

THE FATHER OF PAEDIATRIC ENT*

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Abstract

Thomas Phaer was certainly a very remarkable man; he was a great translator, rather than a great physician and he was also a lawyer and a politician. Inspired by Luther and Tyndale he did for law and medicine what they had done for Religion. He translated French and Latin paediatric texts into English, but he is perhaps best remembered for his first English translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. He certainly wrote the first English book on general paediatrics, which includes interesting and valuable insights into contemporary views on brain abscess, otalgia, sneezing, gangrenous stomatitis and quinsy.

Background

Dr Thomas Phaer (1514-1562), has been dubbed the "*Father of English Paediatrics*."ⁱ This is because he was the author of the first work in English on child care.¹ He was a country physician and author of three other medical textbooks, but he was principally celebrated in the years just after his death as a poet whose chief claim to literary fame was that he was the first man to translate Virgil's *Aeneid* into English.

He is now best known as the author of the *Boke of Chyldren*, which is acknowledged as the first English book on paediatrics. His other medical texts are hardly known. One is concerned with Phlebotomy (which unlike some "*leechbooks*" is not written in verse); it is called "*Declaration of the Veynes of Man's Body, and to what Dyseases and Infirmities the Opening of Every One of Them Doe Serve*". He also wrote a treatise on the Plague.

Some biographers^{i,ii,iii,iv,v,vi} state that Thomas Phaer was born in 1510, which was the year after Henry VIII had acceded. It is perhaps more likely that it was a few years

later in 1514, which is the date cited in the Welsh Parliamentary records (Phaer became an MP in Wales.)^{vii} In 1931 Sir Frederic Still wrote his seminal book on the *History of Paediatrics* and I must acknowledge a great debt of gratitude to him in the production of this paper.

Sir Frederic was himself a brilliant scholar and linguist and as such had a great affinity with Phaer. Indeed if Phaer was the sixteenth Century Father of English Paediatrics, Still was surely the nineteenth Century Father of British Paediatrics and was the inaugural President of the British Paediatric Association. In his book he tells us that the spelling of Phaer's name is open to debate: "*Phaer, whose name with the easy, go-as-you-will orthography of the time was variously spelt Phayer, Faer, ffair, Faier, Phayr, Phaier*".^{viii}

The other excellent biographical paper on Phaer by John Cule (to which I am also indebted) adds *Phair, Phaire, Fayre, Faire, Ffaer* and *Ffer* to the list of variations.^{ix}

¹ This is the citation on the memorial plaque in St. Llawddog's Church, Cilgerran. It continues, *To do them good that have most need, that is to say chidren, and to shew the remedies that God hath created for the use of man.*

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Fig 1. The coat of arms of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health: the Mother figure is Baroness Lloyd, the first lady president holding a double helix, which looks a bit like a caduceus and the Father figure is Thomas Phaer in contemporary, academic dress. He is holding scales which signify the role of the College in setting standards and professional examination

His father, who was also called Thomas came from Norwich and is thought to be of Flemish origin presumably because of his surname. His mother Clara's father was a Sir William Goodyear of London.^x Pembroke, where Phaer chose to live was associated with Flanders and King Henry I had gathered Flemish weavers and wool merchants in this part of Wales some 200 years earlier. Another (perhaps better) reason why he moved to Pembroke was because he had married a rich Welsh heiress from the area. She was called Anne, but is sometimes referred to as the Welsh Annes (cf. Agnes). She was a widow to a wealthy merchant from Haverfordwest.

The Act of Union between England and Wales had taken place in 1536.

The beginning of the sixteenth century was a very complex and exciting time in Britain, both socially and culturally. On the

one hand, the country was just realising the fullness and richness of life brought about by the increasing communications with Europe and the blossoming artistic Northern Renaissance; there was a new patriotic enthusiasm growing around Good Queen Bess and fired by the War with Spain, and on the other, was the fear of squalor, poverty and death which could be seen in abundance in all the major towns (especially the metropolis). In between these two extremes, the floodgates of intellectual progress had been opened, giving rise to another conflict, between the New Philosophy and the old. Astrology, so important in mediaeval thought was being supplanted by astronomy. The unproven tenets of Hippocrates and Galen were being questioned. Witchcraft was giving way to science. Even religion was in a state of turbulence.



Fig. 2. Thomas Phaer was the Constable of Cilgerran Castle and as such armigerous, (ie he was entitled to bear arms). We learn from the lease on his estate that his achievement was Argent, on two bars gules, six cinquefoils pierced and a chief or: The crest (not shown) is a crab in pale reversed.



Fig. 3. Martin Luther (left) and William Tyndale. Both these men had a profound and lasting influence on young Thomas Phaer. They had challenged the Church and the State by translating the Holy Bible into the vernacular. The scriptures had hitherto only been available in Latin. These two had now brought them within the grasp of the educated layman. Luther was excommunicated and Tyndale was executed. Phaer however, inspired by their bravery and integrity, did for medicine and the law what these two great men had done for religion.

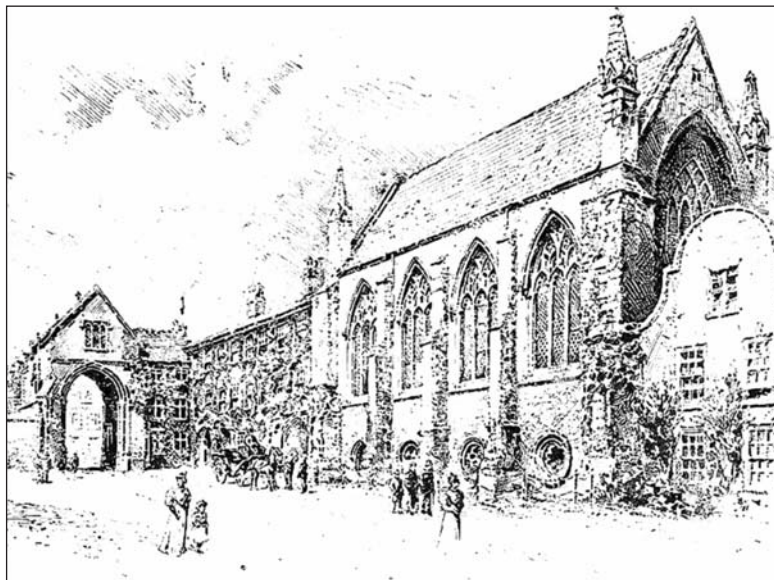


Fig 4. Norwich Grammar School which stands right in the centre of Norwich in Cathedral Close still teaches children up to University entrance.

It must also be remembered that during this period, medical practice in society was extremely diverse. Healers of many differing types and grades were widely dispersed. Friends, family, the local gentry, clergy or the “wise woman” might well be asked for medical advice.^{xi} The term “Medical Marketplace”^{xii} was coined to encompass the idea that a sick person may not go to the apothecaries, barber-surgeons and physicians at the top end of the healer spectrum, but might well choose a cheaper option. Literacy among the commonalty was increasing and generally books in English were readily available for the literate public, who would welcome books on professional subjects which had hitherto only been available in Latin.

Education

Phaer probably went to Norwich Grammar School². These schools provided an

excellent standard of education, almost certainly better than that of today. They were called grammar schools because they taught Latin grammar. Latin was the lingua franca of the time and certainly the language of scholarship. It was not only the language of the church – but also of law and medicine, and young Thomas certainly became very proficient in Latin translation. During Thomas’s childhood two significant events took place which must certainly have had a profound and lasting effect on him. Martin Luther had rebelled against the established Roman Catholic church and started Protestantism off in Germany. An important part of his revolt against Rome, was expounding the scriptures to the commonalty and relating them to practical problems in their own lives. To further this aim, he had translated the Holy Bible from Latin into the vernacular in 1521. Clearly the clerics’ control over the laity was under serious threat by this and Luther was excommunicated. The recent introduction of printing into Germany by Gutenberg was fortuitous and German language bibles spread quickly (with Protestantism). Then a few years later in 1525, William Tyndale published the first ever printed English translation of the New Testament.³ This

² Grammar schools started in the 16th century and still exist in the United Kingdom today. They differ from other State schools in that the pupils have to sit an entry examination at the age of eleven. This entry examination includes IQ tests. In 2016, there were still 163 Grammar Schools in England and 69 in Northern Ireland. They are contentious politically and successive British socialist governments have pledged to abolish them. The present Conservative Prime Minister has said that she will increase them.

³ Myles Coverdale published the first *complete* (ie both Old and New Testaments) a few years later in 1535. John Wycliffe had produced a manuscript Bible (in middle English rather

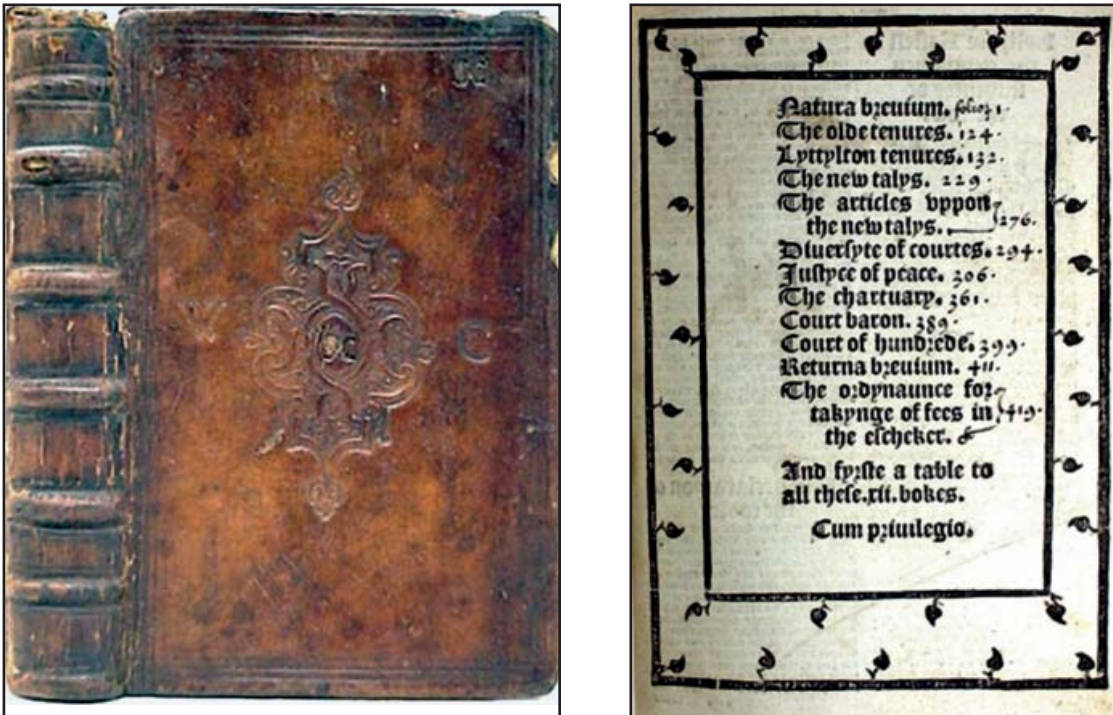


Fig. 5. Phaer's first book, *The Nature of Briefs*. (1535)

book was also seen as a direct challenge to the hegemony of both the Roman Catholic Church and the laws of England. Although Tyndale had fled to Flanders, he was arrested and burned at the stake in 1536 after being executed (by strangulation) for heresy. The dedication, commitment and conviction of these two men who had defied authority to bring education to the common man seriously affected young Thomas.

Phaer left school and went to Oxford (although I have not been able to ascertain which college) and afterwards to Lincoln's Inn to study law, where according to Sir Anthony à Wood's wonderful and lively catalogue of all writers who went to Oxford University, *Athenæ Oxoniensis*, "at length he attained a considerable knowledge in municipal laws." Wood goes on, "Afterwards, being a person of a mutable mind, he eagerly addicted his muse to the study of medicine."^{xiii} This addiction was evidently satiated; Phaer must have studied medicine before 1539, because he states that in 1559, when he received an MD (Oxon), he had already

practiced in Oxford for 20 years. Two of his biographers^{xiv, xv} state that he qualified in medicine on February 6th 1558-1559 (sic). (The reason for the double date is that at that time, the University Year began on 25th March and Phaer's supplicat was dated 6th February.) His research was in poisons and their antidotes^{xvi} and although he has not left us anything in his medical texts on this subject, it is interesting that this is mentioned in his epitaph, written by Sir Thomas Challoner, which was translated by Still:

*The Muses loved him, an Apollo's self,
Patron of Muses, made him bard and leech,
Skilled him in poisons pale of Hecate,
In snakes of Afric's desert, all and each.*^{xvii}

In 1662, Fuller included a reference to Phaer in his *History of the Worthies of England*. Fuller, an Anglican vicar well known for his wit, describes only the first of Phaer's two legal books, and then adds, *But the study of the law did not fadge well with him, which caused him to change his copy, and proceed doctor of physic.*^{xviii}

than Modern English) at the end of the 14th century. The Venerable Bede had translated parts of the Bible into Old English in the 7th century.

Phaer was doubly qualified in law as well as medicine. He translated, wrote and published a number of books on both these subjects.

Law Books

His first law book (published for him by Robert Redman in 1535) was a translation from the Latin about writs or Briefs (fig 5). It was called, *Natura Brevium, newly corrected in Englyshe with divers addicions of Statutes, Cases, Plees*. Following this he went on in 1546 to publish *New Boke of Presidentes in maner of a register wherein is comprehended the very trade of making all maner evidence and instrumentes of Practyse, ryght commodious and necessary for every man to knowe*. (Fig.6: an edition of this volume is the oldest law book in UCL library).^{xix} This second was a comprehensive formula book of legal documents. It was very successful and by 1657, it had been published no less than twenty-seven times and was used by the celebrated Elizabethan jurist, Thomas Egerton.^{xx} Both these books were in English rather than Latin or French and satisfied Phaer's obsession at making knowledge more accessible to the literate commonalty, which was growing in England and was eager to read the printed books which were becoming increasingly available.

Royal Preferment

This public spirited service did not go unnoticed, for we hear that, he was rewarded for his endeavours to popularise legal methods by the appointment of "Solicitor" in the Court of the Welsh Marches.⁴ ^{xxi} Indeed Phaer describes himself as "*sollicitour to the kings and quenes maiesties attending their honorable counsaile in the Marchies of Wales*". He also acknowledges a debt of gratitude to William Paulet, later Marquess of Winchester, for this preferment to the Court of the Council in the Marches at Ludlow and indeed later mentions him in the dedication (to Queen Mary) in his *Aeneid* of 1558.^{xxii} He refers to Paulet as "*his first brynger up and patrone*".

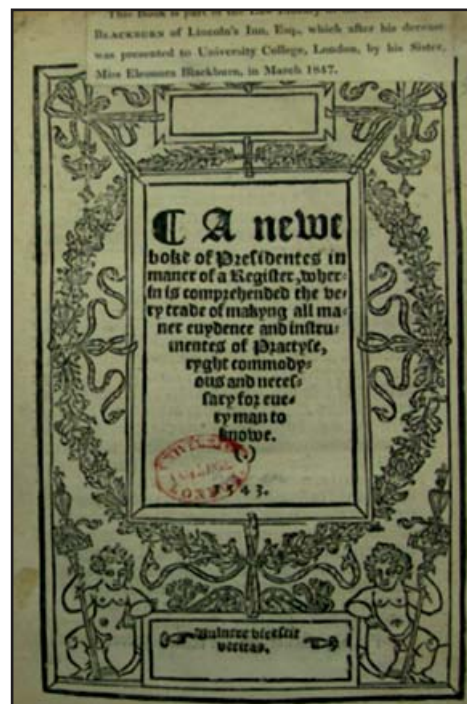


Fig. 6. Phaer's second legal book, *A new boke of presidentes in maner of a register wherein is comprehended the very trade of making all maner evidence and instrumentes of Practyse, ryght commodious and necessary for every man to knowe*.

These as we have said were difficult times. Phaer was a catholic^{xxiii} and as such had made this dedication of his literary works. However, when "Bloody Mary's" Roman Catholic head was cut off in 1558, Phaer had to seek pardon from the protestant Queen Elizabeth. This was granted to him in 1559.^{xxiv} It is said to have been a formality – but an obligatory one for anybody seeking government commission or public trust.^{xxv}

It is not clear when he moved definitively from England to Wales, but we can be sure that in the late 1540s, he was certainly living on an estate called Fforest,⁵ near the town of Cilgerran. This idyllic situation was in Pembrokeshire, but is very close to the county borders with both Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire. He was an MP for Carmarthen in 1547.^{xxvi} This was the year that his wife's former husband a leading townsman of that borough died. The Records Office shows that Phaer married her between 15th June 1548 and 21st December

⁴ The term Welsh Marches is an imprecise one which has differed from time to time, but was used to designate the area around the border between the two countries of England and Wales.

⁵ In the Welsh language double f (*ie ff*) is pronounced like an English f, whereas a single f is pronounced like an English v.

1551.^{xxvii} He then went to live at Fforest near the River Teifi.^{xxviii} We read in Fenton's *History of Pembrokeshire* that, "Doctor Phaer, ... came young into Pembrokeshire, became enamoured and ended his days at, Forest adjourning (sic) Cilgerran, on the banks of the Teivy; a place still well wooded with thriving young timber. In this favourite retirement, by way of relaxing from the labours of his profession he courted the Muses, and translated several books of Virgil's *Aeneid*".^{xxix}

In 1548, he was made Constable of Cilgerran Castle and made Steward of the Lordship of Cilgerran and also Forester.^{xxx} The following year he granted a lease on Cilgerran and in the lease, we hear details of his coat of arms granted by the College of Arms (fig.2 on p.125). Then (as now) only a gentleman (or lady) could bear arms.

He was nominated (though not "pricked") for Sheriff in 1552. Phaer then became Member of Parliament for Cardigan in 1555, 1558 and 1559.^{xxxi} He was also appointed as a Customs Official (again this post was in the gift of his patron, the Marquis). The appointment of "Searcher of the Port of Milford and all ports between River Dyfi and Swansea" was made in 1556; it was not popular and Phaer grumbled about it.^{xxxii} Although he was not too happy about the post, during his work as Searcher, his talent for descriptive literature has left us with a useful and charming account of the ports and their environs during his period as customs official. It fills a descriptive gap for there are no contemporary drawings of the land of Wales.^{xxxiii}

In 1559 he was promoted to *Collector of the Great and Petty Customs of Tonnage and Poundage in the Port of Milford*.^{xxxiv}

Poetry

Despite his intensely busy professional life as a lawyer, physician and politician (Your author hastens to add that politics, unlike medicine and the law can never seriously be described as a profession), Phaer also found time to write poetry. It is perhaps not too surprising that as a gifted Classical scholar, Phaer was a great lover of verse and his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* is perhaps his main claim to literary celebrity.

He did in fact he write other poems. Betham had translated Jacopo di Porcia's "The Preceptes of Warre" (1544) and Phaer composed a short poem commending this.

*Chyfest⁶ is peace, but yf by
extremetye
Thou be enforced to fyght for thyne
owne,
Learn here the science and actes of
Chyvaldrye,⁷
Pollicies and privities⁸ to
many men unknowen;
Whereby thyne enemye may be
overthrowen;
In such a necessitie shalt thou never
finde
Such an other treasure; kepe it wel in
minde*

He published verses in various editions of "A Myrroure⁹ for Magistrates," which is a collection of (mainly satirical) poems written during the Tudor period. Because these were frowned upon by the Lord Chancellor and the Government, they were consequently very popular. He wrote an epic poem about the last native Prince of Wales and his revolt against Henry IV, which was published in the *Mirror*. Here are a few stanzas from that work, which was entitled *Owen Glendower* after the rebellious Welsh prince. This not only shows Phaer's style, but his poetic talent (and underlines his liberal political views).

*A Welshman borne, and of the
Trojan bloud,
But il brought up, whereby full well
I finde,
That neyther byrth nor linage¹⁰ make
us good,
Though it be true a cat will after
kinde:
Fleshe gendreth fleshe, but not the
soule or minde,
They gender not, but fouly do
degender,¹¹
When men from vice to vertue them
surrender.
Each thing by nature tendeth to the*

⁶ chiefest

⁷ chivalry

⁸ secrets

⁹ Mirror

¹⁰ heredity

¹¹ degenerate

same
 Whereof it came, and is disposed like;
 Downe sinks the moulde, up mounts
 the flame,
 With horne the hart,¹² with hoofe the
 horse does strike,
 The wolf doth spoile, the suttle¹³ fox
 doth pike,¹⁴
 And to conclude, no fishe, fleshe,
 foule or plant,
 Of their true dame the property doth
 want.^{xxxv}

After he settled into home in Wales, Phaer began his opus vitae, the translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* into English verse. This is an epic poem in twelve books, written by the Roman poet between 29 and 19 BC, which tells the classical myth of Aeneas, a Trojan, who survived the Fall of Troy, but was exiled.

After meandering around the Mediterranean, he eventually landed in Italy. There he became ancestor of the Romulus and Remus (and thus the progenitor of all true Romans). Like all Latin epic verse, the poem is written in strict dactylic hexameters (and comprises 9,896 lines). Although there is an intrinsic beauty in the rigorous scansion of Virgil when read in Latin, the dactylic hexameter does not lend itself as well to spoken English. Phaer however was true to the Virgilian metre and translated the poem accordingly. He started his work on 4th May, 1555, and amazingly the first book was completed on the twenty-fifth of the same month.^{xxxvi} Despite this amazing start, Phaer did not in fact complete the full twelve books of the epic. His first seven books were published by Kingston in 1558. By April 1560, he had finished the ninth, Then he injured his right hand in some way and had to use his left.^{xxxvii} He never completed the last three books but continued work right up to his death later that year by which time he had only just started the tenth book.

In 1562, the work was published as "*The Nynne fyrst bookes of the Eneidos of Virgil converted into English verse by Tho. Phaer, doctour of physike, with so muche of the tenth booke as since his death (1560)*

¹² deer

¹³ sly

¹⁴ hunt stealthily

coude be founde in unperfit papers at his house in Kigaran Forest in Pembrokeshire." His friend and colleague, Dr Thomas Twine (of Lewes in Sussex) later completed the last three sections, which were published in London in 1573 by W. How.

Thomas Phaer's fame rests on the fact that he was the first poet to attempt a full and complete English translation of Virgil's epic.¹⁵ It was well received and we hear that Phaer's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, or rather the first nine books and part of the tenth, into verse was certainly held in high esteem not only in his own time but by successive generations; and it was on this that his reputation as a poet was founded.^{xxxviii}

Let us just share a few lines to appreciate the work for which he had so much dedication and passion; the following is his translation of *Aeneas'* vessel making landfall in Africa.

*Far in the shore, there lieth an isle
 and there beside a bay,
 Where, from the channels deep, the
 haven goeth in and out alway;
 On either side, the reaches righ, to
 heaven up climb to grow,
 And under them the still sea lieth, for
 there no breath can blow;
 But green wood like a garland grows,
 and hides them all with shade,
 And in the midst a pleasant cave
 there stands, of nature made,
 Where sit the nymphs, among the
 springs, in seats of moss and stone
 When ships are in no cables need, nor
 anchors need they none.^{xxxix}*

Medical Literature

Phaer wrote three medical books, which were all first published together in 1544. He included with his three original texts a translation of the celebrated *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni*, which he calls *A Regiment of Life*.

The first edition of this compendium was published in London by Edward

¹⁵ Two others had made shorter earlier translations: Gawin Douglas, the Bishop of Dunkeld in Scotland (1474–1522) had translated all twelve books into Middle Scots English in 1513 (and then added a thirteenth by Matteo Vegio); Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey translated two books, a few years previously – the second in 1554 and the fourth in 1557. These however were in iambic pentameter.

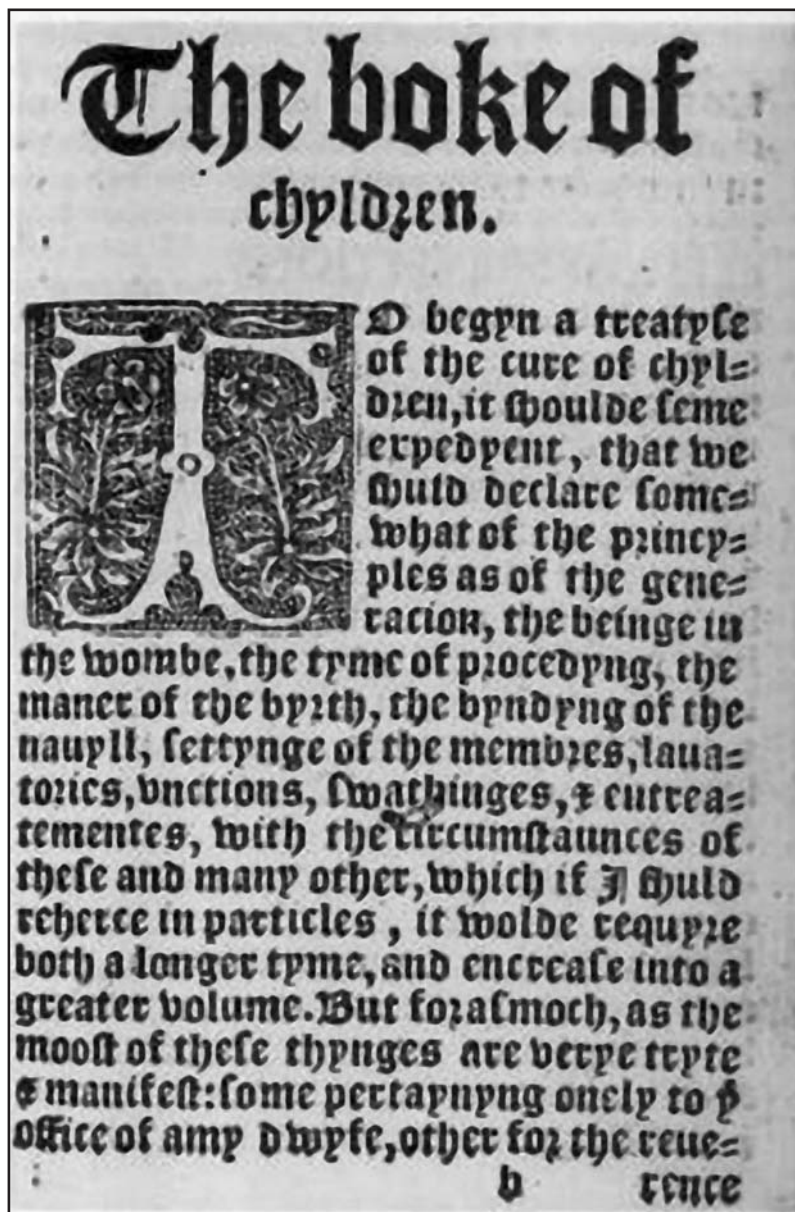


Fig. 7. This is from the first (1544) edition of Phaer's book. There is only one known extant copy of this version, in the Huntington Library in San Marino. It was suspected that a "lost edition" existed because the 1546 edition referred to itself as newly corrected and enlarged, but the first edition lay undiscovered until 1998/9. A facsimile copy is available online.

Whytchurche. The colophon states, *The Boke of Chyldren, the Regiment of Life, A Goodly Breyefe¹⁶ Treatise of the Pestylence and a declaration of Veines in mans body*. It is interesting that the *The Boke of Chyldren* takes precedence in this very first edition, as this is not the case in any of the known subsequent seven impressions.¹⁷ There is

¹⁶concise or brief

¹⁷A further edition in 1546 (Whitchurch, London) and subsequent ones in; 1550 (Whitchurch, London); 1553 (Kynngston and Sutton, London); 1560 (Whitchurch, London); 1567 (Este and Myddelton, London); 1578 (How,

known to be only one surviving copy of this first edition (in the Huntington Library in San Marino, the United States of America). Apparently this first edition lay undiscovered until 1998/9. It was suspected that this long-lost first edition existed because the 1546 edition described itself as "*newly corrected and enlarged*," implying the existence of a previous imprint. In 1997, Bowers wrote a learned article on Phaer^{xl} and refers throughout this paper to the facsimile 1955 edition^{xli}, saying that he has some personal London); and 1596 (Allde, London).

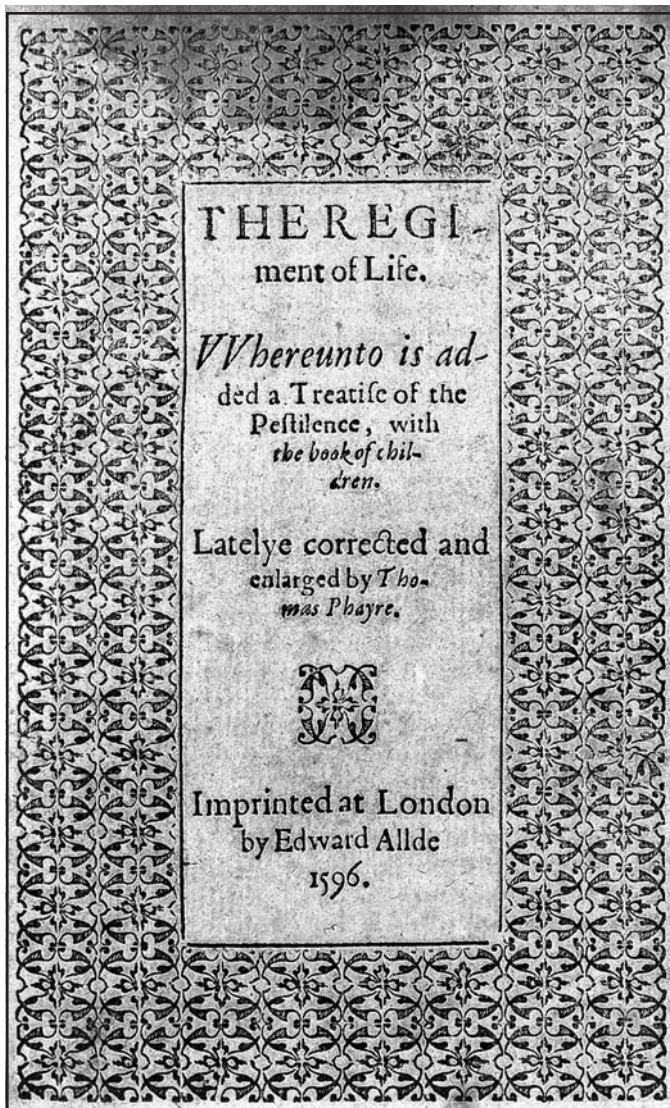


Figure 8. Colophon from Wellcome Library copy of the final edition of Phaer's *Medical Vademecum* published posthumously by Edward Allde in 1596. In this edition, *The Regiment of Life*, his translation (from the *Frenche tonge*) of Jehan Gouerot's *Lentretenement de vie* takes precedence and *Book of Children* is relegated to final position.

scruples about this copy. Two years later in 1999 Bowers then published an excellent facsimile of the original 1544 edition of Phaer's book^{xliii} saying that medical bibliophiles are unaware of the first edition of 1544, buried in Jehan Gouerot's *Regiment of Life* and ignoring all other editions of the period. He goes on to say that a facsimile text issued in 1976 in the English Experience series (no. 802) merely reprints the second edition of Gouerot's book. Unfortunately Bowers does not say when the first edition was discovered, but we can presume that it must have been between his two publications.

As we have seen Phaer lived in Wales and his texts were almost immediately translated into the Welsh vernacular by Ellis Gruffyd.^{xliiii}

The book was very successful and Slack included it as one of the thirteen vernacular medical best-sellers in 16th century England.^{xliiv}

The *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni* was translated by Phaer out of the *Frenche tonge* from the version by Jehan Gouerot (*Lentretenement de vie*). This wonderful mediaeval Guide to Good Health originated in the ancient town of Salerno in Southern Italy. It was translated into many languages and owed its celebrity due to wounded crusaders returning from the Holy Land and calling in there at the famous Salerno medical school on their way home.

Phaer's translation precedes the Harington translation into English by 60 years. The *Regimen* had a definite holistic approach and suggested changes in life style rather than blood-letting, enemas, medications and herbs. Apocryphally it was written as a poem for the benefit of Robert, Duke of Normandy, son of William the Conqueror, who is said to have visited Salerno on his way to the First Crusade and again in 1099 on his return after the capture of Jerusalem, where he was treated for a wound in the arm. There is little if any evidence to suggest that this ever happened. The rhymed medical advice and collections of verses on health had more than likely been current for years in many parts of Italy and Southern France.

The three other texts in Phaer's medical textbook were written by himself to make a compendium of four basic volumes, all comprised together as one complete book. His work on the Plague is titled: *A Goodly Breyefe¹⁸ Treatise of the Pestylence, with the Causes, Signes and Cures of the Same*. In this work, he cites the four rootes or causes of the plague:

The first roote and superiour cause is God's will;

The Second roote of the pestilence doth depende of the heavenly constellations;

The third roote or cause beeinge inferiour, is the stinche and filthy savors that corrupt the air.

This third root is a very clear depiction of miasma – a contemporary idea of the causation of disease by bad smells and toxic gases from marshes.^{19xlv}

His fourth roote is:

the abuse of things not natural, that is to wit, of meate, and drinke, of slepe and watching, of labour and

¹⁸ concise or brief

¹⁹ Even as late as the late 19th century *Hoblyn's Dictionary of Medical Terms*, (Whitaker, London 1878) defines *miasma* as *a volatile, deleterious principle arising from the bodies of the sick and then regarded as the contagious effluviuum of disease; or from decaying animal or vegetable substances; or from certain portions of the earth and then referred to malaria, marsh-gas &c.*

ease, of fulnes and emptynes, of the passions, of the minde, and of the immoderate use of licherly.

Following this is a treatise on venesection entitled, *a declaration of Veines in mans body and to what diseases and infirmities the opening of every one doth serve*.

It is however the first section of the first edition for which Phaer is best remembered, namely his *Boke of Chyldren*, described as a book of *speciall remedies (experimentes) for all diseases, griefes, impediments and defects often happening in young children*.

The Boke of Chyldren

The 1544 edition is generally accepted as the first ever English textbook on the diseases of children (see p.131). An erudite retired Welsh psychiatrist,²⁰ however in an excellent biography of Phaer avers that it was not the first text book on paediatrics, nor was it the first work published in English on paediatrics.^{xlvi}

Pedantically, Dr. Cule is of course absolutely correct. For completeness therefore, it should be said that before this, there were two translations from the German of Eucharius Rösslin's *Der schwangern Frauwen und Hebammen Rosengarten*,^{21, xlvi} firstly a version by Richard Jonas in 1540 and then one by Thomas Raynaldes (Reynolds) in 1545. This book however, as suggested by its English subtitle (... *otherwise named the Woman's book*) was much more concerned with midwifery, although it did contain a few notes about infant's early care.

Much earlier than this there had been at least three printed books on Child Health on the continent of Europe. Paul Bagellardo (1472, Padua) had written *de Aegritudinibus infantum*; Bartholemeus Metlinger had published *Regiment der junge Kinder* in Germany (1473, Augsburg) and there was also a short paediatric text written by Cornelius Rölants of Mechlin around 1483.^{xlviii}

²⁰ John Hedley Cule, MA, MD (Cambridge), MRCS, FRCP, FRCGP, FSA.

²¹ *A Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives*.

It can safely be said that the *Boke of Chyldren* was the first book, written by a British author and published in English to recognise children as a separate class of patients. In his list of the *manye grevous and perilous diseases to which children were susceptible*, he recognised various psychological problems so well-beloved of last century's paediatricians such as *terrible dreames and feare in the slepe* (nightmares) and *pissing in the bedde* (bedwetting). He also includes serious childhood diseases such as brain abscess, smallpox and measles. For these two last, he advises against intervention, counselling *The best and most sure helpe in this case is not to meddle with anye kynde of medicines, but to let nature work her operacion*.

True to his ethic of making education universally accessible Phaer states right at the beginning of his *Boke of Chyldren* his reason for writing it in English. He asks why the classically educated physicians grudge knowledge of physic in English:

Why grutche they phisyk to come forth in Englyshe saying that paediatrics oughte not to be secret for lucre²² of a fewe.

It is as though Phaer is already expecting adverse criticism to this first ever English book of Paediatrics by reviewers of the mid 16th century (or as he calls them “*pike-fauts*”²³) as he then adds, *Although (as I doubt not) everye good man wyll enterprete thys woorke to none other ende but to bee for the comfort of them that are diseased and will esteme no lesse of me by whom they profite than they bee glad to receive the benefites. Yet forasmuche as it is impossible to avoide the teethe of malicious envy I thought it not unnecessary to prevent the furies of some that are ever gnawing and biting upon them that further any godly sciences. To those I protest that in al my studies I never intended, nor yet do intend, to satisfie the mindes of any such pike-fauts (which will doo nothing but detract and judge others, snuffing at al that offendeth the noses of their momish affections howe soever laudable it be otherwais). But my purpos is here to do them good that have moste neede, that is to saie children.*

²² monetary gain

²³ By this wonderful term, Phaer means *pick-faults*.

The first page of text then makes apology for including nothing on matters of childbirth or midwifery:

But inasmuch as the most of these thymes are very true and manifest some pertaining only to the office of a midwife, other for the reverence of the matter, not mete to be disclosed to any vile person.

Phaer starts off then by commenting on the importance of suckling and adds that the poet Virgil described the paramount importance of breast feeding, and emphasises this point by quoting Favorinus who tells us that if a lamb is fed on goats' milk it will develop coarse hair like a goat. After having said that the best milk is from the natural mother, he gives advice on choosing a wet-nurse *not of vil complexion and worse maners, but of such as shal be sobre, honest and chast, wel fourmed, amyable and chearefull, so that she may accustome the infant unto myrth, no dronkard, vycyous nor sluttyshe, for suche corrupteth the nature of the chylde*.

In his description of the breast milk, he describes Soranus'²⁴ test in almost the same words as in Soranus' original description.^{xlix} *That mylke is goode that is whyte and sweete; and when ye droppe it on your nayle and do move your finger, neyther fleteth abrod nor will hange faste upon our naile, when ye turne it downeward, that whyche is betwene bothe is beste.*

Phaer follows up with a sundry list of herbal remedies for *ye encreasyng of mylke in the brestes*, but gives no personal opinion upon which of these rustic cures is best. They include radishes, fennel root, chicken broth, powdered earthworms, fresh butter, neat's tongue, dill, aniseed, harehound, cheese, honey, lettuce and another fourteen assorted substances.

One thing that comes over to me is that Phaer is a great translator rather than

²⁴ Soranus of Ephesus (A.D. 98-138) Classical physician specialising in childbirth, paediatrics and gynaecology; he was leader of the influential *Methodic* school of medicine (emphasizing simple rules of practice, based on a theory that attributed all disease to an adverse state of “internal pores”).

a great physician. Indeed his section on strabismus or *Gogle eyes* is a verbatim translation of Jonas's translation of Rösslin.¹ The clinical description of *Chingles* is equated with *sacer ignis*, English Saint Anthony's Fire and the Greek erysipelas.

He gives full acknowledgement (unlike many of his contemporaries) but rather than recommend one treatment, the one which he has tried and finds to work best in his hands and his own experience, he translates from Latin or French and leaves the layman to choose (in the above instance from over twenty options).

As far as I can tell, Phaer did not add anything to extant medical knowledge in his books – but that was never his aim. His ambition was to enable Englishmen to read about childhood diseases in their own language in an age when medical knowledge was far more diverse throughout society

Sixteenth Century Paediatrics

Let us look at the forty various childhood conditions he mentions: they range from epilepsy and palsie to sneezing and bedwetting and quite a few would fall into the age of the modern otolaryngologist.

Apostume of the brayne (Brain abscess)
Swelling of the heade
Scalles of the Heade (scaling skin)
Watchyng out of meafure (insomnia)
Of terryble dreames and feare in the sleape
The fallyng evill (epilepsy)
Of the palseye or shakynge of membres
Of the Crampe or spasmus
Of the styfries or starknes of the lymmes (spasticity)
Bloudshotten eyes
Watring eyes
Scabbyneff and ytche
Diseases in the eares
Neafing out of meafure (excessive sneezing)
Breedyng of teethe
Canker in the mouthe (it appears, he means cancrum oris or noma)
Quinseye or fwellyng of throte
Cough
Streightnesse of winde

Feblnes of the stomache and vomitinge
Yearinge or hicket (?hiccough)
Colike and rumbling in the guttes
Flux of the belly
Stopping of the belly
Wormes
Swelling of the navill
The stone
Pyffing in bedwetting
Brufting (inguinal herniation or "bursting")
Fayling of the skynne
Chafing of the skynne
Small Pockes and Measels
Fevers
Swelling of the Coddess (scrotum)
Sacer ignis or Chingles
Burnyng and scaldyng (treatment of burns and scalds)
Kybbes (Chilblains)
Consumptions
Leanenesse
Gogle eyes.

Phaer's Otorhinolaryngology

The first childhood disease in the book is *Apostume of the brayne* (brain abscess), which we are told is not uncommon. Phaer describes it as an abscess cavity in the film which covers the brain, which is caused by *too moche crying of the chylde, or by reason of the mylke immoderatlye hote, or of excesse of heate in the blood*. He recognises two types; hot and cold. In both these types, the head is swollen, but *more so if it be of hote matter, the heed of the chylde is unnaturally swollen, redde and hote in the feelynge*. In the cold variety *if it come of colde matter, it is somewhat swollen, pale and colde in the touchyng; but in bothe cases the chylde can not reste and is ever lothe to have hys heed touched, cryeth and vexeth it selfe as it were in a frenesye*.

The remedy for both hot and cold brain abscess is similar. Both require sponging the head of the child with a broth made from herbs and a sheep's head, but in the case of the cold abscess, the sponging must be as hot as the child can endure, whilst a hot abscess will require tepid broth. After this a poultice made from different herbs, more of the broth, bean flour, eggs, duck grease and butter must be applied to the temples (every six hours in the hot one.)

Make a bath of mallowes, camomyll, and lyllyes, sodden wyth a shepes heed tyll the bones fall, and with a sponge or soft cloutes al to bathe the heed of the chylde in a colde aposteme wyth the brothe hote as maye be suffered; but in a hote matter, wyth the brothe luke warme, or in the coolynge, and after the bath, set on a playstre thus.

A playstre.

Take fenugreke, camomyll, wormwood, of every one an handfull, seethe them in a close vessell tyll the thyrde part be consumed, then stampe them in a mortar and styrre them; to the which ye shall put of the same brothe agayne ynough to make a playstre, with a lytle beane floure, yolkes of egges and saffron, addyng to them fresh butter or duckes grese suffycient, and applye it. In a colde matter, lette it lye a day; but in a hote cause ye must remove it every syxe houres.

I give the book's full details of this disease for two reasons: firstly, to furnish the reader with the type of symptomatology and theories of cause believed by our sixteenth century predecessors; and secondly to illustrate the mix of folk remedy and current medical practice.

In *Neafng out of meafure*, the term neasing is derived from the Anglo-Saxon. Niesen is to sneeze in German. It is interesting that Phaer includes this symptom, since menarchal rhinitis and sneezing is very common in pubertal girls but rarely referred to in modern textbooks of either paediatrics or rhinology.^{li}

Phaer suggests a herbal mixture of the juices of purselane, sorrel and deadly nightshade, which is used to annoint the head and then egg white, oil of roses, a little fresh breast milk and vinegar are all made into a paste which is applied as a poultice to the temples.

Canker in the mouthe or noma (cancrum oris) is an acute and ravaging gangrenous infection affecting the maxilla and skin of the face (sadly still seen in some underdeveloped countries). The victims of

noma are mainly young children caught in a vicious circle of extreme poverty and chronic malnutrition. The exact cause is unknown, but it is associated with fusospirochaetal micro-organisms. This disorder most often occurs in young, severely malnourished children between the ages of two and five. It often follows a debilitating illness such as measles, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, cancer, leukaemia or immunodeficiency. Other risk factors include Kwashiorkor and severe protein malnutrition, poor sanitation, inadequate cleanliness, and living in dire poverty. Once again Phaer lists many herbal remedies for canker.

Phaer informs his reader that *Many diseases happê in the eares, as payne, apostumes, swellings, tynclyng and sound in the heed, stoppyng of the organes of hearyng: Water, wormes & other infortunes gottê into the eares. wherof some of them are daungerous and harde to be cured, some other expelled of nature without medicyne.*

For otalgia Phaer recommends the *application of wormes that growe in the bark of trees or in other stumpes in the ground and wyll tourne rounde lyke a pease. Take of them a good quantytye and seeth them in oyle in the rynde of a pomegranade on the hote ymbres that it brenne not, and after that strayne it and put into the eares a droppe or two luke warme; and then lette hym lye upon the other eare and reste. Ye maye gyve thys to all ages, but in a chylde ye must put a very lytle quantitie.* Alternatives include *adder skin and honey.*

Phaer includes *Quinseye* in his book, which he also calls *sangina* and tells us that it is *perylous and it might kill the child by strangulation.* One of the treatments he suggests in *thys outragious syckenes* is a dead bird mixed with honey. If you cannot obtain a dead bird, you can substitute a turd (*chylde's dunge to the chylde, and of a man to a man*) with the honey. An alternative suggestion is the Jew's Ear Fungus (*Auricularia auricula-judae*) *the musherim that groweth upon an elder tree, called in Englysshe Jewes eares.* This use of fungus is more likely to be empirical trial and error than some of the claims of anticipation of mould-based antibiotics.^{lii}



Fig. 9. The tower is the only part of the original Cilgerran parish church to survive the Victorian "restoration." Like so many other churches in the United Kingdom, the zeal of the restorers fell little short of vandalism. The entire nave was pulled down and rebuilt. With the nave walls, many old memorial tablets including the one to Thomas Phaer were devastated. What is worse is that no records of these Memorials were kept.



Fig. 10. Phaer's home today. It was used by Cromwell's forces during the Civil War and stood derelict until 2015. Then it was extensively renovated and is now used as holiday homes

Phaer's Death

It would appear that Phaer was accident prone. On the 4th May 1556, when he had completed translation of the fifth book of the *Aeneid*, he noted that he had escaped some accident. What he says is *post periculum eius karmadini*. Translation of this last word had me bewildered, until it became apparent he was working as a

Customs Official at this time in Carmarthen. There was around this time a dispute with some merchants about the cargo of a Breton ship^{liii}, so there was probably an altercation on this occasion.

Then on 3rd April 1560, he injured his right hand in some way and had to continue writing with his left. On the day before his death, Thomas Phaer translated verse 467 of the tenth book (of the *Aeneid*) and sent it to his literary executor and intimate friend, William Wightman (the *Receyvour* of South Wales) with the added pessimistic note after his name, *Thomas Phaer, olim tuus nunc dei (Thomas Phaer, formerly yours, now God's)*. Wightman wrote in his preface to the 1562 edition of the *Aeneid*: *it should appeare by the two verses in the ende of this booke by hym translated upon his death bed the very day before he dyed, which he sent to me subscribed by his left hand (the use of the right hand beyng taken away, through the hurte whereof he*

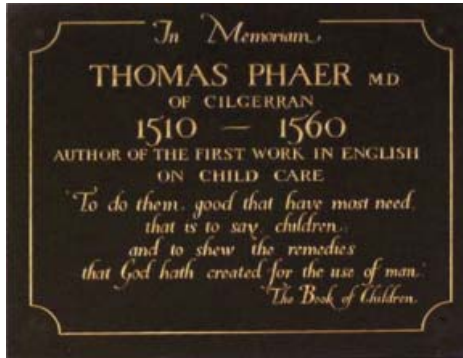


Fig. 11. On 16th March 1986 (Mothering Sunday), this memorial tablet made of Welsh slate with Welsh gold lettering was unveiled in Cilgerran church to replace the original marble and brass commemoration, which was destroyed along with most of the old church in the late 19th century.



Fig. 12. Cilgerran Castle as it looks today. It probably did not look a lot different when Thomas Phaer was made Steward of the Lordship of Cilgerran and Constable of Cilgerran Castle. This was an honorary title and the castle went into ruin as early as 1387.

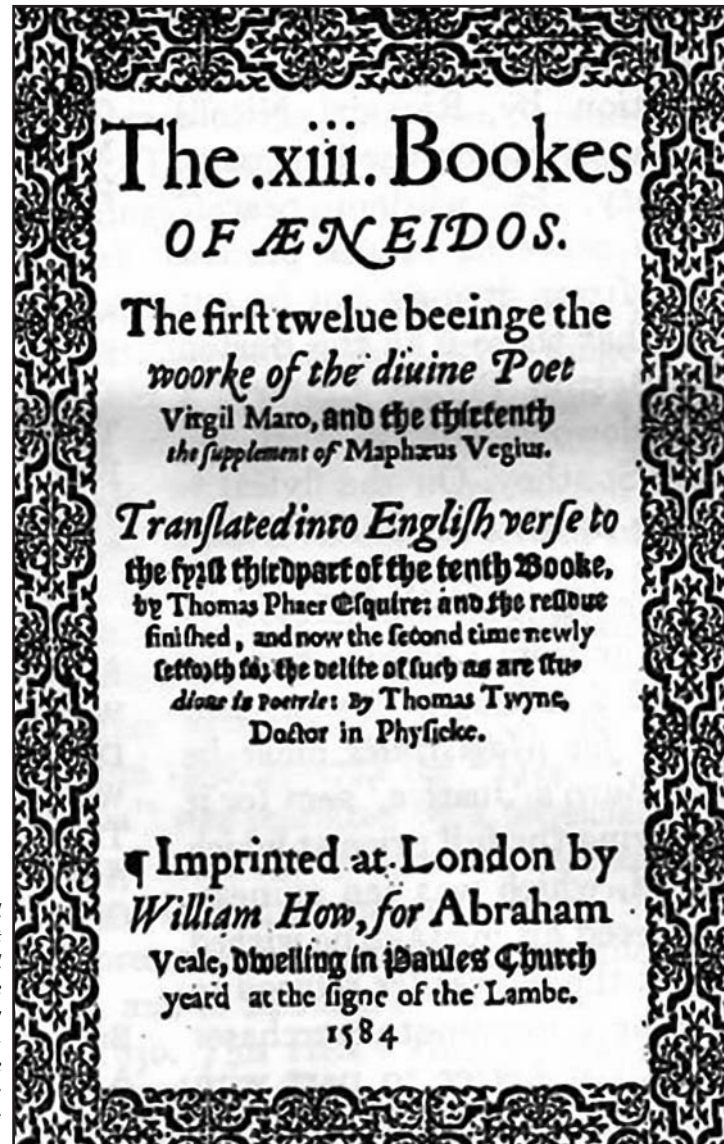


Fig 13. Thomas Phaer was a polymath and his main interest in life during his last years was the translation of Virgil's Aeneid from the original Latin verse. Sadly he never quite finished it before his untimely death in 1560, but he had almost completed the tenth (of thirteen) sections. He asked his friend and colleague, Dr Thomas Twyne to complete the opus and this was realised and first published in 1573.

dyed) that he had gone so much further than those verses be in Virgilles tenth booke.

The last two Virgilian lines which Phaer translated were ironic and were respectfully included by Twyne, when he later completed the epic in 1562. At the end of this first complete edition appear the lines:

*Ech mans day stands prefixt, time
short and swift with ceaseless bretch
Is lotted all mankind, but by their
deeds their fame to stretch,
That privilege vertue gives.^{liv}*

Phaer died on 12th August 1560 at Cilgerran. I had thought that it might have been from a stroke, which had taken away the use of his dominant hand a few months preceding his demise. Chaloner's epitaph however suggests to Bowers that *the hurte whereof he dyed* most likely involved a fall from a horse.^{lv} Sir Frederic Still translated Chaloner thus:

*Phaer, right worthy he of long drawn
years
Alas hath perished by untimely fate:
The sword of Jove – and who shall
'scape his doom?
His blood hath spilt, hard fault of
luckless gait.^{lvi}*

Another epitaph was written in 1563 by Barnaby Googe.^{lvii} Sir Frederic considers it crude to the last degree and it will not be reproduced here.

In accordance with his will, (which interestingly has come down to us and is still to be found in a paper presented to the Shakespeare Society of London in 1849^{lviii}) he was interred at the parish church of Cilgerran. He had also asked in his will for *a marble stone, with suche Scripture thereupon, graven in brasse, as shall be devised by my frynd Mt George fferers*. Sadly nothing now remains of this memorial, or indeed the nave of the parish church which *was ruthlessly destroyed in 1836, together with a large number of memorial tablets on its walls*.^{lix} This vandalism of churches was common in Victorian Britain^{lx} until two great artists, Ruskin and William Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877 to stem the tide.^{lxi} They were not in time to save Cilgerran and the only part of the original mediaeval church of

St Llawddog's to survive the so-called "restoration" was the tower. No record was kept of the memorials devastated, but a replacement memorial was eventually installed in the church on 16th March 1986. This was mainly owing to the work of Dr John Cule, one of Phaer's biographers.

The Renaissance Polymath

Thomas Phaer was a remarkable man. He devoted his whole life to service. Not only was he a physician; he was also the Queen's solicitor for the area in which he lived. He was the Constable of Cilgerran Castle, Steward and Forester of the Lordship of Cilgerran and also served for more than four terms as a Member of Parliament in Westminster. He even grudgingly served the Crown as a Customs and Excise Official.

He was dubbed the Father of English Paediatrics by a paediatrician early in the twentieth century, but before this time was better known for his translation of Virgil's epic poem, the *Aeneid*. He was described in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1909) as lawyer, physician and translator.^{lii} Even at the time of going to print, Google and Wikipedia describe him as lawyer, paediatrician and author.

He worked and lived in rural Wales and two twentieth century historians, Bowers and Nutton question this remote location. Nutton asks where was he able to put his ideas into practice?^{liii} As a former GP myself in a rural area, I cannot see he would have had many problems in this respect.

In addition, Bowers suggests that most authoritative physicians lived either in London or in one of the University towns.^{liiii} With respect to scholarship, too, he would be able to equate this with a rustic existence.

The distinguished mathematician, Robert Recorde (1510–1558) also lived in Pembrokeshire as a neighbour and was Phaer's almost exact contemporary. Recorde was also a physician, but it was he who introduced the equals (=) sign into mathematics.^{liv} He also popularised the + and – signs in Britain and wrote *The urinal of physick* a medical textbook, which went into many editions.^{lv} He too wrote in vernacular English and said that it was

written to all men in common, that they may learne to have some knowledge in their own urines, and thereby be the better able to instruct the Physition, in this thing at the least. It would seem he was a kindred spirit to his neighbour. Sadly he died a bankrupt in the King's Bench Prison in Southwark.

Phaer, it would seem, had mixed feelings about his domicile. He almost certainly lived in Wales because his wife was a wealthy Welsh heiress and was the first recorded landowner of Fforest, one of the great houses of that area,^{lxvi} which is in an idyllic part of Pembrokeshire quite close to the River Teifi. One gets the impression from most of his writing that he is most contented, but he does however describe the nearby Cardigan coast as *all full of rockes and daungiers and all very bare contrey and mountayns*.^{lxvii} The remains of Phaer's original homestead remained derelict and semi-ruined and a new working farmhouse was built nearby in the 19th century. Then happily in 2015, it was extensively renovated as holiday accomodation (Ty Fforest). The old house was reputedly used by Parliamentary troops during the Civil War.^{lxviii}

By no stretch of the imagination can Phaer be rated as a great physician. There is no remaining evidence to show that he ever did any original work (on poisons). In much of his writing, he does not even share with his readers the benefit of his own experience of practice as a country doctor. He was however doubtless a man of vision and integrity. He had a mission in life to rid the contemporary professional worlds in which he lived of mystery and secrecy, to get rid of the humbug and make both medicine and to some extent law accessible to the common literate Englishman. Only a passionate classicist would have undertaken a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, but despite this obvious love of Latin and the classics, I think it fair to say he was obsessed with glorifying the English language and bringing it into the academic arena of the blossoming Northern Renaissance. He has even been called a linguistic nationalist.^{lxviii}

He is now best known for his *Boke of Chyldren* and I shall end with the final lines of his 1544 boke.

These shal be suffycient to declare at this tyme in this litle treatise of the cure of chyldren, which if I may knowe to be thankfully receyved, I wil by Gods grace, supplye more hereafter. Neyther desyre I any lenger to lyve then I wil employe my studyes to the honoure of God and profyt of the weale publike. Thus endeth The booke of childerne, composed by Thomas Phayer, studiouse in medicine, and hereafter begynneth

The Regiment of Lyfe, translated by the same Thomas out of Frenche into Englysshe newly perused, collected and enlarged.

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