

## Ernest Gray and the Diaries of John Knyveton, M.D.

By

Martin H. Evans<sup>1</sup> and Geoffrey Hooper<sup>2</sup>

### **Summary:**

The three diaries of John Knyveton (1729-1809) were published between 1937 and 1946. They purported to have been the journals of someone who served as a naval surgeon during the Seven Years War and later became a man-midwife in London, edited and annotated by Ernest A. Gray. The diaries contain factual, historical and linguistic inaccuracies which indicate that they were written after the events described, and are based on the life of Thomas Denman (1733-1815). In this article we describe the errors in the diaries and review the life and work of Ernest A. Gray who seems to have been the real author. Many publications have quoted from the diaries, the writers being apparently unaware of the semi-fictitious nature of the diaries. We give recent examples of them being cited in historical studies. This paper is intended to make their unreliability as a historical source more widely known.

---

<sup>1</sup> Email address: mhe1000@hermes.cam.ac.uk

<sup>2</sup> Email address: geoffrey.hooper3@btinternet.com

In 1937 a book was published, in London and in New York, that received such an enthusiastic reception that it was reprinted the following year. The book was *The Diary of a Surgeon in the Year 1751-1752* and was described as: 'Edited & Transcribed by Ernest Gray'.<sup>3</sup>

Although the work was presented in diary form, in that each entry was given a precise date, the style was often much more lively than anyone would have written in a personal diary. It had clearly been arranged for a wider readership, with dramatisation and exuberance. In the Editor's Note, Ernest Gray wrote about finding the diary in a leather-bound journal, and 'thought fit to alter the names of many that appear in it, and above all the name and position of the hospital at which John Knyveton attended.'

*The Diary of a Surgeon* was hailed as a new insight into aspects of life in mid-eighteenth century London. The diarist, John Knyveton, had been the son of an apothecary in a small town in Kent and had come to London to study anatomy and surgery. He was shown the use of a compound microscope, dissected parts of bodies, assisted in amputations and other surgical operations, as well as assisting in deliveries and obstetrical procedures. He described the conditions in the hospitals of the time, the way surgeons worked, and he got into various adventures ranging from attending public hangings, drinking parties and duelling, to body-snatching for the dissecting room. He happened to meet the famous writer and lexicographer Samuel Johnson and Charlotte Lennox the poet and novelist. After some months he had spent all his inheritance and resolved to join the Royal Navy to earn a living. With the backing of a certificate from his principal teacher, Dr Urquhart, he was taken on as a Surgeon's Mate, to serve in the British warship *Lancaster*. The second half of the book describes his life aboard a man-of-war. There are accounts of the routine care of sick and injured seamen, a battle with a pirate ship, and impressions of foreign lands. The writing is lively and absorbing – what these days would be called 'a good read'.

The book was given good reviews in some journals: 'This is a delightful book and may be read with a great deal of pleasure not only by the doctor but by any one who cares for early works ... One might suspect a familiarity

---

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Gray, *The diary of a surgeon in the year 1751-1752. By John Knyveton, Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries; Doctor of Medicine of the University of Aberdeen; Teacher of Midwifery to & Man Mid-Wife in Infirmary Hall; Surgeon's Mate, H.M.S. Lancaster. Edited and transcribed by Ernest Gray*, pp xiv + 322, 9 illustrations (New York: Appleton-Century, 1937).

with Pepys were it not for the fact that John Knyveton died while Pepys' journal was still lying about undeciphered. Nothing much is added to the knowledge of medical history, for physicians are already familiar with the history of the period...'.<sup>4</sup> and 'This is a gripping story of surgical training and adventure of a ship's surgeon on the high seas, equally interesting for the laity and for members of the medical profession. The basis of the story is a period in the life of one John Knyveton whose adventures have been recorded and edited in diary form by Ernest Gray. ... An intimate account of the conditions of the time ...'.<sup>5</sup> Some reviewers accepted the work as an authentic transcription of an old manuscript<sup>6</sup>, but others were less enthusiastic: 'Interesting and entertaining. Good reading for a dull day when the spirit needs cajoling without placing too much of a strain on mental faculties. Highly recommended for every physician.'<sup>7</sup> Some critics were not convinced that the memoirs were authentic. A review in the New York Times Book Review in December 1937 pointed out that linguistic anachronisms suggested that the Diary was spurious<sup>8</sup>. However, one could argue that such anachronisms might have been due to Gray's inadequacies as an editor and not to Knyveton.

The Times Literary Supplement (TLS) of 8 January 1938 carried an advertisement by Appleton-Century for their latest books, which included 'The Diary of a Surgeon in the Year 1751-52 by John Knyveton. Edited by Ernest Gray. One of those unusual treasures which do more to throw light on past days than reams of histories. An arresting re-creation of the life of an English doctor in the eighteenth century'.

*Diary of a Surgeon* was reviewed in the TLS in February 1938, under the heading: 'An 18<sup>th</sup> Century Surgeon: Puzzles of a "Reconstructed Diary"'.<sup>9</sup> The reviewer found the work unconvincing, commenting that the style was reminiscent of Pepys, but also 'oscillating so violently between the century which preceded him and the century and a half which followed him.', noting that some of the words and phrases did not come into use until the nineteenth century. He pointed out that 'the editor definitely claims to be reproducing an original document of the year 1751-52 ... On the other hand the publishers on the inside of the dust cover state that the editor "has

---

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous reviewer, *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 62, 5 (1938), 902.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous reviewer, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 12, 8 (1939), 1392.

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous reviewer, *Isis*, 28 (May 1938), 478-480.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous reviewer, *Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 13, 1 (1938).

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Major S. Jarcho in *The British Medical Journal*, ( 22 December 1945), 910.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous reviewer, but now credited to John Baldwin Beresford, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1880, (12 February 1938), 103.

reconstructed in diary form the adventures of John Knyveton,” which appears to be a toning down of the editor's claims.’

A reviewer in the *British Medical Journal* wrote: ‘... such a diary was written, but it is so overlaid with embroidery by the editor that it is impossible to discover how much is original. ... and is full of mistakes owing to ignorance of the conditions of medical education in the middle of the eighteenth century. ... neither could he have himself amputated by the flap method, because it was not yet in use. The service at sea is more probable.’<sup>10</sup>

Other reviewers also recognised that the work was not authentic, pointing out impossibilities in some dates, and suggesting that it was based on the published memoirs of Dr Thomas Denman: ‘The diary is pieced together much as one might piece together a piece of fiction based on the diaries of Evelyn, Pepys and Walpole. This book is apparently based on the autobiography of Thomas Denman, to which are added statements by his son-in-law Matthew Baillie as they appeared in his seventh edition of *Practice of Midwifery*. Names and dates are changed in some instances. This leads to errors, such as when the diarist speaking of the treatment of scurvy, presumably in 1751, refers to James Lind's *On the Diseases of Europeans in Hot Climates*, which did not appear until 1768’.<sup>11</sup>

A few years later J. Paul de Castro published a critical analysis of the errors and discrepancies in *Diary of a Surgeon*. He examined and discredited many details because the dates were erroneous, descriptions were incredible and even accounts of the weather on specified dates were wrong. He acknowledges ‘the value of a book interesting in its medical details ...’ but ends with the summary: ‘Facts no less than names appear to be fictitious in this companionable book. The authenticity of many other incidents could be challenged, but I stay my hand...’<sup>12</sup>. De Castro's analysis was cited in a Questions & Answers column in the *British Medical Journal* a few years later, which remarked: ‘It seems to be established that the book is not an authentic journal. There is no means of deciding whether it is pure fiction or

---

<sup>10</sup> Anonymous reviewer, *The British Medical Journal*, 1 (4 June 1938), 1220. The flap method in amputation, as known today, was introduced in 1837 by Robert Liston. See: M. Sachs, J. Bojunga & A. Encke, ‘Historical evolution of limb amputation’. *World Journal of Surgery*, 23 (1999), 1088-93 and E. M. Bick, *Source Book of Orthopaedics* (New York: Hafner, 1968), 232.

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous reviewer, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 110, 25 (1938), 2109.

<sup>12</sup> J. Paul de Castro, ‘John Knyveton’, *Notes and Queries*, 180, 5 (1941), 76-77.

a mixture of fact with fiction. ... the book does give a very clear and readable picture of the medical life of the time.’<sup>13</sup>

These reviewers did not comment on two other errors which must be regarded as fatal to the credibility of *Diary of a Surgeon* as an authentic work: one is an impossibility of dates and one concerns naval ordnance of the time.

The British ‘Calendar Act 1750’<sup>14</sup> had decreed that in Britain and throughout the British Empire, the old Julian calendar would be replaced by the Gregorian calendar in 1752. The latter had been in use in many European countries from the sixteenth century onwards. In order to synchronize the British calendar to the Gregorian one, it was necessary to ‘lose’ eleven days. The Act decreed that Wednesday 2 September 1752 would be followed by Thursday 14 September. In *Diary of a Surgeon*, John Knyveton, supposedly serving in the warship *Lancaster* in the West Indies, has diary entries for the third of September 1752 (‘We lost a poor wight of a seaman today, he dropping from the Main Yard...’) and the fourth, sixth to thirteenth September (‘Sunday, and the Priest into the town to ring the bell...’). As the Act had been passed in 1750, it is inconceivable that a warship of the Royal Navy, even in the West Indies, would have been unaware of and would not have implemented these changes to the calendar of 1752. When he wrote this section of *Diary of a Surgeon* Ernest Gray seems to have been unaware of this notorious Calendar Act, which supposedly stole eleven days from the British.

The references in *Diary of a Surgeon* to the cannon carried by the British warships are often in error, sometimes referring to calibres (expressed as ‘pounders’<sup>15</sup>) that never existed (see Appendix 3, Ordnance). The most serious blunders are the repeated references to ‘carronades’ (on pages 153, 195 and 198). The carronade was a specialised gun, short barrelled and large calibre, but comparatively light-weight. It was designed to fire a heavy iron ball at a relatively low muzzle velocity, using a reduced charge of gunpowder. It was usually mounted on the forecastle or quarterdeck of a warship for use at close quarters. The design was developed at the Carron Iron Works near Falkirk in the late 1770s, from

---

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, ‘Any Questions "John Knyveton's Diary".’, *British Medical Journal*, (1945), 579.

<sup>14</sup> An Act for regulating the commencement of the year; and for correcting the calendar now in use. 24 Geo II, c.23.

<sup>15</sup> Smooth-bore muzzle-loading cannon of the period were classed in terms of the weight of the spherical iron shot that they were designed to fire. Thus a ‘twelve pounder’ was a gun to fire a cannon-ball weighing 12 pounds. See under ‘Ordnance’ in Appendix 3.

which the gun took its name.<sup>16</sup> This iron foundry had not even been set up at the supposed time of *Diary of a Surgeon*. The new gun was first named in official manuscripts in the late 1770s and the word ‘carronade’ first appeared in public print in 1781, almost thirty years later than the supposed date of the diary. Carronades were not in naval use before about 1780. Ernest Gray revealed his ignorance of the nature of this gun in several ways: he has a British warship fire one forwards when pursuing an enemy – a role that would have been reserved for a long-barrelled, long range ‘bow chaser’ cannon. There are two references in *Diary of a Surgeon* to brass carronades on the *Lancaster*. This is a double nonsense since most were made at the Carron Iron Works, where the guns were never cast in any metal other than iron. A few brass carronades were made elsewhere, but were never issued to British warships.<sup>17</sup>

The second book in the series, *Surgeon's Mate*, was published in London in September 1942.<sup>18</sup> A pre-publication advertisement by Robert Hale described it as: ‘A fascinating account of life at sea in the old days of sail, packed with action, humour, and grim glimpses of ship surgery, taken from the preface to a famous 18th century medical work.’ The book's dust jacket carried a publisher's note which included:

‘Surgeon’s Mate is an expansion of the preface to a famous eighteenth century medical work ... Under the pseudonym of John Knyveton, Mr. Ernest Gray, closely following the original narrative, and with detailed attention to historical and medical fact, presents in diary form a fascinating account of life at sea in the old days of sail. Illustrated by reproductions of authentic plates of surgical instruments and of James Lind’s treatise on the scurvy, by three original drawings, and a photograph of a scale model of a frigate ...’.

The publisher clearly acknowledged that ‘Knyveton’ was a pseudonym, though Gray did not seem to admit this for another four years. The publisher seems also to have been aware that *Surgeon's Mate* had been reconstructed at least in part from the biographical sketch of Dr Thomas Denman that had been included in the sixth and seventh editions of Denman's *Practice of Midwifery*.

---

<sup>16</sup> Brian Lavery, ‘Carronades and Blomefield Guns’ in Robert D. Smith (ed.), *British Naval Armaments* (London: Royal Armouries, 1989), 15-27.

<sup>17</sup> We are indebted to Ruth R Brown, of Basiliscoe, for confirming this.

<sup>18</sup> Ernest Gray, *Surgeon's mate. The Diary of John Knyveton, Surgeon in the British Fleet during the Seven Years War 1756-1762. Edited and transcribed by Ernest Gray*. Pp ix+224, 6 illustrations + fp (London: Robert Hale, 1942).

The dust jacket note also mentions ‘three original drawings’. Two of these purport to show portraits of John Knyveton and his sweetheart. The frontispiece drawing of Knyveton is sub-titled: ‘After the sketch by the Spanish surgeon Louis Strozzi.’ Strozzi was supposed to have been the surgeon to a Spanish ‘Guarda Costa’ warship, a man with artistic talents, and claiming to be a descendant of the Spanish painter Velasquez. His ship had been taken as a prize (page 191, 30 August 1759) and he was aboard Knyveton's ship, the *Edgar*, for a few days. One cannot trace whether there was any such person, but Strozzi is primarily an Italian and not a Spanish surname. The other portrait is titled: ‘Miss Mercy Cheffyns, after the water colour by Samuel Timbs, Esq., artist, of Wells.’ No such artist can be traced in standard reference works <sup>19</sup>. The style of the portraits is modern and they are discreetly signed: ‘D.C. Eyles. 41.’ A third illustration, ‘The Press Gang at Work’ is also signed by him. Derek C. Eyles was a British illustrator for novels and children's books in the 1930s and 1940s.

Being a war-time book, published at a time when the 1939-1945 war had been hard for Britain, *Surgeon's Mate* did not evoke many literary reviews. An advertisement by Robert Hale, in the Times Literary Supplement of 20 February 1943, announced a second printing and included praise from two reviews:

‘A book whose authenticity is assured. A superb book in which Robert Louis Stevenson would have revelled.’ – James Agate.

‘Told in the true Marryat vein. An exceptionally interesting book.’ – Punch.

At the time these reviewers evidently accepted *Surgeon's Mate* as authentic, as did the anonymous reviewer for *The Naval Review*, who gave it an enthusiastic write-up. <sup>20</sup>

The final volume of the trilogy, published in mid-1946, was *Man Midwife The further experiences of John Knyveton, MD*. Edited and narrated by Ernest Gray. <sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> H. Mallalieu, *The dictionary of British watercolour artists up to 1920*. Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club: 2002.

<sup>20</sup> “Oned”: ‘Surgeon's Mate, edited and transcribed by Ernest Gray’, *The Naval Review (London)*, 31, 1 (1943), 68-69.

<sup>21</sup> Ernest Gray, *Man midwife. The further experiences of John Knyveton, M.D., late surgeon in the British Fleet, during the years 1763-1809. Edited and narrated by Ernest Gray*, pp 210 + 1 Epilogue, 6 illustrations (London: Robert Hale, 1946).

*Man Midwife* was listed among 'books received' by the TLS on 8 June 1946, and reviewed in the issue of 31 August under the heading of 'John Knyveton'. The reviewer <sup>22</sup> was quite critical of the book: 'It is a volume to excite some curiosity, and for more than one reason.' After pointing out how many of Knyveton's words and phrases were used at a supposed time long before their first known use, as recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary, he ends the review with: 'Is all this, however, offered to the public as a genuine document of its period, or as a curious and misconceived form of fiction? If the latter, it is (though ingenious in its way) both pointless and – as regards its long succession of operations, details of childbirth, and so on, which would be justifiable if authentic – more than a trifle nauseating.'

This review was followed a week later by a letter from J.B. Whitmore.<sup>23</sup> He pointed out that: 'The career of "John Knyveton" and the particulars of his family bear a remarkable resemblance to those of Thomas Denman, MD, 1733-1815'. Whitmore listed 12 points of similarity between the two. Other similarities are commented on, and he mentions that J. Paul de Castro (see above) had questioned the genuineness of the first book.

When Whitmore compared 'John Knyveton's' career with details of Dr Denman's he was referring to the entry then in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and not to the 'Biographical sketch of Dr. Denman' that was included in the posthumous 1824 and 1832 editions of Denman's *Introduction to the practice of midwifery* and which had also been published as a separate leaflet. <sup>24</sup> This sketch includes an autobiography by Thomas Denman, which covered his life from birth up to 1779, and additional biographical notes thought to have been written by Denman's son-in-law, Dr Matthew Baillie. A manuscript by Denman's daughter, Mrs Sophia Baillie,

---

<sup>22</sup> Now recorded as having been Iolo A. Williams. *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2326 (31 August 1946), 411.

<sup>23</sup> J.B. Whitmore, 'John Knyveton', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2327 (7 September 1946), 427.

<sup>24</sup> A copy of the leaflet is bound in 'Biographical Tracts', in the University of Cambridge Library, D.32.33. The same text was included in the sixth edition (London: E. Cox & Son: 1824) and the seventh edition (London: Cox, Burgess & Hill: 1832) of Denman's *Introduction to the practice of midwifery*. It was also included in the later American editions: eg: 'Francis' Denman', 'From the sixth London edition ... Third American edition ... Notes and Emendations by John W. Francis, M.D.' (New York: 1829). The Denman biography is dated August 1 1823, and is signed only with the letter B. It incorporates his autobiography, dated 5 August 1779.



has passages so similar that in all probability she also contributed to the biographical sketch.<sup>25</sup>

Ernest Gray responded to the critical comments in the review and in Whitmore's letter with a letter of his own in the TLS.<sup>26</sup> He explained that *Man Midwife* was an expansion of an original eighteenth century document, written by an eminent physician. Gray stated that this physician's name was concealed under the alias of John Knyveton, as was the name of the hospital where he had studied ('Infirmery Hall'), in order to protect them. (Denman had studied surgery and anatomy at St George's Hospital in London, as had 'John Knyveton's' fictitious brother, according to the diaries). Gray stated that he had altered some dates in order to correct slips of the real author's memory, but that 'The text of the original has otherwise not been interfered with; it has been closely and faithfully followed and wherever possible the author's own words are given.' This seems to be the first time that Gray acknowledged that 'Knyveton' was an alias. It is hard to give credence to Gray's claim that 'the author's memory is occasionally at fault,' or to Gray's other protestations, given the contrary evidence in the Denman biography.

Gray's letter was followed by one from Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, who pointed out that much of the detail in the accounts of battles, described in *Man Midwife*, could not possibly have been known in London on the dates given. These details were published much later in books such as Southey's *Life of Nelson* and James's *Naval History*. Sir Herbert went on to comment on similar anomalies in the earlier books, such as references (supposedly in 1759) to Captain James Cook's voyages of 1768-1779.<sup>27</sup> Finally, I.A. Williams, the initial reviewer, responded with sceptical remarks about the anachronisms in the diary, as well as about Gray's reasons for suppressing the names of the diarist and the hospital.<sup>28</sup>

It was during this exchange of Letters to the Editor in 1946 that Gray admitted that 'John Knyveton' was a pseudonym, although still maintaining that the diaries were substantially original. At the time when he wrote *Man Midwife* he had made a deliberate effort to persuade his readers that Dr.

---

<sup>25</sup> Manuscript, *Biography of Dr Thomas Denman (1733-1815), accoucheur and lecturer on midwifery, in the hand of his daughter Sophia Baillie. Paper watermark 1818.* (London: the Wellcome Trust Library: MS.5620).

<sup>26</sup> Ernest Gray, 'Man Midwife', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2330 (28 September 1946), 465.

<sup>27</sup> H.W. Richmond, 'Man Midwife', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2331 (5 October 1946), 479.

<sup>28</sup> 'Your Reviewer' (Iolo A. Williams), 'Man Midwife', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2332 (12 October 1946), 493.

Knyveton had been a real person, practising in London at the time. One way that he did this was by adding this 'Editor's footnote' at the start of Book II ('High Noon 1781-1799') in *Man Midwife*:

'In the year 1781 Dr Knyveton was burnt out of his house in Queen Street as a result of the adjoining house catching fire. On this occasion it is recorded, "the life of his son was saved only by his own presence of mind and determined resolution. So imminent was the danger, that many of the spectators thought that he must have perished in the attempt, but he was soon afterwards perceived with the child in his arms." '

Gray put part of this footnote between the quotes, to indicate that these sentences were from an original source. They were, but they were taken verbatim from Dr. Thomas Denman's biography, and not from some supposed leather-bound journal.

In 1947 Admiral Richmond published a more detailed criticism of the naval inaccuracies in the 'Knyveton Diaries'.<sup>29</sup> In a review of all three books, he systematically exposed error after error – in the dates of events described in the diaries, mistakes over naval ships and naval terminology. He pointed out that the *Lancaster*, the first ship in which Knyveton served, was a much larger warship (66 guns) than the Sixth Rate 24 gun ship of the diaries. In fact the *Lancaster* had not even been commissioned at the date when Knyveton was supposed to have sailed in her.<sup>30</sup> Gray's error, in thinking that the *Lancaster* was a small Sixth Rate, and not the Third Rate that she actually was, was probably due to him misunderstanding the Denman biography. In this biography, Thomas Denman described how he was passed by the Navy Board as fit to be a surgeon's mate to a Sixth Rate ship. By chance he had met a naval surgeon, Mr Nadauld, who was a family friend. Nadauld was surgeon of the 66 gun *Lancaster*, and offered Denman a place as surgeon's mate. This kind of patronage ('interest') was common in the Georgian navy.

Although some names in Gray's trilogy were real (Admiral Byng, Captain Drake, Mr Nadauld, etc) many were invented. Richmond mockingly commented that when Knyveton met again with his old shipmate Tom Bowling in 1759, the dialogue opened with the first line of the ballad 'Tom Bowling', written by Dibdin almost 30 years later. Tom Bowling had

---

<sup>29</sup> H.W. Richmond, 'The diary of a surgeon in the Year 1751-1752; Surgeon's mate, the diary of John Knyveton, surgeon in the British Fleet during the Seven Years' War, 1756-1762; Man Midwife, the further experiences of John Knyveton, M.D', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 33 (1947), 60-64.

<sup>30</sup> Rif Winfield, *British warships in the age of sail 1714-1792* (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2007), 34.

originally been a character in Tobias Smollett's novel *Roderick Random*. The late Professor Paul-Gabriel Boucé noted that Smollett often gave his characters names reminiscent of their role. Thus Bowling was associated with the nautical bowline, Strap with a cobbler, Captain Oakhum with the tarred rope fibres used for caulking seams.<sup>31</sup> Having analysed so many anomalies and inconsistencies solely in the maritime incidents in the three books, Richmond concluded that much of the work was fiction, and had drawn on later publications, including W. James' *Naval History* and *Years of Endurance* by A. Bryant.<sup>32</sup>

William Snell published a detailed analysis of many of the errors and anachronisms in the three diaries in 1975.<sup>33</sup> Snell was aware of much of the earlier disquiet over authenticity. He listed many errors and anachronisms not mentioned by earlier reviewers, and suggested that some of the accounts of life aboard a naval ship might have been based on John Masefield's *Life at sea in Nelson's time*.<sup>34</sup> Snell was particularly critical of one aspect of the diaries:

‘In *Medicine and the Navy*, Lloyd and Coulter<sup>35</sup> state that no surgeon's journals have survived from the Seven Years War period which makes *Surgeons Mate* ... all the more dangerous ... There can be no reasonable doubt that John Knyveton was a figment of the imagination of Ernest Gray ... Perhaps it would be charitable to regard Gray not so much as a literary imposter but a Romantic, dwelling happily in the past, reading and writing about the world of his dreams.’

Professionally, Ernest A. Gray was a microbiologist, who had published scientific papers as well as numerous books: see Appendix 1. Born in Hull in 1909, he qualified as a veterinary surgeon (MRCVS) in London in 1932, later gaining an M.Sc. degree for research while at Cambridge.<sup>36</sup> Gray seems also to have been awarded the Ph.D. degree some

---

<sup>31</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, (The World's Classics) Edited with notes by Paul-Gabriel Boucé. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). Commodore Hawser Trunnion and Tom Pipes, the old bosun's mate, are other Smollett characters with names of obvious naval origin.

<sup>32</sup> William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain*, (First published in 6 vols: London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1822-24, later editions to 1886; reprintings to 2010 and current 'print on demand'); Arthur Bryant, *Years of Endurance, 1793-1802*, (London: Collins, 1942).

<sup>33</sup> William E. Snell, 'The diaries of John Knyveton, naval surgeon', *History of medicine*, 6, 3-4, (1975), 23-27.

<sup>34</sup> John Masefield, *Sea Life in Nelson's Time* (London: Methuen, 1905).

<sup>35</sup> Christopher Lloyd and Jack L.S. Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy 1200-1900*, 3 (Edinburgh & London: Livingstone, 1961), 114.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Gray, 'The Association of Bacteria and Ciliate Protozoa in a Chalk Stream' (unpublished M.Sc. thesis: University of Cambridge, 1949).

years later. He was a Fellow of the Royal Microscopical Society. His work as an advisory veterinary bacteriologist took him to many different homes in the London area, East Anglia and northern England. He also taught biology at some schools before he settled in Cambridge, where he retired, dying in 1989. One of his last works was *The Trumpet of Glory*<sup>37</sup> which is a lively biography of John Shipp, a young graduate of the newly founded London Veterinary College, who joined the 11<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons in 1796 as the British Army's first veterinary surgeon. Little had been known about Shipp. He had been buried in the West Hackney churchyard but in the Second World War the church and graveyard were destroyed by bombing. The graveyard was turned into a recreation ground and the headstones had been stacked against the wall. Gray was instrumental in locating the headstone from Shipp's grave, which is now in the care of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. Gray was elected an honorary member of the RAVC in 1988 for his part in this.

The three 'Knyveton Diaries' seem to have been Gray's earliest published books. They appeared under the name of 'Ernest Gray', without the middle initial or name, which was Alfred. He must have read very widely to have created these imaginative works. It is impossible now to know where he gathered material from. Various critics have suggested Arthur Bryant, William James, John Masefield, Robert Southey and material from the London Gazette as possible sources. The account of a flea circus in Durham Yard in London, described in *The Diary of a Surgeon*, has been of interest because of its apparently early date. Similar descriptions were published later in the eighteenth century: for example in Thorley's 1772 *The History of Bees*.<sup>38</sup> As a veterinary microbiologist, Gray might have found the material there. There is no doubt now that the main thread for the three 'Knyveton Diaries' was the life of Dr Thomas Denman (1733-1815). A biography has since been published<sup>39</sup> but when Gray was writing the only accessible biography was the one referred to above, which had been included in the latter editions of *An Introduction to the Practice of Midwifery*. There are very many similarities between phrases in the Gray books and those in the Denman biography. A list of similarities, sometimes verbatim transcripts, is given in Appendix 2.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ernest A. Gray, *The Trumpet of Glory – The military career of John Shipp, the first veterinary surgeon to join the British Army* (London: Robert Hale, 1985).

<sup>38</sup> John Thorley, *An enquiry into the nature, order, and government of bees ...* (London: Thorley/Johnson, 1772).

<sup>39</sup> Colin McCall, *Naval warfare to natal care* (Matlock: SOLCOL, 2010).

Writers of historical novels will create a story set at a particular place or period, but their books are clearly fictional. A few writers have explicitly created a fictional location or time as a frame within which to present authentic material.<sup>40</sup> Gray must be condemned for the way in which he tried to persuade readers that the three 'Knyveton' diaries were lightly edited eighteenth century original material. Snell was right to criticise the way in which Gray persisted in suggesting that *Surgeon's Mate* was a genuine and unique journal of a naval surgeon during the Seven Years War, thus risking that later researchers would be led into grave errors.

Some authors have referred to the diaries, openly recognising that they are largely fictional, but still useful in presenting a general picture of some aspects of eighteenth century medicine and surgery.<sup>41</sup> The diaries are still 'a good read' and those who are not turned away by their defects, and the inconsistent literary styles that others have complained of, will find the books entertaining.

Unfortunately other people, from soon after the publication of the diaries until the present, have been misled into thinking they are genuine. Several writers have cited parts of one or other of the diaries in support of their own conclusions about the history of medicine or social life in eighteenth century London (see Appendix 4). One of the present authors warned of this recently.<sup>42</sup> The diaries are not to be relied on as sources of authentic historical information, whether in medical or maritime matters, or in broader fields such as meteorology, linguistics, crime and punishment, sociology or the politics of the period. All three books are full of errors and anachronisms (see Appendix 3, as well as those already commented on by earlier reviewers). A new danger is the emergence of 'Print-on-Demand' publication. Several of these publishers now offer the diaries. In some cases the online information suggests that the works are reissues of authentic

---

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Blake, *Steering to Glory – A day in the life of a ship of the line* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Reginald Magee, 'Medical Practice and Medical Educations 1500-2001: an overview. (Herbert Moran Memorial Lecture)'. *ANZ.Journal of Surgery*, 74 (2004), 272-276.  
Victor A. Triolo, 'Institution for investigating the nature and cure of cancer. A study of four excerpts', *Medical History*, 13, 1 (1969), 11-28.

N.A.M. Roger, *The Wooden World – an anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986). Gray's *Surgeon's Mate* is included in the bibliography, primarily to warn readers that "it is a crude forgery." and Robin Higham warned that "Another diary supposed to have been written by John Knyveton in 1756-1809 should be regarded as suspect, since it has all the appearance of a modern pastiche." *A Guide to the Sources of British Military History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972)

<sup>42</sup> Hooper, Geoffrey: "The diaries of John Knyveton". *BMJ* 2012;344:e3019 (30 April 2012).

eighteenth century journals. One aim of the present article is to widen awareness of the partly fictional nature of the Knyveton Diaries and to prevent those engaged in research in the history of medicine and surgery, maritime history, sociology, etc. from inadvertently using these diaries as though they are authentic in their details.

Many libraries are now adding a note to their catalogue entries for these three books, stating that they are fictional, or words to that effect. For example:

‘The material ... was taken from journals and diaries of that period ... [and] represents a composite picture rather than the actual writings of a surgeon of the 18th century.-- Surgeons--Fiction. Medicine--Fiction. Surgery--Fiction.’<sup>43</sup>

Other libraries have the books catalogued without any guidance to their authenticity. At least one still has *Diary of a Surgeon* catalogued as ‘not fiction’, which is regrettable.

**Acknowledgements:** we are grateful for helpful advice from the late Paul-Gabriel Boucé, Ruth Rhynas Brown, Andy Clarke, Linda Collison, Joan Druett, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and Rif Winfield.

---

<sup>43</sup> This example is from the current online catalogue of the Cambridge University Library.

## **Appendix 1.**

### Publications by Ernest Alfred Gray.

#### A. Papers in scientific journals (not necessarily complete).

Ernest Gray, 'Microscopic Life in Winter', *The Naturalist* (1935), 77-78.

Ernest Gray, 'Some Ecological Observations upon the Infusoria', *Journal of the Royal Microscopical Society*, 63, Ser. III (1943), 38-42.

Ernest Gray, 'Ciliate Protozoan Fauna of Soil and Inland Waters', *Nature*, 161, 4100 (1948), 854-855.

Ernest Gray, 'The Association of Bacteria and Ciliate Protozoa in a Chalk Stream' (unpublished M.Sc. thesis: University of Cambridge, 1949).

E. Gray, 'The Ecology of the Bacteria of Hobson's Brook, a Cambridgeshire Chalk Stream', *Journal of General Microbiology*, 5 (1951), 840-859.

Ernest A. Gray, 'The ecology of rotifers in Cambridgeshire', *Journal of Animal Ecology*, 22, 2 (1953), 208-216.

Ernest A. Gray, 'Contamination of *Azotobacter chroococcum* by Gram-negative Bacterial Rods', *Nature*, 171, 4365 (1953), 1163.

Ernest A. Gray, 'John Hunter and veterinary medicine'. *Medical History*, 1, 1 (1957), 38-50.

Ernest A. Gray, 'Hobson's brook then and now', *Nature in Cambridgeshire*, 17 (1974), 24-28.

Ernest A. Gray, 'The emperor Hadrian and the Roman mounted troops in Britain', *Veterinary History*, 11 (1978), 14-19.

#### B. Books (not necessarily complete).

Ernest Gray, *The diary of a surgeon in the year 1751-1752. By John Knyveton, Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries; Doctor of Medicine of the University of Aberdeen; Teacher of Midwifery to & Man Mid-Wife in Infirmary Hall; Surgeon's Mate, H.M.S. Lancaster. Edited and transcribed by Ernest Gray* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1937).

Ernest Gray, *Diseases of poultry. Their aetiology, diagnosis, treatment and control* (London: Crosby Lockwood & Son, 1940. Second edition 1946, Third edition 1951, Fourth edition 1954).

Ernest Gray, *Surgeon's mate. The Diary of John Knyveton, Surgeon in the British Fleet during the Seven Years War 1756-1762. Edited and transcribed by Ernest Gray* (London: Robert Hale, 1942).

Ernest Gray, *Man midwife. The further experiences of John Knyveton, M.D., late surgeon in the British Fleet, during the years 1763-1809. Edited and narrated by Ernest Gray* (London: Robert Hale, 1946).

Ernest A. Gray, *Portrait of a surgeon. A biography of John Hunter.* (London: Robert Hale, 1952).

Ernest A. Gray, *Microbiology, an introduction.* (London: Crosby Lockwood & Son, 1954).

Ernest A. Gray, *Roman eagle, Celtic hawk.*(London: Bodley Head, 1957).

Ernest A. Gray, *The dog that marched to Moscow* (London: Bodley Head, 1959).

Ernest A. Gray, *The fifth testament* (London: Bodley Head, 1960).

Ernest A. Gray, *Hobson's Conduit. The story of a Cambridgeshire chalk stream* (Barton, Cambridgeshire: Bird's Farm Publications, 1977).

Ernest A. Gray, *By candlelight. The life of Dr Arthur Hill Hassall 1817-94.* (London: Robert Hale, 1983).

Ernest A. Gray, *The trumpet of glory. The military career of John Shipp, first veterinary surgeon to join the British army.* (London: Robert Hale, 1985).

Ernest A. Gray, *Dogs of war.* (London: Robert Hale, 1989).



## Appendix 2.

Similarities between phrases in the 1823 *Biographical Sketch of Dr. Denman* and in Gray's 'Knyveton Diaries'. Some of the similarities noted here may have been noted by earlier reviewers and critics.

Abbreviations:

TD: *Biographical Sketch of Dr. Denman*. A biography, part of a set of miscellaneous biographies, bound together as 'Biographical Tracts', held at the Cambridge University Library, Classmark D.32.33. The Denman sketch is not attributed to any publisher (others in the volume are published by Hatchard and Son, 1825; Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825; C. and J. Rivington, 1824). The Denman sketch ends (p. 32) with the date August 1, 1823. and the initial B. Pagination: p.1 is the title page. Text from p. 2 to p. 32. This is the pagination used in the notes below. There are other almost identical versions of this 'Biographical Sketch' included in the sixth edition (London: E. Cox & Son:1824) and the seventh edition (London: Cox, Burgess & Hill: 1832) of Denman's *Introduction to the practice of midwifery*, except that the pagination is different. It was also included in later American editions: eg: *Francis' Denman*, 'From the sixth London edition ... Third American edition ... Notes and Emendations by John W. Francis, M.D.' (New York: 1829).

JK1: Ernest Gray, *The diary of a surgeon in the year 1751-1752. By John Knyveton, Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries; Doctor of Medicine of the University of Aberdeen; Teacher of Midwifery to & Man Mid-Wife in Infirmary Hall; Surgeon's Mate, H.M.S. Lancaster. Edited and transcribed by Ernest Gray* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1937).

JK2: Ernest Gray, *Surgeon's mate. The Diary of John Knyveton, Surgeon in the British Fleet during the Seven Years War 1756-1762. Edited and transcribed by Ernest Gray* (London: Robert Hale, 1942).

JK3: Ernest Gray, *Man midwife. The further experiences of John Knyveton, M.D., late surgeon in the British Fleet, during the years 1763-1809. Edited and narrated by Ernest Gray* (London: Robert Hale, 1946).

---

TD p. 6-7: I remained at home, assisting my brother, and getting such improvement as I could, till I was twenty-one years of age, and then I came

to London for further improvement and information, on Sept 13<sup>th</sup>, 1754. The money with which I was supplied for this purpose amounted to 75 l.; 50 l. bequeathed by my grandfather, and 25 l. as my share of what my father was supposed to be worth at the time of his death.

JK1 p. 3 [start of book]: September 17 [1751]

My last day of apprenticeship with my uncle. ... After supper my uncle still very solemn hands over to me the money bequeathed me by my father, in all some £75, and then after more talk falls to his knees, my aunt with him, and invokes a Blessing.

---

TD p. 7: When I arrived in town, I was recommended to Mr. Hunt, a hair-dresser, in Dean Street, Soho, with whom my brother had lodged and boarded.

JK1 p 4: My journey not finished even when we arrived at the posting house, but to hackney coach and so to Mr Hunt's, the barber, of Dean Street, Soho, with whom I am to lodge.

---

TD p. 8: My money being gone, there was a necessity of seeking some employment ... I applied to the Navy Board for an order to be examined at Surgeon's Hall, and very much to my own astonishment, I passed as surgeon to a ship of sixth rate, April 3d, 1755. I believe I was indebted for this to the kindness of Mr Sainthill, one of the examiners, who treated me with great tenderness, though I was an entire stranger to him.

JK1 pp 126-129: (April 3, 1752).

Have but now returned from Examination Hall ... one of the two new Examiners – I learnt after that his name was Mr. Sainthill – did glance at me shrewdly, and murmur something to his companion; and then leans across the table to me, ... to my Great Surprise and Delight the President informs me that I have satisfied the examiners, and hands me a Diploma from the Society of Apothecaries and a smaller certificate certifying that I be a true Chirurgeon; and I catch the eye of Mr. Sainthill smiling and nodding, .... I was informed that I was appointed Surgeon's Mate on a ship of sixth rate the Lancaster, now lying at Blackstakes.

---

TD p. 9: About this time, I was introduced to Mr. Nadauld, Surgeon of his Majesty's ship Lancaster, commanded by the Honourable John Hamilton,

brother to Lord Abercorn. Mr. Nadauld was an old acquaintance of my father, so that I was very glad to go with him as first mate, and I had a promise of being made surgeon at the expiration of one year, if I gave satisfaction.

JK1: pp 160-161: More sailors arrived tonight, and also the Lancaster's Surgeon, Mr. Nadauld; in whom I was delighted to find an old friend of my father's ... He then informs me that this His Present Post was but a stepping stone to Greater Things, and says that if I will be diligent and conscientious about my Duties, he will see that I am made a Full Surgeon at the end of the Year; ...

---

TD p. 9: The ship [his Majesty's ship *Lancaster*] lay at Blackstakes, but I had no money to prepare for the voyage, or to bear my expenses to the ship. I pawned my watch, and set off with about forty shillings in my pocket.

JK1 pp 136-137: after settling my reckonings I shall be left with barely a guinea to enter my new profession, and did wonder today how I might pay my coach-fare to Blackstakes, this lying some way out from London city; being I have learnt a roadstead in North Kent in the river Medway above Sheerness. After some thought I did decide to pawn my watch.

---

TD p. 9: From Blackstakes we went to Portsmouth, where I received two months advance. This was a very great relief to me.

JK1 p. 164: to the purser to hand him my Paper and thereby received five pounds, this being two months advance pay, and which was a great relief to me.

---

TD p. 17: Towards the latter part of the time which we staid at the Havanna, in the whole about ten weeks, I received forty-two pounds as the first payment of my share of prize-money.

JK1 p 229 (June 25 1752): I receiving to my great delight no less than Forty Two Pounds! at which I was greatly uplifted.

[The Denman prize money was from prizes taken in the West Indies in 1760; the Knyveton version refers to the capture of two ships off Madeira in 1752]

---

TD p. 10: ... was sent to sick quarters at Gosport. A good constitution and wholesome nourishment, together with the care of my host and hostess who were very kind to me, enabled me to struggle through this fever, though I was much reduced. ... before I was nearly recovered, hearing a report that the *Lancaster* was ordered to sea, I hurried on board in this very weak state, lest I should be left behind, and thrown among strangers. [In Gosport, after convalescing from a fever]

JK1 p. 310 ['Envoy', the editor's postscript chapter]: John Knyveton duly went to the 'House of Mr. And Mrs. Corder at Gosport ... My good constitution, together with wholesome nourishment, and the care of my host and hostess, who were very kind to me, enabled me to make a great stride towards complete recovery'; but at the end of this time, learning that the *Lancaster* was ordered to sea, he adds that 'I hurried on board still in a weak state, lest I should be left behind, and thrown amongst strangers.'

---

TD p. 10: I was removed on board the *Ramillies* at St. Helens, in April 1756, with a view of gaining promotion, and by this change my pay was reduced to thirty shillings a month.

JK2. p. 11 (March 9, 1756 [new style]): I have been appointed second surgeon's mate aboard our old consort, the first rater *Ramillies*, now fitting at Portsmouth for an expedition to Minorca. ... my pay has been reduced to thirty shillings a month.

---

TD p. 11: I was sent as an assistant to the [Gibraltar] hospital, in which there were more than eleven hundred sick. Here I was again taken ill of the hospital fever, but, having good care taken of me, I soon recovered.

JK2 p. 34: On the eleventh day comes Doctor Payne and looking at me feels my pulse and pronounces me ill of the hospital fever, and I lay in bed for six days more, and then hearing the *Ramillies* was about to sail, hurried aboard lest I be deserted in a foreign county ...

---

TD p.11: I continued on board the *Ramillies*, and one of the surgeon's mates dying soon after, I was appointed first mate.

JK2 p. 36 (July 27, 1756): Mr Westrall is dead, and I am now first surgeon's mate aboard a flag ship, ... God rest you, Tom, God rest you.

---

TD p. 11: We cruised four months off Minorca, when the fleet being very sickly ... We then went to Altea in Spain, where we were supplied with plenty of fruit and vegetables, and fresh meat, at a cheap rate.

JK2 p. 38 (August 8 & August 12): Promised the men they would be in Altea by noon tomorrow. ... Have been ashore on Spanish soil these last days, after getting the scurvy men on deck and feeding them with fruit and vegetables. The port provided the fleet with abundance of provision, plenty of fruit and vegetables, and fresh meat, at a cheap rate ...

---

TD p. 12: I likewise began to be weary of this way of life, and having determined in my own mind to quit the sea, I got leave of absence, and returned to London. When there, I had access to the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire\*, to whose family, at Chatsworth, my father had been for many years apothecary, and which my brother now attended.

\*Charlotte, daughter and heiress of Richard, Earl of Burlington.

JK2 p. 50 (January 5, 1757 [new style]): Have determined in my own mind to quit the sea, and shall seek access to the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire (Charlotte, daughter and heiress of Richard, Earl of Burlington, if my memory does not trick me), to whose family my father was apothecary and whom brother George now attends.

[One may question how an apothecary in Kent would come to serve the Devonshire family who lived primarily at Chatsworth in Derbyshire]

---

TD p. 12: She [the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire] recommended me to Lord Besborough, who was at that time one of the Lords of the Admiralty, and he gave me a letter to Mr. Devest, Secretary to the Navy. I was that very day appointed surgeon to the *Weazle* sloop, in which I remained only a month, and was then removed to the *Centaur*, a twenty-gun ship, under sailing orders for the coast of Guinea, in company with the *Litchfield* of fifty guns.

[Note: "William Ponsonby, earl of Besborough, viscount Duncannon and baron Besborough of the kingdom of Ireland. ... Lord Besborough was constituted 24 June 1746 one of the lords commissioners of the admiralty, which office he exchanged 17 November 1756 for that of one of the lords commissioners of the treasury." (Genuki). – Lord Besborough evidently was

no longer at the Admiralty by early 1757 but no doubt still had influence. He was related by marriage to the Devonshire/Cavendish family]

JK2 p.50 (February 11, 1757 [new style]): I am again of ship; but under what different circumstances! Full surgeon, I, aboard the *Weazle*, sloop of ten guns, and the health of a hundred and twenty officers and men in the hollow of my hand.

[The *Weazle* of 1745-1779 was a three-masted ship-rigged sloop of 16 guns (6 pdr), crew of 125 after 1749 (Lyon, 1993; Winfield, 2007).]

JK2 p.55 - ... writes a letter to Lord Desborough, one of my Lords of the Admiralty

[There are mentions of Lord Desborough in later pages as well ... this is a mistake for Lord Besborough. Lord Desborough was a 20<sup>th</sup> century peer with no connection to the Admiralty]

JK2 p. 61: Captain Coston struck the two fifteen pounders into the hold  
Note: the *Weazle* carried only 6 pounders. Fifteen pounder is a non-existent calibre. See Appendix 3, Ordnance.

JK2 p63 (March 8, 1757): yre. Humble servant to join the *Centaur*, twenty guns, sailing from St. Helens in company with the *Litchfield*, fifty guns, for the Guiney Coast.

---

TD p.12: I think we sailed in March, 1757, for the coast of Guinea, and were ordered to touch at Teneriffe. In our passage thither we took a French privateer, which was sold when we got there, and my share of the prize money amounted to twenty-eight pounds.

JK2 p. 65 (March 17, 1757): We have catched a privateer [then follows more than 3 pages of highly dramatised account of the fighting between the *Centaur* and a French privateer named *Paul*, whose crew boarded the *Centaur*.]

JK2 p. 74 (May 27, 1757): the privateer being sold to a merchant at Teneriffe, a fair share of prize money has now been allotted to all; and the sums placed to each man's credit. My share is twenty eight pounds, ...

---

TD p. 13: We then proceeded to the Cape Verd islands, and took in water at St. Jago, ... We touched at all the places between Gambia and Ancober, and we were tolerably healthy, though it was the rainy season.

JK2 p. 74 (May 26, 1757): Took in water at Saint Jago, ours being very greasy.

JK2 p. 74 (June 14, 1757): ... touching at all the places between Gambia and Ancober. Very hot, and the pitch bubbling from between the deck seams; though the rainy season, we are tolerably healthy, ...

---

TD p. 13: Quitting the coast of Africa we went to Prince's Island, where we wooded and watered, and then proceeded to the West Indies.

JK2 p. 75: ... to my relief we quitted the coast of Africa two days since, for Prince's Island.

---

TD p. 14: We arrived at Barbadoes after a good passage, and then went to Antigua, where the ship was careened, after which we had several cruises among the French islands, but the *Centaur* being a dull sailer, we took no prizes.

JK2 p. 78 (July 15, 1757): We lie in the harbour of Bridgetown [Barbados] ...

(July 21): Off St. Johns in Antigua, after a vile cruise among the islands, cross winds and a heavy swell ... Being heavy with weed, we are a slow sailer ...

(July 22): The *Centaur* is to be careened, ...

(August 11): On board again, the *Centaur* having been thoroughly cleansed of weed, and the *Litchfield* prepared also. We are to cruise among the French islands with intent to damage their trade, ...

JK2 p. 79 (August 20, 1757): Gave chase to a French merchant vessel, but she had the heels of us, the *Centaur* being a dull sailer.

---

TD p. 14: We were ordered to Portsmouth, where the *Centaur* was paid off, and I was immediately appointed surgeon to the *Aurora*, a fine frigate of thirty-eight guns, commanded by Captain Francis William Drake. My prize-money had nearly borne my expenses during the voyage, and when I had

received my pay, and some other emoluments, I might reckon myself worth about 90 l.

JK2 p. 99 (August 17, 1758): I have been appointed surgeon to the *Aurora*, a fine new frigate of thirty eight guns, commanded by Captain Francis William Drake ... with the pay I have drawn and my prize money I am now possessed of 90l.

---

TD p. 14: Captain Drake had been removed from the *Aurora* to the *Edgar*, a new ship of sixty guns, and, upon an application from him, which I solicited, I was appointed surgeon in the spring of 1759.

JK2 p. 104 (November 16, 1758): Captain Drake gave me the application which I solicited from him, and I took it up to London ... managed to get transferred to the *Edgar*, and mighty glad thereat, for now I shall not be becalmed in port, and my pay raised to ninety shillings a month! And the chance of prize money, ...

---

TD p. 15: After a cruise of about three months, the *Edgar* was ordered to Villa Franca, which gave me an opportunity of visiting Nice, and some other parts of Piedmont. During this cruise, Captain Drake was very ill of a sore throat, and my care of him upon this occasion laid the foundation of that intimate friendship which has subsisted between us ever since.

JK2 p. 135 (June 10, 1759): It is whispered the *Edgar* is to proceed to Villa Franca ...

(June 14): We have anchored in the beautiful bay of Nizza or Nice, and the ship surrounded by barges containing cargoes of fruit ... But Captain Drake is very ill with a sore throat, ... [then follows 3 pages describing various 'treatments' given to make the captain well again].

p. 139 (July 28): having traversed much of the inland country of Piedmont and visited Turin and Alba, and the pretty glens north of Monaco and Mentone ...

---

TD p. 15: Then was fought the action off Lagos, between the English commanded by Admiral Boscawen, and the French by Monsieur De la Clue. Two of the French ships, the *Centaur* and the *Temeraire*, were taken, and three others were burnt and destroyed...



JK2 pp 146 (April 18) to 157 (August 24, 1759) – a long description of the battle between the British and French fleets off Lagos (Portugal). Much detail of the battle and of the carnage aboard the captured French ship *Centaure*. [The *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1759 has a report from Admiral Boscawen to the Admiralty, dated August 20 1759, with a brief description of the battle, but it does not seem to be the main source for Knyveton's description. Too early to be in James' *Naval History*. Nothing so detailed in the *London Gazette*.]

---

TD p. 16: Ordered to the Bay of Biscay, ... Some part of the time we were in Quiberon Bay, watching the motion of three or four French ships, which had got into the River Vilaine, after the defeat of Monsieur Conflans by Sir Edward Hawke.

JK2 p 164 [part of a retrospective, covering the period November 24 1759 and September 16 1760 when Knyveton was not writing his diary]: And so we returned to the Bay of Biscay, where we cruised for close on eight months, part of the time watching the motion of three or four French ships which got into the River Vilaine, after the defeat of Monsieur Conflans...

---

TD p. 16: At this time the siege of Bellisle was carrying on under General Hodgson and Mr. Keppell, and the *Edgar* was sent out with orders. I went on shore to see the manner of carrying on a siege, and was very near being killed by a cannon shot.

JK2 p. 172 (May 4, 1761): ... to finish the work Admiral Keppel and General Hodgson and Kingsley had begun, and I went on shore to see how the army conducts its operations ... and was thereby very nearly killed by a cannon shot.

---

TD p. 18: I had received a year's pay, near forty pounds, for the ships of war taken off Lagos; forty-two pounds as part of my Havanna prize-money; and the prize-money for the last ships amounted, I think, to fifty-eight pounds.

JK2 p. 193 (October 4, 1762): Yre. Humble obdt. Is a wealthy man; a year's pay, nearly forty pounds, for the ships taken off Lagos, forty two pounds as part of my Havanna prize money, and fifty-eight pounds for the last ships taken; one hundred and forty pounds over and above my regular pay, which now amounts to a not inconsiderable sum.

---

Bibliography and references:

David Lyon, *The sailing navy list. All the ships of the Royal Navy – built, purchased and captured – 1688-1860* (London: Conway, 1993).

Rif Winfield, *British warships in the age of sail 1714-1792* (Barnsley, Yorkshire: Seaforth/Pen & Sword, 2007).

### **Appendix 3.**

#### Anomalies in the 'Knyveton Diaries'.

Some of the incongruities noted here may have been pointed out by earlier reviewers and critics.

The supposed diarist is named John Knyveton. Ernest Gray clearly wanted us to believe that he was a real person, because in the Editor's Note to the first book, *The Diary of a Surgeon in the Year 1751-1752*, he begins: 'John Knyveton, the author of the ensuing Journal, was born at Bromley on September 16, 1729 ... The three children were adopted by their paternal uncle, George Martin Knyveton, a surgeon residing in the village of Hestley, Kent.' Gray goes on to claim that a descendant of George Knyveton found the leather-bound journal among old family records. This is repeated in the later books. However, in replying to reviewer's criticisms published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1946, Gray admitted that the name was an alias for 'an eminent eighteenth-century physician'. His own publisher had noted this in 1942, on the dust jacket of *Surgeon's Mate*.

One wonders why Gray chose such a rare surname as the pseudonym. In spite of a supposed family origin in Kent, the name cannot be found in the 2012 telephone directory for all of Kent, nor indeed for Greater London or any of the surrounding 'Home Counties'. Although Bromley is a well known Kent town, now on the fringes of London, no village called Hestley can be traced.

There is now a consensus that Knyveton was a pseudonym for Dr Thomas Denman, who lived from 1733 to 1815. Having built the three 'Knyveton Diaries' around Denman's life, why did Gray choose to alter his lifespan to 1729 to 1809?

Calendar errors: two reviewers have mentioned calendar errors, one in connection with the Gregorian calendar. Details of this error are discussed in detail in the main text.

Ordnance: the diaries repeatedly refer to naval cannon of calibres that never existed, or to a type of gun – carronade – that did not come into existence until decades later than the diary entries. The errors concerning the carronade are discussed in the main text. There are often passages in the diaries such as: 'Captain Coston struck the two fifteen pounders into the hold' and 'Halleluja Jones, then cleaning a twenty pounder on the main deck'. These are non-existent calibres, the standard calibres in the 18<sup>th</sup> century having been 6, 9, 12, 18, 24, 32 (and rarely 42 and 68) pounders,

i.e.: cannon designed to fire spherical iron cannon-balls weighing these values in English pounds. For example, a 'twelve pounder' was a gun designed to fire a cannon ball that weighed 12 English pounds. At that period the guns were smooth-bore muzzle loaders, and a 'twelve pounder' would have a bore diameter of about 117 mm or 4.6 inches, which allowed for some manufacturing tolerance in shot and bore dimensions (Dawson et al, 2007; Henry, 2004). In spite of much naval detail in the diaries, Gray seems to have been remarkably uninformed about the naval ordnance of the period and the diaries are full of errors in this respect. For further information about naval cannon of this period, see Bibliography, below

Naval ships: There are many errors in the diaries about the ships that Knyveton was supposed to have served in. The actual *Lancaster* was a 66 gun two-decker Third Rate (Winfield, 2007) not the 24 gun Sixth Rate of the diaries. The size of her guns is also incorrect. As others have pointed out, this *Lancaster* was not even in commission on the date when Knyveton was supposed to have joined her. The probable reason for this error is discussed in the main text. He describes his next ship, the *Ramillies*, as a 'First Rater' in several places. In JK2 he claims: 'We have only ninety guns instead of the hundred for which the ship is pierced'. The actual *Ramillies* of 1749-1760 was built as a 90 gun, three-decker, Second Rate (Winfield, 2007). The *Weazle*, in which Knyveton was supposed to be serving in 1757, is described as a 'sixth rater' sloop. She was actually an unrated ship-rigged sloop carrying sixteen 6-pounder guns and small swivel guns. She certainly did not mount any '15 pounders', as described in JK2, p. 61.

During 1761 Knyveton claims to have been taken to see the *Victory* being built: the same ship that was Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar. Her keel was laid in 1759 and she was launched in 1765 (but not commissioned until 1778) He gives the dimensions reasonably accurately but states 'She will carry 104 guns,'. In fact the *Victory* was designed and built as a 100 gun First Rate and not re-rated for 104 guns until 1817.

Illustrations in *Surgeon's Mate*: There are two portrait illustrations in *Surgeon's Mate*: a frontispiece engraving, captioned 'John Knyveton. After the sketch by the Spanish surgeon Louis Strozzi.' No surgeon/artist of that name has been traced. Opposite p. 81 is an engraving showing a scene with a young woman framed in the manner of a miniature against a country background, captioned: 'Mercy. Miss Mercy Cheffyns, after the water colour by Samuel Timbs, Esq., artist, of Wells.' There is no record of an artist named Samuel Timbs in Mallalieu (2002). Each of these portraits is signed 'D.C. Eyles 41'. The style of these portraits is in the style of the 1940s. The lively illustration: 'The Press Gang at Work', opposite p. 122, is also signed

by Eyles. Derek Charles Eyles was a British illustrator of children's and adventure books, active in the 1930s until the 1940s.

Incongruous phrases, that would not have been used at the time.

JK1 p. 210-211: 'Went aboard the Frenchman in the afternoon to search for drugs, ours being almost exhausted, ... Oh God, if we only had more drugs'.

p. 279: 'We have but few drugs, and these mostly harmless Simples' Although the word 'drug' was in use at the time, it is more likely that a medical man would have used another word, such as 'medicines', 'physic' or 'simples'.

JK1 p. 214 (June 14, 1752): '... their comrades singing sea-chanties and Yarning to them.'

JK2 p. 88 (March 1, [1757 sic; meant to be 1758]): '... measures that always ended in a roar of laughter, singing of chanties and wild huzzas.'

The words shanty, chanty or chantey are not known in the literature, in this context, before the mid 19th century (Oxford English Dictionary: earliest dates: 1856, 1867). There are some mentions of a 'chantey-man' leading a gang of dockside workers in the 1840s (Stan Hugill, 1961) but the word was unknown in the eighteenth century.

JK2 p. 127 (April 12 [1759]): '... much singing of lusty sea songs, and others more ribald, as the men hauled away on the yards;'. Richmond (1947) has already pointed out that hauling and capstan work was not accompanied by singing in the Royal Navy.

JK1 p. 283 (Sept 12, 1752): 'the dice are loaded against him' – this phrase dates from the late 1800s and would not have been in use in 1752.

JK2 p. 35: '... to make an Apozem.' The word has been in use from the 17th century onwards by apothecaries etc. The Oxford English Dictionary includes an example from a novel by Tobias Smollett, but it is doubtful whether it was ever in common use.

JK2 p. 88: 'We are hull down for St. Kitts,' This is a meaningless expression in this context.

JK2 p. 108: 'At the Leaping Hart, my old boozing den of my early student days' Apart from some 16th century examples, spelled very differently, the adjective 'boozing' is not recorded before 1770 (Oxford English Dictionary).

JK2 p. 117 (January 21, 1759): 'Captain Cook on his voyages found the juices of fresh fruits a great deterrent and curative of the scurvy' Richmond

(1947) and others have already commented on the anomaly of a reference in 1759 to Cook's long voyages, the first of which began in 1768; the *Endeavour* did not return to Britain until 1771.

JK2 p. 120-121: 'I turned and recognised in a beggar, poor Tom Bowling, how sadly changed'.

The character 'Tom Bowling' is first mentioned in the diaries on p. 16, as the bosun of the *Ramillies*. The name comes initially from Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. The late professor P.-G. Boucé commented that Smollett often invented names redolent of the character's role; eg: Bowling equates with bowline.

... 'Aye, mate. Here a sheer hulk lies poor Tom Bowling'

Richmond (1947) has mocked this literal reproduction of the first line of the well-known ballad 'Tom Bowling' written by Charles Dibdin and first heard ca 1789.

JK2 p. 123: 'a scarlet rim below the spar deck,' Spar deck would not normally be used in this context. Although in occasional use since the 17th century, the expression did not come into common usage until the end of the 18th century.

JK2 p. 141-142: 'Rear Admiral George Rodney ... flying his pennant aboard the Achilles, 64 guns,' Richmond (1947) correctly pointed out this error in another part of the diary. Any admiral was a 'flag rank': he flew his appropriately coloured flag, not a pennant. Commodores, just below 'flag rank', flew a broad pennant. The *Achilles* of 1757-1784 was a Fourth Rate of 60 guns.

JK2 p.15: 'one sailor attempting to desert, was shot by a quarter master and killed.' It is questionable whether a quartermaster would have been carrying a gun while the ship was being made ready. A marine sentry would have been carrying a musket.

JK2: there are repeated references to 'musketeers', meaning the army-style men who were armed with muskets & bayonets and had a distinctive uniform. This word is anomalous, since phrases such as 'Marine Regiments' and 'Regiments of Marines' had been in standard use since the early 18th century. In 1755 fifty companies of marines were raised as: 'His Majesty's Marine Forces' and these continued as the direct predecessors of the present Royal Marines. They were carried on all main warships as guards and sentries, as well as forming part of a ship's fighting complement. It would

have been normal by the 1756-1762 period to refer to these men as 'marines' and not as 'musketeers'.

Bibliography and references:

- Adrian B. Caruana, *The History of English Sea Ordnance 1523-1875*, Vol II 1715-1815 (Rotherfield: Jean Boudriot, 1997).
- Anthony L. Dawson, Paul L. Dawson and Stephen Summerfield, *Napoleonic Artillery* (Marlborough: Crowood Press, 2007).
- Chris Henry, *Napoleonic Naval Armaments 1792-1815* (Oxford: Osprey, 2004).
- Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the seven seas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).
- Brian Lavery, *The Arming and Fitting of English Ships of War, 1600-1815* (London: Conway Maritime, 1987).
- H. Mallalieu, *The dictionary of British watercolour artists up to 1920*. (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2002).
- David McConnell, *British Smooth-bore Artillery: a technological study* (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1988).
- H.W. Richmond, 'The diary of a surgeon in the Year 1751-1752; Surgeon's mate, the diary of John Knyveton, surgeon in the British Fleet during the Seven Years' War, 1756-1762; Man Midwife, the further experiences of John Knyveton, M.D', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 33 (1947), 60-64.
- Robert D. Smith (ed.), *British Naval Armaments* (London: Royal Armouries, 1989).
- Rif Winfield, *British warships in the age of sail 1714-1792* (Barnsley, Yorkshire: Seaforth/Pen & Sword, 2007).

#### Appendix 4.

Publications that have included references to, or quotes from, the “Knyveton Diaries” in support of a historical theme.

Allotey, Janette C.: ‘English midwives' responses to the medicalisation of childbirth (1671-1795)’, *Midwifery*, 27, 4 (2011), 532-538. There is a minor reference to Gray's *Man Midwife*, to support a suggestion that ex-naval surgeons returning to civilian life after the Seven Years' War might have contributed to a rise in men specialising in midwifery.

Birch, C Allan: ‘Discussion on the Right Patient in the Right Bed’. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 54 (1961), 288-289. Dr Birch read an extract from Gray's *Diary of a Surgeon* as evidence from John Knyveton for multiple occupation of hospital beds by several patients in 1751.

Brander, Michael: *The Georgian Gentleman* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1973). One of his main sources is ‘John Knyveton, whose pithy observations from his medical school days to his death ...’. There are dozens of verbatim quotes from the diaries, many extending over several pages.

Andy Clark used *The Diary of a Surgeon*, at the Wellcome Library, when doing research into early descriptions of flea circuses.

See: <http://fleascircuses.blogspot.co.uk/2007/04/13th-feb-1751.html>;  
<http://library.wellcome.ac.uk/assets/wtx055651.pdf>

Cuppige, Francis E.: *James Cook and the Conquest of Scurvy* (Greenwood: University of Michigan Press, 1994). *Surgeon's Mate* is given as a bibliographic reference to support the view that botany came to play a prime role in eighteenth century preventative and therapeutic medicine.

Gathey, Charles Neilson: *Excess in Food, Drink and Sex* (London: Harrap, 1986) Quotes from parts of *Diary of a Surgeon* and *Man Midwife* to illustrate aspects of gluttony in London society.

Guthrie, Douglas: *A History of Medicine* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1945. Revised edition 1958). Dr. Guthrie used a quotation from *Surgeon's Mate* to describe the effects of scurvy: ‘John Knyveton, another naval surgeon of this time, writes in his diary of the “scores of poor wights lying helpless with swollen discoloured limbs and bleeding mouths” ‘. Guthrie does not appear to have doubted the diaries.

Hacking, Ian: *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1009) cites, verbatim, an entry for August 20<sup>th</sup> 1793 from *Man Midwife*.

Haslam, Fiona: *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: medicine in art in eighteenth-century Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996). One of the illustrations is credited to *Man Midwife*. It is an authentic print from an eighteenth century book.

Henricks, Thomas S. *Disputed pleasures: sport and society in preindustrial England* (New York: Greenwood, 1991). A few lines are quoted from *Man Midwife* in which Knyveton described a duel.



Matthews, William: *British Diaries: an annotated bibliography of British diaries written between 1442 and 1942* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950). John Knyveton and Gray's *Surgeon's Mate* are listed, with no suggestion that the diary is not genuine.

McKay, John P., Hill, Bennet & Buckler, John: *A History of Western Society* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998). The authors seem to have accepted the diaries as genuine: "J. Knyveton, *Diary of a Surgeon in the Year 1751-1752*, gives a contemporary's unforgettable picture of both eighteenth century medicine and social customs" [p. 688]

Megson, Barbara: *English Homes and Housekeeping 1700-1960* (London: Routledge, 1968), 15-17: 'On June 12th, 1770, Dr Knyveton, a fashionable London Doctor, wrote about his new house ... Doctor Knyveton, whose diary you have just been reading, was a midwife, one of the first qualified men to take the study of child-birth seriously.' There is an illustration of a Georgian period London home, to show the type of house that Dr Knyveton would have lived in. It is taken from the same illustration that is reproduced opposite p. 142 in 'Man Midwife'.

Gristwood, Sarah: *Bird of Paradise* (London: Bantam Press, 2005). A biography of Mary Robinson (1757-1800), the actress, royal mistress, poet and early feminist. The diaries are cited in several places in the book as if they were reliable sources. For example (page 104): 'Change was afoot on stage, too, with new techniques and a fresh imagination revolutionizing the spectacle presented: in 1773 the surgeon and diarist John Knyveton attended Drury Lane and was astonished and delighted to see a summer landscape transformed into an autumn one "so softly, and so naturally, I could scarce believe my eyes". The effect was achieved by bright candlelight in the wings reflected off a tin shield and filtered through coloured silken screens.'

Shorter, Edward: *Women's Bodies: a social history of women's encounter with health* (London: Allen Lane, 1983). A verbatim quote from *Man Midwife*, as an example of an obstetrician who was reluctant to use forceps to aid delivery.

Smith, Leslie: *Notes and Queries*, 196 (1951), 327. Part of *Man Midwife* is quoted in a letter about embalming.

Sobran, Joseph: *Single issues: essays on the crucial social questions*. (Human Life Press, 1983). He quotes part of *Diary of a Surgeon* (November 4 1751) in connection with public executions at Tyburn.

Stone, Lawrence: *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977). Knyveton, J., *Diary of a Surgeon* is included among other diaries in the bibliography and some entries are paraphrased in descriptions of hospital scenes and violence in London in 1750-1751.

Watson, George: *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971). The list of letters, diaries, autobiographies and memoirs includes "Knyveton, John. *Diary of a Surgeon*."

Wilson, Philip K. (ed): *Surgery, Skin and Syphilis* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999) includes 'Knyveton, John: *The Diary of a Surgeon*' in the bibliographic references.

A web-site about 'Sweeny Todd: the demon barber of Fleet Street' cites *Diary of a Surgeon* in connection with amputations:

<http://www.pbs.org/kqed/demonbarber/>

An article about grave-robbing for anatomical dissection cites *Diary of a Surgeon* in connection with 'body-snatching' by medical students:

<http://leseay.tripod.com/index-2.html>

An undergraduate praised *Diary of a Surgeon* while working for his BA in 2008: <http://ask.metafilter.com/93215/Help-me-find-old-diaries-published-or-placed-online>.

A footnote in a doctoral thesis: *A value-added tax (VAT) and the Federal Income Tax reform* (University of Illinois, 2008) included a reference to *Man Midwife*.