
FAMOUS FIGURES (1)

A Military Scourge Cured: James Lind

There are few things more important for the military than proper diet. James Lind, who discovered the cause of scurvy, was a man of true greatness. Born in Edinburgh, apprenticed to a doctor there at the age of 15, he entered the Royal Navy as a surgeon's mate in 1739. This was the same year as Smollett joined; Smollett's novel, *Roderick Random*, described the horrors of naval medicine of the times.

By 1747 Lind was surgeon of HMS *Salisbury*, a 60-gun ship, on which he made his epoch-making experiment on scurvy. He had noticed that 'scurvy raged with great violence in some journeys, not at all in others'. The first observation told of the size of the problem, the second that scurvy was preventable. He 'ordered 12 sailors, divided in pairs, to take either cider, elixir vitriol, vinegar, sea-water, an electuary (made of garlic, mustard seed, radishes, Balsom of Peru, and gum myrrh) - and oranges and lemons. He found that 'the most sudden and visible good effects were perceived from the use of oranges and lemons'. Inevitably, some senior officers pooh-pooed his finding. But this, the very

first controlled dietary clinical trial, was later accepted.

In 1748 he took his MD at Edinburgh, his dissertation being *De Morbis Veneris Localibus*. His *Dissertation on Fevers and Infections*, published in 1761, after he had left the Service, entitles him to be regarded as the 'Father of Preventive Medicine'. It begins: 'The number of seamen in time of war who die by shipwreck, capture, famine, fire or sword are but inconsiderable in respect of such as are destroyed by the ship diseases and by the usual maladies of intemperate climates'.

In 1758 Lind was appointed senior physician to Haslar Hospital, where he remained till 1783. The sudden deterioration in naval standards within a few years of his departure may seem hard to credit after a man of Lind's greatness had been in charge, but it is a sequence of events all too commonly repeated in British Military history.

James Lind is commemorated by a plaque in Edinburgh Medical School quadrangle which proclaims him as the Hippocrates of naval medicine.