The Flinders family of Donington: Medical Practice and Family Life in an Eighteenth Century Fenland Town

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This year Australia celebrates the bi-centenary of its first colony. Two hundred years ago, little more was known of the country than its bare existence. Until the first years of the nineteenth century it was thought that New Holland, the name given to western Australia, and New South Wales, that is eastern Australia, were individual land masses separated by a gulf or channel. The man who finally scotched this idea was Matthew Flinders (1774-1814) in his voyages of 1801 to 1803. The first person to start active exploration in the southern land was somebody whom Matthew Flinders greatly admired and who became his close friend, George Bass (b. Aswardby, 1771). Both were Lincolnshire men and both had connections with the world of pharmacy and medicine.

Close to his fourteenth birthday George Bass was apprenticed for seven years by his widowed mother to Patrick Francis, surgeon and apothecary, who lived in Strait Bargate, Boston. As was quite usual, George did not stay his full time but was admitted on examination on 2 April 1789 to the London Company of Surgeons. Francis was a well respected man, a member of Boston town council and a churchwarden. George had had a handkerking for the sea since he was a boy, a desire which must have been reinforced by hearing about the adventures of his master's friend, Robert Rollett, who had been master sailmaker of H.M.S. Resolution on James Cook's second voyage. In July 1790, George was passed by the Surgeons' Company Court of Examiners to act as 'Surgeon 2nd. rate'. In September he joined H.M.S. Shark, and nearly four years later was posted to H.M.S. Reliance, the ship to which Matthew Flinders was also to be posted.

Matthew's home was the small fenland market town of Donington, some ten miles from Boston, where his father, another Matthew (I), (1750-1802) was an apothecary and surgeon, as his father, John Flinders (II), (1713-1776) had been before him. (Fig. 1). Donington was described by a traveller in the Gentleman's Magazine of 1774 as ill kept and dirty; less than two decades later, the writer of the entry in the Universal British Directory (c.1790) was to note the town had been 'very much improved within the last ten years'. A major fenland drainage scheme commenced in 1765 had been followed by the enclosure and drainage of the parochial fen. The new South Forty Foot Drain, stretching from Bourne to Boston, was used as a canal, and Donington had a small port for barges, by which goods are carried to and from Boston and the Washes. The construction of a firm rampart of earth... made from [Donington] to Sempringham, by which the road has been made passable in winter' had also contributed significantly to the general improvement. Most of its thousand or so inhabitants were engaged in agriculture and Donington was noted for its grazing land and for the hemp and flax grown in the vicinity, special markets and fairs being held annually. There were no resident gentry, and thus John and Matthew Flinders, with the local clergyman, the attorney and the master of Cowley's free-school (established 1726), would have formed a small elite group of professional men.

The Flinders family hailed originally from Nottinghamshire where they were farmers many of whom supplemented their income with hosiery making. So far as we know the first to migrate to Lincolnshire was a John
Flinders (I) who was born at Gedling near Nottingham in 1682 to a John and Mary (née Spawton or Sawton). He was a grazier, an occupation which could prove very profitable, and possibly there had long been a connection between the farmers of Nottinghamshire and the rich meadow lands near Boston, so suitable for fattening cattle.

When only twenty this John married Mary Obrey of the feudal village of Coberton on 26 May 1702. It is probable that the young couple did not immediately set up house in Donington as their first recorded child does not appear in the parish registers until the baptism of Mary in November 1706, and the next child not until 1713. Thereafter they were settled there as another seven children were duly registered. It is John and Mary’s son, John (II), baptised in 1713 with whom we are concerned here, as he was an apothecary and grandfather of Matthew the navigator and hydrographer.

To whom John Flinders was apprenticed, whether it was in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire or London, or Donington itself, we do not know. All we can say is that a John Lamplugh practised as an apothecary in Donington, to be followed on his early death in 1727, by another young man William Grant? John could have started with Lamplugh and then have been taken on by William Grant. On 12 October 1731 at Moulton near Spalding, John married the sixteen year old Elizabeth Hursthouse daughter of Matthew of Spalding. They had the usual large family of those days; the Donington parish registers show that at least ten children were born to them, but only two survived infancy, John (II) born 1737, and Matthew (I) 1750. Elizabeth died in January 1768 aged 53, but John (II) was not a widower for long to the distress of his son Matthew(I). In 1770 William, the son of John and Mary Flinders was baptised, to be followed by Mary (1772) and Penelope (1774).

John has left us no record of his practice but we do know a little about him. He was churchwarden in 1747 when the 14 hundredweight bell was hung, and again from 1756 to 1760. He subscribed to a number of books including that of Anthony and John Birks Arithmetical Collections and Improvements published in 1766. The Birks brothers were masters at the Free Writing School founded in Donington by Thomas Cowley, and we know from Matthew his son’s diary that they were welcome guests at his home. John Flinders was an acquaintance of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Secker. In 1763 and 1764 Flinders was able to render the clerical assistance in lending five guineas (£5 5s. Od.) from time to time to his “poor relation Zebedee Elsom” who lived in Donington.

Both of John’s sons followed in their father’s footsteps and became apothecaries and surgeons, the general practitioners of the day, for they practised medicine, surgery and pharmacy, and very often midwifery as well. We may guess that the lads received their initial training from their father, but both were to obtain further experience in London. How or where this was obtained by John(III)(1737-1810) we do not know, but with Matthew we have more information.

In the autumn of 1796, Matthew and his wife made a trip to London, and he wrote in his diary, “While in Town I took the opportunity of calling on my old Master, Mr. Grindall, whom I found in the same House, much emaciated and nearly worn out having done no Business for two years - he did not know me - indeed 27 Years is a long period.” Richard Grindall FRS was a man well known in the medical world of the metropolis. The son of Ralph Grindall of Ware, doctor of physic, he had been apprenticed to Thomas Godman, a ‘Forreign’ brother of the London Barber Surgeons’ Company for seven years in 1735. Grindall rose high in his profession becoming examiner and warden of the Surgeons’ Company (which had separated from the Barber Surgeons’ Company in 1745), and was surgeon to the London Hospital.

Whilst in London, Matthew attended the lectures on midwifery given in St. Saviour’s, Southwark by the Scotsman David Orme (MD, Edin), 1749: LRCP, 1765. The certificate that he received is still extant and reads, ‘These are to certify that Mr Matthew Flinders has diligently attended two courses of my Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery and also attended and delivered in real Labour. Witness my hand and seal at London this 16th day of June 1770. David Orme’ (Fig. 2).”

![Fig. 2 Matthew Flinders' midwifery certificate.](image)

By 1771 Matthew was back in Donington practising as an apothecary and surgeon. His brother John (III) was still practising at Spalding where his three children, Henrietta (1765), John (1767) and Matthew (1769, died in infancy) were born. Mary, his first wife had died, and on 30 September 1764 he had married Henrietta Francis Cressy at Surfleet.

His father appears to have relinquished the practice of medicine and was now farming in a small way. Matthew had bought his father’s house (Fig. 3), and as so often occurs in these family transactions, it was to lead to some acrimonious disputes in June 1766 at the end of each year he carefully cast up his total receipts and expenditures, thus ascertaining how much he had gained during that year, and compared it with previous years. Thus we can see that in 1771 (possibly not a full year) he had received £72 and some odd pence, and paid out £58 15s., leaving him with a surplus of £13. By 1773 the year of his marriage to Susanna...
the daughter of Samuel and Susanna Ward of Bolingbroke, he was making a clear £100 in a year, but new responsibilities soon cut down this increase. Nevertheless, he could write in 1775 with satisfaction, 'on casting up my accounts, I find I have gained £40 this year which is beyond expectations, and will be exceeding useful to pay part of the £80 I was oblig'd to take up. In my 5 years of Business it seems I have saved near £250 clear.'

At this time his receipts from 'Business' were around £225 a year, and it is interesting to compare with figures suggested, by Loudon, for a later period, and by Sigsworth, for country practitioners. William Elmhirst (1721-1773) of Ousleythwaite Yorkshire in the last years of his life seems to have had receipts of about £250 a year from his medical practice. Loudon has written, 'In the country it seems likely that the "moderate general practitioner" would earn between £150-£200, but as we have seen, some earned even less' in the 1820s and 1830s. Flinders' incomings were to increase over the years, but so did his outgoings; however by the mid 1790s his net income rose to some £150, and after twenty four years work he had gained a total of £2,335.

Matthew Flinders' Practice

Of all the branches of medicine in the eighteenth century that of obstetrics was held in the lowest esteem. Archibald Seeker before he entered the Church had been a doctor (MD, Leyden 1721) and Thomas Wintle wrote in a letter dated June 1798 to The Gentleman's Magazine, 'in justice to a great and venerable character, most unjustly traduced ... I do aver that Archibald Seeker never was in the midwifery line, nor ever practised that or any other branch of surgery ...' This had been asserted by Lord Orford, and Wintle thought it must have been meant 'to throw some sort of contempt upon his [Seeker's] character.'

Flinders did not suffer from any such peculiar idea, indeed he appears to have been particularly interested in midwifery. The details were frequently noted in his diary, and he also kept a midwifery case book. Most labours were 'natural' if often lingering - a point which was of great personal interest to him as he stayed with the patient during the whole period. In 1775 he had 43 midwifery cases, no mother died and only one baby was lost, which was an excellent record for the time; no wonder he was attending women for the third and fourth delivery. In four cases he had to use forceps. With Mrs Cotton of Fen-houses, 'the pains [were] insufficient and oblig'd [me] to use the forceps which after several slipping at last proved effective, she has done well.' A month later Mrs Lee was another forceps case, 'I managed but after three or four trials. I wish I could remember always to turn the head with the forceps ere extracting as I think it would be accomplish'd easier.' Happily in June he could write, 'pains insufficient, I used forceps more to my satisfaction and advantage than I remember even to have done before.' In November he went to Mrs Garner of Donington Fen, 'I much feared this case as I was oblig'd to use the crochet before [i.e. the child was destroyed in order to remove it and so save the mother's life], it however proved very lingering ... till the next evening when the birth proved Natural.'

Flinders often gave careful details of his surgical cases especially those which were unusual or required exceptional skill, such as William Store's seven year old daughter who had fractured both radius and ulna, ligating both with a ligature around the elbow and then piercing the integuments; the child recovered well. There was the case of the man who dislocated his jaw by yawning, and a dislocation of the radius in which he gives an exact description of how he reduced it. Considering its vogue at the time, he carried out surprisingly little inoculation against small-pox. He wrote on 7 December 1777, 'The small pox having made their appearance in this parish, the season being favourable and my son and daughter of a very convenient age, I inoculated them - they have passed through that calamitous disorder in the most favourable and easy manner. I have inoculated several others with the greatest success and expect more Business of this kind before we stop.'

He wrote comparatively little on medical treatment except when he or his wife were ill. He administered three of Dr James' Analectic Pills for 'the common illness of the country - fever with debility and pain and chill[en]', which was probably malaria, by no means uncommon in the Fens and East Anglia in the eighteenth century. He mentions an epidemic of measles in which daughter Betsey was the first to succumb, and then the other children and one of the Franklin's too. All recovered well except Matthew who 'is poorly with fever and cough but is mending.'

Unfortunately we hear little about Matthew's pharmaceutical practice, but he certainly had a shop for he mentions it in his monthly accounts. Usually he took about twenty six shillings each month, his 1794 accounts show the following entry: 'Cash taken from Retail - £17 17s. 0d.' He often noted that he had bought sugar for the shop, and there are references to his druggists' bills, such as on 27 November 1775, 'To Mr Robinson, Druggist, £4 12s. 6d.' Some of his suppliers were in London, as witness 16 October 1794, 'Cardige of Drugs (20 staves) from London, 14s. 6d.', others came from Mr Otter of Lincoln. Not infrequently he obtained drugs and phials for his brother, March 1775, 'Rec'd of my Brother for Lint, 1 lb., 7s.; Bark 1½lbs, 11s. 3d., = 18s. 3d.'

Although his returns from the shop seem small, he obviously valued it. In February 1796 a rival set up in the little town, a William Ayliff who had been apprenticed to a Mr Vise of Spalding, 'he is a civil young man and we are on good terms. I have offered him terms to resign all Business but Don[ington] and a Retail Trade, but he has not acceded to the terms - so we must each do as we can for ourselves. I apprehend the Business is very limited for two.'

Druggists were more important to apothecaries and surgeons than being mere purveyors of drugs. In the spring of 1785, he noted, 'In an order of Druggs (sic) from London I got ... the 8th, volume of the Edinboro Medical Commentaries bound and lettered, price 7s. 6d. Somewhat dear indeed though a valuable work, I have now five volumes of it. I could wish I had the first 9 volumes to complete the work.' Early in 1796 Flinders decided to
invest in government stocks: ‘On Sat. 28 May, I paid my Drug[ist] Mr Minshulls half pence, £97 7s. 6d. to purchase me £100 stock in the 3 per Cents, 97 being the price at that time, though I found something lower at that date - the Continuance of the War makes the Stocks thus low.’

We are able to gain some knowledge of the relationship between drugist and country apothecary when we read of the Flinders’ trip to London. Having left his practice in the hands of brother John, they set off on Wednesday 19 October 1796 and ‘reached the Saracen’s Head by 9 o’clock Thursday morning and I took private Lodgings in Wardrobe Place near St. Pauls. We had a most agreeable eight days ... our Druggists very civil, we dined each with them and was at the Shop on Snow Hill every day.’ Matthew’s custom was clearly valued by the druggists.

The eighteenth century saw the rise of many clubs and societies, and medical men were no exception to participation. The true medical society as Batty Shaw puts it met ‘for the advancement of knowledge’, most had medical book clubs and libraries, but they also had aspects of social conviviality. It is usual to agree that the first provincial medical society was founded at Colchester, Essex in 1774 but there were other slightly later ones such as Norwich and Huntington societies of which Flinders would very probably have heard. He wrote in his diary on 14 October 1796, ‘Dr, Wilson and Crane and six of us surgeons and apothecaries have established a Monthly Meeting at the Red Cow, Donington during the summer to discuss Medical Sciences and raise a small Fund for the purchase of New Medical Books - we have had two meetings, I hope it may prove an useful institution, “tis unnecessary here to note particulars, they are set in a Minute Book.’

Flinders had always made efforts to keep up with medical advances. In November 1777 he wrote, ‘I have discontinued the Medical Magazine and take the Medical Commentaries in its stead, this being half the expense and containing only New matter whereas that consists principally of old and almost useless writings.

Indeed Flinders was very fond of reading and was proud of his library. He liked to buy the Annual Register (6s.) which he found agreeable and entertaining, and also took The Critical Review, and The County Chronicle. He bought the third volume of Priestley’s Institutions of which he said, ‘I can not speak too much in praise of this.’ In October 1775, he confided to his diary, ‘I began to take in the Stamford News and I think it the most perfect paper so have omitted joining with my Father for the Cambridge Paper which is very barren of entertainment, and partial on the curious and patriotic side.’ He records having bound volumes of British Biography, Beauties of England, and the Universal Magazine (he particularly approved of this because it ‘showed the seats of war’), and purchased copies of Hervey’s Geography, The Pocket Farrier (many apothecaries acted as vets), The British Traveller and The English Encyclopaedia amongst others. On several occasions he noted that he had either bought books at the Fair, sold unwanted books in order to buy others, or that ‘An Auctioneer of books’ had visited Donington. And when he did not buy, he borrowed, such as Samuel Garth’s Dispensary, and Dean Swift’s Miscellany from the Rev. Mr. Trimnell.

Flinders and his children may well have lived in a small provincial township but they did not live in an intellectual desert. A lunar eclipse was observed through a ten foot telescope, as was the eclipse of the sun on 24 June 1778. He enjoyed the ‘Satirical and comic Lectures’ of Mr. Lowe who visited Donington, and visited an exhibition of ‘magical Deceptions, Wire dancing and ballancing (etc.), the Magic Lantern etc.’, saw a company of comedians at the Bull in 1779, and in 1800 was happy to relate that the Rev. Mr. Tomat of Bicker had given a collection of coins, fossils and ‘petrifactions’ to him. He enjoyed the theatre when he had the opportunity and took The Theatrical Magazine as being ‘the cheapest way of collecting Plays.’

Matthew Flinders’ Family

Whether the relationship between Matthew (I) and his father John Flinders (II) had been earlier a happy one is not clear, but certainly it was marred by John’s second marriage when he was approaching sixty. Matthew found his step-mother tyrannical, and the addition of two half-sisters and a half-brother to the family he regarded as impertinent. John died on Boxing Day, 1776, aged sixty-three. Neither Matthew (I) nor his full brother John (III) received more than a guinea in their father’s will (although John did receive an entailed estate which the father had been unable to touch), everything, and that was not a great deal, was bequeathed to the second family, his wife Mary, and the children, William (aged 6), Mary known as Polly (3 years) and Penelope (2 years). Matthew was made sole executor and one of the guardians, responsibilities which he found a great trial but which he carried out loyally and meticulously.

With his older brother John (III), Matthew was always on good terms even though John managed his affairs badly and was frequently in financial straits. Grumbling mightily to his diary, Matthew usually came to the rescue. The two brothers often met in Donington or Spalding, and the two families frequently stayed with each other. Then out of the blue on 30 October 1782, Matthew wrote, ‘it is with much concern that I remark my brother leaving Spalding, he intends to remove to Odiam in Hampshire, a great way indeed, he has been over precipitate and agreed with a Mr Eastland. It seems a remove was become necessary ... but with a little more patience I think he might have got a Situation nearer than 150 miles which will likely for ever preclude us seeing each other.’

The move was not a success and in February 1784 Matthew was writing, ‘the present plan is to remove from Odiam to Greenwich to attempt a Girls Boarding School and Physick. Pray God it may answer and that they may at least get fixed somewhere where the child can no longer continue in this distress ...’ But by January 1785 Matthew was writing, ‘my brother gives me no account of any increase in Business and I am afraid there is no change for it - it seems the whole dependence is upon the Boarders and their number is but few.’ By June, ‘matters go on as bad at Greenwich as at Odiam, I fear they have been sinking near £100 a year since leaving Spalding ... as I conjectured he has not any Physical Business.’

John decided to cut his losses, and return to Lincolnshire and medicine. He has made several excursions - has been over to Metheringham to see about a place but finds it very mean and he judges quite inadequate for a livelihood - has been to Long Sutton but finds Mr. Bailey has no intention of resigning or taking a Partner, and he has concluded on again coming to Spalding as the last disagreeable resort. The school still staggered on, they now had seven boarders, and then nine, and John’s wife Henrietta wished to persist with it, but John was determined to go to Spalding. Accordingly in July 1787 they were installed in the house of the late Dr Blithe. Their daughter Henny, who had lived at Greenwich before they did, was ‘left behind at a Capital Boarding School at Kennington as an assistant while another place of that kind can be got.’

All the family seemed fond of Henny, perhaps all the
more so because her affairs of the heart went awry. An attorney of Odiam had paid her serious addresses and a match was expected but ‘this match of hers is broke off unexpectedly strange.’ Then after her return to Spalding she became very attached to a Captain Lawford, R.N. Matthew (I) met him in February 1800 and reported on him favourably, ‘He kindly promised to assist my sons on their return - [but] a wedding is not convenient to him yet ...’ And it never did become ‘convenient’; as her cousin Matthew wrote from his captivity in Isle de France on 18 May 1805, ‘Of ... Henny’s happy marriage I begin now to despair ...’ In the long run Henny married a widower, John Newbold of Soulcoates, Yorkshire, at Spalding on 18 May 1809.

Henny’s brother John, called Jacky in his boyhood, entered the Navy. In July 1780 his Uncle Matthew learnt that his ship, the Apollo, had been in action against a French frigate. The following December he was on leave at Spalding before going to fight the ‘perfidious Dutch’ on the Amphiion. ‘He seems to have taken such a real liking for the sea, that I have now great hopes he may succeed in that way of Life.’ At the time of his parents disastrous move to Greenwich he had just returned from America and was ‘not far from being a Lieutenant and has all his Wages and some prize Money to receive.’ Tragically on a return voyage to the West Indies in 1793 he died on 13 August after a three week long fever. He was only twenty-seven.

Matthew’s Own Children

Matthew had ten children by his first wife Susannah, and three by his second Elizabeth. The first of his children Matthew was born 16th March 1774, to be followed by Elizabeth (Betsey) 24 September 1775, John 28 September 1776 (who died on 13 November), then on 19 July 1777 there were twins, both daughters. These twin girls being 2 months before due, the particulars of the Labour I have noted in my diary, ‘May be difficult times for the expectant. When you write let me know what has happened. The two we have living ...’ I would gladly keep but by no means wish an increase, however let that happen as it may.‘

Less than eleven months later (28 May 1778) the unfortunate Susannah was delivered of twin boys, both of whom were dead. Matthew did not omit to give him abundant gratitude to Divine Mercy. On 22 May 1779 Susannah (who later in life was to prove to be a woman of very decided views) was born, and then another John arrived on 5 April 1781 (and his life was to be tragic indeed), and finally Samuel Ward on 3 November 1782 (who was to follow closely the career of his famous brother Matthew).

By now Susannah’s health had completely broke down, having had eight labours and ten children in less than nine years. ‘She had a good labour but she had been poorly a long time - had an agony a great part of her pregnancy and lost flesh - this has been a fatiguing - ... and now I am in utmost distress of her safety.’ In the New Year of 1783 he wrote, ‘My wife still often out of her mind, other times well and capable - sometimes have great hopes of her recovery, at others depressed to lowest despair.’

In the midst of his troubles, his step-mother, Mary Flinders aged 46 died on 6 January 1783. She had given up ‘the farming business’ in December 1780 so that when the village schoolmistress died, she was glad to take her place in July 1782. There was a house attached so that her own place could be let and bring in some much needed income. Now on her death everything had to be sold and the children sent to live with an R. Jackson at 8s.6d. a week.

Matthew decided in February that a change of air and scenery might benefit his wife and so sent her to Bolingbroke, but by March the situation was desperate. He called in Dr Hairby but to no avail as she died on 23 March 1783.

In spite of his expressions of great grief, Matthew’s thoughts quickly turned to taking another wife. As he so practically, if unromantically, put it, it was ‘useless to nurture one’s grief ... and accordingly have pitched on the amiable Mrs E[llis] late Miss E[lizabeth] W[ekes], but since her widowhood is at her sister’s at S[pi]lsby.’ Having exchanged a few letters he made the journey there on Sunday, 20 July 1783 and ‘met with friendly treatment.’ The courtship was swift and they married on 7 December. Their first child was born on 3 October 1786 but to their distress was a cabinet delivery, the father being the accoucheur. Two more girls were born to them, Hannah on 6 April, 1789 and Henrietta 31 January, 1791. Happily for Matthew’s peace of mind there were no more children, his wife nearing forty.

In some directions his responsibilities were by now lessened. Very soon after his first wife’s death, his half-brother, William, was apprenticed to an ironmonger, a Mr Jenning of Spalding. ‘Charity gave £10 and we £10 more, the indentsures are not to take place yet in order he may be of age before his time of serving is out, he is to be washed and mended at his own expense.’ In the summer of 1792, William left Mr Jenning and went as a journeyman in a wholesale shop in Birmingham. Two years later after experience in a large town renowned for its metal-working, he decided to set up in business in Boston. He did well and in 1800 bought out his partner, a Mr Hanley, borrowing from his half-brother a £100 at ‘the usual interest.’

William’s sister Polly was apprenticed in turn to a Mrs Foggon of Boston for three years to learn millinery and clear starching in July 1785, ‘the term is £5 down, £5 at the year end and £5 at the end of three years, to be boarded and washed ... we find for clothes as usual.’ Mathew had the last of his father’s children off his hands with the binding of Penelope to a Miss Nainby. She like Henny and Susannah later went to work in London, in her case in a shop.

Matthew Flinders gave considerable thought to the education of his children and spent as much money as he could sensibly manage on it. When he was nearly six, Matthew (II) was entered into Mr Whitehead’s school to learn reading. The following year he started writing and Latin. In January 1785 his father wrote, ‘Matthew fast approaching his 11th, year and not yet sent out to a Grammar School though he improves his Latin very well under my own tuition, he goes only half days to Mr Whitehead, keeping close to his Latin each afternoon ... my present intention is not to send him until twelve years old and then to give him two years at the best neighbouring school I can.’ Matthew went to Horbling for the two years of 1786 and 1787 and then his father wrote that he had taken him from school, ‘I mean him to assist me in my Business, he has made a Proficiency in Learning, exceeding any hope I could reasonably form.’ Matthew was not quite fourteen.

By the time he was sixteen, it was decided that he was to gain further training from a Mr Dell of Lincoln, a place about which they had been informed by the druggist Mr. Otter. He should have started on 1 June 1790 and received ten guineas which would have kept him in clothes and pocket money, but instead of which on 14 May his father saw him on to the coach for London and Rochester, ‘to Commodore Pasley’s to embark on the Scipio 64 guns - it has long been his choice - not mine. Henny got him this situation. I shall heavily miss him.’ Matthew senior had
already realised that he would have to hire a lad to replace his son when he went to Lincoln, and planned to make Bettery use the shop in Spalding, and where she was to be followed by her sister Susan; Cousin Henny was in later years to educate Hannah and Henrietta.

John did not go to the same school as his brother Matthew. In July 1792, his father put in his diary, ‘Having had a good account of Rev. Mr. Barwis’ school at Deeping we have put John there this mid-summer, it is a year sooner than Matthew went out but John and Samuel had so many rude companions that we thought it best to part them, and I hope he will improve faster in his Latin than with me; he can read and write very decently and is tolerable in his accounts but his manneres were unpolished which I hope may at this new seminary take a better turn; the term I 6 guiness per year but I expect inclusive it will be £20.57. The next sumner his father could report that his learning was improved but not other matters. John left school in the midsummer of 1794 at the same time as his sister Susan. ‘My Intention is to apprentice John with his Uncle William Flinders at Boston, and Susan... to a Mrs Magnus a milliner of good repute, but not till Christmas.’

The children were now flying from the nest with a vengeance for in the summer of 1794, Samuel, although not yet twelve, was fitted out to join the Navy with his brother Matthew (II). The costs were a severe burden to their father. Nevertheless the older Matthew (I) did not retract as he wrote to his namesake, ‘my aim with my children has been to give them a decent education, consistent with my circumstances and number of my family, and then put to them in some way to get their own bread, not neglecting their inclinations as so as the way.’ With that end in view he apprenticed Susan with Mrs Magnus of Boston for three years. She started on 20 January 1795 and ‘having made her trial of eight weeks and both parties liking, my wife went over again March 26 and concluded ye Business, Mrs Magnus would not take her for less than £30.79’ It comes as something of a surprise that a man who was respected in his profession and not in desperate money straits should have apprenticed his daughter to such an occupation as millinery and shop-work at this period in English history, but recent research has shown that the extent of women’s involvement in the public sphere of business before 1800 has been underestimated. As D’Cruze has noted, ‘had it been socially unacceptable for women to trade in their own right, it could hardly have remained such a common family strategy.’

Always a difficult boy, matters did not go so smoothly with John. He did not go to his Uncle William, instead on 16 April 1795 he went on a month’s trial at Mr Kelsey’s a printer in Boston, but ‘Mr K. has returned him as not suiting on May 15th. the premium was to have been £60.91 Matthew was much disturbed but on 6 July was able to write, ‘I have some satisfaction in noting that I have this day been to Boston and had my son John bound apprentice to Mr John Topholme, chemist and druggist - he had been near three weeks and both parties liking - the Term 1 years and the Premium £50, half down and the Rest at ye year’s end. I like the old Gentleman, he appears a Steady, Regular man, and John seems pleased.’

A year later on 8 July, Matthew paid Mr Topholme his outstanding £25. The apprenticeship however was never finished, in January 1800 John Topholme requested Matthew to remove his son as his conduct was ‘so unexampled and base’. Flinders and his wife managed to persuade him to keep John longer on a promise of better behaviour. ‘What course I am to take with him I’m totally at a loss - his simplicity we might bear with but I am sorry to say that his mind is debased and vicious.’ By November 1800 Flinders was asking his son Matthew, who had recently returned from Australia, if he could procure some situation for John at sea ‘as all my friends think that the only place for him.’

Whether young Matthew (II) would have agreed is doubtful but by the New Year his father had to write, ‘What we long feared has arrived, my very unfortunate son John, is returned upon my hands and in a state terrible to conceive viz: a deranged one, totally unfit for any species of Business.’ His father had great difficulty in finding a ‘proper receptacle for him’, but at last on 3 March his wife took John to York Lunatic Asylum which was described as an ‘excellent repository for such unfortunates... this is the best situation we have been able to procure for him... the expense with Clothes I expect will be about £30 p.a.’

And that is the last word that is ever written about John, but in fact he long outlived his brother Matthew, and only predeceased Samuel by ten months. The records of the York Asylum (now Bootham Park Hospital) show that he died there on 8 March 1834.

Just a month after John’s admission, young Matthew (II) sent his will to his father in which he made him his ‘universal heir’ but with many instructions as to how he wanted his worldly goods disposed. He told his father that he and Miss Chappelle had had an attachment but had had to wear themselves of it. ‘I have no present or future intention of marrying either her or any other person, but leave England only wedded to my ship...’. Ten days later Matthew senior was amazed to receive a letter from his son that he and Ann Chappelle were marrying immediately, and that he planned to take her on the voyage with him.

Young Matthew wrote that he had managed to stay strong-minded until he had made his will and sent it with the accompanying letter to his father, but then he had reflected that he had earlier sold his farm in New South Wales, and furthermore, that he now had a ship, ‘... the pseyry of which had added to his situation, so that a moderate computation made £300 or £400 a year on which a wife could be kept genteelly.’ The marriage promptly took place at Partney, and he and Anne came to Donington on 18 April to stay one night. The father felt great uneasiness at this hasty step as he called it?

The marriage undoubtedly created tension between father and son which distressed the young husband who had other disappointments to bear as well. Although for a period his wife had been allowed on board with him, he was then told that she could not accompany him to Australia in the Investigator. ‘It is certain, I should not have married but with the idea of taking her with me, others had been allowed this privilege and I could not forsee that I should not have been denied it. (sic). Yet I am by no means sorry for having married. If you knew her worth you would not.’

Shortly after Samuel and he left Spithead for their famous voyage of circum-navigating Australia. It is sad to think that their father never heard of their great achievement, for on their return to Port Jackson in June 1803, Matthew found a letter waiting for him from his step-mother telling him of his father’s death on 1 May 1802.

Matthew, no longer ‘the younger’, felt the loss of his father keenly, but it was probably no surprise to him. Samuel on his visit to Donington in November 1800 had reported back to his brother that their father’s appearance had greatly deteriorated. Matthew senior certainly knew he was seriously ill for he wrote to his eldest son in the same month, ‘It is my intention if God spare me a few years,
when the two young ones now at home (Hannah aged twelve and Henrietta aged nine) have got their education to send them out into the World, that they may do something for themselves as I am certain young people do the best from Home and make more useful and valuable members of society... though I can not reckon on many years for my diminished strength and spirits seriously warn me not to reckon on much time...” He calculated that ‘...if all my Property was the best of...’ he was worth about £4,000.

Before he left for Australia Matthew (II) urged his father to purchase an annuity as had already been suggested and so stop over working and becoming ill-tempered. A few months later an advertisement appeared in the newspaper on 13 March 1802, “M. Flanders, surgeon, apothecary and accoucheur, after a practice of more than 30 years at Donington, wishes to retire from business, and will treat with any gentleman for the resignation of it.” Whether John Hood Large, surgeon and apothecary of Market Harborough, Leicestershire, had begun to ‘treat’ with Matthew Flanders in the last few weeks left to him is not known, but Large did in fact take over the Donington practice.

The mural inscription in the parish church of Donington records that Matthew Flanders (I) was ‘a man of exemplary life, amiable manners and superior abilities’, but a more moving epiplathy surely comes from his son in one of his last letters to his father. Matthew (II) wrote that he wished ‘them to be dearest friends and not just a humble duty between them, (and that) he had always explained himself freely as man to man.’

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NOTES
1. Public Record Office (Kew), The Inland Revenue Apprenticeship Records, LR.1/163, 1863.
2. Patrick Francis had been an apprentice of James Padddon, apothecary of Wragby (See, P.R.O. LR./1/24, Dec. 1764).
4. We know little about John Flanders (II) many brothers and sisters except that Robert returned to Nottingham to become a silk-stocking manufacturer.
5. John Laughton, son of an attorney, had been apprenticed to John Trotter, surgeon and apothecary of St. Neots, Huntingdonshire. William Grant after training with James Haymo Spalding, practised in Holbeach, Lincolnshire for a short while before coming to Donington. People moved about more in the eighteenth century than often thought.
6. Two of these children appear to have been born before John and Elizabeth settled in Donington.
7. Matthew (I) wrote on 17 February 1775 that it was his birthday and that ‘My Father and Mrs F. dined with us and accidentally Mr Birks came in the afternoon.’ This must have been Mr John Birks as Anthony had been buried 9 September 1769.
9. October 1761 John (II) married in Nottingham Mary Hardy. He is described as ‘of St. Giles, London, surgeon’ and was aged twenty three. (See Nottinghamshire Marriage Bonds, Harleian Society). Their daughter, Francis Mary, was baptised at Spalding, 15 September 1762.
10. Matthew Flanders (I) wrote two combined diaries and accounts books covering the years 1775 to 1802 which have been deposited in the Lincolnshire Archives Office (L.A.O. Flanders 1 & 2), hereafter referred to as ‘Diary’. October 1776, Volume II, f.82v. I am, with Mr. Christopher Sturman, currently preparing an edition of these publications.
11. The Triennial Archicondial Visitiation of the Bishopric of London shows Ralph Grindall to be a surgeon in Ware, Hertfordshire with 2 daughters. The Visitations from the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Grindalls had Lincolnshire connections by marriage. A ‘Foreign brother’ was one who had not been trained by a member of the London Company of Barber Surgeons but who had obtained his membership by paying a fine known as ‘Redemption’. Ralph Grindall had paid a premium of £100 for his son’s apprenticeship. (See P.R.O. LR./1/14.)
12. The certificate is in the possession of Miss Ann Flanders Petrie who was kind enough to let me have a copy of it.
13. Diary, 4 June 1777, f.75v.
14. In order to buy his father’s house Matthew had had to borrow £80 from Thomas Beets of Wigoft at 5 per cent. Diary, volume I, f.12v.
18. Diary, f.27, volume I, The practice of inoculation preceded vaccination, and consisted of deliberately infecting the patient at a propitious time with what was hoped to be a milder attenuated form of smallpox. It was attended by real dangers of severe illness, and even death, in a proportion of cases.
19. Diary, June and July 1785, volume II, f.6v.
20. William Aylliff was in the long out of his apprenticeship for he had started with William Ware, surgeon and apothecary, in 1789. (See P.R.O. LR./1/34.) This was not the first time Matthew had been troubled by a rival doctor. On 7 November 1789 he had written, ‘A Mr Wrangle from Boston, one of the Faculty, has just fixed in this parish as my opponent - have determined to avoid Chapel, but he noted rejoicingly on 30 July 1791, ‘Opponent Wrangle and Family are gone, not being able to subsist here - the coast is now clear again.’
22. Diary, volume II, f.79v. Flanders had been investing in land and property for several years.
24. Diary, volume II, f.81r., Dr Crane was William Crane, M.D. (Glasgow) who practised in Boston. It is probable that Matthew Flanders asked as secretary; unfortunately the minute book has not survived.
25. Diary, volume I, f.26v.
26. Ibid., f.16v., 30 June 1776.
27. Ibid., f.36v., 3 March 1777.
28. Ibid., f.33v., September 1778.
29. Ibid., f.60v.
30. Ibid., f.70r.
31. Diary, volume II, f.26v.
32. John Bailey is commemorated by a memorial in Long Sutton church, which records he was murdered in the spring of 1794 (T.N. Durrant of Long Sutton, parish register, 25th May 1794).”
33. Edward Bith, M.D. (Aberdeen), ex-Army surgeon who unusually rose to the rank of physician. Matthew had consulted with him on several occasions early days of practice.
34. Diary, volume II, f.25v., April 1787.
35. Matthew (II) was referring to the careers of his two sons, John Matthew (II) and Samuel, in the Navy; patronage and useful connections were all important in the eighteenth century.
37. Diary, volume I, f.45v.
38. Diary, volume I, f.70v., 4th May 1784.
39. Diary, volume II, f.64v., 22 October 1793.
40. Diary, volume I, f.22v., One twin appears to have lived long enough to have been baptised because a Susannah daughter of Matthew and Susannah Flanders is to be found in the baptisms of the Donington parish register for 19 July 1777.
41. Ibid., f.61v., 31st December 1782.
42. Ibid., f.59v., 62v.
43. William Hairby of Spilsby had received his initial medical training by means of a six year apprenticeship with Samuel Bennet, surgeon and apothecary at Alford, Lincolnshire, starting in 1743. Later he practised as a physician obtaining his M.D. of Aberdeen in 1779 when he was fifty two. Four years later he became M.D. (Glasgow) a rather more meaningful qualification.
44. Hannah, the sister of Elizabeth Wekeas, married Willingham Franklin at Boston on 25 Feb. 1773. They were the parents of...
Sir John Franklin. The two families, the Flinders and the
Franklins, saw much of each other; Matthew (I) described
John Franklin as ' . . . every Inch an Honest Tar' (Diary, volume II,
f.305v, May 1800).

45. In cases where it has proved impossible to deliver the child, an
instrument known as a crotchet is used, thus destroying the
child which is then removed piecemeal.

46. Many charities paid in part or wholly paid the premium of an
apprenticeship. Careful records were always made as to
who was responsible for the apprentice's clothes, their washing
and mending, during the time of servitude.

47. Diary, volume II, f.57v.

48. William Flinders was successful in his business, Holden's
Triennial Directory of 1809, 1810, 1811 shows him to have
been established as an ironmonger in Bargate. He married
on 18 June 1795 a Miss Peacock of Ely who had ' . . . some estate
in Cambridgeshire' (Diary, volume II, f.73r).

49. Mary Flinders married James Cawthor from Pinchbeck at Spalding
on 13 May 1793. (See, Lincolnshire Parish Registers, Marriage,
Phillimore, volume II, p.169.)

50. Diary, volume II, f.61r, March 1793. The premium was £20.
Her guardian gave her £3 for clothes so that Penelope was left
with only £27 out of her inheritance of £50. Matthew (II)
 Junior wrote to his father on 9 May 1801 that, 'It came in our'
(Matthew and his wife's) way to assist Penelope, at least in
racing her consequence with her employers, by laying out a
sum of money at the shop' (L.A.O. Flinders 5/7).

51. Diary, volume I, f.42v, Jeremiah Whitehead was one of the
witnesses of old John Flinders' (II) will in 1776.

52. Ibid., 74v.

53. Diary, volume II, f.28r. The Reverend John Shinglar (d. 1828)
thurs curate of Horbling, was a well respected Latin scholar. In
1811, Matthew Flinders (II) writing to his step mother, asks to
be remembered to his old friend, Mr. Shinglar (L.A.O. Smith
of Horbling 4 (Manorial): Donington Wykes manor bundle
1809-1815).

54. Joseph Dell (d. 1795) surgeon and apothecary of Lincoln
(mayor in 1768 and 1769), trained a number of apprentices.
Francis Otter had an important chemist and druggists' business
in (High St.) Lincoln, in which he was followed by Henry and
Robert Otter.

55. Diary, volume II, f.43r. Cousin Henrietta was a governess in
the household of Captain Thomas Pasley, R.N.

56. In 1796 Betsy married the local draper and a man of
property, a Mr Harvey. The marriage started in fine style with a
honeymoon in London but proved unhappy, the husband
being grasping and unkind to his young wife. A boy and a girl
were born to them, then poor Betsy rapidly succumbed to
consumption and died after less than four years of marriage
(Diary, volume II, f.199v., 27 October 1799). From the
Diary we learn that of all the children Matthew (II) and Betsy
were particularly close.

57. Diary, volume II, f.36v. Barwise is probably the Rev. Joseph
Barwick, for thirty years Vicar of Aslackby, who died in 1828.

58. Ibid., f.68v. Holden's Triennial Directory shows Messrs.
Mamog and Wilby, milliners, in the Market Place, Boston.

59. Diary, volume II, f.72r, 31 March 1795. Susan was soon
agitating for London experience and in September 1797,
Matthew wrote that Mrs Mamog had procured ' . . . a Place in
Town (Mrs Foster, No. 14, Dover St., Piccadilly) - given the
strongest recommendation . . . we pay a heavy premium for
one year, viz. 25 gns, but are advised it would greatly advantage
her.' Before the year expired, in August, she had obtained a
place at Darford, Kent, with a Mr and Mrs Jardine, drapers
and milliners where she was to receive sixteen guineas a year
exclusive of board. Her father thought this was not ' . . .
unhandsome for Cloths and Pocket money - it is as much as
myself or your mother expend on ourselves in those respects.' Susan
thought otherwise and wanted assistance from home. By
early 1801 she wished to set up in business for herself for
which poor Matthew was requested to supply her with £150
for a partnership with a Miss Danger of St. Ives. The following
January, Matthew was horrified to receive a letter from Susan
saying that 'she had married . . . a Mr Pearson, a Journeyman
Draper' and thus had forfeited her partnership. He wrote
her a severe letter, George and Susannah Pearson had thirteen
children.

60. S.D. Cruze, 'To acquaint the ladies: women traders in
Colchester, c.1750 - c.1800', The Local Historian, 17, (1986),
p.158.

'Benjamin Kelsey, printer and stationer, Market Place, Boston.'

62. Diary, volume II, f.73v.

63. L.A.O. Flinders 3/3. Earlier Matthew senior had written that
John seemed afraid of the sea when he threatened ' . . . him
with it if . . . ' his bad behaviour continued, now apparently
John had told Samuel that he was willing to go to sea.

64. Diary, volume II, f.109v.

65. L.A.O. Flinders 3/5, 3 April 1801. 'On board Investigator' off
the Nore. He wished half of his estate to pass to Miss Chappelle

66. L.A.O. Flinders 3/6, 14 April 1801 from 16, King Street, Soho,
London.

67. Diary, volume II, f.107r.

68. L.A.O. Flinders 3/8, 10 July 1801 from Investigator at
Spithead.


70. L.A.O. Flinders 3/8, 10 July 1801.

71. Lincoln Date Book, p. 142 (almost certainly taken from the
Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury).

72. L.A.O. Flinders 3/8, 10 July 1801.