WHICH MOLINS TREATED CROMWELL FOR STONE – AND DID NOT PRESCRIBE FOR PEPYS?

by

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THE story of Oliver Cromwell's treatment by "a certain Dr. Molins" was first published in English in The Times of 27 September 1929.1 Reported by the paper's Milan correspondent, who had seen an advance copy of a biography of Cromwell by Eucardio Momigliano, it said:

When suffering from an illness believed to be calculus, Cromwell, "with the advice of his physicians and surgeons," called in a certain Dr. Molins, "a celebrity of the time, although completely opposed to the present Government." The doctor's opposition and freedom of tongue were tolerated in consideration of his merits. Cromwell was cured by him, but, when it came to parting, the physician said, "Wait a moment, I have not yet finished, because you will be ill again if you do not give me leave to treat you as you have treated the whole of England - that is to say, to upset you and turn you over in your bed three times." And so he did. Cromwell laughed, and willing to remunerate him said, "Ask what you want and you shall have it." The physician replied, "I want nothing, because I have not attended you out of love, but because I could not do otherwise. The only thing I wish is to have something to drink." He was therefore taken to the cellars to taste the wines there, and drank deeply with a toast to King Charles Stuart. The servants, surprised and indignant, reported the episode to Cromwell, who said, "Let him alone. He is mad. But he has done me good, and I do not want to harm him." The day after he sent him one thousand pounds, begging him to accept them in the name of King Charles.

A week later the story was repeated in an unsigned annotation in Medical Press and Circular,2 in which the doctor was identified as James Molins,3 a prominent lithotomist who had obtained a licence from the College of Physicians and who died in 1686, having served Charles II and James II.

This identification was cited in the English translation of Momigliano's book that appeared in 1930.4 It was repeated5 in a paper on Cromwell's surgeons in the following year, and has been widely accepted.6 Moreover, Arthur Bryant7 soon equated this


1 'A friend of Cromwell', The Times, 27 September 1929, 15–16.
3 The name was spelt Molins by the family, but often (phonetically) as Mullins by others.
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"Dr. James Moleyns" with the physician said\(^8\) to have prescribed soothing draughts for Samuel Pepys in 1658, when Hollier\(^9\) removed a stone from his bladder.

In spite of its frequent and apparently authoritative repetition, this identification is impossible. It merges two different surgeons called James Molins, both well known as lithotomists, into one. The first of them obtained a licence\(^10\) from the College of Physicians in 1627 and died in 1638.\(^11\) The second, who served Charles II and James II and died in 1687,\(^12\) was a grandson of the first; he had been given doctorates at Oxford\(^13\) and Cambridge\(^14\) by royal command. Munk's *Roll* of the College of Physicians\(^15\) was the source of the error: it said the James Moleyns or Mullins who was licensed in 1627 was the one who died in 1686 (sic).

The error should not have persisted, though, because the *DNB* article on the Molins\(^16\) family, published in 1894, makes it clear that three successive generations were Surgeons for the Stone at St. Thomas's and St. Bartholomew's hospitals between 1623 and 1687: the first James, who died in 1638; his son Edward, who died in 1663;\(^17\) and Edward's son James, the one who died in 1687. It is the second of these, Edward, whose dates and record make him the most likely one to have treated Cromwell\(^18\) — though there were other surgeons in the family besides these three.

The argument for Edward Molins as the one concerned starts from the date of Cromwell's illness. It was reported by Francesco Bernardi, the Genoese Chargé d'Affaires in London and a friend of Cromwell's, in a letter dated 10 August 1656.\(^19\)


\(^10\) He was examined in Latin and approved as a Candidate on 24 September and sworn on 2 November 1627: Royal College of Physicians, *Annales 1608–1647*, pp. 168–169.

\(^11\) He died on 3 December at his house in Stoke Newington and was buried on 6 December at St. Andrew, Holborn: Guildhall MS 6673/2.

\(^12\) He died on 8 February 1686 (Old Style), aged fifty-seven, and came from a family which for many generations had produced men very eminent in the art of surgery, according to his memorial in St. Bride's, Fleet Street (burnt out in 1940): transcription by A. J. Jewers, *The monumental inscriptions and armorial bearings in the churches within the City of London*, 1910–1919, vol. 2, p. 357 (Guildhall MS. 2480/2); see also note 15 below. He was buried as “James Mullens” 11 February 1686/7: register, Guildhall MS. 6540/2.


\(^17\) Buried at St. Andrew, Holborn, on 27 October 1663: register, Guildhall MS. 6673/4.

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But it happened “in former days” (“nelli giorni addietro”); the anecdote was by way of a postscript to the current news in the letter. Bernardi said that Cromwell was severely troubled by colic and stone, but was completely relieved of his pain within an hour of taking the draught that “un certo medico Mollinis” gave him. Moreover, the prophylactic procedure – turning him upside down three times – had prevented any recurrence “a quest’hora”. There is evidence that Cromwell was “very ill of the stone” at the end of February 1656. An interval of five months suits Bernardi’s words, so that was probably the occasion. The Molins concerned, therefore, needs to be a famous urologist who was a hot-headed, outspoken Royalist and in London early in 1656.

The first James Molins began the family’s tradition of Royal service. He was probably introduced to the Court by his apprenticeship to William Clowes (1544–1604), surgeon to Queen Elizabeth; he married Aurelia, the daughter of John Florio (1553–1625), groom of the Privy Chamber, reader in Italian to Queen Anne. The queen recommended his first appointment to St. Thomas’s Hospital in 1605; he was among the surgeons listed at her funeral. The younger James, grandson of the first, was enough of a courtier to obtain the king’s support for his succession to his father’s posts at St. Thomas’s in 1663, and he was to become a surgeon to Charles II in 1681. However, there is no evidence that he was in London in February 1656, when he was only twenty-four. He did not become a Freeman of the Company of Barbers and Surgeons until 2 December 1663, just after his father’s death and his own succession at St. Thomas’s.

Edward Molins, though, was in his mid-forties in 1656 and in successful relevant practice in London. Richard Wiseman (c. 1622–1676) mentioned him seven times as a consultant, on urological problems in three instances, two of them in 1652, one being the first known case of external urethrotomy. He took apprentices in 1649, 1650, 1656, and 1659. His youngest children, daughters Frances and Mary, were baptized at St. Andrew, Holborn, in 1650 and 1654. Edward lived in Shoe Lane, where his

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19 Carlo Prayer (editor), ‘Oliviero Cromwell dalla battaglia di Worcester alla sua morte’, Atti Società Ligure Storia Patria, 1882, 16: 366–368. Momigliano was the first biographer of Cromwell to use these letters.
22 As “Thomas Mullins”: Public Record Office (PRO), LC 2/5. Each of three surgeons had four yards of black cloth.
23 Parsons, op. cit., note 21 above, p. 96.
24 Surgeon to the Household, 21 February 1680/1: PRO, LC 7/1, f.47. He was appointed Surgeon in Ordinary to James II on 1 March 1684/5: LC 3/56, p. 8.
25 Baptized on 10 March 1630/1, St. Andrew, Holborn: register, Guildhall MS. 6667/2.
26 Admissions to Freedom 1522–1664, Guildhall MS. 5265/1, f. 128.
27 About twenty-one on 5 April 1630 in his allegation for a marriage licence from the Bishop of London: Guildhall MS. 10,091/13, f. 51.
29 Barber-Surgeons’ Company, Wardens’ Accounts 1603–1659 (Guildhall MS. 5255/1) and Register of Apprentices 1657–1672 (Guildhall MS. 5266/1).
30 Frances, 21 March 1649/50; Mary, 10 July 1654: Guildhall MSS. 6667/3–4.
father had owned fifteen houses, some of which were known as Molins Rents (see map).22

It is true that Edward Molins was not Surgeon for the Stone at St. Thomas’s and Bart’s during the 1650s, but, paradoxically, that fact provides the strongest reason for thinking that he was the man who treated Cromwell. He had been given the reversion to his father’s posts at St. Thomas’s as early as 163323 and had succeeded him at both hospitals in 1638 without further formality. He was absent from the hospitals in 1656 because he had been dismissed in January 1644, by order of the House of Commons, “for that he was lately taken at Arundell Castle in Armes against the Parliament”.24 His posts were given to Thomas Hollier, who had married Edward’s niece, Lucy Knowles, five years earlier and had been performing Molins’s duties since he went to join the king’s army at York in the summer of 1642.25 So Edward Molins was indeed an active Royalist in the Civil War. He had to compound for that delinquency with a fine of £18, twice the annual value of his house in Shoe Lane.26 After the Restoration, he obtained the king’s support for his reinstatement at St. Thomas’s.27

There is also good evidence that Edward Molins was consistently hot-headed and outspoken. In spite of the efforts of the Governors to reconcile uncle and nephew,28 he sued Hollier for the salary of his posts at St. Thomas’s from 1644 to 1660.29 Twenty years earlier, he had made a complaint to the Court of Assistants of the Barber-Surgeons’ Company about the Senior Warden, Nicolas Heath, “for giving evil Words of him”, but refused to accept the result: “Edward Molins came into the Court and stood in the face of the Court with his Hatt on his head and his Armes on his side and told the Court he would doe noe obedience to the coe and swore Gods wounds he would submitt to noe man living”. He was fined 40s. for this behaviour, which he regretted a week later. His apology was accepted then, and he consented to be one of the Stewards of Anatomy. His “former misdemeanours” (and, presumably, his fine) were remitted a month later.30

It would be unwise, though, to regard the contumacious attitude of Edward Molins to his Company as final proof that he was the man who treated Cromwell, because he was not the only one, among the many surgeons of his family, who showed disrespect. Even his father, James, had been fined in 1607 for wearing falling bands with his Livery gown – though he learned his lesson, and rose to be Master in 1632. Edward’s younger brother, William,31 had slandered a junior colleague so badly in the summer

31 The will of James Molins, dated 28 November and proved (P.C.C.) 10 December 1638, detailed the houses, including the one occupied by his son Edward, which was left to him for life: PRO, PROB 11/178, f. 176.
33 St. Thomas’s Hospital, Court Minutes 1619–1677: Greater London Record Office, H1/ST/A1/5, f. 43.
34 Ibid., f. 79.
35 Note 34 above; also Edward Molins’s petition for reinstatement in 1660: PRO, SP 29/17, no. 8.
36 Calendar of the committee for compounding, 1643–1660, p. 2554.
37 Parsons, op. cit., note 21 above, p. 94. Also Court Minutes, op. cit., note 33 above, ff. 130–132.
38 Court Minutes, op. cit., note 33 above, f. 131.
39 PRO, C10/61/90.
41 Barber-Surgeons’ Company, Court Minutes 1607–1621: Guildhall MS. 5257/4, p. 13.
Part of William Morgan's map of London in 1682 (see note 32), from St. Andrew, Holborn, in the west to St. Botolph, Aldersgate, in the east. Going down Shoe Lane from Holborn, the third entry on the east is Molins Rents (60). St. Bartholomew's Hospital (318) lies to the north of Warwick Lane, in which the College of Physicians (332) was built on land bought from Thomas Hollier. Salisbury Court runs south from Fleet Street to the Thames (see note 58). (Guildhall Library, City of London.)
of 1640 that he was ordered to pay him £10 damages – and a fine of 6s.8d. to the Company. The following April,

William Molins deposited his Fine of viij. viijd; for his ill language against Adam Coppinger and depraving of the Art of Surgery And this Court in hope of his better conformity did remitt that fine to him. Alsoe upon our Mr.'s Complaint against William Molins for ill and sawcwy language to our Ma' and frequent ill behaviour at publique meetings at the Hall and the said William Molins being called into the Court he stood peromptory and gave daring speeches and told them he cared for none and the Ordinance being read this Court doth impose a Fine of 20s upon him. Alsoe the humble complaint of Richard Turner against William Molins is referred to Court.

There is no record of William Molins paying this further fine; but Richard Turner, who was the Clerk of the Company, was given 20s. “for his extraordinary paines” at the end of July.

It seems that William Molins was just as rashly outspoken as his elder brother Edward: neither was elected to the Court of Assistants of the Company. However, William is not known to have been a fervent Royalist, nor is there any record of him as a urologist. Anatomy was his special interest. His book on the anatomy of muscles, first published in 1648, was reissued (with additions by Sir Charles Scarburgh) in 1676 and 168046 – and also plagiarized by John Browne, that scoundrel surgeon at St. Thomas’s.47 William Molins was one of four surgeons who were given permission in January 1648 to make a private dissection of a malefactor’s body (procured by them) at the Hall, provided that they paid all costs and fees.48 He was very likely the “greate Chirurgion Molins” who visited John Evelyn in April 1649 to see the “Tables of Veins and Arteries” that Evelyn had obtained from Padua. Evelyn returned the visit a few days later, attending a private dissection at Molins’s house.49

There is valuable confirmation of Edward Molins’s reputation as a lithotomist, as well as of his brother’s as an anatist, in the notebooks50 of John Ward (1629–1681), Student of Christ Church and amateur physician, who became Vicar of Stratford-on-Avon in 1662. While still at Oxford, in January 1661, he recorded:

There a 2 of y² Molins in Sue Lane y² one Edward y² eldest is excelent at stone cutting and curing of fistulas in ano or Lachrymale: y² other Gill told mee is y² better Chirurgeon: hee told mee very many

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42 William Molins was born on 13 February 1616/7, according to his horoscope cast by Charles Bernard (1652–1711; Surgeon to St. Bartholomew’s Hospital): British Library (BL), Sloane MS. 1684, p. 15. He was baptized on 27 February 1616/7 and buried on 16 August 1691 at St. Andrew, Holborn: registers, Guildhall MSS. 6667/1 and 6673/6.
43 Court Minutes, op. cit., note 40 above, pp. 272, 277. This episode was wrongly attributed to Edward Molins by Sidney Young, The annals of the Barber-Surgeons of London, London, Blades, East & Blades, 1890, p. 217.
44 Court Minutes, op. cit., note 40 above, pp. 283, 285.
45 Edward was the third senior Liveryman at his death; William last appeared on the Livery list in 1652: Wardens’ Accounts 1603–1659, 1659–1674, Guildhall MSS. 5255/1–2.
48 Court Minutes, op. cit., note 40 above, p. 410.
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pretty stories of his exquisitnes in dissecting bodies wth hee saw admirably performed taking out y^s
muscles and letting y^s only hang by y^s tendons by wth they were inserted. 31

Ward’s informant, who had been working for some years as an assistant to a surgeon in Oxford, was perhaps Philip Gill, 32 who obtained his freedom of the Barber-Surgeons’ Company in 1629 and disappeared from the Livery list after 1652 (or an unknown son of Philip’s).

It is clear that the two well-established surgeons of the Molins family in 1656 were Edward and his brother William. Each had two sons who became surgeons, but none of them, nor any other of the many members of the Molins family who appear in the records of the Barber-Surgeons’ Company during the seventeenth century (twelve in all, 33 besides three Holliers) can seriously be considered as having treated Cromwell. He was surely attended by Edward Molins.

Two years later “Dr. J.M.” signed prescriptions for Pepys when he was cut for the stone by Hollier. When D’Arcy Power first named the prescriber as James “Moleyns”, it was as a famous lithotomist, possibly Hollier’s former master, who had been licensed by the College of Physicians. 34 Much later, he cited the licence as the reason why “James Moleynes” signed with initials, rather than his full name. 35 Unfortunately, he did not then correct the conflation of the first James Molins (d. 1638) with his grandson James (1631–87), although he knew by 1920 that the first James Molins was dead in 1639. 36

The younger James Molins (1631–87) is unlikely to have prescribed for Pepys. There is no evidence that he was in practice as a surgeon by 1658; he was in no sense a physician before 1681, when he was given the degree of D.M. at Oxford. 37 It is true that he lived and died in the parish of St Bride, which included Salisbury Court, the scene of Hollier’s operation on Pepys. Indeed, James Molins was living in Salisbury Court itself, almost opposite the Turners’ house, by the summer of 1671, the year of

31 Folger Shakespeare Library, MS. V.a. 291, f. 32. Printed as ‘There are two of ye Molines in London ...
32 Admissions to Freedom, op. cit., note 26 above, f. 75; Wardens’ Accounts, op. cit., note 45 above.
33 A fuller account of the family is being prepared.
34 Power (1904), op. cit., note 8 above.
35 Power (1931), op. cit., note 8 above. In fact, the use of initials by Fellows of the College started much later. The Statutes of 1647 required all physicians to sign prescriptions with their names: Sir George Clark, A history of the Royal College of Physicians, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, vol. 1, p. 416. Initials are exceptional in this collection of prescriptions (BL, Sloane MS. 1536). “J. M.” occurs after another and “Dr. D.” once (ff. 40, 55): otherwise, all the doctors (including more than a dozen Fellows of the College) are given surnames, usually without Christian name or initial.
36 Sir D’Arcy Power, ‘The Rev. John Ward and medicine’, Trans. med. Soc. Lond., 1920, 43: 253–294. Ward said that Hollier had been apprenticed to “Mr Mullins his father of Shooe Lane”, which Power interpreted as James, the father of Edward. Hollier’s freedom of the Barber-Surgeons’ Company, 9 May 1637, was indeed by service to James Molins (described as physician and surgeon): Admissions to Freedom, op. cit., note 26 above, f. 89.
37 Note 13 above. His memorial described him as “Master of Chyrurgery, and D’f of Physick”: Jewers, op. cit., note 12 above. In his will, dated 5 February and proved (P.C.C.) 7 March 1686/7, he called himself “Doctor in Physicke and Chyrurgeon in Ordinary to the Kings most Excellent Majestie”: PRO, PROB 11/386, f. 40.
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the first surviving rate-book; but he had probably only just arrived there.58

If neither James Molins prescribed for Pepys, who did? Much the most likely physician, the only one with the initials J.M. at the right time in Munk’s Roll, is John Micklethwaite (1612–82), M.D. of Padua and Oxford, who became a Fellow of the College of Physicians in 1643 and President in 1676.59 As a physician at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital since 1648, he had been a colleague of Hollier’s for ten years.60 He lived near the hospital, in the parish of St. Botolph, Aldersgate,61 quite close to Hollier’s home in Warwick Lane. There seems to be no need to look further than Sir John Micklethwaite, as he later became,62 for the author of the prescriptions signed “Dr J.M.”, intended to soothe “Mr. Pepor” or “Mr. Peaper”63 when he was undergoing lithotomy by Hollier.

SUMMARY

It has often been stated that Oliver Cromwell was treated for urinary calculus in 1656 by James Molins, who is also said to have prescribed for Samuel Pepys when he was undergoing lithotomy by Thomas Hollier in 1658. However, the first James Molins, lithotomist to St. Thomas’s and St. Bartholomew’s hospitals, died in 1638 and his grandson James (1631–1687), who held the same posts, is unlikely to have been concerned. It was almost certainly Edward Molins (1610?-1663), son and successor of the first and father of the second James, who treated Cromwell. The prescriptions for Pepys were probably written by Dr. John Micklethwaite.

58 St Bride, Watch Rate, Christmas 1670 to September 1671: Guildhall MS. 6613/1. He was added to the list as “James Mulings” and paid only for the last two quarters. In 1674, he was “Mr James Molines” in the Tithe list (MS. 9801) and in 1678 “Mr James Molins” for the Watch Rate: MS. 6613/2. His house was the fifth or ninth on the left, going down from Fleet Street; Serjeant John Turner’s was the nineteenth or fourteenth on the right.
60 Assistant Physician, 26 May 1648; Physician, 13 May 1653; he had been recommended to the hospital by the House of Commons in 1644, in place of Harvey: Norman Moore, The history of St. Bartholomew’s hospital, London, Pearson, 1918, vol. 2, pp. 499–501.
61 He was in the Ward of Aldersgate Without as early as July 1661, when he subscribed £10 for a present to the king: Guildhall MS. 1503/10, f. 3.
62 He was knighted early in September 1679, on the king’s recovery from fever at Windsor: H.M.C. 79, Lindsey, London, HMSO, 1942, p. 29.
63 Surely meaning Samuel Pepys, although the date of the operation is given as 28 (not 26) March 1658: op. cit., note 55 above, f. 63.