

# Change and Continuity in the Treatment of Headache in English Domestic Medicine Literature, 1770-1880

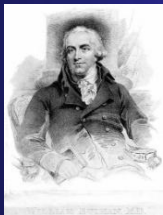


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## Introduction

Domestic medicine is becoming an increasingly explored area in the history of medicine. However, headache remains a neglected area, perhaps due to its non-fatal nature.<sup>1</sup> Despite a lack of attention in secondary literature, headache was a painful and miserable experience for many and similar to other areas of domestic medicine the remedies were subject to modification over this period due to changes in the understanding of the pathology of the headache, the rise of patent medicines and the druggist, and wider reform of the medical profession which brought widespread condemnation of unlicensed medical practitioners and their wares.

The period chosen reflects the dawn of a new era of domestic medicine, in which physicians challenged convention and published medical manuals for the lay public to use themselves at home.



### William Buchan in 1821

Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* is perhaps one of the best known published domestic medicine works and was published in over 140 editions by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

### 18<sup>th</sup> Century Recipe Book

Recipe books frequently contain both medical and culinary recipes, as well as advice on animal husbandry.

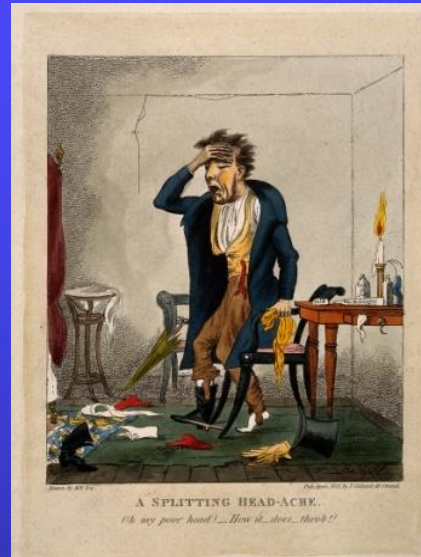


## Main Research Aims

- What was the **basis of prescription** for headache in this period? What changed and what remained unchanged? What factors drove any changes?
- How did the **medical marketplace** impact upon domestic medicine and how did this change with the professionalization of medicine?
- To what extent did the rise of the **druggist** influence headache remedies?
- How was **authority** exerted in the texts and to what extent does profession or class impact upon the inclusion of a remedy in a manuscript or manual?
- What **language** does the author employ in order to persuade the reader to utilise the remedy?
- To what extent is there evidence of **intertextuality** between sources?



A man suffering from headache in the form of devils, 1835. The unpleasant nature of the headache was frequently depicted using devils. This emphasised the pain, pressure, and disabling nature of the ailment. The focus of the headache around the head, the locus of thinking and being, hints at a disruption of the very nature of one's self.



## Methodological Approaches

The main sources include local and national **archival material** consisting of recipe books, commonplace books, receipt books, diaries and correspondence in order to explore the available remedies for headache and the attitudes surrounding headache. **Published domestic medicine manuals**, such as those of Buchan and Gunn, allow exploration of popular medical opinion of this period.

It is hoped that a representative sample of class and gender can be obtained, although there is likely to be a focus on the literate classes. Sources with a clear provenance will assist in determining derivation of headache remedies and their context. Usage is assessed by looking at domestic medicine manuals with wide distribution and multiple editions, and using the annotations in both manuscript and published sources.

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century home medicine chest, for use by an apothecary.

The rise of the druggist meant that many medicines were chemically based and therefore could not be prepared in the home, unlike the traditional herbal remedies.



## Preliminary Results

Analysis of domestic medicine texts has so far revealed elements of change and continuity throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Causation of headache as an accumulation of waste products continues through these texts, although there is a much heavier stress upon the nervous origin of the headache in late 19<sup>th</sup> century works, reflecting the increasing research and understanding of nervous disease. Certain elements of treatment remained constant, in particular the attention paid to the environment of the patient, with reference to the non-naturals (diet, exercise, evacuations, air, sleep, and the passions). However, the most striking change is the shift from emphasis on herbal-based remedies to more chemically-based remedies and proprietary medicines. Herbal preparations are still present in later texts, particularly valerian and mustard seed, but they do not constitute the majority of treatments. The development of the commercial drug market and the rise of the druggist signalled the gradual erosion, but not total elimination, of traditional kitchen medicine.<sup>3</sup>

References: <sup>1</sup> Examples include, Porter, R. (ed.) *The Popularization of Medicine 1650-1850*, London: Routledge, 1992; Jenner, M. Wallis, P. (eds.), *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies, c. 1450-1850*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; Leong, E. "Making Medicines in the Early Modern Household", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82, 1, 2008, pp. 145-168; <sup>2</sup> Rosenberg, C. Medical text and social context: Explaining William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 57:1 (1983), p. 22-42; <sup>3</sup> Curth, L.H. *From Physick to Pharmacology: Five Hundred Years of British Drug Retailing*, Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006, p. 46. Images reproduced courtesy of the Wellcome Trust. Clockwise: William Buchan by T. Kinnersley, London 1821; Collection of Cookery and Medical Recipes, 1748-1809, Sheldon Family; A man suffering from headache in the form of devils by G. Cruikshank, 1835; Mahogany medicine chest, maker unknown, 19<sup>th</sup> century; A man with an excruciating headache by H.C., 1827.