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The strange disappearances of James Lind

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DECLARATIONS It is customary, when discussing Lind's *Treatise on the scurvy*¹ and the Admiralty order for the issue of lemon juice, to remark on the 42-year gap between the publication of the book and that of the order. Many reasons have been put forward: Lind's own inconclusiveness about the nature of the effect of lemon juice on scurvy; the fact that he dedicated the book to Lord Anson, who by that time had little influence as a patron; or simply the slow grinding of the mills of Admiralty bureaucracy.

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As remarkable, perhaps, is the disappearance from the written record of Lind's influence. After the second edition of Thomas Trotter's *Observations on the scurvy* in 1792,² there appears to be a gap in citations until Sir John Simon published *English sanitary institutions* in 1890,³ and then the first issue of the *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* (1915), which included HD Rolleston's *James Lind, pioneer of medical hygiene*.⁴ The James Lind Library's bibliography of commentaries on Lind cites four further articles before the bicentenary of the treatise, three of them published in the *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service*. The other is the first biography of Lind, published by LH Roddis in 1950.⁵

However, Lind's work did make a brief appearance in fiction in the 1920s. Dorothy L Sayers, in *'The vindictive story of the footsteps that ran'*,⁶ makes (rarely for her) a straightforward error of fact when she has Dr Hartmann, in the story, assign Lind's research to 1757, actually the date of the *Treatise's* second edition. Another error, perhaps more excusable in someone with no medical training, is that Dr Hartmann appears to be inducing scurvy in rats. As rats can synthesise their own vitamin C, this is unlikely to have been possible by normal dietary means: the doctor would have done better to use guinea-pigs.

Sayers' story is set in 1921, but was published in 1928, a year after the appearance in the *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* of Stockman's article, *James Lind and scurvy*,⁷ and the award of a PhD to Albert Szent-Györgyi for his work at Cambridge University in isolating vitamin C: perhaps a coincidence, although it is not unlikely that Sayers would have heard of the latter, given the circles in which she moved.

The bicentenary year of the *Treatise* produced, not unnaturally, a new edition,⁸ two bicentennial dinners, and seven further citations, including another from the *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service*.⁹ Since then there has been a steady flow of papers on Lind or aspects of his work, including one by AP Meiklejohn entitled *The curious obscurity of Dr James Lind*,¹⁰ which part-inspired this paper. There was another surge in interest for the *Treatise's* 250th anniversary: 2002–2003 produced six citations, and two books intended for a less-scientific audience: David Harvie's *Limeys*¹¹ and Stephen Bown's *Scurvy*.¹² Work still continues, not least through the James Lind Library.

Thus far for Lind's work; but 1953 generated, retrospectively as it were, another disappearance: that of Lind himself. He died in Gosport on 18 July 1794, and LH Roddis states that he 'was buried in St Mary's Parish Church, Gosport, Hampshire'.⁵ As Gosport's Parish Church is Holy Trinity, one might suspect that St Mary's, Alverstoke, was intended; but Surgeon Lt Cdr Glass, in his article of 1949, says with certainty that 'His remains are in a vault under an old Norman Fount [i.e. font] at St. Mary's Parish Church in the grounds of Portchester Castle',¹³ and quotes a record of the burial from the Parish Register. There is indeed a memorial to James Lind and to his wife Isabel Dickie inside the church: but the vault, when opened - whether in

where it was first published 1830 or 1900 or both is uncertain - revealed no trace of the coffins. A single letter from the Commander-in-Chief at the Royal Hospital Haslar, who began the search for Lind's final resting place early in 1953, says 'churchyard' rather than church,¹⁴ but the vault seems on all other occasions to have been assumed as the original burial place.

From contemporary correspondence still on file we know that 'the Vicar of Portchester had it by hearsay from his predecessor that an old lady organist told him that Lind's body had been disinterred from the Portchester vault about 20 years after the burial, and removed to the Isle of Wight'.¹⁵ James Lind's son John had moved to Ryde, and is buried in Holy Trinity Church there: but there are no other Lind coffins in the church except for those of John's wife and two of his daughters. The Commander-in-Chief then advertised in the local papers, the *Evening News*^{16,17} and the *Hampshire Telegraph*. No definite result emerged from this that did not contradict the story already known: but by 10 May 1953, the *Sunday Dispatch* carried the headline 'Body vanished fifty years ago - hospital advertises for it'.¹⁸ The article continues 'Search is going on all over the country for the body of the great naval surgeon, James Lind, which was buried in St Mary's Church, Portchester, Hampshire, in 1794 but had disappeared - with its coffin - when the vault was opened 50 years ago.' After some discussion of Lind and his work the article concludes on a dramatic note: 'Some old inhabitants of Portchester say 'It is possible body-snatchers took it. Those were queer days. Strange things happened.''

There are no contemporary reports of any such theft, and in 1953 neither the Home Office, the Public Record Office or the Diocesan Records had any record of the disinterment or removal of the body (Institute of Naval Medicine JL/f6). On 18 September 1966 (near the 250th anniversary of Lind's birth on 4 October), there was a service of commemoration of his life and work at St Luke's Chapel, Haslar, which included the unveiling of a memorial plaque. Report of this reached the *Daily Telegraph*, which, referencing Meiklejohn's article,¹⁰ commented: 'Lind kept his 'obscurity' even after his death. A memorial tablet in Portchester Parish Church says he is buried there. The tomb is empty'.¹⁸

After the commemorative service the matter rested for forty years or so, until Mr Iain Mackenzie, of the Admiralty Library at the Naval Historical Branch, visiting Portchester castle one day, felt the need for a cigarette. To light up he sheltered in the west bastion of the Roman fort's south gate, and, looking down, saw the words James Lind MD engraved on the slab where he stood. Later in the year I found the grave with my husband's help, and some while ago took Linda Peters - a descendant of Lind¹⁹ - to see it. To my deep embarrassment I couldn't find it.

That particular year must have been a particularly good one for shrub growth, and when Linda Peters went again on her own, she not only succeeded in finding the gravestone but was able to cut back the undergrowth and clean it. Although it is possible that the stone was moved from elsewhere, I like to think that James Lind is buried there, as close to the sea as he could get. One further mystery, however, remains: why, when he died at Gosport, was he taken all the way to Portchester for burial? Perhaps he made the request in his will.

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