 1795.<sup>41</sup>

Three different factors could have influenced Cullen’s failure to develop his notes for publication. Most obviously, he knew any such work would face competition from the three authors mentioned. Secondly, that the text was far from being in a form fit for publication and would take time and energy that he could not spare to complete. Thirdly, that welcome though the income would be, his professional persona could have been threatened by a potentially lucrative work in a popular idiom for a popular audience.

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<sup>39</sup> GU Sp Coll: MS Cullen 406. The document was probably written in the 1780s, being mentioned in a letter from Benjamin Rush to Cullen in 1784. See John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 651.

<sup>40</sup> James Mackenzie, *History of Health and the Art of Preserving it* (Edinburgh: Will Garden and London: Rivington, Fletcher et al. 1758); Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*.

<sup>41</sup> John Armstrong, *The Art of Preserving Health* (London: printed for A. Miller, 1744).

‘Disinterestedness’ was a resonant notion in Cullen’s time, relating at first to the intellectual and entrepreneurial activities of the aristocracy.<sup>42</sup> But for clever, successful, aspirational professionals with limited income and growing expenditure (such as Cullen), it was a problem that could hardly even be articulated without compromising their gentlemanly status. For this very reason it is hard to map in the documentary record. However, as discussed in Chapter One, a number of letters in the CCC do show that taking money for health advice by letter (an accepted and expected practice of the times) could cause Cullen embarrassment if the process was not handled discreetly. See, for example, the deprecation in this quotation from a letter from Cullen to the surgeon William Clapham in relation to their patient Mr Holt, dated 1783:

With respect to the Fee I have no objection to it, but the trouble of negotiating so small a Draught at such a distance. If you shall ever have occasion to send me a Fee your best way would be to Send it to Newcastle where they always have Scotch notes every day at hand. Your Fee does not give me half so much pleasure as knowing that you are alive and well and as I hope in a thriving way.<sup>43</sup>

To return to the *Essay* under discussion: this document includes a section on the ‘ageing process’, which is seen as part of an examination of the ‘Different States of the Animal Oeconomy, with respect to Temperament Age and Sex’. In other words, ‘ageing’ is seen as a constant factor – rather than the approach to old age itself. However Cullen does comment that ‘the changes of mind associated with ageing are a result of the interplay of

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<sup>42</sup> For the complex philosophical and literary derivation of ‘disinterestedness’ and its resonance in eighteenth-century Scotland, see Pierre Force, *Self Interest before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> CCC DOC ID 4717.

moral causes and physical causes'.<sup>44</sup> He is re-stating the point made in his *First Lines*, that old age is as much a state of mind as a disintegration of body.<sup>45</sup> The document also includes a lengthy peroration on the 'Several circumstances favourable or unfavourable to the morbid action of cold'. This text attempts to persuade the reader that he knows what he is doing in relation to low temperatures. His arguments include: the peril of moist rather than dry cold, that the 'infirm or elderly must study the means of guarding against cold', that unless inured to it in early youth that the young too should be careful 'up to the age of 35' and that cold draughts are a particular danger in respect to the elderly.<sup>46</sup> Cullen himself suggests that he is going on too much when he concludes with 'a series of precepts for the sake of those whose views may be distracted by the multiplicity of considerations above suggested'.

As Benjamin Rush responded in 1784 it is likely that this otherwise undated document was written in the early 1780s. Cullen's extensive notes on cold should be looked at in the context of the high situation and north-west-facing aspect of his Ormiston Hill estate, which he acquired in 1778. The emphasis on cold in the document and even possibly the Ormiston Hill venture itself could be responses to an attack by followers of John Brown from within the Royal Medical Society. Students attending this institution (which, as we will see in Chapter Three, Cullen himself had been instrumental in setting up) claimed that in his lectures Cullen had made contradictory statements

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<sup>44</sup> Though differentiating changes of mind from changes of habit he also comments in the introductory chapter that 'men advanced in life... [find it particularly] difficult to change'.

<sup>45</sup> *The Works...*, ed. by Thomson vol. 2, pp. 388–398.

<sup>46</sup> A character from Jane Austen's *Emma* comes to mind; Mr Woodhouse, Emma's father, is something of an exemplary valetudinarian and hypochondriac. Austen's depiction of him offers to the reader a comic study of the interplay of psychology, character and bodily discomfort in the health concerns of an individual rather left over from the late-eighteenth century. Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: John Murray, 1815).

relating to the effect of cold temperatures in the presence of fever.<sup>47</sup> This was a very sharp attack on their mentor, who felt it as such and broke with Brown at this point. Cullen could justifiably claim to be an authority for his times on the effect of environment on health. His expertise on the physics of low temperature had been demonstrated in his early career by a demonstration of ‘artificial refrigeration’ at a lecture given in Glasgow in 1748. Cullen’s work on this topic influenced the later discoveries relating to latent heat made by his student and later colleague Joseph Black.<sup>48</sup> It is clear from interrogating the CCC that many aspects of Cullen’s advice regarding the ‘preservation of health’ were particularly pertinent to his more elderly patients. In fact Benjamin Rush comments in the previously mentioned letter that his friend should prove his theories true ‘by living till you are 100 years old’.

The third document to be considered is in the form of an undated letter entitled *On Hypochondria*. It provides lengthy, detailed and discursive advice to a gentleman afflicted with the condition.<sup>49</sup> The document seems partly to have been occasioned by this gentleman trying to understand his situation better by reading in the medical literature. Despite his repeated encouragement to individuals to learn about and take responsibility for their own good health, for Cullen, consulting actual textbooks intended

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<sup>47</sup> According to Brown Cullen seemed to claim the nerves were subject to both ‘atony’ and ‘spasm’ (which are opposite and contradictory states) when cold was applied in the ‘hot’ (usually early) stages of fever. See John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 112 and many subsequent references. Brown’s break with Cullen came a little earlier when, in 1776, he accused Cullen of failing to support him as a candidate for an Edinburgh professorship.

<sup>48</sup> This lecture later became Cullen’s first publication. It was read to the Edinburgh Philosophical Society in 1755 and published in their *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary* in 1756. See Edward McGirr ‘Cullen in Context’, *University of Glasgow: Stevenson Lectures in Citizenship 1990 Series* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1990). One more example of the topic of cold surfacing for Cullen at this time, in a different but related context, is the fact that Cullen’s son Archibald produced a dissertation relating to the effects of cold for his Edinburgh medical degree in 1780 (John Thomson et al., *An Account...* (1832, 1859), p. 511). This dissertation claims that alcohol is the best way to revive one suffering from exposure.

<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey Wolf indicates that the text is an eighteenth-century version of the medieval ‘consilium’, a public exercise in diagnostics intended to display the skill and scholarliness of the physician. He dates the document at the late 1740s, early 1750s. See Wolf, p. 234.

for practitioners and students of medicine was a step too far. Despite his remonstrance in this letter the document is detailed and specialized in a way that suggests its intended recipient really is unusually well versed in the 'arts of medicine'.<sup>50</sup> The letter summarises Cullen's developing understanding of the 'non-naturals' at the time (around the late 1740s and early 1750s), while reminding the reader that non-naturals are not constituted as a set of rules because their application always depends on the varied circumstances and nature of the individual. Situating the individual in their environment he states that 'the most healthful situation in this country is the most inland and lowest ground lying on dry fertile soil far from high hills'. He partly follows, partly does not follow his own advice in his later purchase of Ormiston Hill.

In this document Cullen does not go into very much detail in relation to diet, but he does in relation to exercise – perhaps because it is the latter rather than the former that is the problem for his correspondent. He includes a particular warning for those who find themselves desk-bound: 'Even contemplative and studious persons if they do not mix exercise with their studies, soon dull and stupefy their faculties and destroy their purpose, by pursuing it too keenly'. He particularly recommends dancing (though be careful of the bad air of a closed room), bowls, golf and swimming. However, tennis and fencing 'are too violent for valetudinarians'. He also recommends skating – which throws an interesting 'health preserving' light on Henry Raeburn's oil painting of the skating minister.<sup>51</sup> Very much in line with his advice to corresponding patients, Cullen very strongly recommends horse riding, or where this is not possible, riding in a horse-drawn carriage. When well-sustained he calls this exercise 'the Great Catholicon in all Chronic –

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<sup>50</sup> There is a possibility that the intended recipient of this extended letter was Adam Smith. See Barfoot 'Dr William Cullen and Mr Adam Smith', 204-14

<sup>51</sup> Henry Raeburn (1756-1823), 'The Rev. Robert Walker Skating on Duddingston Loch', oil on canvas, c. 1795 (Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh).

Diseases, the most easily procured and to be managed with the least suite and attendance.’ Then, as if this has hit a rather personal note, he continues: ‘Nothing should make me fear the Hypochondriac Disease but such straightened circumstances as would not allow me to fill up my life with exercise and variety’. There is much else in this document that illumines, with lively language and even wit, the generally more soberly coloured advice Cullen gives valetudinary patients in his consultation correspondence. His elderly patients are by no means all valetudinarian – but many of his valetudinarians are in fact old.

### **Advice literature and ‘wonder literature’**

William Cullen’s unpublished fragments on the preservation of health, which include some indications of his attitude to old age, can be considered as falling within the successful and expanding category of eighteenth-century ‘advice literature’.

Complementing this advice literature was another literature, closely linked in relation to old age, which may be referred to as the ‘wonder literature’. Here examples of individuals who attained great age, together, if possible, with details of the regimen they followed to achieve this, were held up as exemplary. The same individuals were referenced over and over again in the literature and in published lectures of teachers of medicine at the time. Many of these examples reach back to classical antiquity.

Prominent among such individuals referenced by Cullen and his contemporary physicians were Cicero, author of *De Senectute* which concerns the exemplary old age of Cato the Elder (234 B.C.–149 B.C.), and *The Discorsi*, healthy living advice from the aged

Renaissance nobleman Luigi Cornaro (c.1467–1566).<sup>52</sup> This latter text itself received influential commentary by Joseph Addison, Francis Lord Bacon and William Temple.<sup>53</sup>

Living to a remarkable old age is of course a subject of the Jewish and the Christian Bible, especially in the chapters of the Old Testament. The ‘Hermitage’ with or without an actual elderly inhabitant – Ossianic or otherwise – was a frequently encountered conceit of eighteenth-century designed landscapes.<sup>54</sup> Figures such as the fourth century Paul the Hermit (d. 341 A.D.) who followed a very severe regimen, as well as the fashionably famous Ossian were inspirational to such conceits.<sup>55</sup> Cincinnatus, Cato and Cornaro are encountered rather more frequently than Moses and Abraham in the neo-classical references of Cullen and his peers. However there are interesting indications that Cullen was familiar with the works of John Milton, the model for an overlap of profoundly Christian and neo-classical ideas.<sup>56</sup> Successful publication within the advice literature genre could bring lasting financial reward. Cullen’s contemporaries Buchan,

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<sup>52</sup> Cicero, *De Senectute*, trans. by J.G.F. Powell (Cambridge University Publishing, 1988); Luigi Cornaro, *Discorsi della vita sobria* (Padua: 1558).

<sup>53</sup> Texts by all four authors are brought together very usefully in *The Art of Living Long*, ed. by William F. Butler (Milwaukee: 1903; repr. Whitefish Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> The most famous eighteenth-century hermitage in Scotland, then and now, is probably ‘Ossian’s Hall’ built near Dunkeld by the Earl of Atholl in 1760. The Earl advertised but was not able to locate a hermit – but in the 1870s a suitable individual, willing to dress the part, was found. Geoff Holder, *The Guide to Mysterious Perthshire* (Stroud: The History Press, 2006), p. 113.

<sup>55</sup> Detail about Paul the Hermit is given in eds. Mulvey Roberts and Porter, p. 113.

<sup>56</sup> Twice in his lectures Cullen dismissively refers to ‘sooty empirics’. This precise phrase was used by Robert Boyle in the *Skeptical Chymist* (London: Cadwell for Crooke, 1661) and shortly afterwards it was used indirectly by John Milton. See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 5 (London: Peter Parker, Robert Boulter and Matthias Walker, 1667), l. 439: ‘if by fire / Of sooty coal th’empiric alchemist / Can turn, or holds it possible to turn, / Metals of drossest ore to perfect gold / As from the mine’. In this passage Milton is explaining the ‘real’, if marvelous, nature of the digestion of angels, as they share a meal with Adam and Eve. Similarly the most significant feature of Cullen’s designed landscape at Ormiston Hill, is described by John Thomson et al., as the ‘dingle’. This word is found, describing a similar topographical feature in Milton’s *Comus, a Mask* (performed Ludlow Castle: 1634). Referencing Milton was perhaps a way of safely reaching back through a respectable, scholarly and ‘patriotic’ neo-classicism to a shared biblical inheritance.

Mackenzie and Armstrong have been mentioned.<sup>57</sup> An author of an earlier generation, whose advice regarding old age also reached a broader, non-professional audience was the physician George Cheyne, particularly in his *Essay on Health and Long Life*, published in 1724.

### **Three case histories of patients of an older age group detailed in the Cullen**

#### **Consultation Correspondence**

The digital, online Correspondence allows the researcher to re-construct ‘case histories’ of individual patients in a way that until now has been difficult to achieve. In fact it may well be easier for us now than ever it was for Cullen himself. These case histories include both letters from the patient as well as from Cullen and also (very often) letters from a wider circle of friends, relatives and other doctors visiting and being consulted about the patient at the same time. It is clear from the stories ascertained here, from just three of the c. 2,500 patients listed, that the CCC represents a fascinatingly dense and easily accessed research resource.

In summarizing these case histories I have tried to avoid the kind of retrospective anachronisms involved, for example, in guessing what was ‘really wrong’. It has been difficult to exclude a modern diagnostic and therapeutic vocabulary completely – for example terms such as ‘chronic’ and ‘acute’ are useful and have a clear modern meaning which does not distort the original text if retrospectively applied.<sup>59</sup> But the use of terms

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<sup>57</sup> Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*; Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*; John Armstrong, *The Art of Preserving Health*, (London: printed for A. Miller, 1744).

<sup>59</sup> The terms ‘chronic’ and ‘acute’ were also used by medical professionals with the same meaning in the eighteenth century, but not particularly frequently.

such as 'case history' and even 'patient' have to be applied in a qualified way. The groups of letters used for this analysis are just an identifiable 'run', sometimes with lengthy breaks. Wayne Wild advises care in setting search parameters when examining the correspondence, to avoid creating a biased view.<sup>60</sup> In accordance with this approach, to identify the three patients to be examined I carried out a simple search for patients with a good 'run' of letters whose birth-date was before 1710. The Correspondence does not really 'take off' until Cullen himself (also born around 1710) is over 60 years old. I preferred one of the patients selected to be a woman as women are not represented 50/50 in the correspondence. The exact age of this lady, Mrs Watt, is not recorded, but Cullen refers to her advanced age in his letters. The three selected patients were required to represent diverse stories, as this was already known to be a characteristic of the correspondence as a whole. The fact that all three lived in lowland Scotland was mere happenstance. Almost always a case history includes more than one problem and very often stories relating to more than one patient (though the term 'patient' itself should be questioned; in many ways, as I hope to demonstrate, 'client' or even 'patron' could be preferred).<sup>61</sup> The text version of the letters cited is fully transcribed from the facsimile digital photograph of the letters. It is referred to as 'normalised' in the CCC as it retains the original orthography, spacing and punctuation of the written text, but unravels contractions that may be obscure to a modern reader. The words contracted can be viewed on the database in the 'diplomatic' versions of the letters.

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<sup>60</sup> Wild, *Medicine by Post*, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault interrogates the use of the word 'patient' at this time period. See David Armstrong, 'Bodies of Knowledge /Knowledge of Bodies', in eds. Jones and Porter, p. 18.

### Case History 1: The Revd. Mr William Thom

The case of William Thom involves an exchange of letters from 1781 to 1786. Mr Thom, who lived from 1709–1790 (and was thus an almost exact contemporary of William Cullen's) was 72 years old at the time of the first letter and 77 years old at the end of this period. He was the minister at Govan and a family friend of the Cullens' and it is likely that he was advised personally about his health by Cullen as well during this time period. However the documents that are available for transcription tell an interesting tale, not least because the preservation in such good order of 'letters out' is an unusual documentary source; but the preservation of 'letters in' from the patient (and their friends, doctors, relatives etc.), which can be related and connected to the letters out, is particularly valuable and unusual in the recording of such a correspondence. Cullen foreshadowed Michel Foucault's insistence on the importance of the patient voice or narrative – and Roy Porter's later championing of it as a necessary development from the historiography long-dominated by the medical profession itself.

This four-document case is occasioned by acute exacerbations Mr Thom suffers in relation to chronic problems with his breathing and with his throat. The first letter is from the patient to Cullen, dated 20<sup>th</sup> August 1781, detailing his situation.<sup>62</sup> Suggested treatment is written on the reverse of this document in Cullen's own hand (this is not a common practice in the CCC as a whole). Then on 29<sup>th</sup> September comes another letter from Mr Thom concerning his own case. The first letter back from Cullen himself is dated 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1783 and is addressed to Mr Thom's attending doctor James Parlane. Then the final letter in this short series is from Mr Thom again and is dated 26<sup>th</sup> July 1786. Both physician and patient are challenged by serious illness over this time period, Mr Thom

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<sup>62</sup> All letters cited regarding Mr Thom are to be found in CCC Case ID: 13858.

being 'threatened with Pthisis' and Cullen himself, in 1783 being 'much indisposed by the fits of the cholera'. The final letter indicates that Mr Thom's condition is improving, under the care of Dr Stevenson (who worked closely with Cullen in the care of a number of his patients in the west of Scotland).

In his first letter, which concentrates on his symptoms and requests advice, Mr Thom comments:

In this illness I am taken care of with Uncommon Attention & tenderness / By the  
Young Woman whom I married about a year & half ago / But I am old born 1709  
tho' not so old by Dozen / Of Years as my father and Grandfather were.

The rejuvenating effects of the company of young women (particularly from their breath and especially that of virgins) is an idea that resurfaced in eighteenth-century Britain from various classical and Biblical sources. It was expounded by the physician George Cheyne in the final chapter of his autobiography, and gained both popularity and notoriety in Dr James Graham's London-based Temple of Health.<sup>63</sup> Cullen does not respond directly to this information from his friend. Mr Thom ends his letter with a gentle complaint that Cullen's son, 'the advocate', did not visit him 'when he was last at Paisley'.<sup>64</sup> Cullen writes a very short note, possibly to himself, or to be forwarded to the patient's locally-based doctor, on the back of this letter:

Mr Wm. Thom of Govan

Astringent and Anodyne

Mixture

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<sup>63</sup> George Cheyne, *Dr Cheyne's Account of Himself & of His Writings, Faithfully Extracted from his Various Works* (London: J. Wilford, 1743). Also Roy Porter, 'Dr James Graham', *ODNB* (2004).

<sup>64</sup> The behaviour of this son, Cullen's eldest, Robert, greatly affected the fortunes of Cullen's family during his final years and after his death. See Rendall, 'The Reputation of William Cullen', 262-285.

Vomit, Blister, Riding

August 1781

The second letter in the series, also from Mr Thom (29<sup>th</sup> September, again from Govan) thanks Cullen for his advice, though there is no evidence as to exactly how this advice was conveyed. He mentions that a surgeon, Mr Wallace had carried out Cullen's instructions, but a new violent pain in his head had occasioned Mr Wallace to call in the assistance of Cullen's one-time student Dr Alexander Stevenson. Dr Stevenson ordered the application of leeches to the patient's temples and 'some pills' (unspecified) which eased the situation. After giving (fairly brief) detail of his daily regimen, the letter gives two quotations from Horace, the first being an elaborate apology for trespassing on the time of someone so important, possibly to the detriment of the community as a whole.<sup>65</sup> This is followed by the wonderfully pithy: 'It is time perhaps I should say to myself *Edisti satis atque bibisti, Tempus abire*'. This is translated within the CCC database as: 'You have eaten and drunk enough; it is time to walk off'.<sup>66</sup>

The letter ends on a note that combines energy in seeking advice, aptitude for following this advice and a stoical acceptance of what may lie ahead. The words are also a warm and graceful compliment from one friend to another:

Writing thus to you I seem to beg further Exertions of your / Skill if you know of  
any method that is likely to banish or to / Soften this terrifying Coff I am perfectly  
Sure you will Soon / Direct me to it. If now I must look on this same Coff as an /

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<sup>65</sup> This not entirely accurate quotation is from a letter from Horace to Augustus (Horace, *Epistles*, Book 2). The name 'Horace' occurs nowhere in the CCC, but other quotations from the poet may be slipped in by correspondents, unattributed, as they are assumed to be familiar. See later discussion of Horace, Cullen, Allan Ramsay and Italy in Chapters Three and Four.

<sup>66</sup> Translation from the end of the letter to Julius Floris (*Epistularum*, II, ii) by Dr Luca Guariento, a member of the CCC project team.

Irresistable Decay of Nature A Prelude of What I May Very Soon / Expect In the  
 Meantime With all the Intenttness of my Soul / I wish Every Good Thing to Mrs  
 Cullen and to Every one of / Family I am what in the Early and Better days of Life I  
 Ever was  
 Invariably Yours  
 William Thom

There is one more letter to consider, the fourth in this particular case history. Dated 26<sup>th</sup> February 1786 this letter is written once again from Mr Thom at the Govan Manse. In this letter he reports being at last free 'of an Almost Desperate pain in the Throat by the Act of your Friend Dr Stevenson'. The letter is even more warmly affectionate than the previous but short and a little incoherent (perhaps rushed). As before his respect and friendship for Cullen merges with the highest respect for 'Medical men of Great merit in Edinburgh'. This respect has had the effect of '[stirring] me on to promote with Uncommon Earnestness the Contribution for the Royal Infirmary some very rich Inhabitants of Glasgow', but sadly he 'could not persuade to give anything at all But Five Guineas were collected...'<sup>67</sup>

This letter connects to another which falls strictly outside this 'patient history'. It is written from Rev. Thom not to William Cullen, but to his son Henry, and concludes the correspondence on a sadder note. The letter is dated 14<sup>th</sup> August 1786 and concerns Thom's reluctant involvement in the referral of a certain Alexander Hamilton of Paisley to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, a patient 'beggared by Idleness and almost Constant Drinking'. The next and final paragraph concerns William Thom's heartfelt condolences to

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<sup>67</sup> Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, founded in 1729, had developed by Cullen's time into a teaching hospital of international renown. It was situated in a building designed by William Adam in 1736. The equivalent in Glasgow, the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, was opened in 1794 in a building designed by Robert and James Adam. Dr Alexander Stevenson was closely involved in the foundation of the latter hospital.

his friend and his friend's family on the death of William Cullen's wife Anna on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1786. His words are halting in their depth of feeling:

I could not have Expected you would write back to me so soon / After the Great loss your Family have recently sustained – I took / Pen in hand on Saturday to write a Line of sincere & deep felt, / To Your father – but I could not do it – Fallacious hopes of Men / I had laid a scheme of seeing – of being with the Doctor, yourself / The Advocate Your sisters and – now no more – in may next / – I sympathise with You all And I sincerely & firmly / believe that amongst all [Mrs?] Cullen's Acquaintances numerous as / they were there is not one Person who regrets her Death more / Deeply or will remember it longer than I do – But I trouble You – I beg pardon – You will forgive for I am, / Dear Sir Yours / William Thom.<sup>68</sup>

A final note about the Rev. Mr Thom is that he had a long standing feud with the University of Glasgow, regarding its professoriate as both overweening and (compared with ministers of the Kirk) overpaid.<sup>69</sup> By comparison, many professors in Edinburgh, including Cullen, were paid not by fixed stipend but by fees for their lectures. This situation helped to create circumstances for excellent teaching, but entailed a precarious livelihood for such as Cullen with no wealthy family behind him. This factor, of course, may have added to his appeal to the Rev. Mr Thom and Thom's wish to support the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, an institution that the Glasgow professoriate had (as yet) failed to replicate in their own city.

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<sup>68</sup> CCC DOC ID: 6149.

<sup>69</sup> See Peter Jones, 'The Scottish professors and the polite academy, 1720–1746', *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy and the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 113.

The other important figure in William Thom's story is Dr Alexander Stevenson (1725–1791) a prominent private practitioner and Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine at the University of Glasgow until 1766.<sup>70</sup> He is amongst the most frequent professional correspondents represented in the Cullen consultation archive, with 31 separate 'cases' (involving innumerable more individual letters) citing his name. Born and educated in Edinburgh, he became a private physician with an extensive practice in and around Glasgow. By 1780 Dr Stevenson was the proprietor of the 1,378 acre estate of Dalgain, which had been purchased by the Stevenson family trustees from the Mitchell family. By the time of his death this estate had been consolidated by Dr Stevenson to 1,378 acres. He not only managed his land in the 'improved' manner, but also built a new village, partly for his estate workers. This village (Sorn) flourishes today.<sup>71</sup> The celebrated doctor is remembered in a published epitaph as 'bountiful', 'beneficent', 'kind', 'gentle' and 'generous'.<sup>72</sup> Another anonymous verse circulated earlier says:

An obsequious Doctor appear next in view,  
 Who smoothly glides in with a minuet bow,  
 In manners how soft! In apparel how trig!  
 With a vast deal of physic contain'd in his wig

Alexander Stevenson is known today through the activities of the Cullen Conservation Project and the researches of the local historian, Dane Love. His life and work is comparatively unrecorded until now because he published very little, and because until

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<sup>70</sup> Information from CCC: Prof. Stevenson surrendered his Glasgow professorship in 1789 to Dr T. Hope, son of his sister Julianna Hope who was married to Prof. John Hope, renowned Edinburgh botanist and colleague to William Cullen. To surrender a professorship in this way was unusual but not unknown. Daniel Rutherford did the same when he secured the post of physician-in-ordinary to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

<sup>71</sup> Information on Sorn and the Dalgain estate from Dane Love, *The History of Sorn: Village and Parish* (Auchinleck: Carn Publishing, 2008), pp. 31, 86, 87.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. pp. 86, 87.

recently the University of Glasgow has not been as successful as the University of Edinburgh in recording the non-publication related activities of its own alumni. My own comments here only touch on the possible detail to be found in Dr Stevenson's correspondence with Cullen.

The following general observations can be made about this four-letter exchange. The first is that matters relating to regimen are mentioned but not dwelt upon by both correspondents. Also that a number of acute problems are managed with Cullen's advice by locally-based doctors, one of whom has considerable prestige. The digitization of these patient related letters has revealed that where local doctors are known, trusted and, more often than not, taught by Cullen, this dealing with acute situations by post is not uncommon. Discussions relating to adjustment and understanding of a patient's regimen are readily furthered by correspondence, but the kind of acute care Cullen was often able to establish through his ex-students is more akin to the modern use of IT for an expert to comment on, or even carry out, treatment remotely. There is also a parallel in the way Carl. Linnaeus used his 'apostles' all over the world, both to collect new plants for naming and to spread the word about his (self-declared) extraordinary genius and his controversial, sex-related theories of plant taxonomy.<sup>73</sup>

There is also an interesting question about the precise status of Dr Stevenson. 'Locally-based' doctors in Scotland at this time were usually surgeon-apothecaries, who may or may not have attended university lectures. Not many doctors trained to this level (even if they had not acquired the formal certification) were found outside the university cities. Cullen was particularly fortunate in his working relationship with Dr Stevenson as

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<sup>73</sup> This was extremely effective for Linnaeus, but proved literally fatal for most of the 'apostles'. See Wilfred Blunt, *The Compleat Naturalist: A Life of Linnaeus* (London: Francis Lincoln Ltd., 1971), pp. 185–198.

this doctor was prepared to visit patients in a wide area of Strathclyde, which included an area where Cullen had both friends and relatives, relating to his youth and the earlier Glasgow- and Hamilton-based parts of his career. Inevitably, as the consultation correspondence and Cullen's professional life drew to a close, his erstwhile friends and colleagues, like himself, were ageing.

### **Case History 2: Mrs Elizabeth Watt**

Elizabeth Watt of Stranraer is known to have died in 1792. Her precise age is not known but her case involves letters from 8<sup>th</sup> September 1779 to 17<sup>th</sup> February 1789 and evidence internal to this correspondence suggests she was an elderly lady. There are 18 letters in this exchange and the intermediary involved is not a doctor or surgeon-apothecary but Mrs Watt's cousin and her husband, Mr and Mrs Broun, who live on St Andrews Street, part of Edinburgh's newly constructed New Town. These cousinly relations convey letters to Cullen and are charged with ensuring letters and recipes from Cullen and actual pharmaceuticals are dispatched safely from Edinburgh to Stranraer. This is not a common arrangement of affairs in the CCC, but here it seems to ensure that Mrs Watt received 'Edinburgh quality' medications as advised by Edinburgh's most respected physician. The first letter (8<sup>th</sup> September 1779) is a recipe for a number of medicines to be 'made up' by an Edinburgh-based surgeon-apothecary (a name is not specified but Cullen uses terms and abbreviations which a non-professional would have been unlikely to understand).<sup>74</sup> This letter is closely followed (10<sup>th</sup> September 1779) by more detailed advice from Cullen as to how to use the recipe ingredients to alleviate symptoms affecting her mouth and

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<sup>74</sup> All letters cited regarding Mrs Watt are to be found in CCC CASE ID 1594.

throat. He amplifies these instructions with advice very closely adjusted to time and place, i.e. whether the patient is at home or in the country, and the need for increased dosage in the months of winter and spring. Finally he gives advice about a frugal and 'light' diet, little alcohol, 'to go a little on horse back', being careful to 'guard against cold' especially 'during the Whole Winter and Spring'. Mrs Watt although elderly, must have been limber enough for Cullen to suggest actual 'horse back' riding.

Three further letters of advice follow from Cullen in which he gives detail of medicines to be made up for Mrs Watt and forwards the necessary dried substances with the letters.<sup>75</sup> The instructions are very detailed and rather like a 'recipe' in the modern sense, in that they are for a house-keeper or house-wife rather than medical professional to follow: 'A paper of the materials is to be put into a Tea pot and a mutchkin of boiling water poured upon it. Let it stand near the fire for ten or twelve hours...'. Mrs Watt writes to her cousin again in April 1784 (precise date unspecified) about various problems, asking him to 'wait one [on] Dr Cullin and acquaint him that I have been very bad last winter and Spring...' The arrangement Mrs Watt prefers of having medicines sent from Edinburgh ('...it cannot be got hear and I never receved any benefits from anything I ever took but what Dr Cullin ordred') is not without risk as a previous consignment, together with a letter from Cullen had been lost en-route. She ends with a plea that the 'Some thing for my back that I have not tryd yet let it be Carefully packed with every other thing...'

On 26<sup>th</sup> August 1785 Elizabeth Watt writes again via Mr Brown describing unassuaged symptoms and declaring: 'I have often give you troble one the following

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<sup>75</sup> The dates of these letters are 25<sup>th</sup> February 1783, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1783 and [unclear day] April 1784.

subject but I think this will be the last as I am very Delicate and weak now...' Cullen replies 'For Mrs Watt', addressing her cousin or any doctor concerned in the case, thus:

I am heartily concerned to find her so much / distressed with so many Ailments  
and infirmities. / I have now been long acquainted with the faults / Of her  
Constitution which must be increased by / The advance of life. But tho I cannot  
undertake / To make her young again I think she speaks / with too much  
despondency and hope her complaints / may still be very much relieved and I  
certainly / shall always endeavor to do it as well as I / can.

There is a further exchange of letters along very similar lines between 7<sup>th</sup> December 1785 and 12<sup>th</sup> February 1789. On this last date comes a letter from Mrs Watt in which she details problems of generalized swelling, strangury and poor digestion. Then after requesting that 'the Electuary... be put in larger jealy pots... as all the part that is Liquid is lost...', she adds a postscript to her cousin, who is herself now ailing:

Dear cousin I received yours [illeg] your Complaint & mine is not to / Be removed I  
wish we [may?] be preparing for our last / Struggle with frail Mortality and send  
me 2 o 3 Nutmegs / With a yeard of good white Inglish flinen about Eighteen /  
Pence a yeard 2 pairs of dark grey Gloves pretty larg / let me know if Mrs runnald  
familie is doing weel / and if you are to Keep the lodging any longer / I am able to  
say no more Compliments to my / Good friend Mr Broun & [?Grizen] send / The  
things as soon as possible

Adieu EW

Cullen replies to this letter on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1789 with a brief note beginning: 'Judging that the swelling which She now complains of, is what threatens her with most danger I

have sent her the same Electuary that was sent to her last Harvest, and she is to use it as she did before...' It is known that Elizabeth Watt, widow of Stranraer, and ingenious deviser of a very personalized medical support system, died in 1792.<sup>76</sup>

Mrs Watt's letters are not those of a highly educated lady and it is possible that she prefers Cullen not to see them, but instead for her cousin to tell Cullen what was in them. Possibly the two men had occasion to meet fairly often, or Mr Broun was prepared to make the short walk across the newly constructed North Bridge to visit the doctor at his Edinburgh home. The letters must have been (perhaps discreetly) handed over anyway – as only this can explain their presence in this archive. Or another (or additional) interpretation of this unusual arrangement could be that Mrs Watt wrote to Cullen via her cousins, so they could be on standby to dispatch Cullen's reply and a new supply of medicines as promptly as possible. Maybe there was a fondness for an 'Auld Acquaintance' concerned for Cullen to take such care with providing and having medications made up, himself, and at one point, waiving his fee.<sup>77</sup> He also does state early on in the letters that he would like actually to see Mrs Watt in Edinburgh, but acknowledges that her state of health, the distance and the time of year were difficulties.<sup>78</sup> Finally the frequent references to 'cousin' in this correspondence are a little difficult to follow. It would appear that Mrs Watt addresses her letters to her female cousin Mrs Brown (Broun) who is married to Mr Brown (Broun) but Cullen's replies are addressed to Mr Brown. It was usual at the time for this gentleman (or any other less than immediate family member) to be referred to as 'cousin' too.

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<sup>76</sup> Further information from CCC (author David Shuttleton): Elizabeth Watt was the daughter of Thomas McCall and widow of William Watt, Surveyor of Customs at Stranraer, whom she married in 1760 at Old Luce.

<sup>77</sup> See letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> July 1786, CCC Case ID 1594.

<sup>78</sup> See letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> February 1783, CCC CASE ID 1594.

### Case History 3: Mr David Bethune

David Bethune was a land-owner living at Kilconquhar, in the East Neuk of Fife.<sup>79</sup> He was born in 1708 and died in 1782. The letters concerning him filed in CCC date from 1769 and end with his death in 1782, when he was 74 years of age.<sup>80</sup> Many of the letters are updates to Cullen from Bethune's locally-based medical advisor, the surgeon John Goodsir. Cullen was consulted along with his colleague and one-time student, Professor Joseph Black. Consultation between senior doctors in a particular case was not uncommon and was determined by the wealth of the patient, the desire of a local doctor for advice from more than one senior doctor and occasionally by the wish of the senior consulting physician to consult a colleague. This correspondence includes a lengthy and detailed letter from Cullen considering all aspects of Mr Bethune's case dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1781 and a pithy pronouncement from the patient (15<sup>th</sup> March 1782) about his own views on old age and the dubious value of 'health spas' [spas and mineral wells] that could have come from Matthew Bramble himself.<sup>81</sup> Among many other problems, Mr Bethune suffered much with digestive discomfort and wind. Cullen attempted for some time to treat this with aperients and suggestions regarding diet and exercise. But a few weeks before the patient died in 1782 he concluded that there was 'some contractions or narrowing of some part of the Colon which laxatives or purgatives cannot remove'.<sup>82</sup> The last few weeks of the patient's life were distressing for him and for all concerned in his

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<sup>79</sup> The name 'Bethune' is a variant spelling of the Scots surname 'Beaton'. Nigel Leask, *pers. comm.*

<sup>80</sup> All letters concerning Mr Bethune cited are to be found in CCC CASE ID: 260.

<sup>81</sup> The famous valetudinarian in Tobias Smollett's last novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (London: 1771). This work is described by Georges Rousseau as 'five characters in search of different kinds of health' in *Framing and Imaginary Disease in Cultural History*, eds. G. Rousseau, M. Gill, D. Haycock and M. Herwig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 9. The two CCC letters examined in detail in this section are DOC ID: 155 and DOC ID: 2173.

<sup>82</sup> CCC DOC ID: 566.

care. The case of Mr David Bethune is well documented in an exchange of some 20 letters. I am going to concentrate here on the two particular letters mentioned above and also on a reference by Cullen in a letter to another of Mr Bethune's doctors, Dr Menzies, to the possible use of electricity to treat Mr Bethune's eye problem.

Cullen's letter regarding Mr Bethune of 4<sup>th</sup> April 1781 is addressed 'to Mr John Goodsir' and 'For Mr Bethune of Balfour'. It was written shortly after seeing the patient himself, and 'being minutely informed of all his complaints'. Cullen continues:

I am still of the opinion that his only ail/ment is a weakness of his stomach. This after long / continuance at Mr Bethune's time of Life cannot be / radically and entirely cured but by pursuing cer/tain measures with attention and pains it can / certainly be much and rendered very moderate /

The measures to be pursued are partly the use / of medicines but more effectually by Air and Exercise.

Admitting defeat in the matter of getting Mr Bethune to take exercise in the fresh air at home, Cullen tries a suggestion he makes very often in his consultation correspondence: take an overland journey and (where possible) partake of healing spa waters. The date is propitious as this is only possible and at all agreeable in late spring and summer. If Mr Bethune choses to travel north, Cullen suggests a circular journey via Fort Augustus (along the military road) and Peterhead, where he could take the waters (suitably warmed). If the patient continues his journey by travelling on southwards:

...he may have an opportunity of making / his journey as long as he pleases and journeying / is there to be his chief object for on reflexion I cannot / find that any mineral water within his reach is / likely to be of any service to him.

There follows dietary advice about avoiding ‘almost all baked and fried meats and all fat and greasy meats or sauces’ and also about avoiding ‘roots and greens’ for their flatulent effect.

Cullen also advises a complex laxative and ‘stomach strengthening’ regime which includes the use of *Columba*, with careful observation of its effects as this is a kind of plant-based pharmaceutical product newly available in Edinburgh.<sup>83</sup> John Murray M.D. cites its effect as:

Powerful antiseptic and bitter...used with much advantage in affections of the stomach and intestinal canal, accompanied with redundance of bile, it is also employed in dyspepsia.<sup>84</sup>

Continuing with advice about treating the patient’s persistent giddiness with the application of leeches as ‘I know that such a disorder of the stomach often affects the head & throws the blood too much upon it’, Cullen concludes by suggesting treating Mr Bethune’s painful eye topically with a mixture (detailed in the appended recipe) of ‘two drachms of Unguentum Saturninum, [a lead-based ointment], one ounce of wax Liniment’ [white beeswax] and a sufficient quantity of the best Olive Oil to make a Liniment’.

Interestingly, it is clear that he has examined the eye very closely himself, and confesses he does not know if this treatment will work. Previously in this correspondence Dr Menzies has suggested to Cullen that ‘Electricity done in the Gentlest way’ might be tried

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<sup>83</sup> This substance is not listed in either Willam Cullen’s *A Treatise of the Materia Medica* (1789) or the 1792 edition of the *Pharmacopeia Edinburgensis*. Its medical efficacy is described but the actual plant is not identified (apart from the fact that it comes from Ceylon) by John Murray (MD, Edinburgh) in the 1804 edition of his *A system of Materia Medica and Pharmacy*. In the sixth edition of this publication (1832), it is given the name *Menispermum coccular* Roxburgh and *Coculus palmatus* de Candolle. The modern name of this plant, known to be a tropical climber, is not clear. Its identification in the CCC as *Swerta carolinensis*, the yellow gentian from Ontario, may be incorrect. John Murray alerts the reader to the fact that this American version of the plant was not the real thing.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 1804 edn, vol. 1, p. 186.

as a treatment for Mr Bethune's eye problem'. Cullen replies the very next day with a comment that combines the possibility of somewhat 'cutting-edge' treatment with a realistic assessment of Mr Bethune's situation:

With regard to the failure of the sight I believe Mr Bethune / himself judges properly in imputing it to age and few at his time / of life miss feeling some failure of that kind and surely no opacity in / the edge of the cornea can have any share in it – if / possible. I have found Electrical sparks taken from the eye very quickly discuss [meaning here disperse] inflammation but it does not give any permanent relief and I / never tried it for specks on any part of the cornea.

A search of all the letters in the CCC reveals that treatment with electrical shocks is mentioned in a total of 112 letters, concerning the cases of 79 individuals.<sup>85</sup> Some 81 of the 112 letters are from William Cullen himself. The patients are about equally of either sex, of every adult age group and a wide variety of social backgrounds. A small number of the letters concern discontinuing or advising against the use of electricity, but most make very clear that Cullen is keen on this mode of treatment, in a variety of therapeutic situations, for a period of about 10 years from 1776 to 1786. He writes that machines are available from him in Edinburgh for the use of local doctors and even patients themselves, without the supervision of a doctor. He does not state from exactly where in Edinburgh, but the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, which also treats patients quite frequently with electricity at this time too – possibly as a result of Cullen's influence – was known to lend instruments out.<sup>86</sup> Cullen further states that there is no difficulty delivering one to

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<sup>85</sup> I think the extent of Cullen's use of electrical shocks for his corresponding patients has not previously been mentioned by Cullen scholars.

<sup>86</sup> The use of electricity to treat a wide variety of patients and conditions is recorded (for example) in the *Student Case Books* (Vol. 6) and corresponding *Ward Ledgers* for the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh (1781). University of Edinburgh Library, Special Collections (no catalogue number available at time of consultation).

where it is needed ‘anywhere south of Inverness’, and this in spite of the poor state of all but the Military Roads in Scotland at this time.<sup>87</sup> Diderot illustrates the transportation of ‘crown’ glass for building purposes using wicker baskets packed with straw and it is likely that similar methods were used for the transportation of delicate electrical machines.<sup>88</sup> However, as Mrs Watt’s experiences show, lengthy road transportation always risked breakage or loss.

It is not yet known exactly which electrical shock delivering device Cullen favoured – but a small road running along the western edge of Cullen’s estate at Ormiston Hill is called to this day, ‘Leyden Road’. Leiden, previously often spelled ‘Leyden’, was where many Scottish physicians of generations prior to Cullen’s studied – excluded as they were by their Presbyterianism from Oxford and Cambridge. But this name could be a reference to the fact that the Doctor, known in his old age as ‘Old Spasm’ used ‘Leyden jars’ as part of the equipment required to create and store electrical energy for when it was therapeutically required.<sup>89</sup>

The second of the letters in the Cullen–Bethune correspondence singled out for particular attention here is that from Bethune to Cullen, dated 15<sup>th</sup> March 1782, i.e.

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<sup>87</sup> CCC DOC ID: 668. Letter from Cullen to Sutherland of Clyne, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1784.

<sup>88</sup> See illustration: ‘un panier de verre’ in chapter ‘Verrerie en bois’, in Denis Diderot ed., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, (trans. *Encyclopaedia or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Craft*) (France: 1751-1772), vol. 10, 1772. *The Encyclopédie* is the finest, and often the only source for detailed visual information about the activities of pre-industrial workshops in Europe at this time.

<sup>89</sup> There was of course a very widespread fascination with the nature and therapeutic potential of electrical shocks at this time. Benjamin Franklin, Luigi Galvani and the aforementioned Dr Graham were famous performers on the ‘electrical stage’. As was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: the machine used to bring about the resolution to his opera *Così fan tutte* (1790) was said to be magnetic rather than electrical, but electrical ‘effects’ have been used in many productions – and comically ridiculous as the scene is, it is not far from the situation a surprising number of Dr Cullen’s patients found themselves in, at home with their machines.

almost a year after the lengthy detailed letter from Cullen cited, dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1781.<sup>90</sup>

The letter is written in some despair at the failure of advised medical strategies and interventions to help his continuing discomfort and pain and with a gesture that attempts to take a degree of agency in the situation upon himself. The letter begins:

Dear Sir

I have at length taken it upon me without the intervention of / any body else to mention to you my present state of health which is & has / been worse for some time past then ordinary...

This is one of only two letters in this case history written directly to Cullen from the patient, the other being dated some time before in 1774. Both letters focus very closely on the patient's difficulty in easing the pain of what he, and for a long time Cullen himself, takes to be trapped wind. The patient himself does not engage to any extent with Cullen's repeated injunctions regarding fresh air, diet and exercise, as Cullen himself concedes in his letter of 4<sup>th</sup> April 1781, though he does offer to give the (previously ineffective) 'Hartfal spaw' another go, ordering 'a fresh quantity to be sent me'. There were three different wells of health-giving waters to drink and bathe in at Moffat at this time. The oldest was particularly sulphurous in smell and taste but Hartfell (a short walk into the hills from the town) was of the chalybeate variety and successfully marketed beyond the town in bottles.<sup>91</sup> Moffat was fast developing at this time as a health spa, particularly popular in the summer time with the professors of the University of Edinburgh. The letter concludes with a certain rueful stoicism:

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<sup>90</sup> CCC DOC ID: 155 and 2173.

<sup>91</sup> At least one variety of mineral water from Moffat was naturally carbonated. Which of the wells it came from, and whether this is the one that was successfully transported, I have been unable to discover.

My weak / sight which keeps pace with my stomach obliides [obliges] me to  
 employ a Clerk who / is my Wife she presents her compliments to you. I still keep  
 the issue in my shoulder tho I am not sensible of ever being the better of it.<sup>92</sup> I  
 have the pleasure / to be with great esteem / Dear Sir / Your most obedient and  
 humble servant / David Bethune

P:S It may not be improper to mention to you that the Calls to mack / my water  
 are too frequent & always hurried Old age must bring / on debility on every part  
 of the system. If we could get the wind / to pass by its proper channel, it would be  
 a great point gained

Sadly for Mr Bethune the 'great point' was never gained. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May John Goodsir described the patient's suffering in a letter to Cullen and Joseph Black, who had just attended him.<sup>93</sup> Goodsir's awareness that he is writing to not one but two of Edinburgh's senior physicians shows in the anatomical detail he uses to describe Mr Bethune's symptoms, with references to such as 'the curvature of the colon' and 'nephritic symptoms'. Less technically, his detailing of a 'disagreeable smell... felt when Mr Bethune had been reaching [retching]', which he had also mentioned in an earlier letter, could have been a sinister indication of a necrosis in Mr Bethune's digestive system.<sup>94</sup> Aware to the last of Cullen's favouring of such, Goodsir mentions in his last paragraph that heavily dosed up with laudanum and sleeping only fitfully, Mr Bethune 'this day which he has not

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<sup>92</sup> Definition given by research team within CCC: 'An "issue" was created by a small cut in the skin, into which a dried pea was inserted. This caused irritation (and sometimes infection), which generated a continuing trickle of serous fluid (or pus)'.

<sup>93</sup> CCC DOC ID: 2214.

<sup>94</sup> The earlier letter is of 9<sup>th</sup> May 1782 (CCC DOC ID: 2206).

done for ten days... proposes to take an airing'. The patient died around three weeks later.

Looking at this case history as a whole it is hard not to conclude that until his letter of 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1781 Cullen does not share the sense of urgency, even desperation in the situation conveyed by the letters to him from John Goodsir and David Bethune himself. This could be because he was being consulted alongside Joseph Black and many of his letters are written jointly with Black. Or it could be that there is something of a Panglossian aspect to his determination never to concede that someone is too ill, or too old for that matter, for their situation not to be improved. Perhaps with his belated proposal to 'take the air', even in extremis, Mr Bethune shared this attitude.

Certain general observations can be made concerning these three particular patients, the Rev. Mr Thom, Mrs Watt and Mr Bethune. For all three patients the situation is very far, in very different ways, from that of the exemplary Dr Clerk. Which is possibly exactly why Cullen was so eloquent in his praise of Dr Clerk. In the real world, 'exemplary' is not encountered very often. It is also striking in the correspondence of all three of these patients and their medical attendants to Cullen that their situations are all of chronic illness with acute exacerbations, Mr Bethune being the most desperately ill of the three. Guenter Risse maintains in his study of the consultation correspondence that compared with Cullen's hospital-based patients, his corresponding patients were managed 'with an extra dose of caution and less aggressive prescribing'. This being the result of them not being under his actual gaze, so to speak, and also of the fact that most of Cullen's epistolary patients came from a privileged socio-economic group, whereas hospital patients were often far from wealthy – but in the kind of work where either their

employer or a charitable organisation would pay the hospital fees. Maid-servants, sailors and soldiers are frequently encountered in the hospital 'books'.<sup>95</sup>

However, there are aspects of Cullen's care of the Rev. William Thom and Mr David Bethune that seem to qualify Risse's observation. It is difficult to extract and follow individual case histories through the 17 bound volumes in the care of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (RCPE), but the digitization of the patient letters has made this a relatively straightforward task, and the working relationship between Cullen and his 'doctors on the spot' can be better studied. David Shuttleton in his online 'Archive' commentary within the CCC says that the digitized database will help towards a 'better understanding of the limits of diagnostic communication and the dynamics of intra-physician exchange'. Selections from the case history of the two men in our study do seem to demonstrate this.<sup>96</sup> Of course it also happens that all three of these patients, living as they do in Govan, Stranraer and Fife are within the local circles of Cullen's extraordinarily international corresponding reach – and thus very likely to be cared for by his trusted ex-students.<sup>97</sup>

The kind of exemplary epistolary support Cullen offered was the privilege of a few. The usual price was two guineas for at least one letter, with a run of letters sometimes requiring repeat payments and sometimes not. And this in the context of a skilled workman being paid 7/6d for a six day working week.<sup>98</sup> A further observation is that

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<sup>95</sup> See Risse, 'Cullen as clinician', ed. Doig et al., pp. 133-51.

<sup>96</sup> David Shuttleton, cited at: <http://www.cullenproject.ac.uk/archive/> [Jan 2017].

<sup>97</sup> The CCC has interactive maps showing the international reach of his correspondence and the precise location of his corresponding patients.

<sup>98</sup> This was a fairly stable figure in later eighteenth-century lowland Scotland despite a number of bank failures (which caused unemployment but did not undermine wages). The figure is suggested by recent research into the eighteenth-century accounts of the Royal Botanic Garden

there is little sign in this correspondence that Cullen mediates or tempers his interventions because his patients are elderly. On the evidence of the letters examined here, his patients are more likely to point out their advanced age than he is to comment on it. Also, reading more widely in the correspondence, there is a certain repetitiveness in Cullen's responses. Almost always he will structure his advice in relation to the 'non-naturals', paying close attention to the constitution and situation of individual patients, but 'ringing the changes' on his favoured themes with rhetorical subtlety. It is notable however that his language in these letters can be, in the appropriate situations, very 'warm', but it is rarely colourful, with an almost complete lack of any use of metaphor. When he does use metaphor it is usually in communication with other doctors and can be very striking because of its absence elsewhere. An example occurs in a letter from Cullen to an 'unknown doctor' regarding a Mr Strangeways, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1769:

In trusting to the strength of his Constitution and neglecting / a proper manner of living, Mr Strangeways has allowed a / good tenement to fall into disrepair, but I hope it may be kept / tolerably tight for a long time to come if the landlord will be plea/sed to give a little attention to it.<sup>99</sup>

The other theme frequently repeated by Cullen in his consultation correspondence as a whole is the attention he gives to the state of the patients' nerves. As discussed earlier in this chapter, an emphasis on the importance of nerves in

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Edinburgh by myself. See Jane Corrie, 'Stories from the historical archives: About Botanic Cottage, the Leith Walk Garden and John Hope's "other" life as a physician' (unpublished paper presented to the Friends of Hopetoun Crescent Garden, Edinburgh, 2009). See also Anthony Lewis, *Builders of Edinburgh's New Town, 1767–1795* (Reading: Spire Books, 2014), pp. 66–67.

<sup>99</sup> CCC DOC ID: 80. It is possible that in his avoidance of metaphor in his consultation correspondence, and to a large extent in his publications too, Cullen was influenced by the writing of John Locke, and a common eighteenth-century preference for 'plain style'. This is one of the half-dozen 'quotes of the day' that circulate on the front page of the CCC – possibly selected for its untypical use of metaphorical language.

understanding the patient's situation was fundamental to Cullen's teaching and practice – but he was often surprisingly vague and inconsistent in his understanding of their actual anatomy and physiology. This was the case even though such understanding underpinned his complex theories of nosology, which classified all diseases according to the patient's symptoms, in relation to each other. These theories, although very effective as teaching tools, were on the whole not accepted by Cullen's colleagues, and he lived long enough to see them ridiculed even by his students. But in his practice the nerves, literally, bound his understanding of the diseased body to the psychology of the affected patient. His attitude to his patients, in which body and mind were not sundered within his professional expertise, would today be called 'holistic', and his patients' appreciation of this is very clear in their letters to him. Cullen's wide and effective sympathies were often, though not always, influenced by the socio-economic status of the patient. An aspect of our three chosen patients is that he did not discuss nerves very much with any of them, or their doctors. It is not the over-stretched, over-loose or over-worked state of the patients' nerves that matters, so much as their increasing rigidity of habit and reluctance to change. And this Cullen perceives (even and especially concerning his own old age) as a situation which can always be improved.

### **The contribution from Sir John Sinclair**

In conclusion, I would like to return to the 'mapping' of old age in Cullen's time, by a further discussion of the work of the Sutherland land-owner, author, agricultural improver and hyperactive 'mapper', Sir John Sinclair. Sinclair made important contributions both to the development of reliable population statistics in Britain and to our understanding of how old age was viewed in the latter part of the eighteenth

century.<sup>100</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, two of his publications are particularly significant. The first of these is his *Statistical Account for Scotland* which was published in 21 volumes (1791–1799), and the second is the unfinished compilation of thoughts of a lifetime, his *Code of Health and Longevity*, first published in 1807.<sup>101</sup> Although considerable critical attention has been dedicated to the *Statistical Account*, the *Code* has not been widely discussed by scholars. The *Statistical Account* was compiled from responses to a questionnaire sent by Sinclair to every minister of every parish. His use of the word ‘statistical’ was particular. By his own account he met with the word on a visit to Germany and chose to use it in this context to sound impressive and attract attention to his project. He states that his more fundamental purpose is:

...an inquiry into the state of a country, for the purpose of ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants, and the means of its future improvement.<sup>102</sup>

However, Sir John’s use of the word ‘statistical’ in this context proved influential in introducing both the word and the modern concept of ‘numerical information often in tabulated form’ to Britain. His questionnaire to ministers does include requests for actual figures, relating, for example, to the different age groups of parish inhabitants. He divides the elderly ‘cohort’ into age 50–70 years old and 70–100 years old, possibly respecting

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<sup>100</sup> Although Sir John was 44 years younger than William Cullen, he was an influential figure from a very young age. He began improving his own very extensive lands in north-east Scotland when he inherited, in 1770, at the age of 16. Cullen did not start work on his Ormiston Hill estate until 1778.

<sup>101</sup> Sir John Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1793). University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, *the Statistical Accounts of Scotland online service* (1999): <http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/> [Jan 2016] Still the best commentary on the complete 1793 *Statistical Account* is Charles W. J. Withers, ‘How Scotland came to know itself: geography, national identity and the making of a nation, 1680–1790’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 21, 4, p. 386.

<sup>102</sup> Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 1, p. 9. Sir John also states in the same passage that the meaning of the word ‘statistical’ in Germany at the time was ‘an inquiry for the purposes of ascertaining the political strength of a country or questions respecting matters of state’.

the biblical, 'three-score years and ten'.<sup>103</sup> Respondents sometimes do provide the requested statistics but not all keep to the questionnaire. The ministers who reply at length and in detail are often as concerned to express their views as they are to provide information. Nevertheless the two *Statistical Accounts* for the parish of Kirknewton (in which Ormiston Hill is situated), published in 1793 and again, following a repeat initiative from the Church of Scotland in 1845, provide the most complete description of Cullen's achievement at Ormiston Hill that has so far been located. It is the author of the 1845 *New Statistical Account* for Kirknewton who states, without giving figures, that the area was renowned for the longevity of its inhabitants.<sup>104</sup>

Maisie Steven comments in her 1995 book on the *Statistical Account* that where statistics are cited by responders:

...in general, longevity does not compare with today's figures. [But] what is noteworthy, however, is the way in which those who did live long seem to have retained their faculties so as to be able to live a completely 'normal' life to a remarkably late stage – in many cases right up to their death.<sup>105</sup>

Steven also makes an illuminating connection between old age and the idea of an active retirement:

Why was it, though, that those who had survived the undoubted hazards of life in the late eighteenth century were still pursuing their normal occupations some 20

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<sup>103</sup> Psalm 90. Going beyond this figure is not recommended: 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.'

<sup>104</sup> See full discussion of the Rev. Mr. Simpson's *Statistical Account of Kirknewton* in Chapter Four.

<sup>105</sup> Steven, p. 101. Although the 1793 *Statistical Account* is frequently cited in studies of particular localities (especially since the confusingly assembled volumes became accessible online), this seems to be the only book-length study that attempts an overview of the whole work.

or 30 years after today's accepted retirement age? Was it simply because nobody had told them it was time to stop and take things easy? From all over Scotland – from Shetland to the Borders, from Aberdeenshire to Tiree – we have reports not simply about old *people*, but old shoemakers, shepherds, spinners, blacksmiths, farmers, still supporting themselves by the trades they had pursued all their lives. Nor was this phenomenon confined to manual workers; mention is also made of schoolmasters, ministers and doctors still active in their late years.<sup>106</sup>

Steven goes on to comment on the surprise of 'early tourists' at the feats of endurance of which Scots were capable, particularly given the extremely frugal diet on which they lived. Not surprisingly for an author who is also a dietician, she finds this frugality (which Sinclair's authors report across all social groups), of great interest:

Although food – comprising mainly dairy products, cereals and potatoes, with a few vegetables, pulses and eggs, a variable amount of fish but for the most, hardly any meat – was not only frugal but decidedly monotonous, its high nutritional rating is quite clear...<sup>107</sup>

Cullen's concerns with regard to his less active, ageing, overfed, under-exercised clientèle, who were inclined to stay indoors out of the Scottish weather because they could, seem rather a matter of common sense when placed alongside such a view of the broader population. But it is important not to label Cullen as 'modern' in the sense of relating to contemporary practice in this respect. His guidance to the particular clientele addressed in his consultation correspondence (concerning diet, exercise, fresh air etc), was informed by his reading of the 'ancients' and his own experience – rather than the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 103.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 103.

scientific methodology that informs our own times. Also the *Statistical Account* was not compiled from reports by impartial, unbiased statisticians. Even though they were likely to have been educated in various aspects of natural science and therefore potentially reliable observers and recorders, the Scottish ministers who reported to Sinclair for his *Account*, were not neutral.

In his later publication, *The Code of Health and Longevity*, Sinclair put old age at the very centre of his enquiries. *The Code* was first published in four volumes in 1807 and later condensed into a one volume version in 1815. In 2008 Sinclair's *Code* was described by John Dallas as 'one of the most comprehensive works on gerontology ever written'.<sup>108</sup> Adam Budd comments on its significance and popularity in his edition of John Armstrong's poem, *the Art of Preserving Health*.<sup>109</sup> Sinclair was justified in his claim that the later publication was necessitated due to the success of the first. But the 1807 work is dense with detail and at times hard to understand. Sinclair wrestles with trying to create a clear taxonomy for his subject, sharing with the reader how he changes his mind about this as the text progresses. This is a pedagogic tactic that Cullen used with apparent success in the lecture theatre, but which does not seem to work for Sinclair here. The four-volume version of the work carries extensive bibliographies which help to locate Cullen's engagement with the subject in his later years. Two of these bibliographies are taken from works by bibliographers of 'scientific' subjects who were renowned at the time, Plocquet and Haller. Sinclair places their lists alongside his own list, extracts from works he considers significant (translated where this is required) and replies by letter from individuals to his appeal for information. He also includes statistical

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<sup>108</sup> John Dallas, 'The indefatigable Sir John Sinclair's "Code of health"', *Journal of Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 38, p 187.

<sup>109</sup> ed. by Budd, p. 45.

tables carrying information about the elderly inhabitants of work houses for the poor in London, including disaggregated figures for people born in the different countries of the United Kingdom.<sup>110</sup>

*The Code* is structured around the non-naturals of diet, exercise, elimination, air etc. and in its 'Conclusion' it includes recommendations to read John Armstrong and Ossian as well as William Buchan, Charles Wesley, Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, William Smellie and Benjamin Franklin. Cullen would not have concurred with the recommendation of Smellie and Buchan, both of whom opposed his teaching in the later years of his life.<sup>111</sup> Sinclair's inclusion of both authors may place him in the camp opposed to Cullen in his later years, despite their strongly overlapping interest in agricultural improvement. However although *the Code* was published after Cullen's death, Sinclair worked on it for many years and cites a number of books that are also listed in *Cullen's Catalogue*.<sup>112</sup> Rosalind Mitchison's comment in her *ODNB* entry for Sir John that '[*the Code*] cannot be considered a success, since he failed to take advantage of the statistical method when analysing the impact of disease', has possibly impacted on attempts at further interpretation.

## Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with how old age was understood in Enlightenment Scotland, and how Cullen squared up to the subject in his life, his practice and his teachings. His

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<sup>110</sup> See Rosalind Mitchison 'Sir John Sinclair', *ODNB* (2004)

<sup>111</sup> Cullen's disagreements with these two figures are explored by Jeffrey Wolf in his thesis. See Wolf, p. 308.

<sup>112</sup> See previous mentions of *Cullen's Catalogue* in this chapter.

written testimony has been considered and placed within the wider literature to which it contributes. The online CCC has been used to show how this documentary resource, newly fully available, can illumine such a theme further. Finally the achievement of Sir John Sinclair has been highlighted. Sir John's 'statistics' and his methods for gathering them were idiosyncratic, but his desire for statistical kinds of evidence was typical of the eighteenth-century 'scientific' mind-set, and an influence on the future gathering of such evidence.

## Chapter Two: Medical Gardening

### Cullen's *materia medica*: his publications, teaching and practice

William Cullen's life and his medical career began and ended in the countryside, surrounded by plants. As well as the obviously plant related pleasures of cultivating his farm and garden, Cullen, like Rousseau and like Goethe, was said to enjoy 'botanising' on his estate in his old age.<sup>1</sup> This entailed the gathering, drying, pressing and mounting (fixing on strong sheets of paper) of plant specimens to be studied for identification and classification. What happened to his herbarium is not known.

Within this plant-related framework to Cullen's life was another that concerned his particular relationship with medicinal plants, the plant-based elements of the *materia medica*.<sup>2</sup> In explanation of this term Cullen comments in the Introduction to his 1789 *Materia Medica* that the origins of the concept are lost in the mists of time, preceding even the ancient Egyptians. However 'at all times the urgency of disease and the knowledge of a few remedies, have engaged man in a constant endeavor to increase the number of them'.<sup>3</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary states that the words are a late seventeenth-century Latin translation of the title of a work by the Greek Dioscorides, *Healing Materials*.<sup>4</sup> The study of *materia medica* reached medieval European universities

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<sup>1</sup> See remark by Rev. Mr Cameron cited by John Thomson and discussed further in Chapter Four: 'In his gardens and pleasure grounds at Ormiston Hill [Cullen] formed an extensive collection of rare trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants. The cultivation of these, and the accurate determination of their species, afforded him always an agreeable relaxation from the more serious studies and labours of his profession'. John Thomson et al., *An Account...* vol. 2, p. 743.

<sup>2</sup> For the way in which the term *materia medica* is used in this chapter see Glossary, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> William Cullen, *A Treatise of the Materia Medica* (1789), vol. 1, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> OED (2016).

from Ancient Greece, via Arabic cultures.<sup>5</sup> The subject tended to become a fixed part of a university-based medical curriculum when a formal, 'philosophical' botanic garden was established. Robert Sibbald and Andrew Balfour founded both Edinburgh's Royal College of Physicians and, in 1670, the city's first physic garden to study both the healing properties and the 'science' of plants.<sup>6</sup>

The term 'materia medica' is now obsolete in mainstream medical teaching, where it has been more or less replaced by 'pharmacology'. Pharmacology is a narrower term than materia medica; it relates (usually) only to the study of the so called 'active ingredients'.<sup>7</sup> Included in plant-based materia medica, as Cullen understood it, were both the 'simples', herbs that could be used by themselves in particular situations and plants relating to the (previously discussed) eighteenth-century 'Hippocratic Revival'.<sup>8</sup> The Galenic 'non-naturals' provided a theoretical and philosophical schema that appealed to the practical, humanitarian ethos of Enlightenment Scotland. It was of immense interest to William Cullen and his peers – and to their students. And as will be seen – this ancient understanding of how health related to illness and how the body and mind related to their environment was also shared by the educated individuals among Cullen's corresponding patients. They looked to their physician for skill and advice in fine-tuning

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<sup>5</sup> According to Cullen, Roman culture did not have very much to add to the Greek understanding of materia medica. William Cullen (1789), vol. 1, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Fletcher, Harold R. and William H. Brown, *The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, 1670–1970* (Edinburgh: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970) p. 46

<sup>7</sup> Herbal cures are currently being studied at RBGE as 'herbology'. This term complements the recently developed 'ethnobotany', the study of all plant uses by people living in the environment of origin of these plants.

<sup>8</sup> 'Simple medicines included fresh and dried plants (roots, bark, wood, herbs, flowers, fruits, buds, seeds, gums/rosins and products from living creatures, juices pressed from plant material, minerals and simple distilled water'. This from the editorial 'Introduction' to Anon. *The Skillful Physician* (London: Thomas Maxy, 1656), repr. by eds. C. Balaban, J. Erlen, R. Sidertis (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997) p. xvii. Cullen used simples as they were fundamental to any materia medica, but in his correspondence the word is not to be found. Traditionally simples were the province of physicians and 'compounds' of the apothecary, but Cullen and his contemporaries were challenging this old division of skills.

the situation, and alleviating their symptoms, rather than absolute cure. In practical terms, the non-naturals are why John Hope tried to grow rhubarb and asafoetida, and why physicians attending George III were so obsessed with his excreta.<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of his career in university teaching, between the academic years starting in 1747 and finishing in 1750, Cullen taught both materia medica and botany at the University of Glasgow. Then during the academic year 1760-1761 he stood in for a colleague at the University of Edinburgh, teaching materia medica here too. This course was such a resounding success that it resulted in a version of notes taken during the lectures by a student being published without his permission.<sup>10</sup> After a deal of huffing and puffing, over some years, he agreed to a further version of this book (now edited and corrected by himself) being published in 1772. The success of the original version was possibly due to the way Cullen had managed to construct a 'system' to classify the different elements of materia medica – which tidied up the ancient, often obscure 'embarrassment of names' so abhorrent to Enlightenment thinking. This paralleled Cullen's more famous system of nosology – a way of classifying all disease processes according to their symptoms. John Hope tried to classify medicinal plants in the 1760s when he too lectured to medical students on materia medica, but he abandoned both the task and its associated professorship in the early years of his career.<sup>11</sup> And this despite having prepared for publication the notes of his predecessor as Professor of Botany in Edinburgh, Charles Alston.

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<sup>9</sup> Noltie, pp. 34,70,78,94.

<sup>10</sup> Anon, *Catalogus Materiae Medicae* (London: 1761).

<sup>11</sup> See NRS: GD/253/144/8/1.

It was not until March 1789, less than a year before he died, that Cullen published his own much more detailed *Materia Medica*.<sup>12</sup> Previously he had published highly successful versions of his medical *Nosology*, his *Institutions of Medicine* and his *First Lines*, but this massive re-working of his *Materia Medica* was his chosen final statement.<sup>13</sup> He could best make this statement with authority at the end of his life and career, because it was based on his long years of treating and advising patients, their relatives and their doctors, in his home, as a visiting physician at Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary and through the letters of his consultation by correspondence.

As in Graeco-Roman times *materia medica* in Cullen's time was grouped into 'animal' (relatively few in number), 'mineral' (rather more), and 'vegetable' (much the largest of the three groups). Given his early career interests in mineralogy, geology, agricultural science and chemistry, Cullen was as interested in the therapeutic use of minerals as he was in the use of plant-based medicinal preparations. But neither mineral-based medications, nor the few remaining, non-food related animal-based ingredients for recipes will concern us here.<sup>14</sup> I am going to focus on the plant-based materials, because there is interesting new information emerging from the CCC and because this particular aspect of his achievement and practice has been so little studied in the past – particularly when compared with the attention that has been given to his achievements in the

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<sup>12</sup> William Cullen (1789).

<sup>13</sup> William Cullen, *Synopsis Nosologiae Methodicae* (Edinburgh: 1769); William Cullen, *Institutions of Medicine* (Edinburgh: 1772); William Cullen, *First Lines of the Practice of Physic* (Edinburgh and London: 1777–1784).

<sup>14</sup> Animal-based *materia medica* included cobwebs, snails, earthworms, millipedes and vipers. These were all retained in the 1756 *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis*, though the human skull, 'mummy', goose and duck fat, scorpion and dog excrement were gone. Of the 1774 edition, fully associated with Cullen, Thomson comments that 'all offensive and absurd articles of the Animal Kingdom with the single exception of millipeds [Thomson's spelling] are discarded'. See John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 571. 'Millipeds' can be found in the CCC.

teaching and practice of chemistry.<sup>15</sup> But in examining the plant-based materials, I intend largely to exclude from my analysis the long list of ‘aliments’ (foods), which Cullen, considered a vital part of his *materia medica*. As with *materia medica* itself, only more so, foodstuffs involve a complexity of synonyms and they are not yet tagged in the CCC, i.e. entered into the database of sorts of items that can be collated or cross-compared. However spices, as they always have done, count as both food and medicine and they are very important elements in Cullen’s recipes for his generally comfortably off, elderly patients.

John Thomson gives a dutiful description of Cullen’s *materia medica* related publications, though he underestimates the eventual success of the 1789 volumes and shows something of a lack of interest in actual plants. The 1990 anniversary publication looks at Cullen and *materia medica* only through the lens of Cullen’s teaching on dietetics.<sup>16</sup> More recently there have been two publications that do shed more light on the study of plant-based *materia medica* in Cullen’s time. The first of these is the aforementioned memoir by Henry Noltie of Cullen’s university colleague and contemporary Professor John Hope.<sup>17</sup> In this richly illustrated publication Noltie comments on Hope’s work with some standard plants of the *materia medica* he shared with Cullen, such as the aforementioned *asafoetida* and *rhubarb*. The two doctors enjoyed professional lives that followed a parallel trajectory. Both were Edinburgh-based university physicians and professors lecturing in a variety of subjects and both had a

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<sup>15</sup> The study of the history of chemistry has followed a similar trajectory to that of the study of the history of medicine, outlined in the Introduction. However in terms of taxonomic science the history of botany is botany itself. New plants can only be identified as such by searching the historic literature. Until the development of molecular and sub-molecular studies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all botanists were to a certain extent historians of their own science, but historians of science have been slow to develop an interest in botany.

<sup>16</sup> Passmore, ‘William Cullen and dietetics’, ed. Doig et al., p. 167.

<sup>17</sup> See also fig. 4.

strong interest in plant taxonomy and materia medica. Both were elected President of the Royal College of Physicians and both were sometimes consulted about the same patient – for example Cullen, Hope and Munro Secundus were involved in the remarkable exchange of letters concerning Dr Samuel Johnson, which will be examined at the conclusion of this chapter. However the nature of the relationship between the two men is something of a mystery. Being close neighbours in the Old Town and with many overlapping interests and club and society memberships (notably the very influential Select and Philosophical Societies) it is unsurprising that there is little in the way of correspondence between them. Only one letter has been identified to date, where Cullen asks Hope's advice about a precise point of plant taxonomy.<sup>18</sup> However when resistance to Cullen's ideas and teaching began to take a factional turn in the 1770s there is some suggestion that Hope could be found in the 'contra-Cullen' camp – though no direct written evidence has been found to support this. Jeffrey Wolf has researched this politicking against Cullen and identifies a line-up of significant figures against him that included John Rutherford, John Gregory, William Smellie, John Brown and William Buchan.<sup>19</sup> Significantly William Smellie published most of Hope's very few publications and benefitted greatly from Hope's active patronage. It is possible that John Hope can be added to Jeffrey Wolf's list – though Hope himself does not seem to have been a factionalist, certainly not of the gusto of someone like Smellie. Perhaps Cullen and Hope managed to bury their differences in their working relationship.

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<sup>18</sup> GU Sp Coll: MS Cullen 717/4, 717/5. Thank you to Jeffrey Wolf for alerting me to this document. Its date, from internal evidence, is probably soon after 1767. There is a broader point to be made; which is that one of the drivers of the 'science' of botany emerging at this time was the need felt by physicians such as Cullen to be absolutely sure of the identity of the plant he was prescribing in his recipes. This need for taxonomic precision also affects the new interest among arts scholars in materia medica, evinced by the two *Materia Medica on the Move* conferences held in Holland (Leiden and Amsterdam) in 2015 and 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Wolf, Appendix 4C, p. 316.

To return to recent research into the materia medica used and promoted by Hope and Cullen, Andrea-Holger Maehle has also published a case study of three much-used medicines of this time: opium, lithotriptics (or ‘stone dissolvers’) and Peruvian bark.<sup>20</sup> In this publication Maehle looks at the coverage of natural science in contemporary magazines and periodicals, noting that while not publishing on such topics themselves, William Cullen and Joseph Black strongly facilitated publications in Edinburgh by Andrew Duncan in particular, by giving him the active support of the university medical faculty. Maehle draws attention to the further contribution to this literature of provincial authors, apothecaries and surgeon apothecaries, though concluding that ‘the important work was done by the élite physicians and naturalists’.<sup>21</sup>

### **Other aspects of Cullen’s grounding in the study of plants**

In his very early years, after attending school and while attending occasional lectures at the University of Glasgow, Cullen was bound apprentice to Dr John Paisley of the University Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons.<sup>22</sup> As a surgeon’s apprentice he would have learned the methods of the apothecary trade and helped to prepare actual medications. Aged nineteen he crossed the Atlantic as a ship’s surgeon, returning to London to work as an assistant to an apothecary. In 1732 he established himself as a surgeon-apothecary at Shotts, near Hamilton. In his mid-20s, in 1734, he became a student of medicine at the

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<sup>20</sup> Andreas-Holger Maehle, *Drugs on Trial: Experimental Pharmacology and Therapeutic Innovation in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (Netherlands, USA: Rodopi, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 2. Further details of Cullen’s career are given by M. Barfoot. Without the timeline of Cullen’s various (often overlapping) academic posts and publications Barfoot provides, it would have been difficult to decipher the detail of Cullen’s varied career from Thomson’s biography alone. See Barfoot, ‘Philosophy and Method’, ed. Doig et al., pp110-133, (fig. p. 115).

University of Edinburgh, but the death of his father in 1736 necessitated a return to Hamilton, where as well as developing his local medical practice, he functioned as an all-purpose doctor to the family of the Duke of Hamilton (and as such to their dogs and horses too). In 1745 Cullen attained his first university professorship (at Glasgow), teaching chemistry and the theory and practice of medicine. Between 1748 and 1750 he also lectured in materia medica and botany.<sup>23</sup> In 1754 he attempted an intervention in relation to the University of Glasgow's botanic garden, suggesting a new, more smoke-free site and more effective supervision by a salaried gardener.<sup>24</sup> His suggestions were not taken up, however, and the university did not develop an adequate botanic garden until the 1820s.

As a further comment on the different development of the Glasgow- and Edinburgh-based medical establishments during the years of Cullen's career it should be noted that the balance and rivalry between physic and surgery differed between the two cities. In Edinburgh the relationship between the two emerging disciplines was more contested. As a university-taught, theory-heavy cluster of subjects, practitioners of medicine were keen to distance themselves from practitioners of surgery, which was more of a practical training starting with an apprenticeship which could involve years of sleeping 'under the table' of the master's workshop. This basic social division of activities was never as pronounced in Glasgow – and this is reflected even today in the survival of Glasgow's conjoint Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, an institution unique of its kind.

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<sup>23</sup> The words 'botany' and 'botanist' seem to have come into English usage from the Greek ('botanikos'), via the French 'botanique' towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The appointment of James Sutherland as King's Botanist and superintendent of the King's Garden in Edinburgh in 1699 is possibly an early use of the term. See Fletcher and Brown, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> See A. D. Boney, *The Lost Gardens of Glasgow University* (Bromley, Kent: Christopher Helm Publishers Ltd., 1988), p. 87.

The various activities of his early career, together with his origin and allegiances in the west of Scotland, gave Cullen an unusually thorough grounding in both the theory and practice of plant-based medicine. As well as going on to lecture and publish on materia medica, Cullen was also very involved in the ongoing publication of repeat editions of the *Edinburgh Pharmacopoeia*.<sup>25</sup> He never ceased to add to his knowledge of the handling of actual plants and plant-based preparations, a fact that is celebrated by the survival of his pestle and mortar, now in the custodianship of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, as I will illustrate in Chapter Four, like Voltaire's *Candide* Cullen's story ended with the 'necessity of cultivating [his] garden', at Ormiston Hill.<sup>27</sup>

Cullen's hands-on knowledge of plant-based medicines is demonstrated well in the letters cited in the previous chapter relating to the care of Mrs Watt. He gives clear directions for the preparations of this lady's medicines, accompanying this with a complex programme of when and how she is to dose herself:

[concerning the strengthening drops and the aperient] It is towards the spring that they will be most necessary and usefull & therefore till after Christmas she should hardly take them at all but during the winter & spring months she may take them pretty constantly.

Such detail flatters Mrs Watt's status as a valetudinarian, though interestingly neither doctor nor patient actually use the word in their recorded letters.

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<sup>25</sup> See comment on the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* in next section.

<sup>26</sup> Though this artefact could be justifiably claimed by historians of the science of chemistry too.

<sup>27</sup> Concluding words spoken by *Candide* in Voltaire's satirical novella *Candide* (Paris: 1759). The last years of Voltaire's own career were lived out at his garden estate of Ferney.

Cullen's letters in this case do give the impression that he has actually prepared the medicines himself. But at this stage of his career this was probably therapeutically deliberate, rather than actually true.

### **Preparation for a study of Cullen's use of plant-based *materia medica***

Detailed comment on the medicines given to the three elderly patients discussed in the previous chapter is possible because of a larger investigation into all 214 of the plant-based materials listed in the CCC. The objective of this investigation (still ongoing) is to put supplementary information onto the CCC database, including digital photographs of growing plants, together with photographs of pressed, dried and mounted herbarium specimens. This has proved a complex task due to the instability of the often archaic nomenclature of the medical ingredients involved (unstable even within and between Cullen's own letters) and the difficulty in precise plant identification due to changes between then and now in taxonomic identification.<sup>28</sup> To give an example of the situation, in relation to just one of the 'botanicals' cited in the CCC, 'cinnamon', the following information has already been deduced by the CCC research team, supplemented by my own reference to the 1792 *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis*:

**Name encountered in a letter: Cinnamon:**<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> I acknowledge with gratitude advice from Henry Noltie, Leonie Paterson and Graham Hardy (RBGE), Mark Herraghty (Digital Consultant CCC), David Shuttleton (PI CCC) and Iain Milne (Sibbald Librarian RCPE) in the development of my method of enquiry here. Henry Noltie has also advised on the derivation of plant names in this chapter and on their correct expression. Where plant names are used elsewhere in this thesis, full accuracy regarding their provenance has not been attempted.

<sup>29</sup> Cinnamon is discussed later in this chapter in relation to medications prescribed for Mrs Watt.

**Synonyms** for this ‘botanical’ in the correspondence: *Cinnamomum*, cinam, cassia (an inferior kind but especially the bark obtained from *Cinnamomum Cassia*), Diacassia.

**Ingredient group:** Botanical (i.e. not animal or mineral).

**Information from the 1792 *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis***, Materia medica section: Nom. Prop. (‘proper name’ i.e. name likely to be recognized by apothecary), *Cinnamomum verum* (Cortex) (i.e. outermost layer of stem or root is the usual part of plant to be used), Nom.Vulg. (‘vulgar name’, in this edition usually a Linnaean binomial and often, though not here, differing from the ‘Nom. Prop.’), *Cinnamomum verum* L.

The method for proceeding with the investigation has been to cross-refer the botanicals listed in the CCC itself to the 1792 edition of the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* and to look for supplementary information in the 1790 edition of William Woodville’s *Medical Botany* and Cullen’s own 1789 *Materia Medica*.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout his long connection with the University of Edinburgh Cullen was very engaged with the updating and improvement of the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis*. An edition had been produced in 1756 by the Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh (RCPE) as Cullen took up his first Edinburgh professorship. In 1774, in close collaboration with Pringle and Munro ‘Secundus’ he was responsible for the major updating and clarifying of a new edition. This rendered the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* lastingly famous and reliable through many more editions, including a second under Cullen’s influence published after his death in 1792. In 1864 the *British Pharmacopoeia*, representing the

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<sup>30</sup> *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* (Edinburgh: 1792); William Cullen *Materia Medica* (1789); William Woodville, *Medical Botany*, 4 vols and supp. (London: James Phillips, 1790–1794).

merger of editions from Edinburgh London and Dublin was published in London. This *Pharmacopoeia* has been published annually since then and remains in active use today.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* of 1792 is in Latin makes little difference to its ease of use, clarity and logical construction as a working reference book.<sup>32</sup> This is just as well as it has proved to be an essential stage in the exercise of elucidating Cullen's 'botanicals'. In the 1774 edition of the *Pharmacopoeia* Cullen et al. use a (deliberately) limited number of already established names from the apothecary trade, rather than the more recently – and still not fully stabilized – Linnaean plant names. Many more Linnaean binomial plant names are cited in the 1792 edition of the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* than the 1774 edition, which is why it has been preferred for this analysis.<sup>33</sup> Even though the 'artificial' classification system developed by Linnaeus has been long abandoned by scientific botany, many of the genera and even the species he described have proved remarkably stable – and are still in use today. Where taxonomic understanding of plants and plant groups has moved on from Linnaeus it is more difficult, sometimes prohibitively difficult, to identify the actual plant Cullen is referring to in his recipes.

The fine engraved illustrations (later hand-coloured) of individual plants by James Sowerby in William Woodville's work will be used to find accurate modern digital photographs of the plants concerned to enhance the currently very text-heavy CCC.

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<sup>31</sup> *British Pharmacopoeia*, published annually (London: British Pharmacopoeia Commission).

<sup>32</sup> My own level of expertise here is O-level Latin and familiarity with Latin-based botanical terms. The edition of the 1792 *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* available for consultation at the NLS has many notes added in pencil over years of use by the Glasgow-based physician, Dr Thomas Brown of Lanfine and Waterhaughs (1774–1853). This doctor has also interleaved the book with lecture notes from his student days.

<sup>33</sup> John Hope produced a further edition in 1783, one of the years of his own Presidency of the RCPE. This used Linnaean binomials for the first time, but not as securely or frequently as is the case in the 1792 edition.

Woodville was a student of both William Cullen and John Hope and the five volumes of his *Medical Botany* have many enthusiastic references to and citations from both these authors. Woodville himself was a noted natural historian and botanist, with a large natural history collection and his own botanical garden in London.<sup>34</sup>

### **The use of plant-based medicines in Cullen's care of his elderly patients.**

In relation to the three patients whose care was detailed in the previous chapter, some 24 individual plant-based ingredients and three preparations which include plant-based materials are mentioned. This is in the context of some 214 plant-based ingredients and preparations identified within the CCC as a whole. One can refer to these substances collectively (and not anachronistically) as 'botanicals'. Students of physic were developing something of a quarrel with the need for accurate plant identification at this time. They are known to have resented being obliged to stay in Edinburgh over the summer months to study botany with John Hope – when they could have learned about healing plants 'from their mother or housekeeper at home' as one particular student noted in his journal.<sup>35</sup>

The list of botanicals selected to be looked at in relation to the three elderly patients as they appear in the letters themselves are:

In relation to the **Rev. William Thom**: Liquorick and laudanum.

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<sup>34</sup> Deborah Brunton, 'William Woodville (1752–1805)', *ODNB* (2004).

<sup>35</sup> 'Letter of Thomas Ismay, student of Medicine... ', *University of Edinburgh Journal*, 8, 59. Similarly as late as the 1960s university medical students were sometimes not enthusiastic about the time they had to spend at RBGE studying botany and plant-based pharmacology. *Pers. comm.* Dr Jean Doyle, Edinburgh pharmacologist.

In relation to **Mrs Watt**: Flora Balaustris, rose, kino, myrrh, aromatics, rosemary, lemon, Peruvian bark, cinnamon and nutmeg.

And in relation to **Mr David Bethune**: Peruvian bark, cinnamon, rhubarb, orange peel, cloves, Colomba, allspice, and ginger.

It may seem surprising that so many of the botanicals identified here are very much in current use. Liquorice, rosemary, lemon, orange peel, cloves, ginger etc. are as familiar a way of making life more palatable today as they were in Cullen's time. In the eighteenth century the growth of the European global trade rendered such exotic luxuries more available to more people. And making things palatable through the use of such luxuries was an important part of Cullen's task. It is well known to those who partake of either western herbal mixtures or those produced within the Chinese tradition, that such mixtures frequently do not taste pleasant. 'Sweetening the pill' is a concept that has not been important in all medical traditions.<sup>36</sup> 'Bitters' were valued by physicians for their astringent properties and the unpleasant taste was part of their perceived efficacy (as was the case for mineral waters) but medicines were also an important reason to partake of the nicer tasting luxuries of life.

### **Rev. William Thom**

The first mentioned botanical, in relation to the correspondence with the Rev. Mr William Thom is liquorice. He writes in the letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> August 1781:<sup>37</sup> 'P.S. Perhaps the

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<sup>36</sup> The first recorded use in Britain of the similar 'gild the pill' is by Robert Boyle in *The Excellence of Theology* (London: 1674).

<sup>37</sup> CCC DOC ID 2048.

Looseness is owing to the Sugar of Liquorick and the Porter which I was advised to drink liberally'. Liquorice is made from the stalks and roots of a shrubby plant, *Glycyrrhiza glabra* L., which is readily grown in Britain, having been originally introduced by medieval monks. Cullen is lukewarm in his comments on the substance in his *Materia Medica* (1789), nevertheless it is mentioned in some 146 letters in the CCC.<sup>38</sup>

With regard to laudanum, there is a probable reference by Cullen in his letter of 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1783 to William Thom's local doctor Mr James Parlane of laudanum, though the letter at this point is not fully legible. Nevertheless as this compound was such an important part of Cullen's botanical armoury (and as it is also prescribed for Mr Bethune) I am going to discuss it here. Research into the database by the CCC team has already revealed that in all the letters this compound also goes by the name of 'T.T.', 'Thebiac Tincture', 'Tinc. Theb.', 'Liquid Laudanum' and 'L.L.'. As is very well known, through the literature of a somewhat later period, laudanum is a mixture of opium and alcohol. Interestingly there is no mention at all of laudanum as such in either volume of Cullen's *Materia Medica*, though there is a lengthy commentary on opium. However laudanum or its synonyms are named in 745 letters in the CCC, and opium as such in 127 letters. Opium too has many synonyms in the CCC.<sup>39</sup> It is possible that in his bitter falling out with John Brown (after 1776), Cullen was not going to use a word so associated with his former student in his own final statement to the world. Thomson notes that after the final rupture, Cullen was not capable of pronouncing John Brown's name.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> William Cullen *Materia Medica*, (1789), vol. 2, p. 147.

<sup>39</sup> The CCC lists: 'Diacodium', 'Paregoric', 'Poppy', 'Syrop de mecon', 'Capitum Papaver', 'Pacific Pills', 'paper album', 'somniferum'. The CCC further describes opium as 'a narcotic addictive resin, derived from the sappy seed heads of the Opium Poppy *Papaver somniferum* (L.)'.

<sup>40</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 651.

In Volume Two of his *Materia Medica* Cullen does include a lengthy contribution to the extensive debate going on at the time as to whether opium was a narcotic or a stimulant. His insistence on attending to the ‘particulars of the situation’ makes this contribution difficult to understand or summarise.<sup>41</sup> But he often used it with ‘Peruvian bark’ to counteract fever and states clearly: ‘I hold opium to be one of the most effective means of supporting the vigour of the system’.<sup>42</sup> In both his *Materia Medica* and letters to consulting patients it is clear that, although Cullen recognized opium was a powerful drug that could be used judiciously in a wide variety of applications, he seems unaware of its potential addictive properties.<sup>43</sup>

Alcohol receives fairly vestigial attention in Cullen’s *Materia Medica*. His advice concerning alcohol consumption generally for his elderly patients can be summarized as ‘do your best to cut back’ to the gentlemen, while being realistic about their ‘habitus’, and maybe a ‘little of what you fancy does you good’ to the ladies, fine-tuning his particular recommendations to their station in life. He was certainly aware of the potential dangers inherent in the high drinking culture of his own professional and social circles – and whenever he got the chance, counselled moderation, while admitting that he was sometimes not capable of following his own advice.

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<sup>41</sup> For opium see William Cullen *Materia Medica* (1789), vol. 2, p. 244 and many mentions closely following. For alcohol, *ibid.* vol. 2, p. 241.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* vol. 2, p. 241.

<sup>43</sup> Although Cullen had much to say on dangers of using opium wrongly, in the very lengthy section on opium in his 1789 *Materia Medica* there is no mention of the dangers of addiction.

## Mrs Elizabeth Watt

There are rather more botanicals to be considered in relation to Mrs Watt, the lady who is so concerned for the prompt and safe delivery to Stranraer of her particular medications. I will concentrate here on just one letter, the very first from Cullen in his correspondence with Mrs Watt. In the recipe appended to his letter of 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 1779, Cullen uses a variety of botanicals, some with an obvious purpose of ‘sweetening the pill’ (or here – the potion):<sup>44</sup>

For Mrs Watt of Stranrawer

Take one drachms each of Pomegranate flowers and red rose, a pound and a half of boiling water. / Soak for six hours and add three drachms of Alum. Strain and to the strained liquid add / Two ounces of Tincture of Kino gum, two ounces of Tincture of Myrrh. Mix and / Label: The Gargle / Take two ounces of Tincture of Mars, half an ounce of Tincture of Aromatics. Mix and Label. / Strengthening Drops / Take six ounces of Tincture of Peruvian bark and twelve ounces of Cinnamon water. Mix and / Label aperient Tincture / Take two drachms of Soluble Tartar, three ounces or a sufficient quantity of , four ounces of Rose water, two ounces each of Simple cinnamon water and nutmeg, one ounce of Simple Syrup and / one drachm of Sodium carbonate. Mix and Label: Aperient mixture

Pomegranate flowers have astringent properties and they are referenced briefly by Cullen in his *Materia Medica* and mentioned in some 48 documents in the CCC, where they are also listed as ‘Flor. Balaust.’<sup>45</sup> The flower and fruit bearing tree is named in the

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<sup>44</sup> CCC Case ID 1594, DOC ID 4505.

<sup>45</sup> The spelling out of ‘Balaustria’ in the CCC may be incorrect for ‘Balaustia’.

*Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* as *Punica granatum* L. – and would have been imported from various Mediterranean countries. The bark of the pomegranate tree also has astringent qualities, and this is also listed in the CCC and referenced by Cullen in his *Materia Medica*. Possibly the flowers offered a milder, scented alternative.

The next botanical listed here – ‘the rose’ – was as well-known as a flavour for confectionery and cakes as it was a sweetening perfumer of medicines in Cullen’s time. The rose (commonly prepared as a jelly from dried petals) lost its well-established and ancient identity as a flavour, as well as a scent, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This coincided with the growing availability in Britain and Europe of the bean pods of the vanilla orchid – introduced from America.<sup>46</sup>

So far, so florally straightforward. But now comes ‘Tincture of Kino gum’, behind which is an interesting tale of botanical discovery and therapeutic innovation. In his *Materia Medica* (1789) Cullen comments that Kino gum was first described by Dr Fothergill in 1757 as an ‘astringent gum transported from Africa’. Also known as ‘Pau de Sangue’ it was a part of the RCPE’s medical armoury, but of ‘no other College that I know of’. He further comments that it is very nice in brandy – but more effective without.<sup>47</sup> The actual tree, now *Pterocarpus erinaceus* Poir. was identified by Mungo Park on his final trip to Africa – from which he did not return. Park himself composed a lyrical elegy to Cullen after Cullen’s death.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Though the rose has held out against vanilla as a flavour as well as a scent in some parts of Central Europe until today. *Pers comm.* Krisztina Rábai.

<sup>47</sup> William Cullen (1789), vol. 2, p. 44.

<sup>48</sup> See also the later stages in the story of ‘kino’, and its possible confusion with other substances in J. Forbes Royle and Frederick W. Headland, *A Manual of Materia Medica and Therapeutics*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (London: John Churchill, 1865), p. 394.

Next comes another tincture – this time ‘Tincture of Myrrh’, a tonic favoured by Cullen as he prescribes ‘myrrh’ in the CCC on some 48 occasions. Commenting in the *Materia Medica*, however, Cullen adopts a slightly lofty and dismissive tone as he is sometimes apt to do in relation to substances well known to apothecaries, and (as in this case) to the general public too. Nonetheless, he concedes myrrh’s usefulness as an antiseptic and tonic, which is how he is using it here, in relation to Mrs Watt’s painful throat. It is very likely that the plant concerned is one or several species of the genus now known as *Commiphora* Jacq. Over millennia different species were grown at different times in different parts of the Middle East.

Progressing to Mrs Watt’s ‘strengthening drops’, Cullen itemises the ‘Tincture of Aromatics’ (mentioned 39 times in the CCC), which is described within the CCC as a ‘general term for highly perfumed botanical substances’ – another aspect to the sweetening of Mrs Watt’s medications, though we can note, as with ‘rose’, a suggestion of a different balance of scent and flavour between Cullen’s time and our own.

Finally, Mrs Watt’s ‘aperient tincture’ includes an ingredient of vital importance in any seventeenth and eighteenth-century physician’s stock of medicines – ‘Peruvian bark’. This was most commonly used as an astringent febrifuge – i.e. to reduce the sweating that was an aspect of ‘intermittent’ (or malarial type) type fevers. It is being used here in its supplementary roles as an aperient, an effective treatment for sore throats and a tonic. Peruvian bark is mentioned a total of 1,710 times in the CCC. Cullen used it as a reliable all-round ‘bucker-upper’ and to restore the all-important ‘tone’ of the digestion,

rather than as a treatment for fever.<sup>49</sup> He was wary of using ‘the Bark’ in the presence of fevers, preferring to emphasise its useful effect on the patient’s nerves. In the CCC it is very often prescribed a number of times for the same patient – hence the very large number of citations. The powdered bark, which comes from various species of the South American genus *Cinchona*, is also referred to in the CCC as ‘Jesuit’s bark’, ‘the Bark’, ‘Cort. Peruv.’, ‘Cortex Peruv.’, ‘Quinquina’, ‘cinchona’, ‘China’, and ‘Kina’ (which was the cause of occasional confusions with the previously mentioned ‘Kino’).

Cullen’s ‘write-up’ of Peruvian bark in his *Materia Medica* was to play an important role in the development of homeopathy.<sup>50</sup> The German physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843) translated Cullen’s text into the German language the same year it was published in English (1789). In an attempt to better understand how Peruvian bark worked, he medicated himself. Self-medication was an increasingly popular, and quite respectable method of experimentation among medical professionals from the 1780s well into the nineteenth century. To Hahnemann’s surprise he developed the symptoms of malaria, having not shown them before – and from articulating his disagreement with Cullen as to how the medicine worked he went on to elaborate his homeopathic theories. Whether or not these theories were correct is not so important here as the fact that homeopathic practice maintains aspects of Cullen’s own therapeutic technique in listening very carefully to what the patient has to say and according the patient a generous amount of time.

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Tone’ is a difficult term to define precisely, but it relates to the ancient understanding of a close connection between stomach and head that Cullen manages to align with his theories relating to the action of the nerves. Famously Queen Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> of England declared (on the approach of the Armada) that ‘I have the heart and stomach of a king’. This is a reference to an organ of greater importance in the scheme of things than being just prone to ulcers and having an important role in the process of digestion.

<sup>50</sup> For Peruvian bark see William Cullen, *Materia Medica* (1789). vol. 2, p. 431 (and many other mentions).

Cullen's contemporary and medical colleague, John Hope, Professor of Botany in Edinburgh, was also Regius Keeper of the re-sited and newly re-furbished Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE). Hope engaged with Peruvian bark in an interesting way, trying to replicate a ploy he also attempted (with doubtful success), with Russian sourced rhubarb. He thought of under-cutting the regular suppliers of Peruvian bark with a new species, *Cinchona jamaicensis* discovered growing in Jamaica by William Wright.<sup>51</sup> Wright was an Edinburgh trained surgeon (who had never as it happens been taught by Hope) who became a botanist of great distinction, as well as surgeon-general in Jamaica.<sup>52</sup> But following Wright's recommendation of this plant to the Royal Society in 1777, it was subject to trials and eventually reported as 'far inferior to the Peruvian cinchona'. Hope however continued to cultivate the tree in his botanic garden.

Hope's attempts at cultivating two medicinal ingredients until then sourced from abroad (rhubarb and cinchona) is an indication of what can be termed an interest, among the Scottish professoriate, in 'cameralist' activities. Cameralism, originally a German term, is the attempt by a particular polity to develop its wealth and power by the internal development of economic resources, possibly sourced abroad, rather than through warfare and conquest.<sup>53</sup> A famous theorist (and variously successful practitioner) of cameralism in eighteenth-century Europe was Carl. Linnaeus – though it is not known

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<sup>51</sup> These suppliers were more likely at this time to be British rather than Spanish (*pers. comm.* Nigel Leask). The modern name for this plant is probably *Exostema caribaeum* (Jacq.) Schuldt (*pers comm.* Henry Noltie).

<sup>52</sup> Noltie, p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> John Hope was also closely involved in two other activities with a strong cameralist dimension; the first of these was his support for the creation of the *Flora Scotica*, eventually produced and published by the English clergyman John Lightfoot; see John Lightfoot, *Flora Scotica* (London: printed for D. White, 1777). Secondly he set up a system whereby seeds collected in North America were distributed to British and European subscribers. On Lightfoot and Hope see Frederick Albritton Johnsson, *The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism* (Yale University Press: 2013); and on rhubarb see Johnsson's 'Scottish Tobacco and Rhubarb: The Natural Order of Civil Cameralism in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 49, 2 (2016), 129–147. On Hope's seed distribution network see Noltie, p. 26.

whether Hope and Cullen would have been aware of this aspect of his achievement. In her 2001 publication Lisbet Koerner explores the importance of attempts at cameralism in Sweden by Linnaeus. These included efforts to grow tea and cotton under glass, and to develop a Swedish fresh-water pearl industry. Linnaeus grew up in a Swedish state greatly and lastingly impoverished by the expansionist wars of the seventeenth century. According to Koerner he would have self-identified as an economic botanist as much as he was (famously) a specialist in plant naming and taxonomy.<sup>54</sup> In relation to Cullen's elderly patients, cameralism is connected with understanding aspects of the ageing process that were very much part of the 'stadial' theories being much discussed in the Scotland of Cullen and Hope's time.

To return to the botanicals recommended for our three patients, 'cinnamon' and 'nutmeg' remain to be discussed in relation to Mrs Watt. In the words of the recipe from Cullen, the 'Aperient' mixture should include 'two ounces each of Simple cinnamon water and nutmeg'.<sup>55</sup> Such botanicals were and are valued for both their smell and their taste and have been traded all around the world for thousands of years as a luxury product. A recent critical engagement with the cultural complexity of the international spice trade is to be found in Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic*, which: '...investigates how, principally in the English Literature and culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the representation of spice operated within ideologies of consumption, including notions of trade, abstinence and luxury'.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> See previous letter to Mrs Watt cited in this chapter.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 10. There is a very large literature on the history of the spice trade. See also Fred Czarra, *Spices: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), and Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Cullen also mentions the useful astringent properties of cinnamon in his *Materia Medica* (where he describes it as ‘an aromatic of most grateful fragrance’) and it is referenced some 964 times in the CCC, almost always as ‘simple cinnamon water’. The plant from which the fragrant bark is taken is grown in China and Ceylon and is named in the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* as *Laurus cassia* L.; it is also referred to in the CCC as ‘cassia’. But the taxonomy of this plant is complex its currently accepted name is *Cinnamomum aromaticum* Nees.

Nutmeg is mentioned in the CCC some 143 times. It was commonly recognized in Cullen’s time as a tonic, an *aide digestion* and (anciently) as a panacea. Tiny nutmeg-graters were carried by gentlemen (often attached to a watch chain) to obtain freshly-grated spice for their possets, puddings and hot wine. The outer casing (aril) of the large hard seeds is the constituent of the spice mace. The nutmeg seeds are borne by the tree *Myristica fragrans*, Houtt. The spice was sourced originally from the Spice Islands (modern Moluccas), the trade in nutmeg being defended fiercely by the Dutch. In 1674 they traded control of the island of Manhattan in exchange for the British ceding claims to the Spice Island of Run.

One final note in relation to Mrs Watt is that in his advice regarding the all-important alimentary aspects of this lady’s regimen Cullen advises the reduction of ‘greenstuff’ – by which he means garden vegetables and plants for salad. This is to avoid challenging the digestive system in a situation where the patient is sedentary, frail, almost always of a nervous disposition, with a stomach that lacked tone. There is much about the classically inspired regimen that strikes a chord with modern advice about health care: take exercise, be moderate in eating and drinking, get out in the fresh air, seek cheerful company and so on. But this is one kind of advice that Cullen and very many of

his peers were wont to give again and again that goes very much against the grain of contemporary practice. Remarkably the word 'garden' only appears once or twice in the CCC where it is not included in the phrase 'garden stuff'. This is mentioned many times, usually with the advice: 'to be avoided'

### **Mr David Bethune**

In all of the letters concerning Mr Bethune we find: 'Peruvian bark', 'cinnamon', 'rhubarb', 'orange peel', 'cloves', 'rhubarb' again, 'Colomba', 'allspice', 'ginger', 'mustard', 'daffy's elixir', 'peppermint', 'Andersons pills', 'guaiacum gum', 'gum arabic', 'asafoetida' and 'laudanum'. When 'brandy' (also included) is added to the list it becomes clear that the spices we still associate with the indulgences of Christmas have a long and close association with the domestic medicine cabinet as well as the kitchen spice rack. In this part of my enquiry I will limit comment to the first three letters in this lengthy correspondence, which lasted from 1769 to 1782.

The first letter to be examined, from Cullen to Mr Bethune on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1769, includes the following recipe:

Take an ounce and a half of finely powdered Peruvian bark, a drachm and a half each of powdered white cinnamon and powdered Green / Vitriol, one ounce of conserve of Orange Peel and a sufficient quantity of syrup of Cloves to make an Electuary. Label: the Stomachic Electuary, / the bigness of a filbert to be taken three times a day.

‘White cinnamon’ is unrelated to the cinnamon discussed earlier in this chapter in connection with Mrs Watt. It is recorded in the CCC as ‘Canella Bark’, or (confusingly) as ‘cinnamon bark’ and ‘wild cinnamon’. According to the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* (1792) it was recognized by Linnaeus as *Canella alba* L. In his *Materia Medica* (1789) Cullen claims that *Canella alba* (which he is not enthusiastic about) has for a long time been confused with yet another medication – the *Cortex winteranus*, or ‘true wintergreen’. Presumably in this letter dated much earlier than his publication – Cullen himself shares this confusion.

Regarding ‘Orange peel’, the bitter and later the sweet orange has been familiar in the West as a luxury food and medicinal item for more than 500 years, and in Cullen’s time it could be cultivated in the more northerly countries Europe by the wealthy, under glass. The taxonomic history, ancient and modern, is complex because of the large number of hybrids, ‘back crosses’ and cultivars – though it was known to grow in China more than 3,000 years ago. In his *Materia Medica* of 1789 Cullen gives considerable detail of his understanding of orange peel’s medical efficacy, including the following:<sup>57</sup> Note his use of ‘virtue’ in this passage:

With respect to the virtues of the peel as presently employed, it is very probable that both by its bitter and aromatic parts it may be particularly useful in restoring the tone of the stomach when it has been much impaired; and I have had several observations that justify this opinion: but it does not appear so often as it should, because we employ it almost only in its dried state, and in too small proportion, as we take it dried with part of the white inert substance that is also in the rind of orange.

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<sup>57</sup> William Cullen, *Materia Medica* (1789), vol. 2, p. 87.

*Citrus aurantium* is the name given to the Spanish or bitter orange in the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis* and this is retained in its modern name of *Citrus x aurantium* L. Its dried peel is also named in the CCC as ‘Cortex Aurantium’ or ‘Cort.Aur.’.

Cullen notes the use of ‘conserva of orange peel’ in other letters, for example to his patient Mr Reddie 25<sup>th</sup> January 1776.<sup>58</sup> Dr Johnson was very fond of dried orange peel and kept supplies to hand in his great coat pocket.<sup>59</sup> Along with James Boswell he encountered Scotch marmalade on his travels in Scotland, and in 1779 he was sent a present of such by Boswell’s wife – for which he returned a beautifully bound edition of his *Lives of the Poets*.<sup>60</sup> The Dundee Keillor family’s canny use of shipload of Seville oranges rather past their use-by date, to sell quantities of marmalade commercially did not occur until 1797 – and it was not until the nineteenth century that marmalade became a regular feature of English breakfast tables.

‘Cloves’ are the dried flower buds of the tree known as *Caryophyllus aromaticus* to Linnaeus, which has been re-named *Syzygium aromaticum* (L.) Merrill and Perry. Cullen approves it in the *Materia Medica* as an effective ‘aromatic’ and ‘stomachic’ but says the preparation exported from Holland itself should be used with care as it very strong.<sup>61</sup>

In the second letter of the Bethune correspondence there is a mention by Mr Bethune of his chewing rhubarb.<sup>62</sup> And here we encounter another very frequently used plant-based ingredient in any eighteenth-century pharmacopoeia – and again one that

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<sup>58</sup> See for example mention by Cullen of ‘half a dram of conserva of orange peel’ in a letter to Mr Reddie, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1776. CCC DOC ID: 1237.

<sup>59</sup> Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 1, p. 206.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. vol. 1, p. 264.

<sup>61</sup> William Cullen, *Materia Medica* (1789), vol. 2, p. 205.

<sup>62</sup> CCC Case ID: 260, DOC ID: 863.

would be recognized by the elderly today. It was not the stalk, familiar to us sweetened as a dessert dish, but the (usually) powdered root that was used medicinally. The story of John Hope's engagement with this plant has already been mentioned. It is clear from Hope's recipes for his private patients and from his botanical notes that as his aperient and laxative of choice he very much favoured the new species (*Rheum palmatum* L.).<sup>63</sup> Seeds of this plant were forwarded to various recipients in Scotland in 1763 from St Petersburg by Dr Mounsey, physician to Catherine the Great.<sup>64</sup> Hope also admired this new plant for its statuesque decorative qualities and had a particularly fine watercolour of it growing in cultivation, painted by William Delacour in 1765.<sup>65</sup>

The only species mentioned in the *Edinburgh Pharmacopoeia* is Hope's *Rheum palmatum* L., though 'Rabarbum', cited as the 'Proper name' i.e. the name commonly used by apothecaries and prescribing doctors, was possibly the already identified *Rheum officinalis* or *Rheum rhaponticum*. An aspect of Hope's enthusiasm for the plant that came via Russia was that he believed that not only could the regular trade in this important commodity be by-passed by growing it in Scotland – but that this rhubarb, unlike the expensive, imported 'Turkey Rhubarb' (also itemised in the CCC) was the 'true' rhubarb.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See fig. 5.

<sup>64</sup> See Noltie, p. 34. For further detail on the complex story of rhubarb in eighteenth-century Scotland see F. A. Johnsson, *The Scottish Highlands* and 'Scottish Tobacco and Rhubarb' (2016).

<sup>65</sup> The Rhubarb Restaurant of Edinburgh's Prestonfield House Hotel is named in celebration of the fact that Sir Alexander Dick was another recipient of Dr Mounsey's seeds. There are also fine examples of the plant cultivated in Princes St Gardens, perhaps in recognition of an old Scots–Russian connection.

<sup>66</sup> The CCC also lists as a separate ingredient 'Tincture Rhœi amar' or 'Bitter tincture of rhubarb'. Buchan describes the preparation of this tincture in his *Domestic Medicine*, but in his very many references to rhubarb he does not particularise the species of rhubarb to be used.

This detail makes Cullen's comments in his *Materia Medica* particularly interesting. He declares he is not interested in the 'true' or 'not true' debate:

I do not think it necessary to prosecute the matter farther with any anxiety, as we have now got the seeds of a plant whose roots, cultivated in this country, show all the properties of what we considered as the most genuine and valuable rhubarb; and which properly cultivated and dried, will, I believe, in time supersede the importation of any other.

The rest of Cullen's discussion is not so enthusiastic as he warns against frequently encountered inappropriate use – especially 'the vulgar practice of employing rhubarb in every case of [diarrhoea]' which 'appears to me very injudicious' – though he does favour chewing of the root itself (as Mr Bethune reports he has been doing) as 'very useful to dyspeptic persons'.<sup>67</sup> William Woodville, in his *Medical Botany*, cites both Hope and Cullen in considerable detail, including giving a complete transcription of a *Philosophical Transactions* article published in 1765 and illustrated with an engraving by Andrew Bell of the painting by Delacour mentioned previously.<sup>68</sup> This engraving later appeared in the 1771 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, largely authored by Hope's protégé and Cullen's detractor, William Smellie.<sup>69</sup>

Returning to botanicals for Mr Bethune, in the third of our short sequence of letters, 'Colomba' is next on the list for enquiry. This was another then newly available plant – and has been commented on previously in relation to Mr Bethune in Chapter One.

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<sup>67</sup> William Cullen *Materia Medica* (1789), vol. 2, pp. 529-530

<sup>68</sup> 'Extract of a Letter from Dr. John Hope, Professor of Medicine and Botany in the University of Edinburgh, to Dr. Pringle, Edinburgh, 24 September 1765' *Philosophical Transactions* vol. 55 (1765), 290.

<sup>69</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. by W. Smellie et al. (Edinburgh: Bell and MacFarquhar, 1771).

The last two botanicals to be discussed here are ‘allspice’ and ‘ginger’. Allspice is listed in the CCC as also being known as ‘pepper’, ‘Jamaican pepper’, ‘Pimento’ and ‘Pimenta’. Its Linnaean name was *Myrtus pimenta* but it is now known as *Pimenta dioica* (L.) Merr. The plant was introduced into Europe in the sixteenth century following its discovery in Jamaica by Christopher Columbus. Woodville comments that it is a very agreeable spice, but with little medicinal use.<sup>70</sup> Cullen gives it a considerable entry in his *Materia Medica* (also confusingly under ‘Piper’) where he includes the following observation:<sup>71</sup>

I have all my life had a dislike to the odour and taste of pepper: which I ascribe to an instinct of my constitution; for when I have taken this spicery, though in a small quantity, it always felt warm in my stomach, and my whole body was heated by it.

‘Ginger’ is also listed on the CCC as ‘Zingiber’, ‘Zingib’, ‘Zinzib’, and ‘Zinziber’. In his *Materia Medica* Cullen refers to it as ‘Gingiber’. The root of the ginger plant was exported east and west from India more than two thousand years ago – and was extensively used both as a spice and a medicine (often to disguise the taste of other medicines) by the Romans. Woodville gives it the Linnaean name of *Amomum zingiber*, now recognized as *Zingiber officinale* Roscoe. In his *Materia Medica* Cullen recommends the importation of ‘gingiber conditum’ from either the West or East Indies, ‘Conditum’ being a wine mixed with spices enjoyed in Roman and Byzantine times.

Discussion of these two luxury spices, all-spice and ginger brings to an end this survey of some of the ‘botanicals’ prescribed in recipes by Cullen to the three elderly patients. Two of the individuals involved, the Rev. Mr. Thom and Mr Bethune were

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<sup>70</sup> William Woodville, vol. 1, p. 722.

<sup>71</sup> William Cullen *Materia Medica* (1789), vol. 2, p. 207.

citizens of some socio-economic standing. The third, Mrs Watt, was from a less well off background, her husband had been an excise official at Stranraer. This chapter will conclude with a look at letters in Cullen's consultation correspondence about a major celebrity of Cullen's time and a near contemporary of Cullen himself, Dr Samuel Johnson.

### **The special case of Dr Samuel Johnson**

Letters regarding Dr Johnson's health have already received considerable attention in the secondary literature. This is partly because of a long standing critical concern to find what was 'really wrong' with the Doctor and also because Boswell tells the following rather complex story clearly in his *Life of Johnson*.<sup>72</sup> A particular exchange of letters concerning Boswell, Johnson and three eminent Edinburgh medical men was instigated by Boswell, in March 1784 when both Cullen and Johnson were in their mid-70s (allowing for the uncertainty about Cullen's exact birth date). Johnson's health, which had never been good, was failing rapidly and he was suffering unrelieved pain and discomfort. The letter from Boswell to Cullen in the CCC follows a plea in a letter from Johnson in London to his friend in Edinburgh that Boswell 'ask [his] physicians for advice' – meaning Boswell should consult with some of the Edinburgh doctors Johnson would have met with on his Scottish tour in 1773. Johnson had dined with Cullen in Edinburgh on the evening of 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1773, when the physician 'talked, in a very entertaining manner, of people walking and conversing in their sleep'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*. Sequence of letters commencing March 7<sup>th</sup> 1784.

<sup>73</sup> James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson LL.D* (London: Henry Baldwin, 1785), account of August 16<sup>th</sup> 1773.

Boswell responded quickly to his friend's request, sending off letters to Cullen and to Cullen's colleagues, Professors John Hope and Alexander Monro ('Secundus'). He cites in full his own letter of appeal to the three Professors in his *Life of Johnson* and also cites a letter to himself from Johnson expressing his gratitude for their response:

I received your kind medical packet. I am very much obliged to you and to your physicians for your kind attention to my disease...Return to Sir Alexander Dick my sincere thanks for his kind letter; and bring with you the rhubarb which he so tenderly offers me.

The additional response from Sir Alexander Dick is either following a separate exchange of letters, or is in response to a widespread sense of concern in Edinburgh that Boswell's three letters might have intensified. Boswell was in Edinburgh, living and practicing law at the centre of a number of influential circles at this time.

Boswell quotes similar sentiments from the letters from each of the three Edinburgh medical grandees:

All of them paid the most polite attention to my letter, and its venerable object. Dr Cullen's words concerning him were, 'It would give me the greatest pleasure to be of any service to a man whom the public properly esteem, and whom I esteem, and respect as much as I do Dr. Johnson,' Dr. Hope's: 'Few people have a better claim on me than your friend, as...hardly a day passes that I do not ask his opinion about this or that word [a reference to Johnson's *Dictionary*]' Dr. Munro's: 'I most sincerely join you in sympathizing with that very worthy and ingenious character, from whom his country has derived much instruction and entertainment'

Hope sends his response via his own friend and Johnson's main physician in London at this time, Dr Brocklesby. However according to Boswell, 'Doctors Cullen and Munro [his own spelling] wrote their opinions and prescriptions to me, which I afterwards carried with me to London, and, so far as they were encouraging, communicated to Johnson'. Boswell's concern that his forthright and medically knowledgeable friend would receive a too forthright response from Edinburgh was justified by the full text of the letter received from Cullen. This letter is now readily accessible through the on-line CCC.

It is useful at this point to cite these letters between Boswell and Cullen. The annotations given in the footnotes here are from the CCC itself:<sup>74</sup>

Dear Sir

Dr. Johnson has been very ill / for some time; and in a letter of anxious / apprehension, he writes to me – Ask your Physicians about my Case. / This you see is not authority for / a regular consultation. But I have / no doubt of your readiness to give your / Advice to a Man so eminent, and who in his *Life of Garth*<sup>75</sup> has paid your / profession a just and elegant compliment. / 'I believe every man has found in / Physicians great liberality and dignity / of sentiment, very prompt effusion of / beneficence and willingness to exert / a lucrative art, where there is no hope / of lucre.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See CCC CASE ID: 1686.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson's 'Life of Garth', first published in 1779 as a chapter in *The Lives of the Poets*. Dr Samuel Garth's most celebrated literary work is *The Dispensary* (1699), a mock heroic poem depicting the professional rivalry between the London physicians and apothecaries as a burlesque Homeric battle; Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Poets* (London: 1779, 1781).

<sup>76</sup> 'I believe...no hope of lucre' is an accurate quotation from Johnson's *Life of Garth* (see note above).

Dr. Johnson is aged 74.<sup>77</sup> Last / summer he had a stroke of the palsy, from / which  
 he recovered almost entirely. He / had before that been troubled with a /  
 catarrhus cough. This winter he was seised with a spasmodick asthma,<sup>78</sup> by  
 which / he has been confined to his house for / about three months. Dr.  
 Brocklesby / writes to me, that upon the least ad/mission of cold, there is such a  
 constrict/ion upon the breast, that he cannot / lye down in his bed, but is obliged  
 / to sit up all night, and gets rest / and some times sleep, only by means of/  
 Laudanum and syrup of poppies;<sup>79</sup> And / that there are œdematous tumours on /  
 his legs and thighs. Dr. Brocklesby / trusts a good deal to the return of / mild  
 weather. Dr. Johnson says that a Dropsy gains ground upon him; and / he seems  
 to think that a warmer climate / would do him good. I understand he / is now  
 rather better, and is using vinegar / of Squills.

I am with great esteem / Dear Sir, / Your most obedient / humble servant /

James Boswell / James Court / 7 March 1784

William Cullen sends the following reply to this letter, from Edinburgh, three days later:

Dr Johnson [i.e. 'concerning Dr. Johnson']

Dear Sir,

It would give me the greatest pleasure to be / of any service to a Man the Public  
 properly esteem / and whom I esteem and respect so much as I do / Dr. Johnson.

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<sup>77</sup> Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield in Staffordshire on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1709.

<sup>78</sup> Cullen addresses the topic of 'spasmodick asthma' in *First Lines*, pp. 403–6.

<sup>79</sup> Dr Richard Brocklesby (1722–1797), the London physician and medical author treated Johnson for the last eighteen months of his life. They became close friends.

I have considered the account of / his Case you have been pleased to honour me / with and I am sorry to find there is so little / In the Power of Physic at least in my power / to be done for him. At the age of 74 Asthma and Dropsy are very insurmountable distem/pers. For the first I have found the most / useful remedies to be Blistering, issues and especially gentle Vomits. How far he is fit / to bear the latter the Gentlemen upon the / spot must judge better than I can. I am / glad to observe that he is in the use of / Laudanum as I believe it is the only means of rendering his life tolerably easy. The Vinegar of Squills I judge to be a medicine very well suited to both his Asthma and Dropsy. I hope the coming in of mild weather / may be of service to him and if he is to live for / another winter he should certainly pass it in a / Climate much milder than that of England. I / cannot help however telling you that I /. despair of his having the opportunity for I suspect he / has not only water in his limbs but also in his / breast.<sup>80</sup> To Conclude I must tell you that the infor/mation is hardly enough to allow me to advise more / particularly and the general view of the Case gives me / no encouragement to attempt it so that it is only my / regard to Dr. Johnson and my very particular regards / for your Commands that could have engaged me to say / any things on the subject. Believe me to be with great / respect and esteem

Dear Sir your most obedient / And most humble Servant /

William Cullen / Edinburgh March 10<sup>th</sup>

The exchange of these two letters is displayed on the home page of the CCC. This nicely echoes Boswell's own evident pride that his intervention on behalf of his friend elicits a

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<sup>80</sup> As Cullen feared, Johnson did not survive the next winter. He died on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1784.

prompt, though sadly ineffective, response from three stars of Edinburgh's intellectual firmament.

The concern for Johnson, widely shared by his friends in the declining months of his life, led to a scheme among them to raise funds for him. These funds were intended to cover the expense of the trip to those warmer climes Boswell mentions in his letter here. Unfortunately this kindly-meant plan, instigated by Boswell, miscarried when the patron appealed to (the Lord Chancellor Edward Thurlow) made his initial award of funds conditional in such a way that Johnson politely but witheringly refused them.<sup>81</sup> Johnson's sensitivities in such matters were similar to those of Cullen and connected, as Cullen's were, to a mis-match between his actual income and his scholarly and gentlemanly status.

To consider the matter of botanicals mentioned in these letters, Cullen remonstrates with Boswell in the letter cited above that 'the information is hardly enough'. This may have given Boswell another reason not to disclose the letter fully to Johnson, or cite it fully in his *Life*. However Cullen does concur with the decision to give Johnson both Laudanum and 'Vinegar of Squills'. Laudanum we have encountered previously but not Vinegar of Squills. Behind this mention by both Boswell and Cullen of a very well-known botanical of ancient provenance (being used in Ancient Egypt from whence it passed to Greece and to Rome) lies a situation that illustrates the complexity of Johnson's attitude to medicine, to medical advice, and to his own health. Squills, now known as Squill, is a plant found in south Asia, west Asia and north Africa. It is also found in the CCC as the 'sea-onion', 'scilla' and 'skillet'. It was named by Linnaeus *Scilla maritima* but has been removed from the genus *Scilla* and is now known as *Drimia*

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<sup>81</sup> Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 2, p. 327.

*maritima* (L.) Stearn. The ‘maritima’ relates to its liking for a sandy, often coastal environment. It is a tall plant (1.5–2m high) with white flowers. John Wiltshire gives a detailed account of Johnson’s self-medication with ‘vinegar of squills’ in a way that did him harm, as well as some good, in the last months of his life.<sup>82</sup> Wiltshire’s narrative, which ends with Johnson’s death on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1784, includes the discovery in 1975 of the letter from Dr Brocklesby written in response to the letter from John Hope, mentioned earlier. This letter describes Johnson having achieved relief from his dropsical state, through a diuresis of 22 pints, brought on by self-administering ‘5 or 6 grams of newly powdered Squills against Dr Heberden’s and my advice for quantity’.<sup>83</sup>

The relief did not last and was not repeated to anything like the same extent despite frequent repeat doses of squill over succeeding months – ‘official’ and ‘un-official’. Johnson’s doctors later tried electrical shocks and finally – a very new addition to their pharmacopeia – ‘digitalis’. However this drug, which could well have helped him, was administered far too late and in a toxically high dose. Digitalis, obtained from foxglove plants, was observed by the physician and botanist William Withering being used as an ingredient in the home made ‘mixture’ of an elderly lady in Shropshire. With this mixture she was able to alleviate symptoms of dropsy. After various experiments with the plant Withering formally described its effectiveness in a publication in 1785. He forwarded a copy of his publication to his former Professor in Edinburgh, John Hope.<sup>84</sup>

Both squill and digitalis work not by affecting the kidneys, as Cullen states in his *Materia*

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<sup>82</sup> This book is referenced in the notes by David Shuttleton in the CCC itself: John Wiltshire, *Samuel Johnson in the Medical World: The Doctor and the Patient* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 55–63.

<sup>83</sup> See William W. Fee, ‘Samuel Johnson’s “wonderful remission of dropsy”’, *Harvard Library Bulletin* 23 (1975) 2712–8. The letter itself is from the Yale Boswell Collection (Item no. C579).

<sup>84</sup> Hope had known about Withering’s discovery since 1783. Or rather known about his re-discovery – the effectiveness of digitalis was also known to the Romans.

*Medica*, but by slowing and strengthening the heartbeat. This helps the kidneys to work more effectively and relieves the dropsical symptoms of a water-logged abdomen and upper legs, when these are related to left-sided heart failure – and of water-logged lungs when breathing is compromised by right sided heart failure.<sup>85</sup> Both drugs are toxic at high or too frequent doses and Johnson experienced what Cullen warns about in his *Materia Medica*, that the dried preparation of squill available out of town was much less strong than the fresh plant which (ironically) was more easily available at city apothecaries. Johnson over-dosed himself badly with the fresh product on his return to London from Birmingham in November 1784.<sup>86</sup>

Almost the very last act of Johnson's life was to cut his upper legs (and his painful hydrocele) under his bedclothes, with lancets he owned himself. A more controlled version of this procedure had helped with his dropsy on a previous occasion. The deed was done – 'not unskillfully', as William Windham wrote in his diary – in an attempt by Johnson to achieve the relief he believed was beyond the reach of both physic and physicians. This was a sad and rather dreadful end to a life that had been full of interest in and enthusiasm for medicine and medics. Johnson had a fondness for physicians and a liking for their company, which was combined with a more quizzical, sometimes sceptical, attitude to their professional pretensions and money-making. But Johnson's many personal doctors and medical friends were by no means all as grand as the Edinburgh doctors appealed to by Boswell in his friend's declining months.

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<sup>85</sup> In his *Materia Medica* (1789), Cullen states that he is rather at a loss to explain how digitalis works, and refers the reader to 'the treatise of my very ingenious and learned friend Dr. Withering on this subject' (William Cullen, (1789), vol. 2, p. 556). I have attempted a retrospective analysis of the situation because both Cullen and Johnson, on this occasion, really were on the cusp of an informed change in therapeutic practice. If he had been well enough, Dr Johnson may have enjoyed the significance of the moment.

<sup>86</sup> Digitalis remains an important, though potentially toxic, cardiac drug. Patients taking it regularly have their blood levels of *Digoxin* checked (*Digoxin* being the name of the commonly used commercial preparation).

**Samuel Johnson: *On the Death of Dr Levet***

As a final comment on Johnson, medicine and old age there is his short poem in remembrance of Dr Robert Levet, an elderly doctor who shared Johnson's household for many years and who died suddenly and quietly:<sup>87</sup>

Condemned to Hope's delusive mine,

As on we toil from day to day,

By sudden blasts, or slow decline,

Our social comforts drop away

Well tried through many a varying year,

See Levet to the grave descend;

Officious, innocent, sincere,

Of every friendless name the friend.

Yet still he fills Affection's eye,

Obscurely wise, and coarsely kind;

Nor lettered Arrogance, deny

Thy praise to merit unrefined.

When fainting Nature called for aid,

And hovering Death prepared the blow,

His vigorous remedy displayed

The power of art without the show.

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<sup>87</sup> 'On the Death of Dr. Levet', *Samuel Johnson: The Complete English Poems*, ed. by J. D. Fleeman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 139.

In Misery's darkest cavern known,  
His useful care was ever nigh,  
Where hopeless Anguish poured his groan,  
And lonely Want retired to die.

No summons mocked by chill delay,  
No petty gain disdained by pride,  
The modest wants of every day  
The toil of every day supplied.

His virtues walked their narrow round,  
Nor made a pause, nor left a void;  
And sure the Eternal Master found  
The single talent well employed.

The busy day, the peaceful night,  
Unfelt, uncounted, glided by;  
His frame was firm, his powers were bright,  
Though now his eightieth year was nigh.

Then with no throbbing fiery pain,  
No cold gradations of decay,  
Death broke at once the vital chain,  
And freed his soul the nearest way.

'On the Death of Dr Levet' is the last of Johnson's poems to be published in his lifetime.

Levet had little formal training and he practised around the streets of London as a sort of

‘lay’ physician. The poem suggests a morality that is biblical in its mention of the ‘single talent’, the ‘Eternal Master’ – and in its evoking of a Christ-like mission. But there is also a suggestion of a stoicism in Levet’s attitude to life and to death that has many exemplars in classical literature. The half-allegorised figures of ‘Nature’, ‘Death’, ‘Misery’, ‘Anguish’ and ‘Want’ flit about the scene in a manner that belies their gruesome reality, suggesting a gentle, almost rococo aesthetic. Yet the poem also sharply satirises the socially and economically aspirational side to being a doctor that both fascinated and repelled the poet. Levet and Cullen, so different in their fame and in their aspirations, tried to serve the needs of suffering humanity. And it is part of Johnson’s great appeal that he was able to encompass and appreciate this in his life and in his writing. This poem addresses a major theme of this thesis, the art of ageing well. It also enacts what it praises, ‘the power of art without the show’.

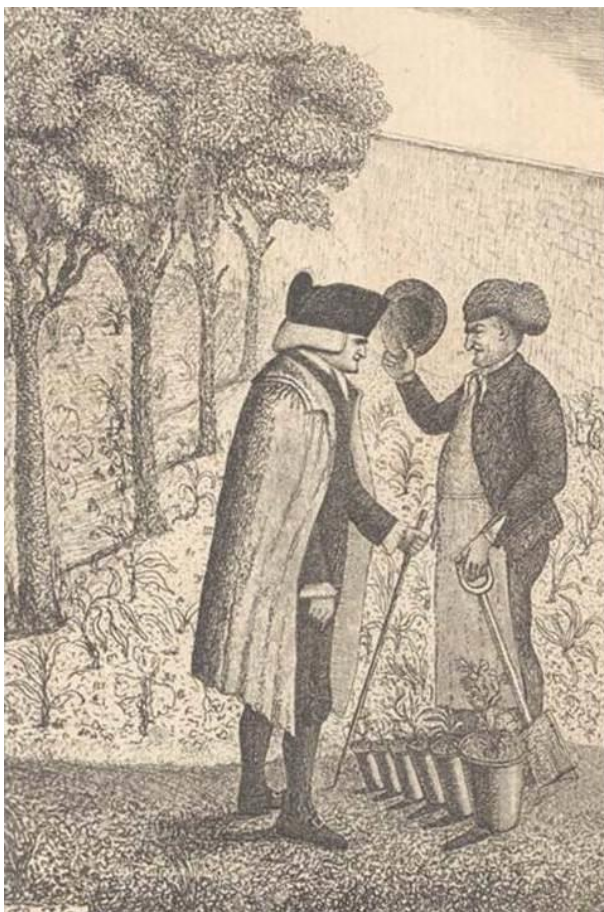


Fig. 4

John Hope conversing with his Head Gardener (1786). The figure on the right may be John Williamson or it may be Williamson's successor, Malcolm McCoig. The potted plants could be on the move either out of or back into their winter quarters in the cool glass-house (Johanna Laussen-Higgins *pers. comm.*). The arrangement is rather like a military review – Hope was known to support the lobby for Edinburgh to have its own militia. See H. Paton, vol. 2, p.415.

Photo: RBGE.



Fig. 5

*Rheum palmatum*, grown by John Hope in the Leith Walk Botanic Garden. Identified by William Cullen in his *Materia Medica* (1789) as the 'true' rhubarb. This specimen was collected by Joseph Rock in 1925 from Kansu, China, and is stored in the RBGE Herbarium.

Photo: RBGE Herbarium.



Fig. 6

Botanic Cottage, RBGE. Built by John Hope 1763-1765 for the Leith Walk Botanic Garden. Re-constructed 2014-2015. De-construction, move to Inverleith and re-construction funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and many other individuals and organisations.

Photo: RBGE.



Fig. 7

Perspective view of Leith Walk Botanic Garden. Watercolour by Jacob More, 1771. Botanic Cottage can be seen in its original situation, facing Leith Walk. Clearly visible behind and to the north of the Cottage are the formal Linnaean 'order beds' and 'officinal' (ie medicinal) beds. Much of the rest of the garden is laid out in a far more informal, even picturesque way, consisting of shrubs and trees threaded with what Hope referred to as his 'screw' walks. The glass house and bordering hot 'stove' houses can be seen facing the pond.

Photo and painting: RBGE.

## Chapter Three: A Neo-classical Retirement

### Introduction

The historical evidence cited in Chapters One and Two has been based on commentary in the scholarly literature (particularly John Thomson's biography of Cullen) and varieties of written sources including Cullen's published texts, his previously unpublished letters and some longer unpublished manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> Chapters Three and Four will develop this investigation by engaging with other kinds of evidence, some more ephemeral and some more substantial than these written sources. This evidence will include a number of short elegiac poems produced after Cullen's death, the landscape of Cullen's retirement estate as it was and as it is now, inscriptions in stone known to be part of his landscaped garden and, finally, actual buildings, whether planned, now standing, or now vanished. This 'archaeology' of different kinds of evidence will be used to indicate what was special, or even what was commonplace about Cullen's particular take on the matter of old age and retirement. How did Cullen and his contemporaries view the final stages of life? And how does their view compare or contrast with our own understanding? Above all how do these views connect with the sense of a 'life well lived' so powerfully evoked by the poem of Samuel Johnson concluding the previous chapter?

### The circumstances of William Cullen's 'semi-retirement'

William Cullen purchased his small estate at Ormiston Hill in 1778. At this time he was either 65 or 68 years of age.<sup>2</sup> By 1778 his many different lecturing commitments at the

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<sup>1</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*

<sup>2</sup> See discussion of this conundrum in Section 'Mapping of Old Age', Chapter One.

University of Edinburgh had been reduced. Until the academic year of 1775–1776 he had been teaching both clinical medicine and the practice of medicine. From this year until just weeks before his death he continued to teach just the practice of medicine. His other major professional activity after 1776, which expanded to occupy a good deal of his available time and energy, was the work required by his consultation correspondence. Guenter B. Risse has carried out a basic count of these documents and found the following interesting result.<sup>3</sup> The archive of patient correspondence was filed by Cullen ‘with increasing diligence’ from the mid-1760s and progressed at a fairly low level for the first few years. In 1772 only seven letters ‘out’ are filed. By 1776 the yearly total had climbed steadily, year on year, until it reached a total of 202. From 1776 until 1789 (the date of the final letter) the yearly total did not drop below 141 letters. This considerable and sustained output began some two years before Cullen’s acquisition of the estate at Ormiston Hill.<sup>4</sup> The income the correspondence produced, together with encouraging sales of his publication *First Lines* may have been factors in his decision at this time to cut back on his teaching and pursue his wish to become a landed gentleman.<sup>5</sup>

There were other, more negative influences on the timing of William Cullen’s decision to purchase Ormiston Hill. By 1776 Cullen’s relationship with John Brown had

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<sup>3</sup> Risse, ‘Cullen as clinician’, ed. Doig et al., pp. 133–51.

<sup>4</sup> Recent research by the CCC team may have changed these figures slightly, but the striking basic pattern of slow start, peaking over a four year period in the early 1770s and then staying at this higher level remains. Also the figures could represent a change to the care with which Cullen retained and filed his letters, but even then the underlying acceleration in the correspondence between 1772 and 1776 remains true.

<sup>5</sup> Prior to the publication of this work’s fourth edition in 1784, Cullen made publishing history through a payment to him of £1,200 for the copyright to *First Lines on the Practice of Physic* from the Edinburgh-based publisher Charles Elliot. This was the most copy money paid in Britain up to this time for the right to publish an octavo edition. See Warren McDougall ‘Edinburgh’, *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland*, vol. 2, *Enlightenment and Expansion 1707–1800*, ed. by Stephen J. Brown and Warren McDougall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.118–132, (p. 121).

broken down.<sup>6</sup> Time was to prove this break-down irretrievable. This situation, which so divided the student body of the university, compromised his relationship with them, which up until this point Cullen had every reason to think had been a good one. He had experienced the old 'regency' system of university teaching in Glasgow, where professors exercised a degree of pastoral responsibility for their students. Edinburgh was different in that students could choose who taught them, according to a professor's reputation and depth of their own pocket. But domestically they were very much on their own, dependent on the kindness of relatives and the care exercised, exceptionally, by professors such as Cullen (and Hope), who took numbers of student boarders into their own household as well as feeding more students at weekly suppers. Cullen acknowledged the vital role of his wife, Anna (née Johnstone) in running an extensive household at Mint Close that enabled these arrangements. A portrait of this lady by William Cochrane (1768), which shows her interrupted while reading a book, hangs in the Hunterian Gallery of the University of Glasgow. The CCC reveals that many of Cullen's students became his correspondents in their later careers, though their letters to their former teacher tend to be both very 'proper' and at times quite technical. The warmth of their memories is better indicated in James Thomson's biography of Cullen. As well as listing numerous examples of pupils of Cullen's who went on to achieve fame of their own (such as Sir Walter Farquhar and Dr Benjamin Rush), Thomson also assembles a number of friendly, grateful letters and presents them in an extensive appendix to Volume One of

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<sup>6</sup> This situation has been discussed in Chapter One.

his *Account*.<sup>7</sup> For example he transcribes the following from Sir J. Carmichael Smyth to Dr Cullen, written just a few weeks before Cullen's death:

My Dear Sir,

London, 25<sup>th</sup> Jan 1790

Although for some years past we have had but little personal intercourse, yet I feel my attachment and regard for you nothing diminished. Nor can I ever call to mind your friendship and goodness to me at the early period of my life, but tears of gratitude drop from my eyes...

...though your health may not admit of your public exertions [Cullen had recently announced his intention to retire from lecturing], I hope it is not so far impaired as to prevent you from enjoying the society of your family and friends, and that *otium cum dignitate* to which you are so justly entitled. That this, my dear Sir, may long be yours, is my most ardent wish; and to hear that it is so, will I can assure you, greatly add to the happiness of your very affectionate friend, and obliged servant,

Jas. Carmichael Smyth.<sup>8</sup>

As well as the painful state of affairs precipitated by John Brown, another negative factor in Cullen's situation in the mid-1770s was the long-running, often acrimonious debate about the siting and future of the University of Edinburgh Museum and the setting up of Edinburgh's Royal Society. Cullen's party (which included his one-time student the

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<sup>7</sup> See John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 460 and Appendix U. Note that Thomson himself does not cite from Cullen's correspondence archive. Ideas relating to patient confidentiality were changing in the nineteenth century – and the immediate descendants of those involved would still be alive.

<sup>8</sup> Cullen's own reference to 'otium' in his garden inscriptions will be discussed in the next chapter.

Rev. John Walker) triumphed, but not until 1783, when the society was granted its charter.<sup>9</sup>

There were other, more positive factors in Cullen's situation as he considered his 'semi-retirement'. First of all his re-modelled version of the *Pharmacopeia Edinburgensis* was published in 1774 and, as we have seen in Chapter Two, was proving its worth as a detailed and accurate work of reference. Secondly, he became President of the Royal College of Physicians between 1775 and 1777. Cullen also laid the foundation stone for two important new buildings in Edinburgh; the future premises of the Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh (RCPE) in George Street (1775), and a purpose built home for the Royal Society of Medicine, to the south of the old city (1776). Cullen had been very active in the promotion and planning of these two building projects, which represented important contributions to Edinburgh's old and new built environments.

### **Cullen's letter to William Hunter 1778**

To sum up Cullen's situation at this time, in his hopes for Ormiston Hill he stood to gain a change in his home and working environment, possibly a change of pace after his long years of professional responsibility and the chance to further the many scientific interests of his early career: geology, botany, the chemistry of soils, and agricultural improvement.<sup>10</sup> Thomson does state quite clearly:

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<sup>9</sup> See Steven Shapin, 'Property, patronage, and the politics of science: The founding of the Royal Society of Edinburgh', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 7. 1 (1974), 1-41.

<sup>10</sup> Cullen was certainly able to follow up his interest in agricultural science at Ormiston Hill. The statistical account submitted by the Rev. Mr. Simpson indicates that the area was particularly rich geologically and botanically. This will be discussed further in the next chapter. See *New Stat. Acc. Kirknewton*, p 433 ff.

He had never ceased to feel the desire to subject his theoretical doctrines to the test of actual trial; to extend, to rectify, and to confirm his knowledge by observation and experience. This long cherished hope he thus expected to carry into effect; and so far as difficulty was concerned, Ormiston Hill afforded ample opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

An expression of Cullen's own ideas regarding his semi-retirement is to be found in a letter of 1778, addressed to his friend, professional colleague and one-time student, William Hunter in London. The letter is unusual in showing (as do his letters to Lord Kames) an 'unbuttoned' side to Cullen's public persona:

With regard to your present employments, I say that every man that has acquired wealth is entitled to have his *hobby*, nay his *hobby-horses*; though some may laugh, it is of no consequence if they cannot at the same time blame, and, truly, I think your employment liable to neither.<sup>12</sup>

I say all this to tell you that I, though late, have got my hobby too. I have got a farm, and if the public would not laugh, I would call it a villa. It is truly a scheme of pleasure, not of profit. I hope, indeed to make two stalks of corn grow where one grew before; but I believe this will be of more benefit to the public than to myself, and my purpose is purely the beauty of strong corn and fine grass. I have a brook, a wood, and very fine prospects; and I shall bring out more pleasure ground than anybody expects. I hope in short to make a Leasowes in Scotland. Whether I

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<sup>11</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account....*, vol. 2, p. 673.

<sup>12</sup> The letter from Hunter that prompted this remark may have concerned early proposals regarding *The Gravid Uterus*; *pers. comm.* Helen McCormack. The famous engravings were not published until 1794.

succeed or no, this language will sufficiently shew you that I am at present happy.<sup>13</sup>

This letter to Hunter is somewhat rueful in tone. It demonstrates an awareness of the aspirational nature of his wish to acquire land, while attempting to undercut his own presumption by the whimsical claim that the whole project is just a ‘hobby horse’. This term would have had a variety of associations for his correspondent, important among which was the use of an indoor, constructed hobby-horse for exercising patients housebound by the weather.<sup>14</sup> As a doctor himself, with his own complement of wealthy patients, William Hunter would have understood this. Also the term would have recalled the most famously ‘hobby-horsical’ character in English letters at the time, the very whimsical Uncle Toby in Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. Uncle Toby was noted for his obsession with moving piles of earth around (to represent recently reported battles on the European mainland) in the miniature setting of his host’s garden. Cullen intended to – and indeed did achieve – prodigious amounts of earth moving as he strove to render the soil of Ormiston Hill fertile.

It is witty of Cullen to include an indirect reference to a famous cleric and satirist of Irish descent, but less hidden in this text is a citation from another famous cleric and satirist of Irish descent, Jonathan Swift. When Cullen states ‘I hope, indeed to make two

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<sup>13</sup> From Cullen’s letter to Dr William Hunter in London, cited in John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 565.

<sup>14</sup> The CCC gives many examples of the varied use of this term, which can apply to different kinds of indoor swings, seesaws and more ingenious contraptions. The novelist Samuel Richardson refers to a particular version as a ‘teeter-toter’ (David Shuttleton *pers. comm.*). However Cullen is also on record as not approving of the use of such contraptions as a replacement for exercise out of doors. See his ‘Letter to a Hypochondriac’ in Section ‘Three case histories...’ in Chapter One.

stalks of corn grow where one grew before...' he is quoting *Gulliver's Travels* from memory.<sup>15</sup> The full quotation reads:

And he gave it for his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.

It is clear that Cullen sees a task ahead. Far from envisaging some well-deserved rest and recreation he is bent on using his retirement, not to stop, but to continue his patriotic life of public service. Cullen is also indirectly reminding his correspondent of his achievement (previously mentioned) in writing about and lecturing on the topic of agricultural science.<sup>16</sup> There are further references in this letter that are very pertinent to the retirement theme of this chapter. The first is his statement 'I have got a farm, and if the public would not laugh I would call it a villa'. The second, which seems equally tongue in cheek, is that 'I hope in short to make a Leasowes in Scotland'. Behind the casual tone both these references are full of significance in relation to Cullen's aims and hopes for his retirement project and to the late-eighteenth century cultural milieu within which he was working. A good deal of the rest of this chapter will be taken up with unpicking both these light-hearted claims.

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<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Dr Patricia Andrew for drawing my attention to this reference, which I now realise was very frequently cited at the time. See Jonathan Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, then a Captain of several Ships* (Dublin: Benjamin Motte, 1726). This passage, in Chapter Seven, is spoken by the King of Brobdingag.

<sup>16</sup> Cullen may have also enjoyed some practical application of his agricultural theories before purchasing Ormiston Hill. John Thomson et al., mention very briefly that Cullen purchased a 30 acre farm on behalf of his brother Robert at Parkhead, nine miles from Glasgow. This he intended to manage on behalf of his brother but there is no further mention by Thomson of what actually happened. Thomson also cites a letter from Cullen to his brother which mentions that he (Cullen) 'has his eye' on Whistleberry and the Saughs – two estates near Hamilton associated with his youth and lost patrimony. See John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, pp. 67, 601.

### Cullen's villa at Ormiston Hill

Cullen's use of the word 'villa' in his letter to William Hunter is interesting because it suggests a retirement modelled on very specifically Roman lines. That is to say, a kind of withdrawal through choice and opportunity, possibly to make a statement about removing oneself from the political fray, not just because one was old and the end of life was approaching. If Thomson is correct in his assessment of the immense impact of Brown's 'betrayal' on Cullen, despite, or maybe because of the sense that his career had peaked, the semi-remove to Ormiston Hill could have represented the shaking of the dust of Edinburgh streets from his heels. It was quite literally a move back towards his old allegiances in the west of Scotland, mentioned in Chapter Two. Particularly in and around Hamilton and Glasgow, many old friends, members of his family and memories of less fraught professional activities remained.<sup>17</sup> Ormiston Hill, being less than half a day's horse ride from Edinburgh, was about as far west as Cullen could move, without breaking his professional, academic and financial ties with the city.

But the word 'villa' does chime perfectly with the 'progressively conservative', pro-Hanoverian, stoical, patriotic, North British, 'back to Roman basics' tone of Edinburgh at this time.<sup>18</sup> Before discussing this in detail it is important to note another instance of etymological change, between antiquity and the eighteenth century and between the eighteenth century and now. 'Villa' today has come to mean a detached house, with a

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<sup>17</sup> The distance by road from Kirknewton to Hamilton is 32 miles. As Cullen points out in a letter to his friend Mr John Betham, who lived on the Isle of Man, 'if you can reach the road from Hamilton to Edinburgh [which passed by Ormiston Hill] I will ride out to meet you'; see John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 220. Cullen first met Mr Betham when he visited the Isle of Man with the Rev. John Walker. The letter to John Betham is examined further in Section 'Cullen's account and my own account.' in Chapter Four.

<sup>18</sup> 'Progressively conservative' is a useful characterisation of Cullen's intellectual milieu by Roger L. Emerson in his *David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009), p. 239. Lord Monboddo did a great deal to further his sometimes eccentric 'genuinely Roman' practices and ideas among Edinburgh-based 'movers and shakers' through his convivial weekly suppers. These were regularly attended by John Hope and by William Cullen, though perhaps less often by the latter.

rural or sub-urban setting, which is elegant, but not extensive in scale. In Augustan Roman times the word suggested rather more than this, namely a large house, in a rural setting, arranged around a central courtyard, with an attached farm and garden. In fact it normally suggested an estate of considerable size, with extensive outbuildings.<sup>19</sup> In Cullen's time the term 'villa' had a more literary than literal provenance. Cullen's contemporary, the painter Allan Ramsay, made a considerable contribution towards the understanding of 'villa' in eighteenth-century letters through his scholarly and archaeological examination of the poet Horace's villa in Italy, just at the time when Cullen was contemplating then enjoying his own 'Horatian' retreat. In particular Ramsay was able to verify Horace's claim that his particular 'villa' was of modest dimensions. The next chapter will develop this discussion concerning Cullen, Ramsay and Horace further. Most importantly the Roman sense of the word 'villa' which both Cullen and Hunter would have called to mind, was an environment worked for pleasure rather than profit. As well as a quiet retreat from the city, this environment offered opportunities for cultivation in every sense: of actual plants and animals, of friends through conversation, of health and ultimately of 'Virtú'.<sup>20</sup> It was the original model for the kind of active retirement Cullen aspired to exemplify himself. However there are very few comments regarding any recommendation to his patients of 'gentleman farming', or gardening as exercise, either in the CCC or the Thomson/Cullen archive preserved by the University of Glasgow. Cullen seems to have regarded such as beyond his remit, both socially and professionally. Of course this makes the gesture he made in his own life all the more exemplary in nature,

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<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to Dr Stuart Gilmour for explaining this point.

<sup>20</sup> This term (Italian 'virtú' from Latin 'virtus'), was elaborated by Machiavelli in *The Prince* (1532). It was further popularised by Adam Ferguson in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh: 1767) and in turn this popularity was mocked by Tobias Smollett in *Peregrine Pickle* (London: 1751). 'Virtú' carries more of a sense of being pro-active, being effective and being manly than the English word 'virtue'. It was in the sense of 'being effective' that it was used in relation to medicinal plants. See previous comment on the 'virtues' of plants in Section on 'Mr Bethune' Chapter Two.

as it stood apart from his directly didactic role. He could advise his (mainly young) students directly – though ‘get yourself a small estate’ was hardly realistic in the circumstances. But his patients, or his corresponding clients were a different matter. Here he worked within his role as ‘ornate physician’, writing to them in an idiom they understood, listening carefully to what they had to say and not straying beyond the bounds of doctorly decorum.<sup>21</sup>

The other well-known classical writers who, like Horace, celebrated villa life were his contemporaries the poet Virgil, and Pliny the Younger. All three were associated with that period of Roman history of deep interest to eighteenth-century Britons, the reign of the Emperor Augustus, when the Republic of Rome gave way to the Roman Empire. Villas were an indication of a commercially successful people, but they could also seem to be an indication of a decline towards luxury and excess. British society was showing symptoms that echoed alarmingly those of the Roman Empire.<sup>22</sup> After all the imperial Pax Romana was accompanied by the degeneration and moral decay of powerful elites. The ‘stadial’ theories of history at the time, promoted particularly in Scotland and particularly by Cullen’s friends and colleagues Adam Smith and David Hume, reflected this understanding of classical history. Stadial theory suggested that Scotland was still at a previous ‘stage’ to England and quite a way from enjoying (so to speak) the luxury of worrying about luxury. It was also a convenient, readily understood way of indicating both to a home-based and to a wider audience that Scotland was still very much in the expanding, developing stage.

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<sup>21</sup> The evocative phrase ‘ornate physician’ is used by Cullen in a lecture to students of medicine; ‘I wish to recommend the study of the Theory of Medicine as being necessary to make a skilful as well as ornate physician’. See John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 504. The phrase has been picked up to critically useful effect by Christopher Lawrence and Jane Rendall. See Christopher Lawrence, ‘Ornate physicians and learned artisans: Edinburgh medical men, 1736-1776’, in eds Bynum and Porter, pp. 153-176. Also see Rendall, ‘The Reputation of William Cullen, 262–285 (p. 265).

<sup>22</sup> Tobias Smollett is much concerned with the effects of ‘luxury’ in his novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (London: 1771). See John Sekora, *Luxury: the concept in Western thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

This concludes, for now, a discussion of the classical and neo-classical connotations of the word villa. But villas in the more modern sense of a detached, comfortably large family home of neo-classical design were also increasingly popular in the years of Cullen's Edinburgh ascendancy. They were appearing in substantial numbers around Edinburgh and around Glasgow at this time.<sup>23</sup> Around Edinburgh they were lived in by the gentry, minor aristocrats and Edinburgh-based lawyers. Around Glasgow they were more likely to be owned by wealthy merchants and business people. Examples of such villas include: Dumfries House (large scale: built 1754), Gunsgreen House, Eyemouth (medium scale: built 1753) and Botanic Cottage, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) (smallest scale: built 1765, demolished and re-constructed 2007–2015).<sup>24</sup> The design of all three of these buildings is known to have involved members of the Adam family. William and his son John remained busy in Scotland, while James and Robert sought their fortunes in Italy and London. Father and son proved particularly adept at adjusting basic neo-Palladian design to the varying wealth of their clients – and to the often strong vertical elements of earlier Scottish mansions these clients may wish to retain. Dumfries House and Botanic Cottage really do have a Palladian design relationship.

### **Cullen's actual home at Ormiston Hill**

The house Cullen and his family lived in at Ormiston Hill was of more modest design and dimensions than the grand villas springing up around Edinburgh and Glasgow. The

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<sup>23</sup> See James S. Ackerman, *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) on the varied country house manifestations of the Palladian ideal, and Ian Gow, 'The Edinburgh Villa Re-visited: Function not Form', in *The Georgian Villa*, ed. Dana Arnold (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1996), pp. 144–155.

<sup>24</sup> The plan to re-build Botanic Cottage and the researches that supported this plan are described in Noltie, p. 40. The project is now completed and the building in use. See fig. 6 and fig. 7. Also <http://www.rbge.org.uk/the-gardens/edinburgh/the-botanic-cottage-project> [Jan 2017].

building is still there, having been retrieved from the derelict state it was reduced to in the 1970s by being re-furbished (though not very sympathetically restored) in the 1990s.<sup>25</sup> It is currently privately owned, and home to a young family. The house is placed facing north-west and south-east and is situated in the upper levels of the estate. It is two-storeyed and rather elongated in shape, with the original eighteenth century farmhouse being extended to the north-east. Cullen is recorded as extending the house himself, but the present, restored 'extension' is more likely to be of a later date. Cullen's residence in at least part of the current building is commemorated by an inscription on a silver coloured panel, in a small garden, in front of it. It is remarkable that such a modest, even ungainly structure has survived the vicissitudes of more than two centuries – and the current house stands as a testament to the concern of local people to preserve Cullen's memory. The medical establishment itself contributed little to this process in the years immediately following Cullen's death. It was not until an initiative by the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh, on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cullen's birth, that his burial place in Kirknewton kirkyard was commemorated with a plaque in the form of a version in copper of a medallion portrait of Cullen by James Tassie. In 1860 this plaque was placed above the entrance to a newly constructed open-roofed mausoleum on the spot where Cullen's son, the judge Lord Robert Cullen was already memorialised. It is likely that the long delayed publication of the full, two-volume, version of John Thomson's *Account* of Cullen's life in 1859 was connected with this belated gesture. David Craigie, one of the collaborating authors of the biography, is in the small group of people photographed at Kirknewton on the day the plaque was revealed.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See fig. 8.

<sup>26</sup> It is also possible that the publication was itself delayed to be close to the anniversary year.

### Exploring Cullen's modest project further

There are many interesting aspects to the modesty of Cullen's house at Ormiston Hill.

Both John Thomson and Jane Rendall look at Cullen's circumstances towards the end of his life in detail.<sup>27</sup> Both conclude that from 1778 until his death in 1790 his financial circumstances were more and more difficult, ending in the shocking fact that he died bankrupt, leaving nothing but debts to his children. Rendall agrees with Thomson on the two main reasons for this: in the first place, it can be attributed to Cullen's generosity, particularly to those students he saw replicating the struggle for patronage and income that he himself had to overcome during his early career. Secondly he was badly advised by his eldest son Robert in relation to the purchase of more land at Ormiston Hill, following an earlier purchases of land near Hamilton.<sup>28</sup> Robert was also perpetually short of funds himself as a young man. He was socially ambitious and enjoyed the company of a rather fast set in Edinburgh and London, subsidised by his indulgent father. A further anecdote regarding Cullen's attitude to money is given by Robert Chambers in his *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*.<sup>29</sup> He reports that the Doctor was in the habit of leaving a good deal of his available funds in a drawer in his house (not specifying which house), and that both Cullen and his wife Anna would take out what was needed, when it was needed. If in fact Anna kept a closer eye on finances than he did himself, this could have been another factor in Cullen's miserable situation after she died in 1786.

However, there may be more to the modesty of Cullen's house than this sad tale.

The stable block and policy buildings built at right angles to and a little further north of his

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<sup>27</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 9 and vol. 2, p.650. Also Rendall, 'The Reputation of William Cullen', 262–85.

<sup>28</sup> See earlier footnote in this Chapter, previous Sector, 'Cullen's letter to William Hunter...'

<sup>29</sup> Robert Chambers, 'William Cullen', *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (Edinburgh: Blackie and Son, 1856).

house seem to be on a rather more grand scale than the house itself, using fine stone and neo-classical detailing and design. These buildings (which like his house have become family homes) were also refurbished in the 1990s. The building which once faced east towards the original stable square now faces west across a new square to modern buildings of a design that echoes the neo-classical elements of the original.<sup>30</sup> But the graceful proportions, scale and design of the old stable block buildings are distinctly incommensurate with the house. It is likely that Cullen could not afford a more imposing house, but he could also have been making a statement by not building one. Perhaps the improvement he intended was not to be associated with grand living. Here he was anticipated by none other than the grandest aristocrat he ever had dealings with, his patron, the Third Duke of Argyll. The support of Argyll (previously Lord Ilay) had been an essential factor in Cullen's appointment in Glasgow as Professor of Medicine (1751) – and later his successful academic transfer from Glasgow to Edinburgh when he was appointed Professor of Chemistry in Edinburgh in 1755. John Thomson reproduces just two letters between Cullen and Argyll in his *Account*.<sup>31</sup> It would appear from the many letters Thomson cites between Lord Kames and Cullen that Kames acted as a friendly and diplomatic intermediary between the two. All three men shared an enthusiasm for chemically related improvement projects.

During his lifetime Argyll developed and improved two estates in different but in some ways similar parts of Britain. The first of these is at Whitton, on Hounslow Heath,

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<sup>30</sup> This 'shift' of buildings was deduced by a close examination of the 1807 map in the NRS; NRS RHP 85547.

<sup>31</sup> The first letter from Argyll to Cullen (dated 1751) is a brief note expressing surprise that the matter of Cullen's Glasgow professorship had taken so long to conclude and promising 'that if you want to be informed of anything passing here in your way [i.e. chemistry related developments in London] I will make my friend Dr Mitchell write to you'. The second letter, from Cullen to Argyll (dated 1752) concerns his recent work on purifying sea salt using potash. In this letter Cullen is unusually frank about his wish to be paid for his labours: '...like many other chemical enthusiasts having spent more time and money than I could well afford, I begin now to wish that my chemical labours would afford me some returns'. See John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, pp. 70, 75.

north west of London – and the second the estate known (tellingly) as ‘the Whim’, near Edinburgh, just south of Leadburn. Both these sites, like Ormiston Hill, were considerable challenges to the would-be improver. Both were boggy, heathy and infertile. It would take a ‘virtuoso’ improver to do anything with them. And this is what Argyll, like Cullen, proved to be – transforming the Whim to a fine and productive landscaped garden. After Argyll’s death the exotic conifers at Whitton were fine enough to be acquired by Kew.

The order in which the Duke chose to go about his task on these two estates had echoes (on a smaller scale) at Ormiston Hill. He acquired Whitton in 1722 and by 1725, he had built a large aviary and green-house – which he lived in when he visited. Accommodation more fitting to a duke, his family and friends, in the form of a smallish box-like Palladian villa was not built until 1735. Similarly the modest, though well-proportioned mansion house eventually built to a design by William Adam at the Whim – is still today overshadowed by the extremely grand policy buildings built close by. As well as the challenges they threw up to improvement, a factor in all three of these estates, Ormiston Hill, the Whim and Whitton was that they attracted complaints from family, friends and colleagues at the discomforts of the situation. At Ormiston Hill there were also the additional circumstances of the estate being high up and facing north. Of course it could be argued that Whitton and the Whim were the sort of improvement projects with which an intellectually curious, wealthy aristocrat, fond of his horses and dogs, could readily indulge himself. After all Argyll did have the rather more luxurious improvements at Inverary (begun by the Third Duke in 1744) to grace with visits as well. But there is a stoical, utilitarian, even sternly ‘Roman Republican’ element to Cullen’s project that can be further explored. This element was given expression in landscape and gardens at vastly different levels by Cullen and Argyll, And it was also expressed, in a slightly

different key, in a number of planning and building projects by the architect and master builder, James Craig.

### **James Craig, William Cullen and neo-classical Edinburgh**

It has already been mentioned that in the mid-1770s Cullen was involved in the planning and construction of two significant contributions, both of neo-classical design, to Edinburgh's built environment: a new building to house the Royal Medical Society and new premises in the New Town for the Royal College of Physicians. In 1775, Cullen laid the foundation stone for the College's new premises on George Street.<sup>32</sup> This grand building, to a design by James Craig (which originally included pavilion-style wings), was a refined version of the rather clumsier building that stands on the site today.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately for the College (and possibly for Cullen's later reputation), Craig's building was to prove unsuitable for its purpose and ruinously expensive to run.<sup>34</sup> In 1842 the College moved again – to where it currently stands on Queen Street. The festive occasion in 1775 that marked the start of the building process on George Street is recorded by Cullen's one-time student (and later house guest at Ormiston Hill), Syllas Neville, in the following way:

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<sup>32</sup> A maquette of this building is still held by the RCPE. See notes to the exhibition held at the time of the *Cullen Symposium* (Edinburgh: 1990) in ed. Doig et al. p. 76. Also a view of the front elevation of the building can be seen in the portrait of James Craig by David Allan (c. 1781), National Galleries of Scotland. See fig. 9.

<sup>33</sup> For a long time a bank, this building is now a restaurant and bar known as 'The Dome'. An Asclepian rod and snake from the old building still decorates the front door of the replacement building, which also contains decorative glass from the windows of Craig's building.

<sup>34</sup> Just before he died (1786) Cullen's colleague John Hope was much concerned with trying to balance the accounts of the College. He was President of the RCPE from 1784 to 1786. See NAS GD 143/8/1–8.

[The stone] was laid by our father of medicine Dr Cullen. Attended by the whole Society; all the Professors...honoured us with their company at supper. Old Cullen was very merry...we enjoyed ourselves more than we should have done at the great table. I stayed until about 2 in the morning.<sup>35</sup>

Note that Cullen was 'Old Cullen' to at least some of his students even by this early date, when he was either 62 or 65 years old. The tortuous discussions between James Craig and the team of Members and Fellows who formed the committee which developed the project are recorded in the College papers.<sup>36</sup> Despite frequently chairing meetings Cullen seems not to have been able to prevent over-spending on elaborate external ornament to the building, which led to a restriction of funds available for completion of the interior. Craig seems to have been put on the defensive a great deal, as the doctors quarrelled with each other and with him. At one point John Adam is called in to arbitrate and Cullen is obliged to make an interim payment to Craig out of his own pocket. The matter was concluded with an award of an expensive piece of plate and an effusive letter of thanks to Craig from the College. The prolonged and sometimes acrimonious discussions he found himself trying to control, initially as President and from 1776 as Chair of the Buildings Committee, could have been yet another reason for Cullen considering that the time was ripe for a change.

In 1776 William Cullen also laid the foundation stone of a new building for the Royal Medical Society. This society was created in 1737 by and for students of medicine attending the University of Edinburgh. Cullen himself had been involved in its creation

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<sup>35</sup> *The Diary of Sylls Neville, 1767–1788*, ed. by Basil Cozens-Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), cited in eds Doig et al., p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> See RCPE Sibbald Library Archive, *Minute Book 1773–1780*. This book gives an account of the quarterly meetings of members, fellows and licentiates.

and support when he was an Edinburgh student. The society was now moving to a box-shaped neo-classically styled building near the Royal Infirmary. This new building held a meeting room, library, museum and (interestingly) a chemical laboratory. But as with the College building, these particular premises did not last – even, in this case, for Cullen’s life-time. In 1782 the building was sold to facilitate expansion of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary Hospital and no trace of it now remains.<sup>37</sup> These two, now vanished, building projects, in which Cullen played such a significant role, can be seen as an important element in the development of Edinburgh’s particularly strong version of a North British identity. They were part of the process of improving Edinburgh itself, which developed considerable momentum during Cullen’s ‘flourishing’ years, and which as we will see in detail in the next chapter was complemented by his intentions for his rural estate.

Cullen’s chosen Roman-style retirement project in the countryside was echoed by parallel developments in the City of Edinburgh itself. James Craig was an important influence on these developments and it is worth looking more closely at some of his other projects. Despite his quarrels with the physicians, Craig was pleased enough by 1781 with the RCPE building project to include a front elevation drawing of the building in his portrait by David Allan. The other drawing, very recognizable in the painting, was of his plan for the laying out (but not the building design) of Edinburgh’s First New Town. Or rather it is a version of his plan. There are two others he is known to have considered both before and after the acceptance by the City of Edinburgh Council in 1766 of the plan that is recognizable in the layout of the streets today. The first of these included streets laid out in the design of a Union Jack – a somewhat impractical arrangement. And the second, shown on his knee in the painting, included a circus of houses at the centre of the

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<sup>37</sup> See notes to the exhibition held at the time of the *Cullen Symposium* (Edinburgh: 1990) cited in ed. Doig et al., p. 56.

plan, in an arrangement rather like the present grand circus of Moray Place (in the west end of the later New Town development on the old Moray Estate). The rather comically literal ‘flagging up’ of Craig’s North British intentions by his original street layout were echoed in the naming of the major streets of the New Town: Princes Street, Queen Street, Hanover Street, George Street, and so on, are a reminder to visitors and residents today of the strongly Hanoverian persona of the city at the time. And the North British element was still more evident in the original name of St Andrew Square and St George (now Charlotte) Square and their respective churches at each end of George Street.<sup>38</sup>

Memories were still painfully extant in Edinburgh of the city’s humiliation during the Jacobite Rising of 1745. A pro-Hanoverian attitude, which could be framed as simply patriotic, was a safe stance – and also avoided the hazardous waters of party affiliation. This was an important consideration for an academic star such as Cullen and a high profile architect such as James Craig. A modest family background and insecure income left both of them more than usually dependent on the patronage system. James Craig followed up his success in getting his New Town plan accepted with further large scale plans to enhance and beautify the city of Edinburgh. The first of these was to widen and level Leith Walk, providing a grand boulevard connecting the city with the port of Leith. This plan, undated but submitted in the late 1770s, included an enhancement of the frontage

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<sup>38</sup> Sir Lawrence Dundas appropriated the site on St Andrew Square for his mansion house. The church originally intended for this site (the present Church of St Andrew’s and St George’s West) was eventually built on a south-facing site on George Street itself. It was completed in 1784.

of the Leith Walk Garden, founded in 1763 by Professor John Hope.<sup>39</sup> Significantly Hope secured both a start-up grant and a promise of successive annual payments for his garden from the Treasury in London, through his patron the botanically minded Third Earl of Bute. This was during the few months in which Bute was First Lord of the Treasury. Craig's plan for Leith Walk would have linked up a number of other projects with which he was closely involved. These include the Observatory on Calton Hill, the layout of St James Square, extensions to the glasshouses and the construction of a monument to Linnaeus within the Leith Walk Garden itself and part of the new 'Fort' in Leith. The Fort was erected very swiftly when John Paul Jones threatened Scottish ports in 1779. The current layout of Leith Walk is not of Craig's design, but the other schemes mentioned were all realized, at least in part.

The third and last of James Craig's grand plans for Edinburgh was for the re-fashioning of that complex part of the old city now known as South Bridge. This plan, published in 1786, necessitated the approach to North Bridge leaping across the chasm of the Cowgate, and was to include a south-facing crescent of large houses connecting the Royal Infirmary in the east with the university buildings on the west. As Craig pointed out this was not only a grand and elegant welcome to the city, but would have been a particular convenience for the University's students of medicine as they could lodge in the houses in-between. Also, further north, an octagonal arrangement of buildings was

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<sup>39</sup> Craig's plans for improving the frontage and entrances to Hope's Leith Walk Garden have been known about for a long time – but how this plan fitted into a much larger scheme was only discovered in 2009 when the full scrolled linen map was put up for sale. It was purchased by the NRS and is now catalogued as NRS RMP 142206. James Craig's plan to enhance the frontage of the Leith Walk Garden's gardener's cottage was used to inform the reconstruction of this building as Botanic Cottage, using the original stones and timbers, in the present RBGE in 2016. Recent archaeological investigation of the Leith Walk Garden site seems to indicate that the neo-Palladian gateways that are part of the re-erected building may not have been part of its long life on Leith Walk. Rather pleasingly, they now represent the realisation, on a small scale, of one of Craig's sometimes overblown architectural dreams (and this in 2015, the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the acceptance of his plan for Edinburgh's New Town).

planned to facilitate the crossing of traffic flowing north–south with traffic on the east–west trajectory of the Canongate, by leaving the Tron Kirk in the centre of the arrangement. After collapsing in its first manifestation, the North Bridge had been securely in place since 1776. The culmination of Craig’s impressive approach to the city would have been Register House. This building, the largest connected with the first New Town, was designed by Robert Adam, payed for through management of the ‘Annexed Estates’ and built rather slowly over the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>40</sup>

Craig appended a statement of intent to his plan for South Bridge in which he expounded his ideas concerning both a healthy built environment and the safety of his suggested street layout.<sup>41</sup> He took the opportunity, once again, to highlight his pro-Hanoverian loyalties:

I must beg leave to mention a remarkable instance of the hazard carriages run in turning a right angle, where there is a great thoroughfare: His Majesty, and the Prince of Wales, in different carriages, went to Greenwich to meet Admiral Parker, upon the return of the Fleet... His Majesty’s carriage was about to turn down the west wing of the building, as being the nearest way to the river; but his coachman could not, till too late, see two carriages which at the same time, were driving

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<sup>40</sup> Management of the Scottish estates (annexed by the Government post 1745), by a committee based in Edinburgh, had proved difficult and was not a financial success. However in 1784 the previous land-owners were offered re-possession of their estates if they paid the accumulated debts on the land. This manoeuvre, combined with the re-payment of a loan to the Forth-Clyde canal proprietors, did raise the funds necessary to complete the building; *pers. comm.* Tristram Clarke, Archivist NRS. Also see Annette M. Smith, *Jacobite Estates of the Forty-Five* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1982, re-print 2003). At the time of his letter to the Duke of Argyll, cited previously (this chapter, Section ‘Exploring Cullen’s..’), William Cullen was consulted by the committee on the usefulness of seaweed in the process of bleaching linen. He was enthusiastic about the use of organic ashes for producing ‘all kinds of alkaline substances’, but he missed the potential for using seaweed in the manufacture of glass. In 1755 Cullen was rewarded by the committee, for his trouble, with three ‘fine suits of table-linen’.

<sup>41</sup> James Craig, ‘A Plan for Improving the City of Edinburgh’ (London: Dodsley, Boydell and Nicol, 1785), reproduced in *James Craig 1744–1795: The Ingenious Architect of the New Town of Edinburgh*, eds. Kitty Cruft and Andrew Fraser (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1995), p. 120.

along a traverse street: The consequence of this was, that His Majesty's carriage was beat down with great violence, and broken to pieces, and His Majesty's invaluable life was in the most imminent danger.

Craig is aware of the balance that has to be struck between financial feasibility and the health-promoting generous proportions of his proposed streets and buildings. Also keen to flag up his previous successes, he states:

No street, I believe was ever feued out more rapidly than George's Street in The New Town, although the feu-duty is higher than Prince's Street and Queen's Street; and I am inclined to believe, that it is owing to the breadth of George Street that the public gives it the preference.

Craig draws his argument to a close with a swift nod of apology to Robert Adam – 'the distinguished architect' – who is also working on plans for the South Bridge area (a much modified version of which is in use today). Finally he cites two works of the poet Horace, with the text of the second deftly altered to refer to Edinburgh, not Rome. First comes 'Ille terrarum mihi præter omnes angulus ridet...' This is translated as 'That little patch of land delights me more than any other'. Then: 'Alme Sol, curru nitido diem qui / promis et celas, aliusque et idem / nasceris; possis nihil urbe nostra visere majus' is translated as 'Kindly Sun, who in your shining chariot both reveal the day and hide it, who are reborn both different and yet the same, may you look upon nothing that is greater than our city.'<sup>42</sup>

This literary conclusion to Craig's argument is balanced by a quotation on the title page from *Liberty*, a work by his uncle, James Thompson:

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 128. Translations by Roy Pinkerton from Horace, *Odes*, 2.6., pp. 13–14 and Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*.

August, around, what PUBLIC WORKS I see!  
 Lo! STATELY STREETS, lo! SQUARES that court the breeze,  
 Even fram'd with elegance the plain retreat,  
 The private dwelling. Certain in his aim,  
 Taste, never idly working, saves expense.<sup>43</sup>

The last line here envisages a situation 'devoutly to be wished' by both Craig and Cullen but in fact their final years bore a sad similarity. They both had large families and both enjoyed careers of notable prestige but little financial security. They both died bankrupt, leaving their surviving families to clear their debts.

### **Pattern books and 'system'**

The Augustan-toned culture of intellectual Edinburgh, particularly evoked here by Craig through his quotations from Horace, was re-enforced across the mid-eighteenth century by the increasing frequency of travel through France and Italy to view actual Roman buildings, remains and works of art. Like William Cullen himself James Craig missed any opportunity there might have been to enjoy the Grand Tour. A way of achieving such a journey, when not a scion of the aristocracy oneself, could be to accompany a 'milord' as a tutor. Cullen's friends David Hume and Adam Smith both benefitted from such an arrangement in their youth – as did the painter Allan Ramsay, whose work in relation to Horace's villa will be discussed in the next chapter.<sup>44</sup> Recent research into the buildings history of Scotland, as distinct from its architectural history, has demonstrated that the

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<sup>43</sup> From James Thomson, *Liberty. Ancient and modern Italy compared* (London: n. pub, 1734). Craig has altered the original ordering of the lines of these verses.

<sup>44</sup> In an earlier era, in 1730, the poet James Thomson (aged 30 at the time) enjoyed a three year Grand Tour with the son of Sir Charles Talbot.

upsurge of building in both rural and urban Scotland from the mid-eighteenth century onwards had Roman connections that were only partly related to the journals and souvenirs of the Grand Tourists. Anthony Lewis and David Maudlin have shown that easily available architectural pattern books and methods, and building materials that could be demonstrated to be ‘authentically Roman’ were important too.<sup>45</sup> The pattern-books could be understood by an increasingly literate and entrepreneurially canny cohort of master–craftsmen, in the vanguard of whom were James Craig and the Adam family. In Edinburgh, in particular, their skills were encouraged by an effective and lasting hegemony of bankers, lawyers, councillors and academics. This situation carried the New Town project through its subsequent phases, through financial boom and bust and long years of war, until well into the nineteenth century.

The authentically Roman aspect of Scottish-Georgian building was to do with a particular line of influence, a developed ‘system’ of building that found an enlightened and responsive clientele north of the English–Scottish border. The rules of this system, were thought to be Greek in origin, but best articulated by the Roman architect Vitruvius, who was the direct inspiration for the work of Andreas Palladio. Vitruvius wrote in great detail not only about design, specifying the four ‘orders’ of architecture, but also about building materials increasingly used in eighteenth-century Scotland such as slate, lime, glass and lead. True neo-Palladian design and building methods arrived and flourished in England many decades before they reached Scotland.<sup>46</sup> But it was in Scotland that they were successfully adapted to build small and medium sized buildings as well as very grand

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<sup>45</sup> See recent papers by Daniel Maudlin, including D. Maudlin, ‘Cyma Recta: Palladianism and the Every Day’, *Palladianism: the Good, the Bad and the Unexpected* in ed. RIBA Publishing (London: RIBA Publishing, 2015), p. 18-20. This book accompanied the exhibition of the same name at RIBA in 2016. Also see Lewis (2014).

<sup>46</sup> For example: Chiswick House, completed to a design by Kent for Lord Burlington in 1729, and (much earlier) the Queen’s House in Greenwich, built in 1636 by Inigo Jones.

ones.<sup>47</sup> Inspired on the largest scale by folio books such as *Vitruvius Britannicus* – and on a pocket book scale by authors such as Batty Langley – architects and master builders in Scotland created the fine buildings in rural and urban settings we now refer to as ‘Georgian’.<sup>48</sup> Just as Linnaeus had demonstrated order in the kingdom of plants and Cullen an order in the nosology of disease and the classification of materia medica, so the pattern book enthusiasts had found a way of ordering and describing how ‘modern’ buildings should be constructed. It is difficult to demonstrate the connections and possible influences between say Cullen, Ramsay and Craig because much of this was effected through the conversation and shared social activities of near neighbours, rather than the usual sources of historical evidence, letters and publications. Cullen’s enthusiasm for publication only occurred in the latter part of his career. But it can be demonstrated that the Edinburgh virtuosi swam in the same medium so to speak, both culturally and intellectually. They both devised and responded to the changing fabric of the city in which they operated.

### **Connections with William Shenstone and his garden ‘the Leasowes’**

This discussion regarding the Edinburgh New Town and structures connected with Cullen and Craig, follows on from the particularly Roman resonance of Cullen’s statement ‘you

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<sup>47</sup> James Craig and John Adam were the two most influential architects in this respect. Craig worked both beside and for the Scottish arm of ‘Adam family enterprises’, though the detail of the working relationship between himself and John Adam is not well documented. Later in the eighteenth century Robert Adam was to use what he articulated as an even more authentic version of Roman design in his fantastically fashionable buildings and interiors, built primarily in England for extremely wealthy clients.

<sup>48</sup> Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, in 3 vols. (London: pub. by various booksellers, 1715-1725) and Batty Langley’s *The Builder’s Jewel or the Youth’s Instructor and the Workman’s Remembrancer* (London: C. and R. Ware et al. 1768). William Adam began a similar project, *Vitruvius Scoticus*, which was continued by John Adam and grandson William, but not published until 1822. This was not too late to influence neo-Palladian building design in America. See William Adam and John Adam, *Vitruvius Scoticus*, (Edinburgh: Black and Robinson, 1812); repr. ed. James Simpson, (New York: Dover Publications, 2011).

would call it a villa', in his letter to William Hunter cited at the beginning of this chapter. In this letter Cullen goes on to say; 'I hope in short to make a Leasowes in Scotland', which is a similarly casual, jocular remark. In fact he ends the letter with the statement 'I am in short happy'. But his mention of '[the] Leasowes' is as packed with interesting socio-cultural and literary reference as 'villa'. The Leasowes was a designed landscape of a very particular character, created by the poet William Shenstone, in the countryside a few miles from Birmingham.<sup>49</sup> The garden had both caught and created a wave of fashionable interest in gardens that were didactic in intent, but enjoyably emotional, aesthetic and literary in their presentation. The taste for such reached a peak in England at the time Shenstone died – in 1763 at the early age of 49 years. By naming the Leasowes, rather than any other garden, as his inspiration Cullen is associating himself with the fact that for Shenstone his garden was a chosen retirement project, begun when he inherited his father's estate, when he was only 27 years of age. Shenstone expresses his own understanding of his own retirement in the following words, taken from a letter to an actor friend, Mr Hull of the Covent Garden Theatre, written in December 1761:

...no men are fit for Solitude, but those who find the source of Amusement and Employment in themselves. Fancy, Reflection, and a Love of Reading, are indispensably necessary for such a Situation. It is downright Lunacy for a Man who had passed his Life in a Compting-House, or a Shop; who possesses, possibly, but a moderate Share of Natural Understanding, that Understanding too not cultivated by Education, and who has never known what it is was [sic] to look into

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<sup>49</sup> The following authors have been particularly helpful in informing my understanding of the Leasowes; Sandro Jung, 'William Shenstone's Poetry, The Leasowes and the Intermediality of Reading and Architectural Design', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 37, 1 (2014), 53-77; Michael Symes and Sandy Haines, *Enville, Hagley, the Leasowes: Three Great Eighteenth Century Gardens* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Ltd., 2010); Tim Richardson, *The Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden* (London: Transworld Publications 2008; Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape and Architecture in Eighteenth-century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

a Book – It is, I repeat, downright Lunacy, for such a Man to think of *retiring*. He knows not the Fatigue he is going to encounter: he will want Employment for his Hours; most probably, may shorten his Existence, and while he retains it, it will be one continued State of Apathy, if not Disorder.<sup>50</sup>

This sounds harsh. Does he really mean that only persons of a certain education (and by implication, especially in England, social standing) are capable of enjoying retirement? Certainly this is Shenstone's view expressed just to one person and at one particular time. But I would suggest that, as he so often does in his correspondence, he is exaggerating for rhetorical effect what was in fact a perfectly conventional, polite view of retirement for his time and place. This was a view with which Cullen would not only have acceded, but which he was in the process of helping to construct, through his mid-eighteenth century re-fashioning of ancient Galenic-Hippocratic ideas about health and care of the self.

By specifically mentioning the Leasowes in his letter to Hunter, Cullen is also indicating that for Scots interested in the 'post-1745' improvement agenda, the idea of the *ferme ornée*, which reached its finest expression in England at the Leasowes, was lastingly meaningful.<sup>51</sup> This was not the case in England itself, where Launcelot 'Capability' Brown had a powerful re-shaping influence on more than 170 properties, particularly during the 1760s and 1770s. If actual farming was allowed to be seen in his constructed views, it was pastoral, rather than arable, with animals being kept at a safe

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<sup>50</sup> Letter CCLXXXIII, 'To Mr Hull, from W. Shenstone, the Leasowes, Nov. 26<sup>th</sup> 1761', *Letters of William Shenstone*, ed. Marjorie Williams (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939), p. 607.

<sup>51</sup> Shenstone used the term *ferme ornée* to describe a garden like his own, which contained homely (though picturesquely presented) features of farming such as animals, growing crops and farm cottages – as well as more aesthetic and ornamental features. But when speaking of his own estate he most often used just the term 'farm'. The first *ferme ornée* was said to be Woburn (or Wooburn) Farm in Surrey, established by Phillip Southcote between 1734 and 1758. The first use of the term in Britain was by the landscape gardener Stephen Swizer. Lady Luxborough, who was closely advised by Shenstone, produced her own *ferme ornée* at her estate, 'The Barrells'. She referred to it in correspondence as her *ferme negligée*, which conjures up a rather delightful picture of early morning gardening.

distance by the ha-ha (to maintain an illusion of a garden lawn that continued to the horizon) and farm buildings removed, if necessary, from the view. Brown's achievement and the fact that it worked best on a very large scale, with the appropriate resources to effect the required changes, meant that the designed landscape became accessible only to the very wealthy.<sup>52</sup> Gardens that are, more truly, later descendants of the Shenstonian *ferme ornée* are more likely to be found in America, or in Europe. In Europe, they are often known as 'English Gardens'. Very notable examples of such are: Thomas Jefferson's estate at Monticello, Virginia, Ermenonville (where Rousseau was first interred) in France, the Garden Kingdom of Dessau-Wörlitz in Germany, and even Catherine the Great's expensively 'templed' garden at the Palace of Tsarskoe Selo, near St Petersburg.<sup>53</sup>

Cullen's colleague, the physician and botanist John Hope had gone out of his way to visit Shenstone's garden on one of his very few excursions away from Edinburgh. This journey, which took place in 1766 was to various gardens in England, looking for inspiration for his new botanic garden in Edinburgh. He carried out a similar journey in 1768 to the more accessible parts of the Scottish Highlands.<sup>54</sup> On both journeys Hope jotted down ideas, impressions and sometimes little drawings in a notebook which he seems to have written in his carriage, between stops. His focus is on plants and (particularly) trees, and he is hard to impress, commenting frequently 'we have that

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<sup>52</sup> Which is not to disparage Brown's very lasting achievement. Like William Shenstone he was indebted to William Kent for his understanding of the relationship of landscape design (and the experiencing of landscape) to theatre.

<sup>53</sup> The Scottish architect Charles Cameron was employed to design the unique Cameron Gallery for Catherine the Great in 1784. This is a long structure jutting out towards the large lake at the centre of the garden. The building combines very strong stone Roman-type features on the ground floor with a light as air pavilion of glass and pillars, surrounded by an outdoor walkway above. It also has a long, sloping, stone approach of half-buried arches – which in later years acted as a sumptuous form of disabled access for the Empress.

<sup>54</sup> The notes and drawings from Hope's journey south are copied and transcribed in John Harvey, 'A Scottish Botanist in London in 1766', *Garden History*, 9, 1 (1981), 40-75.

already in Edinburgh'. There are few comments on the aesthetic elements of the gardens he visits. However the Leasowes made a particular impression on him. He sketches some of the monuments and records their inscriptions – and recent research has revealed that the design of his botanic garden in Edinburgh includes elements that echo the calculated informality of the Leasowes.<sup>55</sup> In particular, Hope's monument to Carl. Linnaeus, which was erected in 1781 and still exists in the present RBGE, was designed by Robert Adam and created in James Craig's workshop in the form of a supremely elegant but very simple stone funerary vase. Such monuments were a particular feature of Shenstone's garden and were annotated either with his own verse or quotations from the classics.<sup>56</sup> Not a single stone vase, nor any of Shenstone's other (sometimes rather flimsy) monuments and buildings survive at the site of the Leasowes today – apart from his house. But the outlines of his garden, including many of its water features and strips of woodland are still extant, cared for by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. The upland pasture area has been particularly well preserved as a golf course has been sited there for the last 100 years, using Shenstone's home as its club house.

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<sup>55</sup> In the drawings archive of RBGE there are many plans, most projected, some achieved for the Leith Walk Garden. Johanna Lausen-Higgins has analysed all these plans and draws attention to the design elements of Hope's garden on Leith Walk that were highly unusual for a formal mid-eighteenth century botanic garden. See Johanna Lausen-Higgins, '*Sylva Botanica*: evaluation of the lost eighteenth-century Leith Walk Botanic Garden Edinburgh', *Garden History* (Winter, 2015), 219-236.

<sup>56</sup> It is interesting that the parallel development of 'vase-mania' in domestic ceramics, partially created and very successfully exploited by Josiah Wedgwood, happened in the 1760s. There may well be a connection but Shenstone's personal clique of friends, publishers, landscape gardeners and poets centred on correspondents in London and exchanges with the proprietors of the neighbouring landscape gardens at Hagley, Enville and The Barrells – the estate of his corresponding friend Lady Luxborough. Shenstone himself had surprisingly little to do with the 'Lunar Men' of Staffordshire, though his garden was popular with and much visited by a wide social group in the 1740s and 1750s. For Hope's monument to Linnaeus see fig. 10.

Only parts of Shenstone's prescribed route around the garden are accessible today without guidance from experts familiar with both the history and geography of the site.<sup>57</sup> The full original route went anti-clockwise, initially winding through woods and along waterways, then rising to extensive views of the surrounding countryside, particularly west to the Shropshire hills. Then the route plunged down to finish at the dramatic Virgil's Grove water feature, which was more or less central in the garden, and a short walk from the comforts of Shenstone's house. Robert Dodsley gives a very clear and detailed description of the whole walk enjoyed by visitors to the Leasowes in the volumes of verse and prose by and about Shenstone he edited and published in 1764, the year after Shenstone's death. When he comes to Virgil's Grove he responds rather breathlessly:

...it is not easy either to paint or describe this delightful grove: ...Be it therefore, first observed, that the whole scene is opaque and gloomy, consisting of a small deep valley or dingle [note his use of this word]; the sides of which are inclosed with irregular tufts of hazel and other underwood; the whole overshadowed by lofty trees... [After the spectator has looked to the right to admire a series of cascades and a small lake] his eye rambles to the left, where one of the most beautiful cascades imaginable is seen by way of incident, through a kind of vista, or glade, falling down a precipice over-arched with trees, and strikes us with surprise. It is impossible to express the pleasure which one feels on this occasion, for though surprize alone is not excellence, it may serve to quicken the effect of what is beautiful. I believe none ever beheld this grove, without a

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<sup>57</sup> As part of the event 'William Shenstone: A Tercentenary Conference' (Oxford, 2014) delegates were fortunate to be guided around Shenstone's own suggested route at the Leasowes by Chris Gallagher and a number of other speakers. Chris Gallagher gave an accompanying talk; 'The Round of Mr Shenstone's Paradise: topography, architecture, verse and metaphor'. See fig. 11.

thorough sense of satisfaction; and were one to chuse any particular spot of this perfectly Arcadian farm, it should, perhaps be this...<sup>58</sup>

The restoration of this special place has been a major – and highly successful – project for Dudley Council in recent years. Shenstone was known to get very cross if his route was followed in the wrong direction. It was tempting for visitors short of time who had come over from his rather grand neighbours to start at the intended dramatic climax of Virgil's Grove. He also had to put up with vandalism of his delicate garden structures by certain other kinds of visitors. He remonstrated with a poem, painted on a wooden board, at the garden entrance, which, after summoning some very Shakespearian fairies, concludes with the words: '...harm betide the wayward swain, / Who dares our hallow'd haunts profane'. Dudley Council has to find equivalent strategies for the twenty-first century to safeguard the garden today.

Cullen's claim to be 'creating a Leasowes' at Ormiston Hill is far from fanciful. Both gardens combine a view of pastoral land in their upper reaches, with more distant views towards a gently hilly landscape. And both have a central focus of a dramatic and unexpected water feature that is essentially natural, but cleverly enhanced. The scale of both estates is remarkably similar; the Leasowes being (originally) 250 acres and Ormiston Hill (originally) 220 acres. Furthermore Dodsley also describes a repeated feature of the Leasowes that is replicated by Cullen at Ormiston Hill, which is to achieve a pleasing effect through a clever process of miniaturisation:

This scene, though comparatively small, is yet aggrandised with so much art, that we forget the quantity of water which flows through this close and overshadowed

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<sup>58</sup> 'A Description of the Leasowes', *Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone Esq*, ed. Robert Dodsley, 2 vols (London: 1764), vol. 2, p. 333.

vally; and are so much transported with the intricacy of the scene, and the concealed height from whence it flows, that we, without reflection, add the idea of magnificence to that of beauty.

Dodsley associates this effect with gardens in China. William Gilpin objected that the promised high drama of this feature, and Shenstone's water features generally, were often compromised by an unreliable and inadequate water supply.<sup>59</sup> Samuel Johnson also remonstrated with Shenstone's very public, very early retirement in his *Lives of the Poets*. He did give the poet and his garden a chapter – though it was a masterly, even excruciating, exercise in damning both with the very faintest of praise (and one or two inaccuracies).<sup>60</sup> Shenstone had been dead more than a decade before Johnson's essay was published so he could not be hurt by this – and Johnson, despite himself, indirectly added his own fame to that of the garden itself.<sup>61</sup>

Regarding echoes of the Leasowes at Ormiston Hill; there is something strikingly similar in the scale of the ambitions of Cullen and Shenstone, when set against the scale of their resources. Compared with some in their intellectual peer group, and most in the social group to which they aspired, both men were not wealthy. But Cullen and Shenstone attempted to 'make a virtue', perhaps even 'perform a virtue', out of their modest situation. Both succeeded in this to varying degrees in their lifetime, even though each of their gardens faded rather quickly after their death. But I would claim that both

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<sup>59</sup> William Gilpin, *Observations relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty Made in the Year 1772 On several parts of England; particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmorland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: R. Blamire 1788), vol. 1, p. 60.

<sup>60</sup> 'Shenstone', Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, vol. 2 (London 1779, 1781).

<sup>61</sup> Another vociferous opinion monger, Horace Walpole, scorned Shenstone's poetry and claimed (when Shenstone's letters were published in 1764) that only the fact that he found so many of his friends mentioned made them interesting. See A. R. Humphreys, *William Shenstone: An Eighteenth-Century Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), p. 99.

gardens, the one so famous and the other so obscure, should be considered as a special kind of small scale, 'scholarly' retreat for their creators; to be compared, for example, with William Cowper's garden at Olney, or Gilbert White's small estate at Selbourne. Cullen's own reference to the Leasowes invites such comparisons with gardens south of the border – and maybe even with certain gardens far more distant in time and place such as the famous Humble Administrator's Garden in South China.<sup>62</sup> All of these scholarly gardens combine a high moral tone and a modest scale with beguiling whimsy, in a way that recalls, inevitably, Joseph Addison, writing his articles for *The Spectator* in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Hope's Botanic Garden (discussed earlier) can also be included in this rather special 'garden listing'; the fact that it was state funded gave it security in one way, but kept it perpetually short of funds in another. At one point he had to borrow money from his head gardener to secure the installation of a water pipe into his garden.<sup>63</sup> But to give examples of the 'beguiling whimsy' that could accompany scholarly gardening on a tight budget: William Cowper had his spaniels and pet hares, Gilbert White erected two-dimensional versions of the three dimensional statues he could not afford, William Shenstone encouraged hens to run in and out of his house, and Dr Cullen scattered exotic seeds on his lands to confuse his more botanically minded visitors.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Mid-eighteenth century designed landscapes, north and south of the English/Scottish border, shared a strong fancy for either the 'Gothick' or 'Chinoiserie'. There was a growing body of scholarship supporting both, but there was also a great deal invented on the spot. Because of his interest in ancient British history and antiquities, Shenstone preferred the Gothick – but the clever miniaturising mentioned earlier was and still is very much part of formal Chinese gardens.

<sup>63</sup> See NRS GD/253/146/2/4.

<sup>64</sup> Both John Thomson and the Rev. Mr Simpson state that an 'adventitious' or 'adventive' flora outlasted the Cullen family's stay at Ormiston Hill. Simpson gives the further detail of Cullen attempting to deceive his guests by deliberately scattering exotic seeds on his lands. See *New Stat. Acc. Kirknewton*, p. 438.

Returning to the particular fame of Shenstone's *ferme ornée* variety of garden and how this would have registered for Cullen: Shenstone's garden would not have become quite such a fashionable 'must see' if it had not been for his fame and popularity as a poet and playwright. This reputation continued to increase up to and for many decades after his death. And it was not just south of the border that this happened; both Robert Burns and William Wordsworth cite Shenstone as an important literary influence.

I will now consider three documents that illuminate possible connections between Shenstone and Cullen's retirement projects. The first of these is a letter from Shenstone concerning Scotland. The second is a letter from Shenstone to his friend, the poet Richard Jago, in which he comments on his self-identification as valetudinarian and as a hypochondriac, though he does not actually use these two words. The third is his collection of aphorisms, *Unconnected Thoughts about Gardening*. The document we could call Shenstone's 'Scottish letter' is dated 24<sup>th</sup> September 1761, and is carried by his friend the Birmingham chemist John Roebuck to a fellow litterateur, Mr MacGowan.<sup>65</sup> We know that Mr MacGowan lived in Edinburgh and figured in the publishing and circulation of literature in the city. It is not clear from the letter exactly where Mr MacGowan is when he receives it, but a remark by Shenstone towards the end of the letter seems to indicate Mr MacGowan is not in Edinburgh at this time. After some introductory pleasantries, Shenstone comments 'The Scotch press, of which you send me so many agreeable specimens, has, I think, not a rival in the world, unless it be that of my neighbour Baskerville'. He thanks his correspondent for sending him 'early copies' of 'the

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<sup>65</sup> With the help of the artist John Kay, this gentleman has been identified as 'Johnnie McGowan... [who] was well known and generally esteemed as a good natured inoffensive sort of man with a considerable penchant for talking on subjects not usually considered of much moment. He was fond of antiquarian pursuits and possessed a good library, besides a pretty extensive private museum of curiosities and antiquities.' See H. Paton, vol. 1, p. 416 and William Shenstone 'Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening', ed. Dodsley (1764), vol 2, pp. 125-148

Erse fragments', poetry by 'Ossian', translated by MacPherson.<sup>66</sup> He praises Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* and he praises Scotch snuff – and he puts feelers out for 'any old Scotch ballads', commenting that 'it is in the remote parts of the kingdom' that such 'curiosities' are found. He goes on to state what could be taken as his own analysis of why 'Virgil's Grove' was proving so annoyingly popular:

The taste of the age, seems to have been carried to its utmost height so far as regards plan and style, as may appear in the works of Akenside, Gray's Odes and Church-yard Verses, and Mason's Monody and Elfrida. The public has seen all that art can do, and they want the more striking efforts of wild, original, enthusiastic genius. It seems to exclaim aloud with the chorus in Julius Caesar, 'Oh rather than be slaves to these deep learned men, / give us our wildness and our woods, our huts and caves again'.

After requesting to be remembered to mutual friends, Shenstone states 'I have many more Scotch friends whom I wish to particularise; but these, if I am not mistaken, live in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh'. The letter ends with a promise to send 'a copy of Percy's translation of a genuine Chinese novel'.<sup>67</sup>

This letter, to a literary colleague rather than a close friend, is polite but informal and full of graceful references to interests he shares with his correspondent and to things Scottish. It also involves an exchange of manuscripts gratifying to both correspondents. But among Shenstone's voluminous correspondence, it is one of very few to make such interesting and sustained reference to Scotland. What the letter also indicates very well

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<sup>66</sup> Going by the date of this letter he probably means *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland*, ed. James MacPherson (Edinburgh: Hamilton and Balfour, 1760).

<sup>67</sup> *Hao Kiou Chooan or the Pleasing History*, completed and edited by Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore (London: R and J Dodsley, 1761).

is how Shenstone manages to combine retirement and withdrawal, while keeping remarkably active in his chosen literary world. This world may seem rather remote from that which Cullen inhabited in his own retirement, but both Cullen and Shenstone used letters, with a high degree of sophistication, to comfort and assuage both themselves and their correspondents.

One kind of comforting and assuaging Shenstone felt he needed is indicated in the following letter, which is very different in its tone and content to the one just cited but obviously closer to Cullen's concerns. In fact so closely does it echo Cullen's concerns and recommendations, it could have been written in reply to the Doctor, instead of (as it is) to Richard Jago:

...My vertigo has not yet taken away my senses: God knows how soon it may do; but my nerves are in such a condition that I can scarcely get a wink of even disordered rest for whole nights together. May you never know the misery of such involuntary vigils! I ride every day almost to fatigue; which only tends to make my want of sleep more sensible and not in the least to remove it. I have spirits all day, good ones; though my head is dizzy, and I never have any study of greater subtlety than a newspaper. I cannot say the journey to L[apworth] would be at all formidable to me; for I ride about fifteen miles, as I compute it, every day before dinner. But the nights from home would be insupportable to me...

[Shenstone goes on to comment on the necessity of having 'perspiratory wheys and slops' made up for him through the night.] I hope you continue mending. The benefit of riding is not only universal and would cure me too, could I make one previous advance towards health. Have you tried cold-bathing? Perhaps it may not suit your case. I wish I had not dropt it. I take my fluctuations of nerves to be

caused, as that of the sea is, by wind; which I am continually pumping up, and yet find it still renewed...

Shenstone continues his letter with a couple of lively stories about recent small incidents in his life. His generally cheerful tone belies the rather self-involved nature of the letter's contents. He finds himself interesting, he expects his correspondent to find him similarly interesting and most of all he is using the letter itself, written just before retiring to bed, as a way of feeling better. The parallels with Cullen's consultation correspondence are many and subtle.

From a letter touching on his concerns as a man of literature and a letter dealing with aspects of his health – I will now consider a document addressed to a broader audience, Shenstone's *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening*.<sup>68</sup> This collection of aphorisms was likely to have interested Cullen not only when he came to planning and developing his own garden, but also because he himself had met with considerable and sustained success when he decided to compose his *First Lines on the Practice of Physic* in an aphoristic style.<sup>69</sup> As well as being loosely clustered into chapters, Cullen's text was set out, as aphorisms commonly were, in individually numbered sections. Many of these were rather too long to be easily memorable. And though this work proved remarkably successful and popular, its readers occasionally complained that they found it difficult to use it to look things up. This was very much helped by the excellent index attached to later editions. The aphoristic *Philosophia Botanica* published by Carl. Linnaeus in 1751 would have been known to Shenstone and Cullen, as was the fact that aphorisms were much used as a way of conveying information and advice in the ancient Hippocratic

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<sup>68</sup> Shenstone, ed. Dodsley (1764), vol 2, p. 125.

<sup>69</sup> I am not suggesting that we know whether Cullen was inspired by this particular text when planning his designed landscape, though it is possible he might have been.

corpus.<sup>70</sup> It was an established format within both the philosophical and medical literature of Cullen and Shenstone's time.<sup>71</sup> Devising and discoursing on aphorisms was an aspect of the examination of students for their M.D. in Cullen's time at the University of Edinburgh.<sup>72</sup> However, by the later-eighteenth century, as Latin was starting to fade as a common language in intellectual Britain and Europe, the aphorism faded too.

Shenstone's title in his *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening* is somewhat misleading. The thoughts do not seem to be particularly unconnected at all, but are set out very clearly with the intention of suggesting both an etymology and a taxonomy of his subject. He begins:

Gardening may be divided into three species – kitchen gardening – parterre gardening – and landskip, or picturesque-gardening; which latter is the subject intended in the following pages – It consists of grandeur, beauty, or variety. Convenience merely has no share here; any farther than as it pleases the imagination.

Shenstone is here trying to bring helpful clarity to the muddled discourse of taste – much as William Gilpin was to continue doing in his many publications of a later decade.

Precisely how many cows standing up and/or sitting down [are] truly picturesque?<sup>73</sup>

Shenstone's didactic purpose is achieved with lightness of touch. As he owns in the

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<sup>70</sup> Carl. Linnaeus, *Philosophia Botanica* (Stockholm and Amsterdam: 1751) and Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* (c. 400 B.C.).

<sup>71</sup> Other authors using aphorisms likely to have been known to Cullen and Shenstone at this time include Francis Bacon, Blaise Pascal and Francois de la La Rochefoucauld. *Pers. comm* Kenneth Boyd.

<sup>72</sup> This examination process, which in his own case involved both Cullen and Hope, is described very fully by the medical student Syllas Neville. See ed. Cozens-Hardy, p. 223.

<sup>73</sup> William Gilpin, *Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1772, on several parts of England; particularly the mountains, and lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland* (London: 1786), vol. 2, Section 31. Gilpin's observations regarding cows are satirised by Elizabeth Bennet, in conversation with Mr Darcy in Chapter 10 of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (Whitehall: T. Egerton, 1813).

second paragraph he is indebted to such authors as 'Burke, Hutchinson [and] Gerard'.

Deciding on the 'peculiar character' of a part of a garden, or perhaps a whole garden, is rather like understanding the temperament or constitution of a patient: 'whether it be the grand, the savage, the sprightly, the melancholy, the horrid, or the beautiful', i.e. first agree what type of situation is under contemplation, or how that situation can be classified. Then you will be better able to work with it.

Shenstone continues with a comment that resonates with the experience of visiting both the Leasowes and Ormiston Hill today:

I use the words *landskip* and *prospect*, the former as expressive of home scenes, the latter as distant images. Prospects should take in the blue distant hills; but never so remotely, that they be not distinguishable from clouds.<sup>74</sup>

The high views from both properties are unexpected and pleasing – but not overwhelming. They are rather Italian in scale in fact. At the Leasowes and on a smaller scale at Ormiston Hill the frisson of the sublime only happens at the end of the walk, when the walker has been mentally and imaginatively prepared for it through the inscribed urns, seats, root-houses, statues, pools and waterfalls encountered on the way. Many of these have a melancholy tone, created by their commemorative purpose – and

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<sup>74</sup> The poet A. E. Housman's 'blue remembered hills', viewed in his youth from Bromsgrove, were the same Shropshire hills viewed by Shenstone, just 10 miles from Bromsgrove, at the Leasowes. Rather than Housman borrowing the important 'blue' from Shenstone (though of course this might have been the case), I would suggest first of all that it is a common phenomenon in England when viewing hills in the rainier west from an easterly vantage point – especially in evening light and secondly that both had Italian landscape painting in mind.

enhanced by their careful siting.<sup>75</sup> In this particular text Shenstone's concerns are aesthetic, painterly and philosophical. The actual farm which was part of his landscape and which successfully provided him with a living until the end of his life, is strangely absent. So, for that matter are plants – other than bushes and trees. Shenstone did not always like to use the term *ferme ornée* in relation to his own estate because his aim for his visitors was for them to have an experience that was as much literary as aesthetic. The Leasowes can be considered as a counterpart to the partly lyrical, partly didactic, often lengthy 'Georgic' poems produced by such friends and colleagues as Richard Jago and William Mason.<sup>76</sup> There is a poetic structure and timing to the experience of walking his grounds. In fact his control of the experience is so clever, through the appearance, disappearance and re-appearance of views and perspectives that even now, in its decayed state, it can also be described as 'filmic' in nature. The same can be said of far grander designed landscapes, such as Stowe, Castle Howard or Blenheim. But the important differences are to do with scale, expenditure and ambition. The factor to note about the Leasowes is that it was designed to be walked around, not driven through in a carriage. Ideally at least half a day should be dedicated to the experience, although, on the advice of Shenstone himself, if every opportunity to reflect and feel a pleasing melancholy were taken in his garden, at least a whole day would be required.

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<sup>75</sup> Root houses were constructed of twisted wood (of no commercial value) and any dried plant material to hand. They were sometimes tucked in to a natural rocky outcrop. They were intended to suggest that a hermit might have or might still live there. They were madly fashionable around the middle of the eighteenth century, but being ephemeral as well as cheap to construct, many have vanished from the landscape. Shenstone was much attached to his many root houses, none of which survive. See Gordon Campbell, *The Hermit in the Garden: from Imperial Rome to Ornamental Gnome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Also root houses were often called 'fog houses' in Scotland. See for example the one belonging to Lady Geraldine Ross Lockhart at Cora Linn.

<sup>76</sup> See for example Richard Jago, *Edge Hill, or the rural prospect delineated and moralized* (London: 1767) and William Mason, *The English Garden* (London: 1772–82).

One further (and for our purposes here, final) sentiment from this document is the following – with which Cullen would have certainly concurred:

The works of a person that builds, begin immediately to decay; while those of him who plants begin directly to improve. In this, planting promises a more lasting pleasure, than building; which, were it to remain in equal perfection, would at best begin to moulder and want repairs in imagination.

Gardeners of every time and place have found stone to be the most expensive of materials. Stone is plentiful in Scotland, but still expensive because of the cost of moving it. In Scotland today the height of estate walls and even more of walled gardens (luxuries over and above the cost of a house) can be correlated with how wealthy the owner of the estate was at the time such structures were built. Even Palladio used stucco covered brick for his palatial farm-houses in the Veneto.

### **Conclusion: the frustrations of retirement**

It is clear that Cullen's half-joking specification of the Leasowes as the model for his retirement project in his letter to Hunter carries a revealing set of associations. These associations go beyond the virtuoso experiment in improved farming his chosen site required. There was the tempting possibility that the Ormiston Hill project could bring him a version of the artistic, literary and gentlemanly status to which he aspired, and which his medical achievements only partially satisfied. There is even a sense that the more famous he became as a doctor, and the more successful he was at placing the art and science of medicine on a professional footing, the further out of reach his aspirations became. The fact that the worlds of art, natural philosophy, science, medicine, law and

literature all over-lapped and involved the same individuals is an essential aspect of Enlightenment Edinburgh. However all these worlds were drawing inexorably apart in the final years of Cullen's career. A retirement in a more modern sense, a withdrawal from his previous activities, could perhaps have saved him from the experience of outliving his own era. However initially he was certainly not willing – and latterly was probably not able, to remove himself from his medical avocations. Also Cullen may well have lived long enough to realise that his great project at Ormiston Hill was a failure. A sense of frustration with the 'Catch 22' he found himself in regarding finances, is revealed in a brief but illuminating statement he made, years earlier, in connection with his work for the Committee of the Annexed Estates. In a letter to Lord Kames, he comments:

...I should be very glad to find my interest connected with schemes of this kind [i.e. the development of a bleach for linen]; but at present I would be hurt by any suspicion of interested views. I have a great ambition to establish Arts, – and I have not avarice enough to practice them.<sup>77</sup>

This statement can be interpreted, using a modern vocabulary, in the following manner: 'I would be glad of payment but my medical reputation (on which I am financially dependent) depends on my gentlemanly persona, which would be put at risk by payment for my services. I have a wide range of arts related interests but am unable to manage my income in such a way as to develop them.' Cullen on his windy cold hill, longing for visitors who seldom called, and Shenstone, only really pleased when his visitors came in carriages with coronets on their doors, both found themselves very famous in the final years of their lives. But in their different ways, both were fated to fall short of their own expressed aspirations. Perhaps it was also a fellow feeling for the additional frustrations

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<sup>77</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 78.

of celebrity that lay behind Cullen's wish to 'make a Leasowes in Scotland'.



Fig. 8

William Cullen's house at Ormiston Hill (2012). Ruined building restored in 1990s. South-east facing elevation.

Photo: David Shuttleton.



Fig. 9

Portrait in oils of the architect James Craig by David Allan c. 1781. Craig's hand is on a version of his plan for the New Town of Edinburgh that was not used. On the floor is an elevation drawing of his design for the new Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, which was used (apart from the 'wing' components). A foundation stone was laid by William Cullen in 1775 but the interior was not completed until 1830.

The painting is owned by the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh. This image: *Wikimedia Commons*.



Fig. 10

Engraved copy of the design by Robert Adam for the monument to Carl. Linnaeus commissioned by John Hope and erected in 1779. This monument, which stands around 15 feet high, was constructed in James Craig's workshop for the Leith Walk Botanic Garden. It has been moved a number of times but can still be seen today, in the current Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Its design echoes that of the neo-classical funerary urn style monuments which were such a feature of Shenstone's garden 'the Leasowes', visited by Hope in 1766. An inscription was added by Hope within the roundel which reads 'Linnaeo posuit J Hope 1779'. Linnaeus died in 1778.

Image: Archive of Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

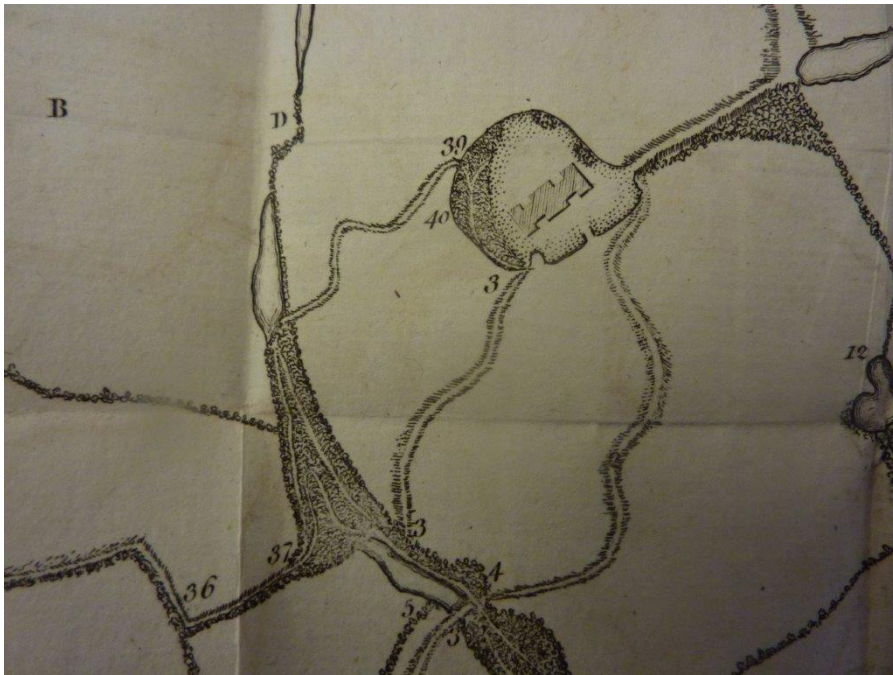
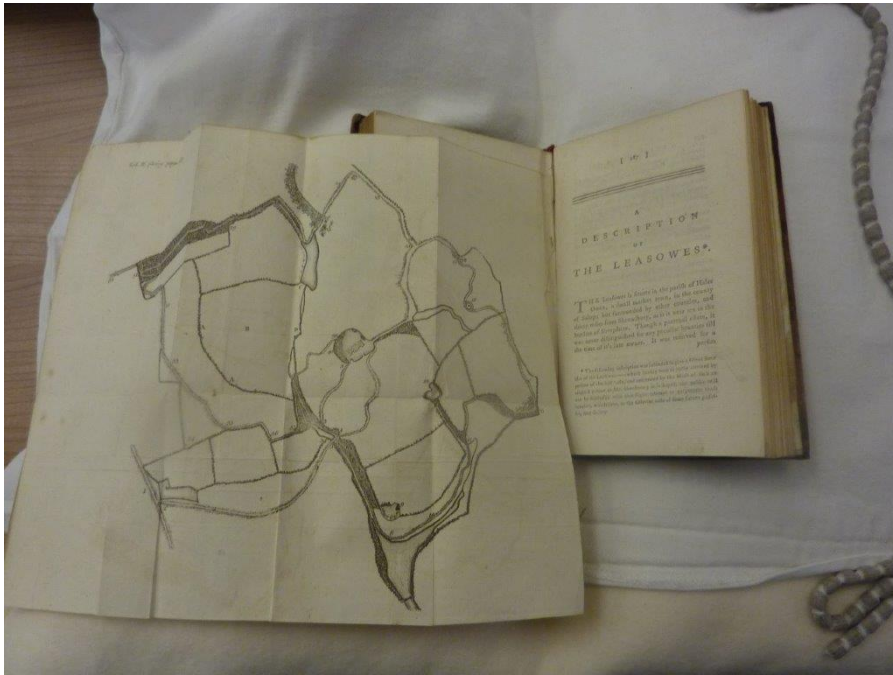


Fig. 11

Robert Dodsley's plan of the walk around the Leasowes garden. No.38, which should indicate Virgil's Grove is missing – perhaps to discourage visitors from going straight there. It is hard to be certain, but I think the optimum view of the grove is looking north-west from just to the left of the lower no 3, very close to the carriage drive to the house. The plan accompanies Dodsley's chapter on the Leasowes. See (as in top picture) 'A Description of the Leasowes, in Dodsley (1764), vol. 2, p. 333.

Own photographs: courtesy of NLS.

## Chapter Four: Ormiston Hill

### Introduction

Previous chapters have examined the intellectual and biographical context of Cullen's retirement project at Ormiston Hill; the present chapter turns to the Ormiston Hill site itself, which it will examine in more detail. There are three major sources of information available: the first being what can be seen on the site today, the second being information presented by John Thomson in his *Account* of Cullen's life, and the third being the detailed write-up of the parish given in the 1845 *New Statistical Account of Kirknewton*. One particular detail of Cullen's project will be singled out for closer examination, the tablets inscribed with verse from Horace placed at the top and bottom of his estate. Cullen's plans for an 'Horatian' retreat' will be set alongside the parallel and exactly contemporary activities of the Scottish artist, Allan Ramsay, researching and digging at the very site of Horace's villa in Italy. I will then examine some comments from visitors to the estate, made during Cullen's lifetime. Finally I will survey some other estates in eighteenth-century Scotland created by high-achieving professional men.

### Cullen's account and my own account

By the autumn of 1782 Cullen was starting to enjoy his project at Ormiston Hill. John Thomson cites a letter from him to an old friend William Betham (dated 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1782) which illustrates this, echoing the tone and even some of the detail of the 1778 letter to William Hunter cited in the previous chapter:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 20. An extract from this letter has already been cited in relation to Cullen deciding on a site for his project that would be west of Edinburgh. See previous chapter.

But let me indulge, as we have often done, in a little, badinage, which, *septuagenario proximus*, I still relish a little. I must tell you that I have got upon my hobby; my amusement is a little farm and a little pleasure-ground. If your daughters had not seen the shabby figure of them, [they had recently stayed at Ormiston Hill] I should have made a fine picture to you; but I beg you will not mind what they say. They have no feeling for the beauty of a field that was heath, now brought to rich pasture. They were not so long with me as to have the pleasure that I have in seeing a tree grow ten feet in three years. I have done a great deal, but it is all levelling work; other people cannot know what earth has been moved, but I have had some amusement in the turning of every shovelful. I hope to go on for some years yet; but my greatest pleasure is to get a visit from an old friend, whom I fancy I can interest a little in my improvements, but whom I certainly tire in his attending to my detail of them...and there is no man alive I would wish to persecute so much as yourself. For God's sake, let us meet before we die...

Thomson associates this letter, with its cheerful detail and poignant final appeal, with the very moment of the eruption into Cullen's life of the 'Brown affair', which he sees as being greatly destructive both to Cullen's peace of mind and to his reputation. As discussed earlier in this thesis, John Brown's challenge to his former mentor Cullen had many repercussions for Cullen personally, and for the development of formal and informal medical practice in Britain, Europe, and America.<sup>3</sup> Basically it was to do with whether the whole of medical practice could be simplified down to getting the right balance of stimulants and sedatives to enable the body to heal itself. Following the letter quoted here, Thomson goes on to discuss every aspect of the Brown affair and its

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<sup>3</sup> The consequences of the breakdown of the relationship between Cullen and Brown are discussed in Chapter One. See Section 'Hypochondria and valetudinarianism...'.

historical and international repercussions, for nearly 300 pages. This very partisan tirade, possibly triggered by the enthusiastic tone of Cullen's letter to Betham, over-freights the biography with detail about a controversy that raged on through the first half of the nineteenth century.

It is only in the letter to William Betham cited here, and the one cited earlier to William Hunter, that Cullen himself writes in any detail about Ormiston Hill. In the whole of his consultation correspondence, his cherished new project is mentioned on only two or three occasions, and then only as a postal address. Thomson redresses this situation by providing readers with a surprising amount of detail, much of it assembled by David Craigie, who, as we have seen, was involved in the Royal College of Physicians belatedly placing a memorial to Cullen at Kirknewton. In fact Craigie provides such precise information that it is possible to use nothing but his directions and a contemporary *Ordnance Survey* map to find the site of Cullen's house and land. Identifying the boundaries and details of the estate is aided by a number of older maps, particularly one produced in 1807, 17 years after Cullen's death.<sup>4</sup>

Today the land and buildings of Cullen's estate at Ormiston Hill are privately owned.<sup>5</sup> As described in the previous chapter his former house sits to the south-west of a cluster of policy-buildings.<sup>6</sup> There are further buildings of a later date both to the west and to the east of Cullen's house, and between this row of buildings and the upper reaches of the dingle is a livery stable. The surrounding land is now mainly pasture for

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<sup>4</sup> 'Plan of Ormiston Hill Estate, Kirknewton, Midlothian' (1807), NRS, Ref: RHP 85547.

<sup>5</sup> I would like to record my gratitude to the people who live there for making me welcome on a number of exploratory trips over the last five years, particularly John Thomas, Charles Young, and Jane Deane. I am also grateful to David Shuttleton, Henry Noltie, Christopher Dingwall and Iain Milne for their company and for their own informed impressions on some of these visits.

<sup>6</sup> See fig. 12

horses, partially edged by strips of coniferous forestry. Until they were demolished four years ago, there was a group of large derelict sheds, once used for the intense farming of either pigs or chickens, just to the west of what is now the small community of Ormiston Hill. Just over the crest of the hill, to the south of the estate, there is a small aerodrome, used in recent years by the RAF to fly gliders.

The main house on Cullen's land now, a few hundred yards to the north-west of his own house, was built in the mid-nineteenth century to a Scots-baronial design by David Bryce. This house is approached along the old main road, through the small town of Kirknewton (bypassed to the north by the current A 71). This road was the main overland route from Edinburgh to Glasgow, and went via Cullen's home town of Hamilton. Very soon after leaving the town (travelling west) comes a left hand turn, leading underneath the Edinburgh to Carstairs railway line, to a private driveway to the Bryce house. The drive climbs gently uphill, just east of the hidden dingle until it sweeps over a bridge and ends at the north side of the house. The bridge is substantial, built of honey-coloured stone and crosses the dingle at a considerable height from the burn below. It is from the garden to the north of the Bryce house that the dramatic part of Cullen's 'dingle' can now be accessed, by descending wooden steps beside the stone bridge.<sup>7</sup> The drama is increased by the fact that the bridge crosses a deep chasm without rising – therefore unless you look over the parapet of the bridge you are not even aware that you are on one.<sup>8</sup> The resulting thinness of the structure at the top of the arch has left the bridge vulnerable to the elements and it required substantial repairs to remain viable some three or four years ago. During this restoration it was discovered that the

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<sup>7</sup> See fig. 13

<sup>8</sup> Rather like Thomas Telford's Dean Bridge in Edinburgh, carrying traffic over a spectacular river gorge visiting car drivers are not even aware exists.

bridge was designed by the architect and landscape artist Alexander Nasmyth. There is another bridge by Nasmyth, very similar in design, to be found in the Almondell Country Park nearby. These two bridges are pleasingly, ‘rudely Roman’ in their detailing, both at road level and, even more, when seen from below. Both have small seats set into the stonework at either end. Thomson states that the bridge was designed by Nasmyth for Mr Wilkie, who employed David Bryce as architect for his house – though the bridge fits with Cullen’s neo-classical leanings rather better than it does with the later house. Thomson also states that the owner of the new house built a suite of out-buildings (stables etc.) to the west of the house. These buildings are now gone – but they were in the vicinity of the walled garden, which is still there.<sup>9</sup> If more of Cullen’s own out-buildings to the east survived at this time, it could be that the owner kept a neo-classical theme in the ancillary structures of the estate as a coherent visual contrast to his smart new/old villa. This would also subtly indicate that the estate was older than the house itself.

In Cullen’s time the dingle could be walked from where the headwaters pass under the small road approaching Cullen’s house from the west. At this point it is possible to see where the burn (a tributary to the Gogar Burn) approaches through the fields to the south of Cullen’s estate.<sup>10</sup> As it reaches the road, the initially tiny stream of water plunges into the beginning of the dingle, which is itself mostly hidden from the surrounding landscape. This over-deepened ‘cleugh’, as it is known in Scotland, is likely to have been glacial in origin, as are many geological features of the Pentland Hills. It twists and turns on its progress north affording shelter in its depth and even shafts of sunlight

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<sup>9</sup> The 1807 plan of the estate reveals that during Cullen’s time a complex of old buildings existed on and near the site of the later walled garden, including one labelled ‘manor house’.

<sup>10</sup> See fig. 14

on walls that, surprisingly, face south. The garden historian Christopher Dingwall noticed finished stone, indicating remains of a water level walkway, on a visit four years ago – and also pointed out that a mill race seems to run along the bank of the dingle to the west, which could be the reason for the initial existence of a waterfall, possibly raised by Cullen, as a major ornamental feature of the garden.<sup>11</sup> The combination of walkway, possible mill house and the picturesquely secluded dingle suggests that Cullen indeed aimed at his own version of the Shenstonian *ferme orneé* – but a miniaturized version, perhaps inspired by Shenstone’s own scaled-down dramatic effects that so impressed his friend Dodsley.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence of Cullen’s original plantings, which was still to be found at the time of the *New Statistical Account*, is today rather scanty.<sup>13</sup> There are a number of lime trees and yew trees in the area of the dingle, which are substantial enough to have been planted more than 200 years ago.<sup>14</sup> The Balsam Poplar, *Populus balsamifera*, Cullen mentions in a previous part of the letter to Betham quoted earlier, is a fast growing tree of great beauty and sweet scent (introduced to Britain from America), but does not live very long. Also the current owner of the dingle is aware that the area north of the waterfall was developed as an Edwardian water garden around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth-century. Unsurprisingly it was against a south-facing cliff, facing the waterfall, which was probably the highlight of the whole garden, that Cullen placed his

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<sup>11</sup> See fig. 15

<sup>12</sup> See ‘A Description of the Leasowes’ in Dodsley (1764), vol. 2, p 333.

<sup>13</sup> *New Stat. Acc.* p. 433.

<sup>14</sup> The lime trees are of the genus *Tilia* (species not yet identified), and the yew is *Taxus baccata*. As well as their long association with landscaped gardens north and south of the Scottish border, lime trees also recall the name of Carl. ‘Linnaeus’. This was his father’s academic name, and referred to the large lime tree (German *linden*, Swedish *lind*) that grew in the village of his birth. The flowers of lime trees are also very sweetly scented.

‘Shenstonian’ seat. It was positioned in an alcove, and was perhaps surrounded by the more exotic plants, of a kind that this corner of his garden could have protected. There is no indication that Cullen possessed a glasshouse. It would have been a costly item to build and vulnerable to the high winds his land was exposed to.

There were some other stone features of Cullen’s garden. One that can still be seen today is a small quarter-circle curved wall set at what (from the 1807 map) would have been the main approach to his estate, east of the old policy buildings.<sup>15</sup> Such walls (there would have been an answering quarter-circle the other side of the drive) are found associated with many ‘improved’ Scottish estates and often indicate a degree of neo-Palladian inspiration. Botanic Cottage, in the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), is framed by two such curved walls. The whereabouts of the two stone tablets inscribed with lines from Horace (discussed later in this chapter) is now not known. However Thomson is precise in describing their positioning at the lower northern entry to the dingle and on the south-facing wall of Cullen’s house. There is a tablet shaped indentation on the south-facing wall of the older part of the house, which may confirm Thomson’s suggestion.

Climbing north from the head of the dingle remarkable views open out, south to the nearby rounded summits of the Pentland hills, north to the Firth of Forth and the Ochil Hills and east towards the City of Edinburgh. Using a map to look north from high up on Cullen’s estate, another happy factor in the estate’s situation can be noted. Prospects from Cullen’s estate may have included a view of at least three other substantial ‘gentlemanly seats’. Foremost in size and grandeur would have been Hatton

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<sup>15</sup> The 1807 *Estate plan of Ormiston Hill* reveals this road ran south uphill to these curved walls from a lodge house on the ‘old’ main road through Kirknewton.

(earlier known as Haltoun) House, a renaissance style palace, demolished following a fire in the mid-twentieth century. The household at Haltoun was familiar to Cullen as for a number of years towards the end of both their lives he had advised Robert Kirkland (surgeon apothecary to the resident family) about the health of the elderly 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Lauderdale (1718–1798).<sup>16</sup> Only its very ornate baroque gateway, facing the road into Kirknewton from Edinburgh, and two elegant stone pavilion buildings now survive. Other larger scale mansions that may have been visible looking north from Cullen's estate included the L-shaped Calder House, which dated back to the mid-sixteenth century, and more to the east, Dalmahoy House near Ratho, designed in 1725 by William Adam.<sup>17</sup> Both these houses are still standing. Cullen could have used his site, as Shenstone so cleverly used his own, to 'call in' the grand houses belonging to his neighbours.<sup>18</sup>

Also from the hill to the south of Cullen's estate it is still possible to enjoy a distant view of Edinburgh's Old Town, with its towers and turrets stretching back to the north-east, beyond the castle perched high on its volcanic rock.<sup>19</sup> Even by 1790 development beyond the old city walls was limited, and tree cover was generally more sparse than

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<sup>16</sup> Having been long inhabited by the Maitland family, in 1792 Hatton, or Haltoun House was acquired by Henrietta Scott, the future wife of the patron of Cullen's eldest son Robert, the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Portland. Robert, by then Lord Cullen, is cited as 'in residence' at the palace in an itinerary for the road journey between Edinburgh and Glasgow published in 1799. Daniel Paterson, *A New Account and Description of all the Direct and Principal Cross-Roads of Great Britain*, 12<sup>th</sup> edn. (London: Longman and Rees and W. Fader, 1799), p. 675. Given the circumstances of his brothers' and sisters' enforced departure from the family home in 1792, their elder brother taking up residence in the palace up the road seems extraordinary. The information used by Paterson may have been inaccurate, but Hatton House was owned at the time by the future wife of a patron much courted by Robert – the Duke of Portland. James Gilleghan has researched the life of Dr Kirkland, (local medical practitioner to the Maitland family) and the materia medica he used. See James Gilleghan 'Watson Family Medicine- Part 3, James and Robert Kirkland, Surgeons of Gogar 1763 – 1774', *Trust Talk, the newsletter of the Costorphine Trust* (February 2016).

<sup>17</sup> A former seat of the Earls of Morton, Dalmahoy House was built for George Dalrymple, Lord Dalmahoy (1680-1745).

<sup>18</sup> From Alexander Pope 'Epistle to Lord Burlington' (1731), cited in Richardson, p. 303.

<sup>19</sup> *Pers.comm.* John Thomas, current resident at Ormiston Hill. Alexander Nasmyth painted at least two versions of a distant view of Edinburgh from the west. These paintings, like many of Edinburgh and its environs of the time, show a landscape with fewer trees than today.

today. So it is likely that this view of the Old Town dominated Cullen's rides (on horseback or in a carriage) between his town house and his country estate. Before leaving the subject of views from Ormiston Hill it is worth noting that both ministers, in both their *Accounts* for the parish of Kirknewton, extol the remarkable views to be had from the grounds of their own home, which was re-built in 1730 when the parishes of Mid Calder and Kirknewton were amalgamated. Their enthusiastic descriptions are both cited in Appendix Three. The manse, which survives today as an hotel, and its glebe were sited near the northern edge of Cullen's estate. We know from the Rev. Mr. Cameron's *Statistical Account* that he was on very good terms with his neighbour. It is not impossible to imagine Cullen, having walked his visitors up for the hill views, then down into the dingle, finishing walks with visitors with the unexpectedly tremendous views from the low down situation of the manse. And maybe he would have been able to refresh them with a little tea and conversation with his friendly neighbour inside the manse itself. This may be a fanciful notion – but it is also exactly the sort of dramatic surprise Shenstone aspired to contrive at the Leasowes.

### **Visitors' impressions in verse and in prose**

Altitude in Scotland will readily produce fine views and prospects. But the further north one travels the more altitude and latitude interact to produce an ever greater divergence of environmental conditions across an ever smaller distance. Also important are factors such as aspect, whether a certain site is on the west or the east side of the country, and how far that site is from the temporising effect of the sea. At 190m in altitude and at 56° north Cullen's estate was too high, too central in the landmass of Scotland, and too north-facing ever to be comfortable for many of his visitors. How it suited his family, who often

accompanied him to his country retreat, is not known. Thomson does report that Ormiston Hill was visited, though he gives little detail as to who the visitors were. As we have seen he mentions the shelter afforded by the dingle 'during summer, [when] the trees sufficiently excluded the rays of the sun to render it pleasant'. Hot sunshine was not a nuisance very often for either visitors or residents, one imagines – particularly in view of the complaints articulated by two specific individuals. The first of these is recorded by Cullen himself, in the letter to his friend Betham already cited:

I had a visit this summer from my good friend Alexander Wilson [Professor of Astronomy at University of Glasgow]. I was very intent on pointing out to him the singular growth of my balsam poplars; but when I turned about to see his look of complacent satisfaction, he told me gravely he believed the barometer did not stand so high here as at the shore by four tenths! However, I still go on teasing my friends.<sup>20</sup>

Air pressure drops with altitude. A measure of 'four tenths' clearly impressed Alexander Wilson as rather a lot.

Another individual who records his impression of Ormiston Hill is Cullen's student, Syllas Neville, who visited in July 1781. Neville was more mature than many of his student colleagues as he did not start to study medicine until he was 31 years of age. The scion of parents whom he preferred to keep vague about, and with a family fathered upon his own servant, he was sensitive about his gentlemanly status. But his memoirs reveal a sustained and admiring fondness for Cullen and a critical admiration for the gardens large and small he always sought out in his wanderings. He was an experienced and educated

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<sup>20</sup> John Thomson et al. *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 220.

connoisseur of such, with a particular fondness for water features, and this is his journal entry recording his visit to Ormiston Hill:

Wednesday July 4<sup>th</sup> 1781: This afternoon Dr Cullen was so kind as to take me in his carriage to his farm near Kirknewton, which from being very bad land he has improved exceedingly. I only wish the return may be equal to the monies the worthy man has laid out. His walk and shrubbery by the brook pleased me most.

Thursday July 5<sup>th</sup>: Walked about with the Doctor and a gentleman from Hampshire who has a taste for farming, from 7 o'clock to 9 and again after breakfast. The house is comfortable enough with the additions the Doctor has made. It stands high and commands an extensive prospect into several countries, but it is much exposed and the neighbouring country bleak and disagreeable. The doctor brought us back to dinner at his house in the town.

A factor in Neville's appreciation of the dingle could have been the relief of getting out of the wind, in the company of these two keen improvers who did not mind a long excursion before breakfast. The date is striking too – the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence. Neville was a declared republican sympathiser and supporter of radical causes. It was probably as well that this sometimes hot-headed (if mature) student, given to being rude about George III, was staying overnight out of town on this particular anniversary.<sup>21</sup>

Alongside these two accounts of Ormiston Hill by visitors, there is an elegiac lyric poem to be considered, which does not appear in Thomson's *Account*, but which has

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<sup>21</sup> ed. Cozens-Hardy. I am grateful to Jeffrey Wolf for introducing me to Syllas Neville. Cozens-Hardy remarks in his 'Introduction' that he has excised many letters, particularly those relating to Neville's long years as a student in Edinburgh. The full transcription of this archive remains to be done.

been preserved among the Cullen papers presented to the University of Glasgow by John Thomson's family after the publication of the two volume version of *An Account*. This elegy is one of five such that have been found, composed in celebration of Cullen soon after his death.<sup>22</sup> Three of these are in manuscript form and one a printed cutting. Two are designated as being by 'Anon', one by 'E. W.' and one by 'John Armstrong'.<sup>23</sup> A fifth poem was published in *The Bee* and is by the naturalist and African explorer Mungo Park.<sup>24</sup> All five poems celebrate Cullen's fame and his powers as a healer and as a teacher, but only one refers very directly to Ormiston Hill.<sup>25</sup>

This particular poem is anonymous, and in manuscript form. It not only celebrates Cullen's achievement there, but with the exclamation; 'Tis consecrated ground...' hopes that the location itself will remain a memorial to its creator. The first part of the poem *Verses Written at the Villa of Ormiston Hill* reads:

Hail, happy bower, Contentment's calm retreat,  
 The envy, now, of proudest princely seats!  
 What magic hand adorns the smiling plains,  
 Where lately Desolation seemd to reign;  
 Gives here to blow, the balmy fragrant gales,  
 That fan the flames of blooming Indian vales?  
 'Tis she – fair Science yonder seems to stray,  
 And bright-eyed Genius to direct the way.

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix Four for the text of the other poems mentioned here.

<sup>23</sup> GU Sp Coll: CUL/1/3/206a. As mentioned in the Introduction this John Armstrong is not the Georgic poet but possibly John Armstrong (1771–1797). See *ODNB* listing by T. F. Henderson, revised Grant (2004).

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Karina Williamson and Mark Duffill, 'Mungo Park: Man of Letters', *Scottish Literary Review*, 3, 2 (Autumn/Winter 2011), 55-79. The poem was published in the Edinburgh Journal *The Bee* on 15 June 1791, signed 'M.P.' and annotated 'Braes of Yarrow, June 4, 1791'.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix for the other four poems.

The reference to 'blooming Indian vales' suggests both the global reach of Cullen's fame (with the West and the East Indies evoked here as well) and the international nature of his plant collection. The poet also pays tribute to the transformation wrought by 'Science', in a magus like way, where an exotic fertility has been produced in an unlikely and desolate place. The lines 'Gives here to blow, the balmy fragrant gales, / That fan the flames of blooming Indian vales?' also intimate the windy nature of the real Ormiston Hill. The 'fragrance' may well have been dominated by the aforementioned Balsam poplar, extolled by Cullen to his visiting astronomer. Many trees of the Poplar genus have scent in the right atmospheric condition, but *Populus balsamifera*, or the true Balsam poplar, has a very sweet, pervasive scent in rainy weather. Being native to North America (which was supplying a great deal of botanical excitement to Britain and Europe at the time), Cullen's trees were possibly of the true *balsamifera* species. Also, in the *New Statistical Account* for Kirknewton, the Rev. Mr. Simpson lists certain particularly fragrant wild plants in his parish that may have contributed to the scents of Cullen's cultivated estate. These include Sweet cicely, named by Simpson as *Myrrhis odorata*, Honeysuckle (named as *Lonicera caprifolium*) and *Rosa sabini*. To describe the gales at Ormiston Hill as 'balmy' may be using more than a little poetic licence – but 'fragrant' the estate certainly could have been, when winds were not too high or one was sheltered by the dingle.

The poet continues:

When, from these scenes the heavenly Powers shall part,  
And leave in wreck their wondrous works of art;  
From far, their votaries shall fly, to view  
Their once lov'd haunts and pay devotion due.  
Surviving Fame shall guide their steps around

Exulting cry – Tis consecrated ground.  
 It was here, great Pæon, in the years of yore  
 To bless mankind, unlock'd his sacred store  
 Twas here, he gave Hygeia's charms to glow  
 Her influence shed o'er all the world below:  
 Twas here, she rear'd her rural ivy'd throne:  
 Twas here, of old, illustrious Cullen, shone!<sup>26</sup>

In an idiom that is conventional, even old-fashioned for its date, the poet summons some rather unfocussed beings – 'Heavenly powers', 'votaries' and 'Fame' – before specifying the two named figures of 'Paeon' and 'Hygiea'. This could represent a graceful tribute to the poet John Armstrong as these two figures are found in the opening lines of his *Art of Preserving Health*. As has already been mentioned, Armstrong's 'Georgic' poem is one of the very few poetic works to be listed in the catalogue of Cullen's privately owned books drawn up following his death. Furthermore the author states he is writing his verses at Ormiston Hill itself, presumably among a selection of Cullen's own books.

According to Homer 'Paeon' was physician to the Greek gods, with the epithet sometimes referring to Apollo himself. 'Hygiea' is the Greek and Roman goddess, daughter of the physician Asclepius (to whom belonged the rod and single snake, symbol of medical practice for millennia). Today the word 'hygiene' is restricted to the area of cleanliness and sanitation, but in Cullen's time, and for Cullen himself hygiene meant far more than this. Hygeia's 'charms' in the eighteenth century included giving advice about every aspect of how to avoid disease by leading a healthy life. One of the best known representations of Hygiea in Edinburgh at this time (and today) is the statue adorning the

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<sup>26</sup> GU Sp Coll: CUL/1/3/206a.

replica of the Temple at Tivoli over St Bernard's mineral well, beside the Water of Leith near Stockbridge. The temple was designed by Alexander Nasmyth and its foundation stone was laid in 1789.<sup>27</sup>

### **Thomson's *Account*, and the *Statistical Accounts* for Kirknewton of 1793 and 1845**

From considering descriptions relating to my own visits and to the impressions of Cullen's friends and colleagues, we will now look more closely at the details of Ormiston Hill in Thomson's *Account*.<sup>28</sup> This detail is mostly from the pen of David Craigie, rather than John Thomson.<sup>29</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the dedication of a mausoleum and plaque over Cullen's grave at Kirknewton, on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in 1860, was preceded the year before by the long delayed publication of the full two volume version of Thomson's *Account*. Craigie's full 'write-up' of Ormiston Hill within these volumes, the publication of Thomson's biography, and the memorial placement and ceremony at Kirknewton are likely to have been connected. Within the following text Craigie claims that his account is verified by 'traditions of the neighbourhood'. One would

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<sup>27</sup> The original statue, too large for the space and rather crudely made of Coad stone, was said to be nevertheless popular with visitors because of her sweet smile. The temple was situated within a partially-designed landscape that was a popular country stroll for Edinburgh residents before the later expansion of the New Town engulfed it. Given Cullen's long advocacy of the benefits of mineral waters (especially of the iron rich chalybeate variety) the whole delightful composition should in a sense be considered as a memorial to his medical influence. It is not known whether he ever knew of the plan to build the temple and open the well (the date 1789 suggests he might) but William Smellie published satirical verses about it which made an obvious reference to Cullen's nosological theories. The temple and its walks were restored in the mid-nineteenth century, to fit the changed surroundings. It was accessible to partake of the waters until the 1950s. See Patricia R. Andrew, 'St Bernard's Well and the Water of Leith from the Stock Bridge to the Dean Bridge: a Cultural History', *Journal of the Old Edinburgh Club*, New Series, 9 (2012), 1–33. See fig. 16.

<sup>28</sup> References to Ormiston Hill are to be found in John Thomson et al. *An Account...* vol. 2, pp. 220, 268, 270, 521, 742ff.

<sup>29</sup> See Shuttleton, 'An Account of... William Cullen: John Thomson and the Making of a Medical Biography', in eds. Coyer and Shuttleton, p. 240.

like to think that Cullen's dingle was still traversable, by the party photographed in front of his new monument, some 80 years after he created it:

This dingle or ravine, though on a small scale, possesses many elements of natural beauty; and these Dr Cullen had labored diligently to develop and improve. The site of the dingle, lying between two elevated banks, the clear stream murmuring at its base, and following the windings of the ravine, the silence and retirement seem strongly to have struck his imagination. He made a walk along the margin of the rivulet; he planted poplars, birches, firs, and other trees along the bank; he scattered numerous perennial plants over the whole space; and, lastly, he constructed a small alcove to afford rest and shelter when required. In this retreat, in which, during summer, the trees sufficiently excluded the rays of the sun to render it pleasant, the traditions of the neighbourhood say Cullen spent much of his time during the summer recess; and the physical characters of the place are unquestionably of that kind, that they might make him for the time forget, that he was so near Edinburgh, the scene of his professional labours, and the anxious cares of the physician's life.<sup>30</sup>

Concerning Cullen's more directly 'improving' activities, in a previous passage the author states:

Notwithstanding...its elevated situation and its northern exposure, Ormiston Hill was the delight of Dr Cullen; and between planting trees, clearing and rooting up heath, reclaiming and improving moss grounds, levelling, covering gravel with new soil, and cultivating shrubs and flowers imported into the place, he succeeded in

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<sup>30</sup> John Thomson et al. *An Account...*, vol. 2, p.744

giving to it a degree of rural beauty and vegetable profusion and variety which struck every one who visited the territory. The relics of some of this industrious exertion may be at present traced in the adventitious Flora of Ormiston Hill.<sup>31</sup>

It is interesting that in the *Account* Craigie does not have anything to say about the neo-classical elements of Cullen's retirement project. He recognizes Cullen as a good doctor and a great teacher and also tries to persuade the reader that he was a good man, but there is little sense here that his retirement project was in itself 'exemplary' in a way that echoed the ancients. Cullen's achievement in transforming a very difficult site is acknowledged, but his motivation is viewed more in terms of a romantic attachment, a return to the rural scenes of his youth and early manhood. The very particular moral and cultural references in the gesture are rather dismissed in a sense that retiring to the peaceful countryside is just what anyone with the means would wish to do, which of course can also be true. However Craigie does not pass over the matter of Cullen's bankruptcy without remonstrance: '...even [the virtue of generosity], carried to extreme, was in his case productive of effects which, after his death, caused a sufficient amount of evil'. And if this was not forceful enough, the author elaborates further, on a later page:

While we contemplate this history of rational and sober relaxation from the cares of active life, one unpleasant thought arises and disturbs all. It is not a matter of doubt, that considerable sums of money had been spent in reclaiming Ormiston Hill from a state of nature, in improving it, and making it what it was left by Dr Cullen. More, indeed, was spent upon it than there could be any well-founded expectation of seeing returned during the lifetime of Dr Cullen.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 673.

<sup>32</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, pp. 681,745.

There are complex relationships between the various authors of the *Account* and Cullen's surviving family that are described by David Shuttleton.<sup>33</sup> Jane Rendall also examines the experience of the aftermath of Cullen's death for his surviving family.<sup>34</sup> The Cullens and their spouses proved a valuable source of material, anecdote and support to the biographers, but they also insisted on a degree of editorial control. On the whole the participants in this protracted, many-sided debate dealt with the situation with intelligent sympathy for the people involved. But powerful enmities lingered. These were directed particularly against the Duke of Hamilton (who stands accused of wasting Cullen's money and his early career), and Cullen's very successful (and eventually very wealthy) protégé and friend, Dr William Hunter. Hunter died in 1783, predeceasing his mentor by seven years, but he chose not to remember the Cullen family in his will – possibly assuming the family circumstances would remain comfortable. Rather than commenting directly on the relationship between the two men, *An Account* presents transcriptions of a lengthy sequence of letters between them, which illustrate the nature and the true reciprocity of their friendship. David Shuttleton does warn that the authors of *An Account* edit the original text of letters where they see fit. As late as 1782 Hunter received the lively letter from Cullen cited at the beginning of Chapter Three, the tone of which does not indicate anything amiss with their friendship. The cascade of events (to be described in the Conclusion to this thesis), that eventually terminated both Cullen and his land-owning project, did not start until after this date. However the death of this close colleague and friend, who belonged to a younger generation, might in one sense be considered to signal the beginning of the end for Cullen.

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<sup>33</sup> Shuttleton, 'An Account..' in eds. Coyer and Shuttleton, p. 240.

<sup>34</sup> Rendall, 'The Reputation of William Cullen' 262–285. Also Rendall, 'Family Politics and Reform', p. 75ff.

There is a moment in Craigie's account that evokes the tragedy of Cullen's situation, where he cites Thomas Gray's *Alcaic Ode: written at the Grand Chartreuse*:

Saltem remote des, Pater Angulo

Horas senectae ducere liberas;

Tutumque vulgari tumult

Surripias, hominumque curis.

An 'alcaic' was a verse form particularly associated with the poet Horace. This fragment is translated by Robert L Mack as: 'Grant, Father, that I may pass the untroubled hours of old age in some secluded corner; and bear me off unharmed from the tumult of the crowd and the cares of men'.<sup>35</sup>

The description of Ormiston Hill in Thomson's *Account* also extensively cites the 1793 *Statistical Account for the parish of Kirknewton*, submitted by the Rev. Mr Cameron, who was minister of the combined parishes of Kirknewton and Mid-Calder from 1786 to 1811. He was clearly an admirer of his illustrious neighbour, and wished that Cullen's work as an improver was better known. The passage quoted by Thomson is fully in accord with Thomson's basic hagiographical intention:

[Dr Cullen] was a great master in the scientific branches of husbandry; a consummate botanist; and possessed a full formed and correct taste in the fine arts. These attainments appear conspicuous in his operations at Ormiston Hill. In the year 1758 the Doctor, after finishing his course of chemistry, delivered to a number of his particular friends and favourite pupils nine lectures on the subject of agriculture. In these few lectures he, for the first time, laid open the true

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<sup>35</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 669. Translation from Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 266–267.

principle concerning the nature of soils, and the operation of manures. These were discoveries entirely his own, and which have since been made known to the world by a variety of channels, though without the notification of the source from which they proceeded. The justness of these principles he demonstrated by his practice on the lands of Ormiston Hill, which, though naturally of an ungrateful soil, rendered worse by immemorial bad management, and situated in an unfavourable climate, he raised in a few years to a surprising culture and fertility. Early in life he was a proficient in botany, and was the first person in Scotland who understood the Linnaean system, and recommended the study of it to his pupils at a time when it met with much opposition from others. In his gardens and pleasure grounds at Ormiston Hill he formed an extensive collection of rare trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. The cultivation of these, and the accurate determination of their species, afforded him always an agreeable relaxation from the more serious studies and labours of his profession.<sup>36</sup>

‘The justness of these principles he demonstrated by his practice’ is a clear indication that if Cullen intended his retirement project to be ‘exemplary’, with this admirer, and in this context, he certainly succeeded. Cameron’s account of Cullen continues beyond this, but the remaining text is not cited by Thomson. It can be found among the Appendices to this chapter. The 1845 *New Statistical Account* by the Rev. Alexander Lockhart Simpson is not cited by Thomson/Craigie, possibly because its mention of Cullen is rather perfunctory. It is also a little mysterious; it would be good to know what exactly the author meant by his reference to ‘interesting traces of his peculiar tastes’:

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<sup>36</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 742.

Dr Cullen, the celebrated physician, was proprietor of Ormiston Hill in this parish. Here he delighted to relax from the laborious duties of his profession, and there are still remaining abundant and interesting traces of his peculiar tastes, and of the care bestowed by him on its embellishment. His remains lie in the churchyard of Kirknewton.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, Mr. Simpson provides much more detail about the geology, botany, developing industries and agronomics of his parish than does his predecessor in the 1793 *Statistical Account*. Simpson was a natural historian of some accomplishment, and his informed descriptions invites further conjecture as to why Cullen chose this particular spot for his retirement project. After describing the general topography of the parish as descending south to north in three ‘shelves’ (Kirknewton itself being situated on the middle one) he comments on the climate as being ‘good and salubrious. There are no particular or prevailing diseases incident to the locality; and instances are quite common of a very advanced age’. He remarks that the number and variety of small mills operating in the parish has declined since access to the larger mills of the city improved – which confirms Christopher Dingwall’s more recent observation of mill-related remains around the dingle.<sup>38</sup> Access to Edinburgh mills was helped by the opening of the Union Canal (1822) and the construction of the railway line through Ratho (the Edinburgh–Carstairs link that cuts across the lower part of the dingle was constructed at a later date). Regarding the basic soil types of the parish Simpson comments that the northernmost area is most fertile, with soils deteriorating southwards through the parish until ‘On the tops of the hills, the soil is a turfy loam, exchanged in a few spots of limited dimensions

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<sup>37</sup> See Appendices for text by Rev. Mr. Simpson concerning Cullen not quoted in Thomson et al.

<sup>38</sup> John Thomson et al. *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 435.

for peat earth'. He also points out the presence of limestone, ironstone and coal within the parish boundaries, saying 'a seam [of coal] was discovered by boring on the estate of Ormiston, a considerable time ago, but no shaft was sunk'. Simpson is as interested in land drainage as Cullen, but notes a change of emphasis from arable to pasture land, which is due to the increasing demand from Edinburgh for milk: 'A great proportion of the wet soils, which appear to have been at one time regularly cultivated, are now seldom subjected to the plough, but allowed to remain in pasture. When occasionally such soils are broken up, it is usual to take two crops of oats followed by a fallow, and, the fourth year, to sow them down again with grass seeds': Cullen's Swiftian 'blades of grass' would appear to have been more durable than his 'ears of corn'.<sup>39</sup>

Simpson also makes it clear that, as well as being situated in an area of considerable geological interest, his parish is one of great botanical interest and variety too. He provides a list of the 60 or so species of plants to be found there. However he laments the fact that the area is close to (without encompassing), any of the more famous botanical hot-spots of the Pentland Hills area, and that areas of local variety have been diminished in recent years by day-tripping plant hunters from the city, and 'foraging excursions of herbivorous botanical students'.<sup>40</sup> He laments the disappearance of a number of species, including the Royal fern, *Osmunda regalis* – one of the largest ferns native to Britain and one not at all common in Scotland. He remarks on Cullen being responsible for the appearance in the area of two species that do not belong there: the yellow Welsh poppy, *Mecanopsis cambrica* and the Dusky cranesbill, *Geranium phaeum*. This was doubtless the legacy of Cullen's whimsical scattering of exotic seeds to confuse

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<sup>39</sup> See the discussion in Chapter Three, 'Cullen's letter to William Hunter'. The 1807 Plan of the Ormiston Hill Estate indicates that fields are still, at this time, dedicated to 'corn' in the southernmost reaches of Cullen's estate.

<sup>40</sup> See *New Stat. Acc. Kirknewton*, p. 437.

his botanically minded friends, mentioned in Chapter Two. The ‘adventive’ or ‘adventitious’ flora resulting, remarked upon in both *Statistical Accounts*, is the result of a temporary population of introduced plants eventually dying out. Where such a population remains and flourishes the situation is deemed ‘invasive’ rather than ‘adventive’. Britain had not yet experienced the flourishing of exotic plants such as *Rhododendron ponticum* or Japanese knotweed that have alarmed later generations.<sup>41</sup>

Simpson does single out the Ormiston Hill ‘ravine’ (or dingle) for a mention in relation to the flourishing of what Linnaeus called ‘cryptogams’ – or plants of ‘hidden sex’ whose method of reproduction was not understood. These, the so-called ‘lower plants’, include bryophytes (liverworts and mosses), funghi, ferns and algae. The high but protected dingle could well be a good habitat for such plants, and – like Dollar Glen in the Ochil Hills and Roslin Glen in Midlothian – a full botanical survey may reveal it as such.<sup>42</sup> Simpson also comments on the variety and beauty of fossil plants exposed in local limestone and freestone quarries. One final note on this indirectly informative text is that ‘Mr James Hamilton, schoolmaster at East Calder, published in Edinburgh, in 1742, a very respectable translation of the Georgics of Virgil, accompanied with notes on the subject of agriculture, of which he seems to have had more knowledge than are generally found accessible by men of his profession and experience’.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps this gentleman was present at Cullen’s lecture on agricultural improvement, given fairly early on in his career at Ratho, a parish to the south and east of Kirknewton.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*).

<sup>42</sup> It is only in recent years that Scotland as a whole has been recognized in botanical science as a globally important location for such plants, particularly bryophytes. All kinds of ‘lower plants’, including microscopic diatoms, have been a major research interest at the RBGE for many years.

<sup>43</sup> *New Stat. Acc. Kirknewton*, p. 433.

<sup>44</sup> Withers, ‘William Cullen’s Agricultural Lectures’. (144-56).

Before developing this mention of Virgil's *Georgics* (and staying with the topic of agricultural improvement), it is worth asking 'why Ormiston Hill?' The name 'Ormiston' is most associated with the village in East Lothian, famous in Cullen's time as the situation of the most celebrated improved farm in Scotland, created by John Cockburn of Ormiston in the first half of the eighteenth century. Cockburn is credited with being a major force behind East Lothian's development as a productive farming area even to this day. But he over-reached his personal finances and died in 1758, in debt. The name 'Ormiston Hill' does pre-date Cullen's own improving activities in West Lothian, but this location can be (and possibly always has been) confused with the other, more famous Ormiston.

This concludes a survey of the most detailed contemporary or near contemporary accounts available of Cullen's achievement on his rural estate. Chapter Three has discussed the neo-classical dimension to Cullen's positioning, in relation both to his retirement project and to his contribution towards developing the built environment of Edinburgh. There has been some discussion of the painter Allan Ramsay, the Roman Augustan poet Horace, and the cultural reverberations in Scotland of the Grand Tour. These topics will now be investigated in more detail in relation to what were, literally, the most 'speaking' elements at Ormiston Hill, the two tablets inscribed with brief quotations from Horace Cullen placed at the top and bottom of his garden.

### **The Horatian dimension to Cullen's retreat**

According to John Thomson's *Account*, the words 'PROCUL NEGOTIIS' from the opening line of Horace's *Epode* II were inscribed on a tablet fixed to the gate at the northern, lower, entrance to the dingle. The other tablet, inscribed with the words 'EST ULUBRIS' taken from the closing lines of the same poet's *Epistle* 1.11. was attached to the actual house, probably facing south. Between these opening and closing statements, facing

north and south lay the 'text' of Cullen's house and designed landscape. They were cleverly sited, as well as carefully chosen words, possibly intended to contradict John Brown's accusation that Cullen was a poor classicist.<sup>45</sup> The full opening lines of *Epode II* are:

Beatus ille qui procul negotiis  
 Ut prisca gens mortalium  
 Paterna rura bobus exercet suis'

This has been recently translated as:

Blessed is he, who far from the cares of business  
 Like one of mankind's ancient race  
 Ploughs his paternal acres.<sup>46</sup>

These words are some of the most often quoted from all Latin poetry and have been the subject of much scholarship both in relation to their original context, the long lasting Augustan poetic tradition and a particular kind of retreat to the country that was being evoked. The full quotation includes the famous 'Beatus ille', referred to by John Dixon Hunt as the 'Happy the Man topos'. This phrase, which occurs in both classical Latin and

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<sup>45</sup> Thomson refutes Brown's assertion that Cullen used him as a 'sort of Latin secretary'. See John Thomson et al. *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 711. However, the words Cullen uses in his inscriptions, while worth looking into further here, would have been easily recognized by his peers. They have their limitations as 'proof' of Cullen's abilities as a classicist.

<sup>46</sup> A. S. Kline, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com> (2005) [Jan. 2016].

Augustan poetry, originates in Virgil's *Georgics* II, composed in the same decade as the quotation from Horace that Cullen is using here (c. 30–40 B.C.).<sup>47</sup>

Incorporated within the Latin word 'negotium' is the concept of 'otium'. The precise meanings of both 'otium' and 'negotium' were not stable in the Latin literature of Rome itself, but both words had their origin in military practice. 'Otium' was the period of the year when military campaigning was relaxed and soldiers were free for two or three months to go home. Here they could spend their time being usefully employed, usually on or in relation to the land, in the activity known as 'otium negotiosum'; or they could do nothing particularly useful, in which case they could slip into 'otium otiosum'. 'Otium' was associated with the idea of using the countryside as a useful retreat from the city, and with making good use of such a retreat, both morally and practically.<sup>48</sup> But to use 'negotium' here, as Cullen does, is to claim a true break from 'business as usual'. It is important to realise that the word 'otium' does not signify a quiet and pleasurable retreat so much as a retreat with a specific purpose of useful work. Cullen, jokingly, but very specifically, eschews usefulness in the letter to William Hunter cited earlier:

It is truly a scheme of pleasure, not of profit. I hope, indeed to make two stalks of corn grow where one grew before; but I believe this will be of more benefit to the public than to myself, and my purpose is purely the beauty of strong corn and fine

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<sup>47</sup> J. Dixon Hunt and P. Willis, 'Introduction', *Genius of the Place: the English Landscape Garden 1620–1820*, eds. J. Dixon Hunt and P. Willis (London: Paul Elek Ltd. 1975), p. 11. Particularly see Virgil, *Georgics* II, lines 485ff. Virgil's *Georgics* received a highly influential translation by Dryden in his *Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics, and Aeneis... Adorn'd with a Hundred Sculptures* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1697). Cullen quoted directly from the *Georgics* in his published work; see, for example, the passage beginning 'Aut ibi flava feres..' in relation to the usefulness of rotating cultivation with leguminous crops in his *Materia Medica*, (1789), vol. 1, p. 292.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Burke has illustrated how these words travelled into and changed in various European languages over the succeeding 1600 years in his article 'The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe', *Past and Present*, 146 (February 1995) 136–150.

grass. I have a brook, a wood, and very fine prospects; and I shall bring out more pleasure ground than anybody expects.

Cullen's plans had to be at least avowedly (although maybe not actually) devoid of utilitarian intent, in order to maintain his carefully assumed pose of 'disinterestedness'.

In a final twist, which has caused difficulty for classical scholars ever since, closer consideration of the final lines of the full *Epode* reveal that the praise of country life found here is being articulated by Alfius, a moneylender. At the end of the poem he rather abruptly declares his fixed intention of not giving up on other schemes, in spite of his intended retreat to the country. The full meaning of the well-known complete poem could have been decoded by visitors to Ormiston Hill as a self-deprecating or self-aware gesture by Cullen. That is to say 'my ambitions are appropriately scholarly and gentlemanly – but my situation is that I am, in fact (and despite my clever use of 'negotium'), obliged to continue with my avocations'. Self-deprecation is a note Cullen strikes very often in his lectures to students of medicine. But far from indicating real indecisiveness, whether in his garden or in the lecture hall, this note is very much part of his didactic purpose.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The following extract from Cullen's lectures on 'The Institutions of Medicine' (1770–1771) indicates his 'purposeful indecision' very well: 'Of the subjects touched, many of them are imperfect. But I plead that the present state of science does not admit of our going further. I have endeavoured always to point out the most important enquiries. I have attempted to throw new lights upon them, but always, I hope, with due diffidence. I have dictated no opinions, but have always led you to the exercise of your own judgement. It is only by this exercise you will be led to inquiry; or can succeed in it. I shall be vain of having erected you into critics upon myself. If this be upon a full view of the subject, it may lead you to discover my faults; but I expect it will at the same time dispose you to excuse them, and I shall thus be happy correcting your knowledge with my own credit.' William Cullen, *Valedictory Address* to students attending his 'Institutions of Medicine' lectures (University of Edinburgh, May 1771). Cited from an MS in Cullen's own hand in Thomson et al., *An Account...* vol. 1, p. 428.

The words EST ULUBRIS on the second of Cullen's inscribed stones are in the closing line of the 11<sup>th</sup> *Epistle* in Book 1 by Horace. The letter is addressed to Horace's friend Bullatius:

Quod petis, hic est,

Est ulubris, animus sit e non deficit aequus'

A modern translation renders the fuller context as:

Those who rush to sea gain a change of sky not themselves.

Restless idleness occupies us: in yachts and chariots

We seek the good life. But what you're seeking is here:

If your mind's not lacking in calm, it's at Ulubrae'<sup>50</sup>

The full letter is a gentle comic chastising of those who seek to register their status and improve their mind by travelling abroad. Bullatius is an older, wealthier friend of the poet, travelling in Asia when the *Epistle* is composed. Ulubrae was a small town referenced elsewhere by Horace, and by Juvenal and Cicero too as a rather bleak, 'back of beyond' sort of place near the Pontine Marshes. Cullen himself was well-travelled during his earlier years, living in London and traversing the Atlantic as ship's surgeon. Before gaining his first professorship in Edinburgh (1755) his career had taken him to Hamilton, Glasgow and Northumberland. He also revisited London, and (Thomson notes), travelled to the Scottish island of Arran in 1742 with the ailing 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Hamilton.<sup>51</sup> But the travels of his early career had been very much related to getting on and making a living. Ironically, when Cullen had the time to travel he did not have the money, and when he

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<sup>50</sup> A. S. Kline, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com> (2005) [Jan. 2016].

<sup>51</sup> John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 1, p. 17. In the CCC Cullen recommends the goat whey (as available on Arran) on a total of 54 occasions between 1764 and 1785.

had the money, he lacked the time. If staying at home was an enforced necessity for him the 'EST ULUBRIS' he placed as an inscription at Ormiston Hill turned this necessity into a virtue. There is a wry 'Dunroamin' quality to the quotation that reinforced his declared intention to understand his own environment so he could best advise his patients about theirs.

William Cullen's quotation of Horace on his estate was witty and fashionable – and it was an echo of such made by a number of his professional peers. For example from 1755–1760 a handsome 'medium scale' neo-Palladian villa was built by James Boswell's father, Alexander Boswell, Lord Auchinleck and Laird of Auchinleck. A stone inscription of a longer version of the 'Est Ulubris' quotation was placed over the formal entrance to this building and is mentioned by Boswell in his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* published in 1785: it can still be seen there today.<sup>52</sup>

Inscriptions from Horace can also be found at Newhailes and Arniston, which were similarly the property of members of the Scottish legal establishment, respectively the Dalrymple and Dundas families.<sup>53</sup> In woodland close to the house at Arniston there is a still-surviving grotto surmounted by a quotation from Horace and built underneath a

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<sup>52</sup> Boswell, *The Tour to the Hebrides*. Boswell and Johnson's tour of Scotland took place in 1773 and included a meeting between Boswell, Johnson and Cullen. Also, on this journey, Johnson had an encounter with Boswell's formidable father in his home at Auchinleck. Boswell could be rather arch with his more fashionable friends about his responsibilities as a landlord after the death of his father, referring to himself in correspondence as the 'Laird of Ulubrae'. He may have seen the inscription as a clever, public rebuke from his father for not spending much time in Ayrshire. But John Strawhorn demonstrates that after his father's death Boswell was a conscientious landlord, keeping careful track of his estate and various farm properties despite regular absences in Edinburgh and London. See John Strawhorn, 'Master of Ulubrae: Boswell as Enlightened Laird', in *Boswell: Citizen of the World, Man of Letters*, ed. Irma S. Lustig (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), p. 117.

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Andrew and Iain Gordon Brown have examined the inscriptions at Newhailes in an unpublished study. The advocate Sir John Dalrymple of Newhailes (1726–1810) was the author of *An Essay on Landscape Gardening*, a text that was written in 1760 and known to William Shenstone and Robert Dodsley but not published until 1823 (Greenwich: W. Richardson).

road.<sup>54</sup> This latter feature replicates the situation of the best-known eighteenth-century grotto in England, that of Alexander Pope. Over the entrance to his grotto Pope had inscribed, from Horace's *Epistle* XVI: 'secretum iter et fallentis semita vitae'. A fuller version of this text ('Quid pure tranquil; honos, an dulce lucellum, / An secretum iter, et fallentis semita vitae') was translated by Samuel Johnson as:

Whether the tranquil mind and pure,  
Honours or wealth our bliss ensure:  
Or down through life unknown to stray,  
Where lonely leads the silent way.'<sup>55</sup>

Alexander Pope was influential in the reception of classical writers both during and after his lifetime and enjoyed his own Horatian retreat in rural Twickenham from 1719 until his death in 1744. Pope's chosen corner of the gentle landscape of the upper Thames was popular with a literary and titled social group even before he moved there. His famous grotto (which still exists although his house has gone) was much visited and used in Pope's later years to display his substantial collection of mineralogical specimens.

A comparative study of classical inscriptions to be found in the designed landscapes of the eighteenth-century in Scotland would help to place in a wider context the particular inscriptions of Horatian texts placed by physicians and members of the Scottish legal establishment discussed here. But gathering such evidence is difficult, as the inscriptions are vulnerable to both decay and changing fashions in estate design and management. Why was there so much Horace being cited by men of intellectual significance in Scotland at this time? Three contributing factors can be identified. First of

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<sup>54</sup> See Appendix for translations of the two quotations from Horace in the grounds of Arniston.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Johnson, untitled article, *The Adventurer*, 138 ( 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1754).

all there is the extent, variety and pithy adaptability of the poet's corpus. Secondly there is his connection to the rule of Augustus, which was an important focus for those keen to emphasise Scotland's emerging 'North British' identity. And thirdly the standard of education in the classical literature in Scotland at the time left Cullen and his peers with an easy familiarity with the Latin original.

Cullen's *Catalogue* demonstrates his own familiarity not just with Latin and Greek but with French, Italian, German and Dutch authors too.<sup>56</sup> Michael Barfoot points out that he was also 'said to have read Arabic in order to judge for himself how the Hippocratic and Galenic texts were translated and used in Arabian medicine'.<sup>57</sup> Yet despite this, Cullen himself played an important part in the slow contraction of the shared classical culture of late eighteenth-century Scotland. Despite his interest in and knowledge of languages, the 'republic of letters' facilitated by the use of Latin for so many hundreds of years across the linguistic boundaries of Europe, grew steadily more narrow. Cullen was himself one of the very first professors in Scotland, initially in Glasgow and then in Edinburgh, to teach in English rather than Latin. He also wrote most of his textbooks in English.<sup>58</sup> The various editions of his *Materia Medica*, *First Lines* and *Institutions* were all published in English, though his *Synopsis Nosologiae Methodicae*, first published in 1769, was not translated into English until 1800 and was still being published in Latin in 1819.

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<sup>56</sup> Cullen's *Catalogue*, RCPE – SN 6.3.

<sup>57</sup> Barfoot, 'Dr William Cullen and Mr Adam Smith' 204-214, p. 206.

<sup>58</sup> See 'List of William Cullen's publications' in Wolf, p. 332.

### Allan Ramsay and the 'Georgic' dimension to Cullen's retreat

There is possibly a fourth answer to the question 'why Horace and why now?' as this question relates to the Edinburgh-based professoriate in the eighteenth century.

Scholarly knowledge about Horace was being opened up in a new way, by a travelling Scot, just as Cullen was considering which quotations to use and where to place them. In the 1770s the artist Allan Ramsay, son of the poet Allan Ramsay, sought to discover the site of Horace's own retirement villa, the Sabine villa at Tivoli. Ramsay was one of the leading portrait painters in Britain, and an important and influential figure in Edinburgh, London and Italy, a direct contemporary of Cullen's, though not quite so long lived.<sup>59</sup> He moved in circles that were known to Cullen, including a number of Edinburgh's influential informal clubs and societies. And he moved freely backwards and forwards along the Edinburgh–London–Rome axis.<sup>60</sup>

Horace had been granted the villa for use during his lifetime, by the Emperor Augustus. Allan Ramsay's project to locate, examine and illustrate what remained of the villa, which involved years of effort, has been documented in detail by a group of authors in *Allan Ramsay and the Search for Horace's Villa*.<sup>61</sup> Ramsay's investigation drew a number of threads together: a fascination with Horace he inherited from (and fully shared with) his father, an antiquarian concern to learn the detail of the villa, and his own conviction that being one of the finest portrait painters of his time was not enough. To consolidate his status as a scholar and a gentleman, he himself felt he needed better -

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<sup>59</sup> He lived from 1713–1784.

<sup>60</sup> Among a number, the two most significant were probably the Philosophical Society and the Select Society. The Select Society was founded by the younger Allan Ramsay.

<sup>61</sup> *Allan Ramsay and the Search for Horace's Villa*, ed. by Bernard D. Frischer and Iain Gordon Brown (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

credentials.<sup>62</sup> As Ormiston Hill was to Cullen, so the Sabine Villa was to Ramsay, a 'hobby-horsical' project which reached beyond their acknowledged place in the world and their already established fame.

Until Ramsay's investigations (from the 1750s across a number of Italian sojourns through to his death in 1784), the Grand Tourists had speculated and theorised about the location of Horace's villa. Although there was something of a consensus about where it was, Grand Tourists did not visit the site. The general difficulties of road travel at the time were part of the reason, but the known poverty of the area and the limited comfortable accommodation available were further deterrents to the gentlemanly traveler. In fact there was a small palace overlooking the actual site of the villa, belonging to Count Orsini. He invited Ramsay and his companions to stay, but only after a preliminary visit, when they stayed with a local priest in far humbler lodgings. Ramsay complemented his site discovery and preliminary archaeological work with a detailed analysis of the topographical allusions in Horace's poems.<sup>63</sup> This analysis, which was overlooked during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was published for the first time by Fischer and Brown, with a commentary by the editors. It gives a greater depth to our understanding of Horace at the very moment of losing what can be termed the

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<sup>62</sup> The 2014 exhibition at the Hunterian Gallery in the University of Glasgow (*Allan Ramsay: Portraits of the Enlightenment*) brought attention to this aspect of Ramsay's achievement by displaying a selection of his modest looking polemical pamphlets, so important to him towards the end of his life, alongside a selection of his finest portraits. See Iain Gordon Brown, 'The Pamphlets of Allan Ramsay the Younger', *The Book Collector*, 37, 1 (1988), 54-85. Also the publication associated with the exhibition includes an essay by John Bonehill, 'Ramsay's Classical Curiosity', *Allan Ramsay: Portraits of the Enlightenment*, eds. Mungo Campbell et al. (Munich, London & New York: Prestell, 2013), p. 91.

<sup>63</sup> Allan Ramsay, *An Enquiry into the Situation and Circumstances of Horace's Sabine Villa Written during travels through Italy in the years 1775, 1776 and 1777*, transcription of MS included in ed. Frischer and Brown, p. 109.

‘common currency’ of Horatian reference, which is as lost to us now as his villa once was.<sup>64</sup> It is possible that Cullen could have seen this manuscript.

As we have seen, projects for improvement of the land in this period, such as Cullen’s farm and garden, were situated in a constructed classical-literary context, which Allan Ramsay did a great deal to illuminate, particularly for his Edinburgh-based friends and colleagues. Such projects were also situated in a contemporary literary context. Authors within the highly developed and diversified pastoral poetic tradition could be approving, or they could be critical of what Cullen and many of his peers were pleased to call ‘agricultural improvement’. In Scotland improvement for the landowner could mean clearance for local populations. Similarly in England improvement could entail enclosure of previously communally used land. Important milestones of pastoral poetry published in this period include Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770), George Crabbe’s *The Village* (1783) and *The Thresher’s Labour* (1730) by Stephen Duck.<sup>65</sup> The Georgic authors, who wrote lengthy didactic poems published across the eighteenth-century, were more positive in their reaction to forces of change in the countryside, but their poetic achievement did not live beyond the ascendancy of Romanticism.<sup>66</sup> These included Christopher Smart (*The Hop Garden* 1752), John Dyer (*The Fleece* 1757) and the Scottish born and trained physician, James Grainger (*Sugar Cane* 1764). One of the earlier Georgic

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<sup>64</sup> Other than ‘Carpe diem’, the one line of Horace still readily available to non-classicists is possibly ‘Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori’. This was used by supporters of the 1914–18 War but Wilfred Owen used it to such furious satirical effect in his poem *Dulce et Decorum est* (1917) that it is probably now best known in this context. *The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations* lists 84 entries for Latin quotations from Horace likely to be encountered by an anglophone readership as recently as 1961. See *The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, eds. J. M. and M. J. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1961).

<sup>65</sup> Though Goldsmith was himself criticised by Crabbe as idealistic. See Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 228.

<sup>66</sup> Kevis Goodman has commented on why the Georgic authors flourished when they did, and why, as a poetic form Georgic poetry has received so little critical attention for so long. See Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

poems of this period with bearing on Cullen's Ormiston Hill project was the work of another Scot, John Clerk of Penicuik – *The Country Seat* (1727).<sup>67</sup> These poets took their inspiration from 'authentic Roman originals', in this case Virgil's *Georgics*, just as the builders of Hanoverian Edinburgh looked back to the Roman architect Vitruvius and Allan Ramsay sought and found Horace's original Sabine Villa. The renewed focus on these particular poems by Virgil was accompanied by attempts on English and Scottish soil, actually to follow Virgil's advice.<sup>68</sup> The fact that 'Farmer George', George III, was 'Georgical' in his agricultural enthusiasms added to the fashionable nature of the cause, while handing his critics another way of mocking him. In a recent study of the relationship between Georgic and improvement, Claire Bucknell brings poetic and agricultural developments in Scotland and in England into the same frame.<sup>69</sup> She reads her chosen poems as being not so much pre-Romantic and solipsistic, but of their own times in being 'a confident and enthusiastic [engagement] with contemporary forces of commerce and empire'.<sup>70</sup>

Another Georgic poem, the fame of which lasted rather longer than many of the poems already mentioned, was by the Scots-born, Edinburgh-educated physician John Armstrong (who was rather more famous than the 'other' John Armstrong previously cited). His *Art of Preserving Health* was published in London in 1744. He uses the Hippocratic–Galenic 'non-naturals' to structure his work, bringing a lively and engaging

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<sup>67</sup> John Clerk, *The Country Seat* (1727), NRS GD/18/4404/1. His poem was celebratory of the first, short-lived wave of improvement in Scotland between the two Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745. The manuscript of this poem awaits publication.

<sup>68</sup> Virgil's *Georgics* were published in an influential illustrated edition translated by Dryden in 1697. Virgil, *Works*, trans. and ed. by John Dryden (London: Jacob Tonson, 1697).

<sup>69</sup> Clare Bucknell, 'Mid-Eighteenth Century Georgic and Agricultural Improvement', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36, 3 (2013), 335-52.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p. 351.

awareness of the natural and the cultivated environment together with a classically rooted understanding of health and illness. His topographical references are mainly a combination of English and classically Roman. But his Scottish provenance sometimes shows through, with disarming charm for a reader familiar with Scotland.<sup>71</sup> The poem's classical credentials (particularly admired by David Hume) were of the 'Beatus ille' variety, closely rooted in notions of honourable, Roman-style retirement. Armstrong had qualified as a physician in Edinburgh and despite the fact that he failed to maintain a livelihood as a doctor, his poem aligned his classical references with his gentlemanly medical persona. The poem offered practical advice relating to personal habits, diet, exercise, temperature etc., together with an understanding of variable factors determined by environment that was gratifyingly up-to-date for an educated audience. Ironically the publication was so lastingly popular that Armstrong was never able successfully to develop his career as a physician. Appreciation of this poem by a modern audience has been extended by Adam Budd's recent critical edition.<sup>72</sup> Budd presents the poem alongside texts that were historic to an eighteenth-century reader and texts that were published around the time of the publication of Armstrong's poem. The texts are variously from a literary, a critical and a medical background, and this alignment helps to

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<sup>71</sup> For example the following seems to owe more to Edinburgh than the Thames valley:

...except the baleful east  
 Withers the tender Spring...And sourly checks  
 The fancy of the year. Our fathers talk  
 Of summers, balmy airs and skies serene.  
 Good heavens! For what unexpiated crimes  
 This dismal change!

Armstrong, *The Art of Preserving Health*, vol. 3, p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> John Armstrong, *The Art of Preserving Health: 18<sup>th</sup> Century Sensibility in Practice*, ed. Adam Budd (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011).

demonstrate an important theme for this thesis, that in an eighteenth-century context there were no clear dividing lines separating these approaches.

### **Conclusion: other projects**

To return from poetry extolling productive landscapes to the landscapes themselves, it is instructive to seek out other Scottish land-owners, contemporary with Cullen, who shared some at least of his 'retirement' aims in creating Ormiston Hill. In the preceding discussion, I have chosen to concentrate on Ormiston Hill, the Leasowes, and (to a lesser extent) the eighteenth-century Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. But of course there were other landscaped gardens and improved farms in Scotland created by professional men with a 'literary' bent. On a smaller scale comparable with Cullen's efforts, these might include the following: the improved farm developed by James Hutton at Sighthouses; the estate of Alexander Munro ('Secundus') at Craiglockhart in Edinburgh; the small estate of the philosopher Adam Ferguson at Bankhead; the Dalswinton estate developed by the banker Patrick Millar; and the privately owned botanic garden created by the Rev. John Stuart at Luss beside Loch Lomond.<sup>73</sup> Finally – though this is by no means an exclusive list – it would be interesting to study the estate at Blair Adam owned by the Adam family (nearly lost on two occasions through son Robert's precarious financial affairs), as much of its eighteenth-century layout survives. In England there are also the retirement estates in the surrounding countryside of the city of York medical establishment. These are mentioned (but not detailed) in Michael Brown's publication of

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<sup>73</sup> Rev. John Stuart of Luss – minister, botanist and Gaelic scholar who accompanied Thomas Pennant on his 1772 tour of Scotland.

2011.<sup>74</sup> Erasmus Darwin of Lichfield, physician, gardener and author of *the Botanic Garden* would be another interesting figure to examine, particularly as he enjoyed strong connections with Edinburgh, since his time as a student there.

Comparison might also be made with estates on a much grander scale, such as the one created by Cullen's friend and colleague Lord Kames at Blair Drummond, near Stirling. As previously mentioned Kames was very keen to maintain a correspondence with Cullen, particularly concerning matters relating to agricultural improvement. The correspondence (which was free and friendly on both sides), covered many other issues, often suggested by Kames's somewhat scatter-gun intellectual approach. However his achievement as an improver at and near Blair Drummond was extraordinary. Like Cullen at Ormiston Hill, and the Duke of Argyll at Whitton and the Whim, Kames attempted some 'virtuoso improvement' of a boggy, heathy, area of land known as Kincardine Moss. This time the area of land was extensive and the task enormous, but Kames succeeded in a project that proved profitable by importing tenants from the Highlands of Scotland (sadly previously 'cleared' from their own lands) to remove vast amounts of wet mossy turf in return for cottages that were rent free for a fixed period.<sup>75</sup> This was a demonstration of exactly the 'depth of pocket' that Cullen lacked to keep his own venture going. Fertility on the land was achieved and maintained by Kames, but at some cost to the ecology and dependent livelihoods of the upper reaches of the Firth of Forth, down to which enormous quantities of unwanted material was flushed along excavated drains. Eventually Kames' income from his 'moss farm' was said to total more than £2,000 a year,

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<sup>74</sup> This publication has been an important English referent in looking at the broader social, cultural and political dimensions to establishment-based medical men in Scotland.

<sup>75</sup> See many references to Kames' improving activities in F. A. Johnsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier*.

and the land concerned remains under productive cultivation today.<sup>76</sup> There is remaining evidence of Kames' draining activity (both on his land and on the bed of the Firth of Forth), but the house he built at Blair Drummond was replaced in the nineteenth century by another – and most traces of his designed landscape disappeared under the landscaped garden created around this new house. This nineteenth-century landscape was changed further by the opening of the 260-acre Blair Drummond Safari Park on the estate in 1970. Perhaps the ever-curious natural philosopher in Lord Kames would have been pleased.

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<sup>76</sup> Remnants of the original 'raised bog' are now conserved as an important natural habitat.



Fig. 12

Policy building, originally constructed by Cullen, restored and turned into housing 1990s. This building is situated a few yards north-east of his house.

Photo: David Shuttleton.



Fig. 13

The 'rudely Roman' stone bridge, designed by Alexander Nasmith and constructed over the deepest part of the Ormiston Hill dingle soon after Cullen's death in 1790. This bridge is very similar in design to one two or three miles away in Almondell Country Park, also designed by Alexander Nasmith. Both bridges have required recent restoration.

Photo: David Shuttleton.



Fig. 14

The tributary to the Gogar Burn approaching through pasture to the south-west of Cullen's house. This very modest waterway (running rather dry in this photograph) falls into the dramatic dingle just a few yards north of here.

Photo: David Shuttleton.

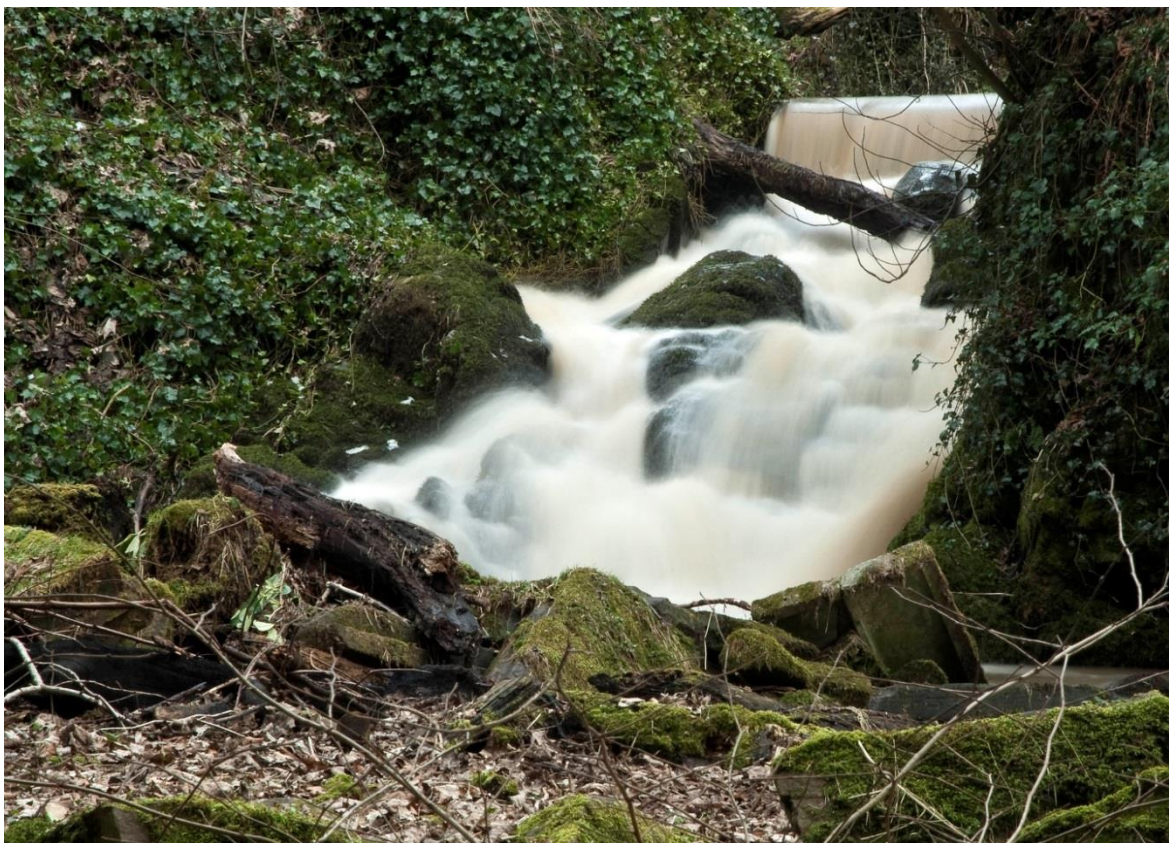


Fig. 15

The dingle cascade at Ormiston Hill, once a major feature of Cullen's miniature designed landscape. Note the pieces of dressed stone in the foreground.

Photo: Iain Milne.



Fig. 16

St Bernard's Mineral Well, beside the Water of Leith, Stockbridge, Edinburgh. The temple, inspired by one at Tivoli was designed by Alexander Nasmith and constructed in 1789. Mineral water is accessible from the chamber (once a grotto) beneath. The statue of Hygieia is nineteenth-century and replaces the eighteenth-century original.

Photo: Charles Dodds.

## Conclusion

### **William Cullen's exemplary retirement: life, teaching, medical practice, and the art of ageing in Enlightenment Scotland**

Through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the memory of Cullen's achievement was kept alive in America through his role in teaching the founders of university medical education there.<sup>1</sup> In Britain Thomson's lastingly popular biography had a crucial role in ensuring an honourable mention in the annals of the history of medicine to this day. In Germany and in Italy his reputation rested, rather oddly, on being the teacher who nurtured then rejected the ideas of John Brown. A considered summary of the views of the next generation of Edinburgh doctors can be found in the 1830 edition of the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*, edited by David Brewster in an article written by the editor himself. Brewster lauds Cullen's skills as 'an instructor' and praises his achievement in positioning the Edinburgh University School of Medicine as a globally important institution. However, he awards Cullen equal 'column inches' with Erasmus Darwin and John Brown – and delivers a verdict on Cullen's medical theories typical of the early years of the nineteenth century: he did not know what we know now, but his influence on the development of vitalism and the study of pathology should be acknowledged.

But Cullen's formal, taught medical theories have not been the central concern of this thesis – although I would like to acknowledge that the recent thesis by Jeffrey Wolf is invaluable in its comprehensive analysis of the research on this difficult subject.<sup>2</sup> To return to my own particular 'view from the edge' so to speak – it would appear that the

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<sup>1</sup> Brunton, 'The Transfer of Medical Education', ed. by Sher and Smitten, p.242ff.. Also Andrew Hook, 'Philadelphia, Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment', ed. by Sher and Smitten, p.227ff..

<sup>2</sup> Wolf, p. 332.

'art of ageing' was recognized by a very particular group of people in Enlightenment Scotland. However although individual elders were remembered and admired by everybody, there was little sense of a specific cohort of people who made up 'the elderly', or for that matter of 'retirement' as a goal for more than a very restricted group of people. In the eighteenth century, old age and retirement were, in their different ways, elite concerns. There is evidence, physical, manuscript and published, that Cullen's aims for his final years were deeply rooted in the 'progressively conservative' assumptions and attitudes he shared with his peers.<sup>3</sup> The neo-classical, Augustan inflection of his plans for his rural estate was paralleled by contemporaneous developments in the urban fabric of the city of Edinburgh, to which Cullen himself made a major contribution. Ormiston Hill enabled him better to inhabit the professional persona of the scholarly doctor with wide cultural interests he had endeavoured to live up to during his long and varied career. This persona was not his own invention but a shared ideal. This is well-illustrated in a highly influential publication by a contemporary and professional colleague, *The Duties and Qualifications of a Physician* by Dr John Gregory, published (following a series of lectures on the subject) in 1772. According to Alexander Broadie; 'Gregory's primary and obvious question concerns the qualities possessed by a physician that makes for best practice. His answer articulates Enlightenment values',<sup>4</sup>

I shall, in the first place, consider what kind of genius, understanding and temper, naturally fit a man for being a physician. – In the second place, what are the moral qualities to be expected from him in the exercise of his profession, viz. the

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<sup>3</sup> Emerson, *David Hume, medical men*, p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> This and the next comment by Broadie are from Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment Reader* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2010), p.751. The passage by Gregory is from John Gregory, *Observations on the Duties and Offices of a Physician and on the Method of Prosecuting Enquiries in Philosophy* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1770).

obligation to humanity, patience, attention, discretion, secrecy and honour, which he lies under to his patients. – In the third place, I shall take notice of the decorums and attentions peculiarly incumbent on him as a physician, and which tend most effectually to support the dignity of the profession; as likewise the general propriety of his manners, his behavior to his patients, to his brethren, to surgeons, and to apothecaries. – In the fourth place, I shall particularly describe that course of education which is necessary for qualifying a physician to practice those ornamental qualifications expected from the physician as a gentleman of liberal education, and without which it is difficult to support the honour and rank of the profession.

For Gregory and for Broadie, ‘chief among the moral qualities that a physician should have is the Roman stoic virtue of humanity...the portrait of the physician painted in this lecture [lecture no. 1.] is of a gentle, highly educated person, of discernment and good judgement, all in all the best sort of citizen, a fine representative of polite society’.

In a sense this much has always been understood about Cullen, from the moment his life ended. But I have hoped to show that part of Cullen’s very ‘up to date’ version of neo-classicism was also manifested in his creative projects. Similarly his consultation correspondence illustrates something of a ‘dance of manners’ with his patients and their carers, using his own thoughtful re-interpretation of the ancient Hippocratic understanding of the balance of well-being with disease prevention.<sup>5</sup> Cullen does not usually employ a ‘professional’ vocabulary when addressing his patients, but one that they could share and understand. Also he tries to give the patient agency in the

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<sup>5</sup> Cullen uses the word ‘proper’ 1,540 times in his correspondence, in a truly dance-like way. Scanning all the letters that include this word reveals something of a ‘pulse’ of about three mentions in a longish letter. Very rarely does he mention it once, and not again.

therapeutic situation: that is to say, that at all times, the patient is empowered to do something for him or herself. Yet he can also sound appropriately authoritative when he needs to, which in itself can be therapeutically beneficial. The fact that two out of the three patients discussed in Chapters Two and Three enjoyed the attention of doctors who had been Cullen's students added to this effect. However, on the evidence of my presented cases I would slightly take issue with G. B. Risse's assertion that '[Cullen's] patrons were quite important to him, not their diseases'.<sup>6</sup> As Brewster acknowledged early on, Cullen's knowledge of physiology and disease processes looks very limited viewed retrospectively – but his emphasis on the importance of the doctor's own observations, combined with a careful attentiveness to the patient's own story, would have an important effect on the development of clinical practice in the future. Furthermore in relation to his teaching he recognized the didactic effectiveness of combining observation, classification and an embracing theory, while also acknowledging that both classificatory methods and theoretical structures are open to change. He did not say 'this is right' and 'this is wrong' so much as 'this is my opinion at this particular moment – see if it works for you'. Cullen's was a dynamic, exciting and above all memorable way of teaching, as a legion of grateful students were keen to acknowledge in the later years of his life and in the years immediately following his death.<sup>7</sup>

To continue a response to Risse's statement, I would also say that in its demonstration of the detail of Cullen's care for three of his elderly patients, this thesis has illustrated Cullen's sophisticated understanding of the plant-based ingredients of *materia medica* – and his willingness to embrace new technologies such as treatment by

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<sup>6</sup> Risse, 'Cullen as clinician', ed. by Doig et al., p. 133-152, (p.146).

<sup>7</sup> See fig. 17.

electrical shocks. He aimed and at times succeeded in bringing his patients real relief. He also frequently advocated the use of minimal medication. As we have seen where this was difficult, for a particular patient, he developed the use of the placebo – a therapeutic tool he also invented.<sup>8</sup> At times (and very much in line with many of his colleagues), he advocated the ‘vis mediatrix naturae’ – a Graeco Roman idea that means using the body’s natural capacity to heal itself – and ‘letting nature take its course’. This notion was lastingly popular among Cullen’s generation of medical men and also fundamental to the theories of John Brown.

‘Letting nature run its course’ was often Cullen’s chosen tactic in treating his hospital patients, many of whom were ill with fever.<sup>9</sup> Considering that it would be long decades before the true vectors of infectious disease were identified, the expedients of keeping patients warm, rested, fed and watered and in hospital for weeks rather than days, seem to have been remarkably effective judging by the number of patients released who were recorded as ‘cured’. One does need to consider, however, that the vigour and frequency of the bleedings and purgings some patients had to endure caused them not infrequently (rather like George III) to abscond. Hospital patients are an omission from this study. Few of them were elderly but a cross comparison with those that were with Cullen’s largely very different corresponding patients would be instructive.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> C. E. Kerr, I. Milne and T. J. Kaptchuk ([www.jameslindlibrary.org](http://www.jameslindlibrary.org), 2007). In the search by early medical historians for who discovered what first, Cullen became famous for introducing ‘neurosis’, meaning just ‘nerve related’, rather than the meaning it has today. However his invention of ‘placebo’ perhaps deserves greater celebration as it has retained something very close to its original meaning.

<sup>9</sup> See Guenter Risse, *Hospital Life in Enlightenment Scotland: Care and Teaching at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> John Hope’s hospitalized and corresponding patients have been compared, by myself, in a study that awaits publication.

### **Cullen's Consultation Correspondence and other potential areas for future research**

The digitization of Cullen's consultation correspondence offers a multitude of opportunities for further research, across many different academic disciplines. A useful follow-on from this study of plant-based materia medica would be a comparative study of the mineral ingredients in Cullen's medicines – particularly as there is a great deal of research into Cullen the 'philosophical chemist' to build on, and there is research going on at this time by the School of Archaeology at the University of Glasgow into the 'mineral earths' used medicinally by Greek and Roman society.<sup>11</sup> Similarly 'aliments', the other vital part of Cullen's materia medica are deserving of further attention.

The ease of access to the digitized material also allows the researcher to question what is *not* there. One of the biggest surprises has been that although Cullen frequently suggests exercise in the fresh air (while avoiding a hard sweat), he very rarely recommends gardening as such – or attending to agricultural activities, or rather the overseeing of such activities. In a predominately rural society and a culture obsessed with agricultural improvement this is surprising. And we have also seen that his dietary recommendations for those of a 'nervous' and/or dyspeptic inclination actually rule out the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. There seems to be a degree of 'ring-fencing' going on, at least of his own rural, Horatian pursuits. Cullen's remonstrances to both Lord Kames and the Duke of Argyll could be the result of many years of being consulted as an expert in agriculture and the study of chemistry and minerals. His fame in this respect peaked rather earlier than his reputation as a physician and teacher – and remained very high. Interestingly Cullen's disinclination to amplify the medical advice in

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<sup>11</sup> As part of the tercentenary celebrations The Royal Society of Edinburgh recently hosted a conference entitled *The First One Hundred Years of Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh* (2013). William Cullen and his student Joseph Black rather dominated the proceedings.

his correspondence with advice regarding farming or gardening is replicated by his patients not using their medical correspondence to query such matters either. It would seem that such subjects were usually beyond the decorum of medical correspondence for both parties.<sup>12</sup>

### **The failure of Cullen's cherished project**

It is apparent that to various degrees and at various times, Cullen felt himself to be socially, culturally and financially compromised. Acquiring Ormiston Hill could have been a way of addressing this situation. The difficulty that raised its head was one frequently encountered in his career – the question of 'disinterestedness'. How could he aspire to landed, scholarly, gentlemanly status while not appearing to be profiting from his enterprise? Yet lacking sufficient capital behind him, how could he prosper in this enterprise without making a fairly swift and substantial return on his investment? Without identifying the problem of disinterestedness directly, Thomson very clearly states that Cullen was foolish in his choice of site for his estate – and foolishly ambitious in his hopes for it.

Starting as he did with the purchase of his estate in 1778, at the age of 68 (or 66) years, Cullen ran out of time – and he also ran out of luck. Significant dates and events that contributed to his misfortunes included a locally bad harvest year (recorded by the Rev. Mr Cameron) in 1782, the death of William Hamilton in London in 1783 (his friend, professional colleague and the man who had become something of a mentor), and a

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<sup>12</sup> There are one or two exceptions to this observation to be found among Cullen's papers in the Special Collections of the University of Glasgow. David Shuttleton has identified a letter from Cullen advising a patient not to go into his garden without a pruning hook. David Shuttleton *pers. comm.*

further run of bad harvests, sulphurous smogs and freezing winters following the Laki volcanic eruptions in Iceland in 1783.<sup>13</sup> Finally and perhaps most significantly, there occurred the death of his wife Anna in 1786.

In October 1789 Cullen was visited in Edinburgh by Dr Richard Warren and his family, carrying a letter of introduction from Dr Pitcairn in London. Dr Warren was concerned to find Dr. Cullen debilitated and frail, which he feared was not helped by his host eating and drinking so little. Dr. Warren was concerned enough to write to Dr Cullen from Newcastle on his way back south, suggesting that he needed the tonic of taking some wine daily, as he had been wont to do. In a letter of reply, after thanking Dr Warren for his concern, Cullen continues:

The infirmities of age have been gradually coming on for years past, and I do not find that they advance faster than in proportion to my years. They diminish the activity both of my body and mind; but as I judge, more in the former than the latter. If you are of the opinion that drinking more wine would obviate the progress, I shall certainly attend to it, though I do not find that an additional glass of wine does me any service.<sup>14</sup>

Cullen is not anticipating a swift 'cutting short', a blessed 'snuffing out' such as he described happened to Dr Clerk and Johnson described in relation to Dr Levet.<sup>15</sup> Instead

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<sup>13</sup> For the 1782 event see Rev. William Cameron, *Stat. Acc. Kirknewton*, p. 410. 1782 is confirmed as a disastrous harvest year in the Lothian region generally by T. C. Smout in his 'Introduction' to an alternative edition of these works, *Statistical Account for Scotland 1793*, vol. 9: *The Lothians*, ed. by Witherington and Grant (Wakefield: E.P. Publishing, 1982), p. xxxv. Nigel Leask describes the failure of Robert Burns' farming ventures over a similar time period. See Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Also see Dewey W. Hall, *Romantic Naturalists, Early Environmentalists: An Ecocritical Study, 1789-1912* (Pomona USA: Routledge 2014) p. 185-186.

<sup>14</sup> This exchange of letters can be found in John Thomson et al., *An Account...*, vol. 2, p. 656.

<sup>15</sup> Both events are discussed in Chapter One.

there is an indication here of a stoical acceptance of a gradual but ineluctable decline. And mingling with polite gratitude there is also a faint gesture of authority, reminding his correspondent of his long years of advising others concerning their diet, and his right as an individual to understand his own constitution better than anyone else. Whether his increasing inability to manage his affairs, the unfortunate choice of decade to start an ambitious farming project, or the over-indulgence of his son Robert was the most significant factor in the failure of Cullen's Ormiston Hill project – it is not possible to say.

### **Final reflections**

I asked in the Introduction: 'What did patients and therapists in the later eighteenth-century recognise as the good life – and how does this differ or not differ from what we look for today? How does one cope with a life that may be long in years, but also long in morbidity and disability?' Our expectations today are very different from those of the elite group of people studied here – and our fears for the future are great. Modern medicine ensures that more of us live longer, though there are large geographical and demographic differences in life expectancy even within individual cities in Scotland. But even for the privileged populations of 'the West' it can be hard to attain 'a good life' in old age – and it looks as if it may get harder in the future. But 'a good life' is not the same as '*the* good life'. In this respect Cullen, and his patients, students and peers were not short of advice. As I have tried to demonstrate this advice was derived from the ancient Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition, from more contemporary contributors to the 'advisory literature', from their Christian, church-going habits, and from traditional family wisdom. For a privileged group of people advice came from their physician too. Ageing moderns are often bereft of all of these potentially vital and vitalising sources of support

– which is not to wish ourselves back to the eighteenth century, but merely to underline some differences.



Fig. 17

This portrait hangs in the Cullen Room of the present Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. It is said to be 'after' a painting in oils of William Cullen by William Cochrane, date unknown. The image celebrates Cullen as a great teacher. The expression on his face and the gesture of his right hand are authoritative and didactic but quite gentle. In his left hand and on the table can be seen his lecture notes, usually fairly brief and folded in a manner recorded by a number of his students.

Photo: Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

### Les envois

The following, published in 1767, is taken from the *History of Civil Society* by Adam Ferguson. It describes not an individual, but the essential spirit of Enlightenment-style 'improvement', which Cullen so well exemplified:

He would be always improving and carries his intention where-ever he moves, through the streets of a populous city, or the wilds of a forest...If he dwell in a cave, he would improve it into a cottage...the scenes of human affairs perpetually change in his management: his emblem is a passing stream, not a stagnating pool. We may desire to direct his love of improvement to its proper object, we may wish for stability of conduct; but we mistake human nature, if we wish for a termination of labour, or a sense of repose.<sup>16</sup>

And this extract is from a letter from Horace Walpole, dated July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1770:

On Wednesday night a small Vauxhall was acted for us at the grotto in the Elysian Fields...I could not help laughing, as I surveyed our troop, which instead of tripping lightly to such an Arcadian entertainment, were hobbling down by the balustrades, wrapped up in cloaks and great-coats for fear of catching cold. The Earl you know is bent double, the Countess very lame, I am a miserable walker, and the Princess though as strong as a Brunswick lion, makes no figure in going down fifty stone stairs. Except Lady Anne – and by courtesy Lady Mary, we were none of us young enough for a pastoral. We supped in the grotto, which is as proper to this climate, as a sea-coal fire would be in the dog days at Tivoli...

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<sup>16</sup> Adam Ferguson, *An essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh: 1767, this edn. Paris: 1789) p.11.

Lady Mary Coke, who was a fellow guest, noted in her journal that Walpole feared a chill from the grotto and 'desired when we came back to the house a glass of cherry brandy by way of prevention'.<sup>17</sup>

The park at Stowe may seem a long way (in every sense) from Ormiston Hill, but Walpole's comical self-awareness – and his concerns – are classically valetudinarian. They would have been recognised – and validated as such – by William Cullen.

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<sup>17</sup> The quotations from both Horace Walpole and Lady Mary Coke are cited by John Martin Robinson, in *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (Norwich: Jarrold Publishing 1990), pp 134-137. The letter from Walpole (at Strawberry Hill) to George Montague can be found in W S Lewis ed. *the Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven: 1937-83) vol. 10, p.314.



## **Appendices**

**APPENDIX 1: The two inscribed stone tablets placed by William Cullen on his estate at Ormiston Hill**

**APPENDIX 2: The Horace inscriptions at Arniston**

**APPENDIX 3: Passages from the two *Statistical Accounts*, not quoted in Thomson et al.**

**APPENDIX 4: The other four poems composed in celebration of the life of William Cullen**

**APPENDIX 1: The two inscribed stone tablets placed by William Cullen on his estate at Ormiston Hill**

***Stone 1: PROCUL NEGOTIIS***

From Horace: the opening lines of *Epode 11*. Facing north, over the lower entrance to the garden. Translation by A S Kline 2005 (<http://www.poetryintranslation.com>): [2017]

Beatus ille qui procul negotiis

Ut prisca gens mortalium

Paterna rura bobus exercet suis

*Blessed is he, who far from the cares of business*

*Like one of mankind's ancient race*

*Ploughs his paternal acres*

***Stone 2: EST ULUBRAE***

From Horace *Epistles* 1:11. Facing south, attached to the house. Translation by A. S. Kline, 2005 (<http://www.poetryintranslation.com>): [2017]

Quod petis, hic est,

Est ulubris, animus sit e non deficit aequus

*What you are seeking is here:*

*If your mind's not lacking in*

*Calm, it's at Ulubrae*

## APPENDIX 2: The Horace inscriptions at Arniston<sup>1</sup>

The earliest inscription is on the pediment above the entrance to the tunnel that leads to the grotto, which was constructed under the direction of Robert Dundas 2nd Lord President of the Court of Session in 1758 by John and James Adam. The inscription is taken from Horace's Epistle, Book 1, Epistle XV1, line 15 and reads:

HAE LATERBRAE DULCES, ETIAM, SI CREDIS, AMOENAE

*This retreat, so sweet – yes, believe me, so bewitching.*

There is also a quotation from Horace (Ode 11. 111, lines 9-12) on the west side of a large rustic bridge over the South Esk. This was built under the stewardship of Robert Dundas Lord Chief Baron of the Court of the Exchequer around 1810:

QUO PINUS INGENS ALBAQUE POPULUS

UMBRAM HOSPITALEM CONSOCIARE AMANT

RAMIS? QUID OBLIQUO LABORAT

LYMPHA FUGAX TREPIDARE RIVO?

*To what end do the tall pine and the white poplar*

*delight with their branches to join their hospitable*

*shade? Why does the fleeting water fret its quivering way along the winding*

*stream?*

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Vanessa Stephen, Garden History Society of Scotland, who supplied the transcriptions and translations.

### APPENDIX 3: Passages from the two *Statistical Accounts* not quoted in Thomson et al.

#### **1. *The view from the manse at Kirknewton described by the Rev. William Cameron:***

The manse was constructed in the 1730s and extended and improved in 1750, when the two parishes of Kirknewton and Mid-Calder were joined. The manse, in part of its glebe, is now an hotel, situated on the north side of the 'old' main road, to the west of Kirknewton:

From the manse, a prospect opens to the eye one of the richest and most beautiful to be seen in Scotland. On the east it is terminated by a full and picturesque view of Arthur's seat, the metropolis. And its venerable castle, which is on a level with the manse, and which seems as if only about 5 or 6 miles distant. On the north appear the Ochil hills, the frith of Forth. A great part of Fife, and several of the coast towns; and on the south arise the Pentland hills. From a rising ground, a few yards distant from the manse, a part of 13 counties may be seen, and a stretch of country about 100 miles, almost from Berwick to Greenock.<sup>2</sup>

#### **2: *The view from the manse at Kirknewton: described by the Rev. Alexander Lockhart Simpson:***

The site, it is understood, was selected, among other considerations, for the sake of the view, and the choice in this respect has been eminently successful. Rarely is there to be met with any thing finer or richer in all constituents of landscape beauty than the surrounding prospect. The stretch of country which it embraces

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. Mr Cameron, *Stat. Acc., Kirknewton*, p. 415.

is of wide extent, with a surface broken and varied into the most pleasing and striking forms of picturesque scenery, and wearing throughout an aspect of smiling fertility and cultivation. In this general appearance there are some features which stand out in more distinguished prominence. Among these the eye will not fail to mark the stately baronial mansion of Hatton, old and gray, looking out from among the still noble remains of its magnificent park trees, telling of princely state and wide domain passed away; the deep masses of the Dalmahoy woods; the Frith of Forth, now hid, now seen, amid the openings to the left [i.e. looking north-west], and, on the right [i.e. looking south-east] the twin hills of Dalmahoy and Kaimes, towering singly in front of the diversified range of the Pentlands; and the whole closed in [looking due east] and terminated by the far famed capital of Scotland, with all the peculiar characteristics of the 'romantic town' spread out in full and clear display.<sup>3</sup>

**3. *The Rev. Mr Cameron on Cullen's achievement at Ormiston Hill – also not quoted in John Thomson et al.:***

...He was likewise remarkable for his critical knowledge and correct judgement in architecture and painting. The hall of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh is an example of the former, which was planned when he was President, and according to his directions. The front of this building may be considered as the most chaste and beautiful model of Greek architecture, that has yet appeared in Scotland. The acuteness to his eye, and of his mind, in discerning the beauties and

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<sup>3</sup> Rev. Mr Simpson, *New Stat. Acc.*, p. 448.

blemishes in painting was well known to his intimate friends. This talent rendered him a superior judge in the disposition of grounds, and in the arrangement of rural ornaments. When he first entered into possession of Ormiston-hill, everything about the place was in such a ruinous state, so comfortless and so unpromising, that he placed over the front door of the house EST ULUBRIS: But by great attention and good taste, he soon made it a commodious and pleasant residence. While he resided there, he was accessible at all times to his neighbours, and testified the untmost readiness to give his valuable advice to the poor *gratis* on every occasion of distress; and attended them as anxiously as to those of the first rank in the realm, for whom he daily prescribed. In this he seemed to be of the opinion of his famous predecessor Dr Boerhaave, who used to say, that the poor were his *best patients*, for God is their paymaster...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rev. Mr Cameron, *Stat. Acc. Kirknewton*, p. 417.

#### APPENDIX 4: The other four poems composed in celebration of the life of William Cullen

##### *Poem 1: 'Verse by E. W.' Edinburgh 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1790*

When angry death had hurl'd his vengeful dart  
 And pierc'd the [Vet'ran] of the healing Art  
 Thus mourn'd Edina for her Cullen dead,  
 And deeply sighing bowed her pensive head  
 'Ah wherefore boast', she cries, 'our laurel's bloom  
 'If thus my worthies sink into the tomb;  
 'Though not a few thy days allow'd by Fate,  
 'When virtue dies, alas how short's the date,  
 'Twas thine my son with honours to preside,  
 'A gentle Ruler and unerring Guide,  
 'A mind – replete with all the stores of Art,  
 'A noble genius and a candid heart,  
 'Though still we boast of many a laurel'd sage,  
 'The rising glories of the future age,  
 'Yet so thy fame – belov'd lamented shade!  
 'Unenvied – grateful honour shall be paid,  
 'So shall my children in thy footsteps tread,  
 'Rever'd while living – and regretted dead'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> GU Sp Coll: CUL/1/3/204. Reading of second line suggested by Jane Rendall. A fifth poem, by 'M.P.', is discussed in Chapter Four.

**Poem 2: Anon**

Alas! Great Master, Physic could not save  
Thy matchless worth from the devouring grave  
Thy healing hand oft turn'd the darts of death  
And kindled up the tyrant's fiercest wrath  
O He mark'd the ardour of thy active soul  
And heard thy name resound from pole to pole  
With tenfold vengeance then his shafts were hurl'd  
And snatched our Aesculapius from the world  
His power great teacher is not further given  
For thy fair fame has mounted up to Heav'n  
When you appeared, vain systems serv'd to blind  
With endless theories the bewilder'd mind  
Medicine lay bleeding with a fatal wound  
And nature's self was unexplor'd around  
Though clouds and darkness led the world  
You rose superior like the God of day  
  
Dispel'd the mist that darken'd nature's face  
Illum'd mankind and taught the paths to trace  
Science no longer was of names the sport  
Truth and truth only systems could support  
Thy stores of learning have enrich'd mankind  
The purest treasure of the noblest mind

Ages to come shall feel thy healing power

And Cullen live till Physic be no more. .<sup>6</sup>

***Poem 3: 'Verses on the Death of Dr Cullen', by John Armstrong***

O SKILL'D to life aid to impart

And skill'd to ward the fatal blow,

Cullen! In spite of all thy art,

Thou liest among the vulgar low

But thine shall be no vulgar doom;

PHYSIC, From System's chains set free,

Now drooping sits upon thy tomb,

And mourns its Father, lost in thee

While honours public worth attend

Thine Is a tribute more sincere –

Rever'd a sage, but lov'd a friend –

Affection sad shall drop a tear.

Now full of years, his strength decay'd,

Cullen from public life retir'd;

But fame pursu'd him to the shade

And, crown'd with honours, he expir'd.

Now to thy lov'd and honoured name

Shall Gratitude its tribute raise;

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<sup>6</sup> GU Sp Coll: CUL/1/3/204. Printed text, without provenance.

And, ever dear to future fame,  
 Thy works shall consecrate thy praise.<sup>7</sup>

***Poem 4: 'On the Death of William Cullen' by Mungo Park***

When lapdogs die  
 Or ladies sigh  
 Or linnets cease to sing.  
 The poet then.  
 Will take his pen,  
 The muse will spread her wing.  
  
 Shall real worth drop like a flower at eve,  
 Without a friendly wreath to deck its grave,  
 Shall Cullen fall, that venerable name,  
 Which from Edina spread the rising day.  
 And soar'd immortal on the wings of fame,  
 Far as fair science darts its palest ray?  
 Say, shall he fall without a tear, Of grateful tribute to a name so dear?  
  
 The pupil best can feel a teacher's death,  
 One who has felt a Cullen's fost'ring care,  
 One who rejoic'd each friendly word to share,  
 Can best lament him when depriv'd of breath.  
 Oft when he cheer'd with philosophic blaze,  
 The darken'd paths of theory's winding maze,

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<sup>7</sup> GU Sp Coll: CUL/1/3/206a.

And nature's footsteps trac'd,  
 Still shunning hypothetical rules,  
  
 And all opinion of the schools,  
 But such as practice grac'd,  
 The student look'd and wonder'd at his plan,  
 And thought the teacher something more than man.

But vain is all the praise I can bestow,  
 And vainer still, Should I attempt to shew  
 The wit which made the haughty pedant bow;  
 The liberal hand  
 Which made hard struggling merit's bosom glow,  
 And bade the opening buds of genius blow,  
 And gratitude expand

His fame shall not upon a nobler tongue  
 Whose mild humanity exacts the song.  
 Where suffering mortals vex'd with racking pains,  
 Confess his healing hand in grateful strains  
 Where patients driven by the fever's wrath,  
 To the dim threshold of the house of death,  
 Extol a Cullen with their latest breath.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mungo Park, 'On the Death of William Cullen', cited in Karina Williamson and Mark Duffill, 'Mungo Park Man of Letters' *Scottish Literary Review*, 3, 2 (2011). Originally published in the Edinburgh Journal *The Bee* on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1791, signed 'M.P.' and annotated 'Braes of Yarrow, June 4, 1791'.



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Concerning Mrs Watt	CASE ID: 1594 DOC ID: 4505
Concerning Mr Bethune	CASE ID: 260 DOC ID 566
Letter to Sutherland of Clyne	DOC ID 668
Concerning Mr Bethune	DOC ID: 155, 2173 DOC ID: 2214 DOC ID: 2206
Regarding Mr. Strangeways	DOC ID: 80
Letter to Mr. Reddie	DOC ID: 1237
Concerning Mr. Bethune	DOC ID: 863
Concerning Dr. Samuel Johnson	CASE ID: 1686

**NRS** National Records of Scotland

John Hope's cultivation of rhubarb	MS 253/144/5F
John Hope's struggles with RCPE accounts (1780s)	MS 253/143/8/1–8.
James Craig's plan for Leith Walk (1770s)	RMP 142206
Plan of Ormiston Hill Estate (1807),	RHP 85547
Hope's debt to Williamson	GD/253/146/2/4
John Clerk, <i>The Country Seat</i> (1727)	GD/18/4404/1

**RCPE** Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (Sibbald Library Archive).

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*Minute Book* College Meeting Minutes. RCP/COL/2/1/1 1769-1795

**GU Sp Coll** University of Glasgow Library: Special Collection

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Letter to a patient with hypochondriasis (undated)	MS Cullen/405
<i>The Preservation of Health</i> (1780s)	MS Cullen/406
Letter to John Hope regarding classification of plant	MS Cullen/717/4
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