

West of England Medical Journal

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Dr. William Cadogan of Bristol (1711-1797):

Father of infant care in Britain*

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INTRODUCTION

Forty nine years ago in 1964 I came across a pamphlet in the medical library in Bristol by William Cadogan with the title: "An essay upon the nursing and management of children from their birth to three years of age" (1), (Fig 1).

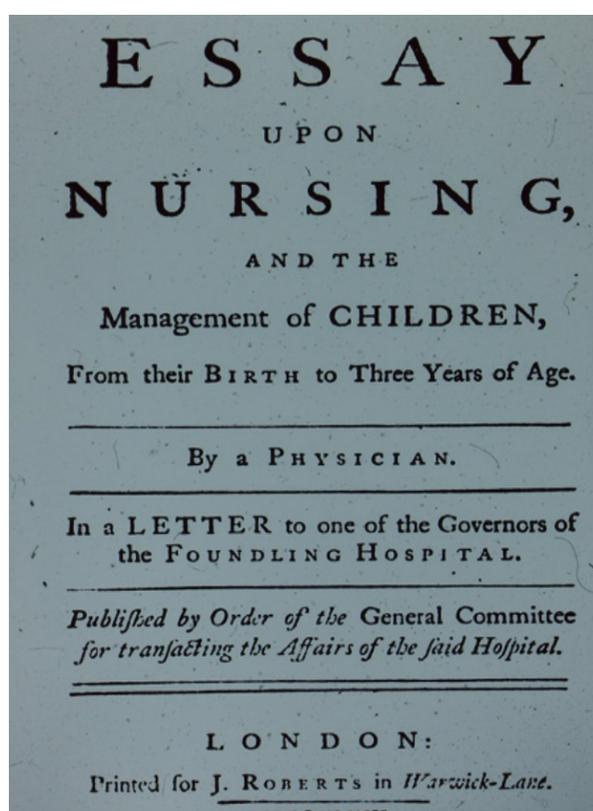


Figure 1: Dr. William Cadogan's pamphlet prepared at the request of the Governor's of the Foundling Hospital, London, 1748.

It impressed me so much that I asked my secretary to make a typed copy, for, of course, at that time there were no photocopying facilities. Six years later, in 1969, John Thearle, who had come from Australia to work with me, gave me a small book as a Christmas present with the title 'The Father of Infant Care: the life of William Cadogan 1711-1797' (2). The authors were Mowenna and John Rendle-Short, whose father Arthur Rendle-Short, had been Professor of Surgery in Bristol. John Rendle-Short was Professor of Paediatrics in John Thearle's

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home city of Brisbane. In 1957 he had based his Cambridge MD on the career of William Cadogan and had subsequently published a number of essays on his life and achievements (3,4). I am indebted to him and his sister, as well as others(5,6), for much of my knowledge of Cadogan.

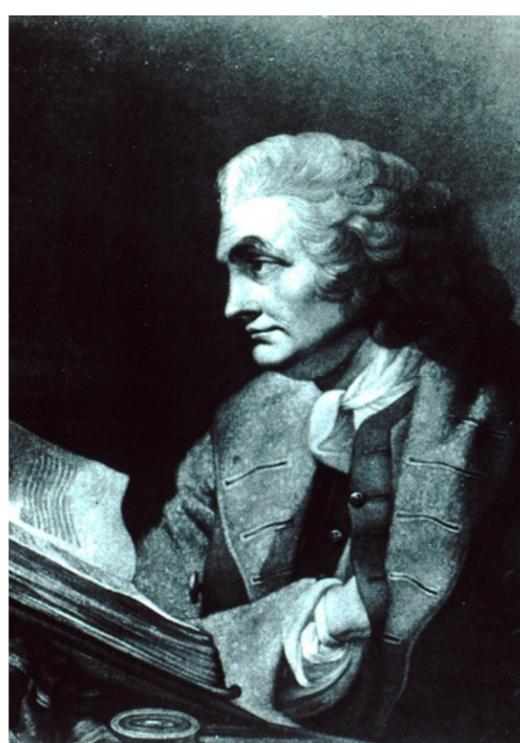
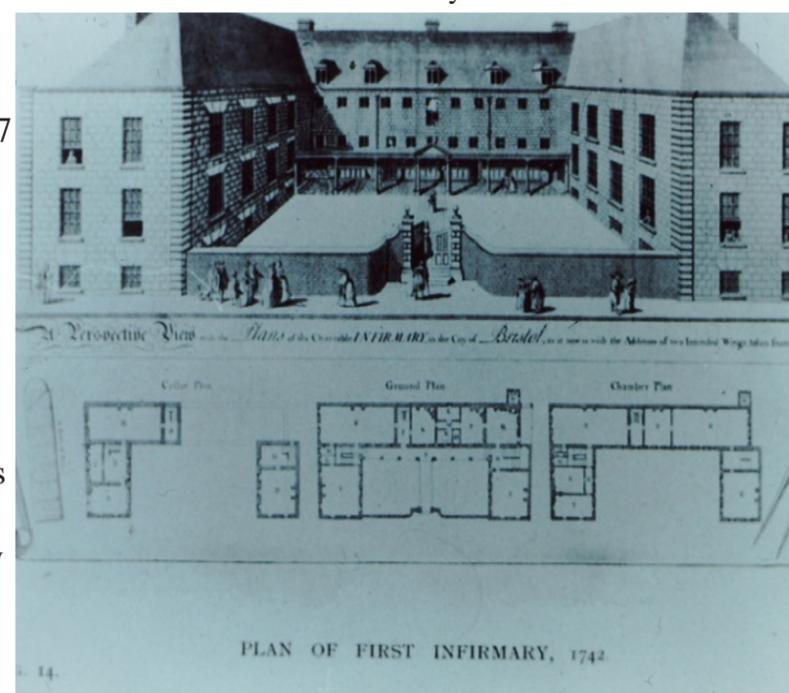


Figure 2: Dr. William Cadogan, 1769.

William (Fig 2) was the son of Roger Cadogan of Usk in the County of Monmouth. It is likely that he was born in Cowbridge just outside Cardiff and received his early education in the grammar school there. In 1727 at the age of 16 he studied medicine as a servitor at Oriel College, Oxford, matriculating in 1732. He then travelled to Leyden in Holland to study under the famous Professor Hermann Boerhaave. In 1737 he graduated MD at the age of 25, the title of his thesis being 'De nutritione, incremento, et decremento corporis'. Following this we have no knowledge of his whereabouts or activities for the next ten years. However, it is possible that he was practicing in Bristol for a brief entry in Farley's Bristol Journal in the spring of 1747 described him as an 'eminent professor of physic in this city'.

Bristol was at that time, after London, the busiest port in the country with an extensive trade with Africa, America and the West Indies. One of the West Indies colonized by the British in the 17th century was Antigua. From there a ship arrived in Bristol one day carrying an attractive and wealthy young heiress, Frances Cochran. She was accompanied by her elder brother. We don't know when she married William Cadogan but in May 1747 she gave birth to a daughter who was named after her mother. Frances Cadogan's late father, Archibald Cochran, who had died in 1736, had been a sugar planter in Antigua, though he also had a home, Cheshunt, in Hertfordshire, England. In his Will he left Frances £2,000 and, on her marriage day, a gift of 50,000 lbs of sugar! As already stated, we do not know when William and Frances married. Perhaps they had met in Bristol or possibly William had been out in Antigua during those missing ten years, perhaps as an army doctor. What we do know is that from that time, Cadogan's career took off. In December, 1747, he was appointed one of the four consultant physicians to the Bristol Infirmary (Fig 3) which had opened its doors a few years earlier(7) and he and Frances set up home on the east side of the very fashionable Queen's Square in Bristol.

Figure 3:
The Bristol Infirmary in 1742



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Fig 4



Figure 4:
The Foundling Hospital, London, in 1749

But now I must digress. In 1739, a benevolent and philanthropic retired sea captain, Thomas Coram, had succeeded in opening the first Foundling Hospital in Britain(8,9). It was situated in an area of London still known as Coram Fields (Fig 4), across the road from the now famous Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children. It had taken Captain Coram seventeen years to raise the necessary support and funds to build the



Figure 5: Captain Thomas Coram (1668-1751), painted by William Hogarth (1697-1764)

hospital. One of his most distinguished contributors had been George Frederick Handel, who gave all the royalties from the Messiah to the hospital. He organised a performance annually throughout the late 1740s which raised £7,000. He also left the original musical score to the Foundling Hospital in his Will. Many artists also supported the institution. First among them was William Hogarth who painted this magnificent portrait of Captain Coram (Fig 5) and presented it to the Foundling Hospital in 1740(10). It still hangs in Coram House today. Many of Hogarth's colleagues, including Reynolds, Ramsey, Wilson and Gainsborough, followed suit and soon all these painters took to dining together once a year at the Turks Head Tavern in Gerard Street to admire each other's contributions. Once the hospital had opened many of these pictures were hung on its walls, creating the first picture gallery in London to which the famous flocked to visit. Twenty-five or so years later in 1768 this convivial group of artists themselves became an institution, known as the Royal Academy of Arts. Sir Joshua Reynolds, knighted by King George III in honour of the occasion, was the Academy's first President.

Meantime to return to William Cadogan, it was in 1748 that, at the request of the Governors of the

Foundling Hospital, he wrote his 'Essay upon Nursing and the Management of Children from Birth to Three Years of Age'. This pamphlet was an immediate success, and went through many editions in his lifetime, bringing Cadogan international distinction and fame. The honest commonsense of his advice did much to correct the appalling ignorance that existed both in this country and abroad at that time, particularly amongst the wealthy whose infants were swaddled, and either farmed out to wet-nurses or fed on gruel or pap from birth. Let me give you a short extract:

'...the treatment of children in general is wrong, unreasonable, and unnatural ... let anyone, who would be fully convinced of this matter, look over the Bills of Mortality; there he may observe that almost half the number of those who fill up that black list, die under five years of age ... Ought it not therefore to be the care of every nurse and every parent, not only to protect their nurselings from injury, but to be well assured that their own officious services be not the greatest the helpless creatures can suffer? ... The mother who has only a few rags to cover her child loosely, and little more than her own breast to feed it, sees it healthy and strong, and very soon able to shift for itself; while the puny infant, the heir and hope of a rich family, lies languishing under a load of finery that overpowers his limbs, abhorring and rejecting the dainties he is crammed with, till he dies a victim to the mistaken care and tenderness of his fond mother ... children in general are over-clothed ... The truth is, a newborn child cannot well be too cool and loose in its dress; ... But, besides the mischief arising from the weight and heat of these swaddling-cloaths, they are put on so tight, and the child is so cramped by them, that its bowels have not room, nor the limbs any liberty, to act and exert themselves in the free easy manner they ought ... This is a very hurtful circumstance; for limbs that are not used will never be strong, and such tender bodies cannot bear much pressure: the circulation restrained by the compression of any one part, just produce unnatural swellings in some other ...'



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Figure 6: Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753).
[Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.]

Needless to say, Cadogan was also a passionate exponent of breast feeding. Incidentally, Sir Hans Sloane (Fig 6), who was a physician to the Foundling Hospital was able to show from the hospital statistics that the mortality among inmates was nearly three times higher if dry-nursed rather than wet-nursed [48 v 19%](9). This was one of the first, if not the first use of statistics to prove a point in medicine.

Where did Cadogan get his, for those times, revolutionary ideas? One suspects that they originated in Antigua where the slave women reared their infants in a natural and healthy way, unprejudiced by the strange practices of European civilization; or maybe he learnt from his wife Frances as she brought up their own daughter, who, we know was fed from the breast.

In 1749 Cadogan was elected a Governor of the Foundling Hospital. His wife Frances had died earlier that year and in 1752 he resigned his post in Bristol and moved to Red Lion Square in London. He was 41. His success there was immediate. Elected F.R.S. in 1752, he obtained MD degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge Universities in 1755 and in 1758 was elected a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians.

He was Censor to the College on four occasions and gave the Harveian oration twice, first in 1764 and then in 1792 at the age of 81. He also became a fellow of the Royal Society. Surprisingly, Munk's Roll(5) of the Royal College of Physicians claim Cadogan for London, making no mention of his seminal work in Bristol.

In 1761 Cadogan was appointed physician to the army and the following year served with it for several months in Portugal in the 'war of Jenkins ear' with Spain before being invalided home.

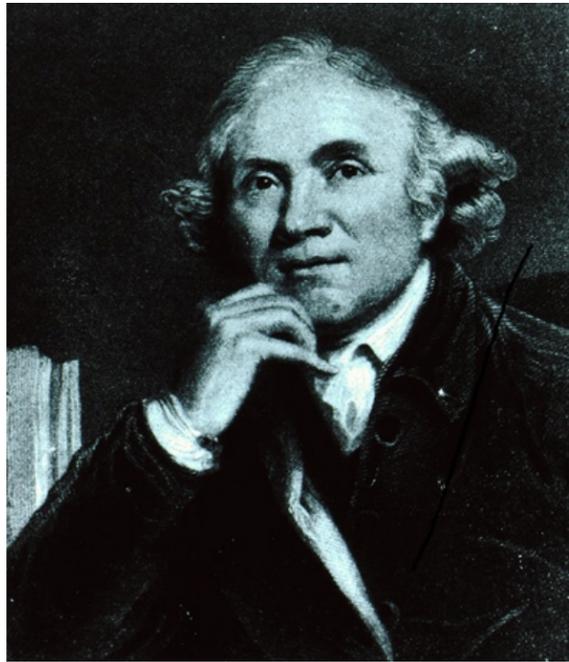


Figure 7:
Dr. John Hunter (1728-1793).

It is of interest that John Hunter (Fig 7) was on that same expedition, and while in Portugal made the observation that sea shell fossils might be found in rocks high in the mountains. From this he deduced that the world must be at least 100,000 years old, rather than the 4½ thousand years claimed by biblical theologians. However, Hunter's friends persuaded him not to publish this hypothesis, both for the sake of his own reputation as well as for his safety. A hundred years would pass before Charles Darwin presented similar ideas to the world.

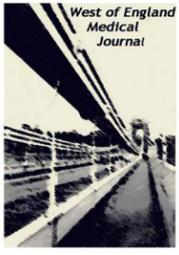
In 1771, Cadogan produced his second important work, 'A Dissertation on the Gout ...'(12). This disease he blamed on indolence, intemperance and vexation, and advocated for its treatment, activity, temperance and peace of mind. In this essay he did not spare his colleagues, commenting on the 'precarious skill of prescribing doctors' and the 'ignorant but enterprising and influential quacks'.

The book brought a storm of abuse about his head to which he remained indifferent, confident in the soundness of his assertions. However, while Cadogan may have felt it his duty to teach temperance in eating and drinking, he may not have always practised what he preached as the following anecdote from the Quarterly Journal of Science, Literature and Arts in 1828 suggests:

'When dining one day at a College dinner, after discoursing most eloquently and forcibly on abstinence and temperance – and particularly against pie-crust and pastry – Cadogan is reported to have addressed a brother MD in the following terms: 'Pray, Doctor, is that a pigeon-pie near you?' Yes, sir'. 'Then I'll thank you to send me the hind quarters of two pigeons, some fat of the beef steak, a good portion of the pudding crust, and as much gravy as you can spare!'

Cadogan has been described as a man of pleasing manners and good taste. By the 1770's he was one of London's leading physicians, counting among his friends many famous contemporaries, men such as Samuel Johnson, David Garrick and Joshua Reynolds. In 1760 he purchased land in Fulham on the south bank of the Thames from the Bishop of London and built himself a home which in time developed into Hurlingham House. It is now, with extensions, the famous Hurlingham Club.

Ten years after Frances' death, William married a Mrs. Spencer in 1759, and after her decease, a third wife, Mrs. Groen, in 1772. But there were no further children to these later marriages. In 1797 William Cadogan died at the grand age of 86 and was buried in Fulham churchyard. So ended the life of one of the most distinguished physicians of his age, the father of infant care in this country, and, in my view, one of the two most distinguished doctors ever to have been associated with the City of Bristol. If Cadogan was here today, he would surely be proud to know that his image adorns the logo of the British Society for the History of Paediatrics and Child Health and that each year a prize is awarded for paediatric medical history in his name.



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