

Dr. John Goodsir (1746-1816): A Healer of Souls and Healer of Bodies  
By His Distant Cousin, Michael T. Tracy

Two centuries ago Dr. John Goodsir was among the best known men in the East Neuk of Fife. According to the *Glasgow Herald Newspaper* dated Saturday, 26 December 1868: "Dr. John Goodsir was a well-known and popular man. 'The customs of the period' in which he lived were primitive and curious, and the practice of the healing art in rural district was carried on in pack-saddle fashion and regularity. Dr. Goodsir would start from Largo on Monday, caparisoned for the week with drugs and surgical appliances and not return home till Friday as itinerant with his physic as the ancient Peripatetic with his philosophy..."<sup>1</sup> Thus was the daily routine of one of Fife's earliest medical doctors spanning over 40 years.

### Early years

The future doctor of Largo Parish, Fife was born on Wednesday, 19 October 1746 in Wemyss Parish, Fife and baptized on Saturday, 22 October 1746.<sup>2</sup> He was the first son of John Goodsir a tenant farmer of Muiredge, Wemyss Parish, Fife and his wife, Janet Walker.

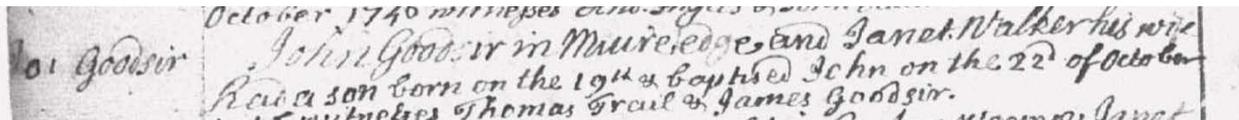


Fig.1. Baptismal Record of John Goodsir, 22 October 1746, Wemyss Parish Records, Crown Copyright

He received his early education at the Upper Largo School in Largo Parish, Fife.<sup>3</sup> He matriculated at the University of Edinburgh for the sessions of 1768-69<sup>4</sup> and sessions of 1769-70.<sup>5</sup> After his education young Dr. Goodsir relocated to Largo Parish, Fife where he met and later married Agnes Johnston on Friday, 12 November 1773.<sup>6</sup>

### Family life

The 1803 Gazetteer of Scotland gives us a good description of Largo Parish, Fife during the times of Dr. Goodsir. "Near the coast the appearance is delightful, exhibiting a pleasant landscape of gentlemen's seats, surrounded with thriving plantations, populous villages, fertile fields, dales, coppices, and clear rivulets... The town of Largo is situated at the influx of the small burn of Kier, where its actuary forms the harbor; with a stone quay, where vessels of 200 tons may take in and discharge their cargoes."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Glasgow Herald Newspaper*, 26 December 1868 p.2

<sup>2</sup> Baptismal Record of John Goodsir, 22 October 1746, Wemyss Parish Records, Old Parish Records 459/0030 0069

<sup>3</sup> Yuille, George. History of the Baptists in Scotland. Glasgow: Baptist Union Publications Committee. 1926. p.147

<sup>4</sup> 1768 Discipuli D. Alexandri Munro M.D. Anat. Professoris Joannis Gregory M.D. Med. Pract. P. Gul. Cullen M.D. Theor. P. Jos. Black, M.D. Chem. Matriculation Volume 1762-1785. University of Edinburgh p.74

<sup>5</sup> Anno 1769 Discipuli Dr. Alexandri Munro. Joannis Gregory M. Pract. Prof. Guilielini Cullen. Med. Theo. Matriculation Volume 1762-1785. University of Edinburgh p.88

<sup>6</sup> Marriage Record of John Goodsir, 12 November 1773, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0443

<sup>7</sup> The Gazetteer of Scotland 1803. Dundee: Ray, E. 1803 (Largo Parish description)

Dr. Goodsir and his wife Agnes Johnston resided in the town of Largo, Largo Parish, Fife where all of their children were born and raised. They had eleven children:

John baptized on Sunday, 23 April 1775<sup>8</sup> and died on Wednesday, 26 August 1789;<sup>9</sup>  
James born on Friday, 11 April 1777<sup>10</sup> and died on Friday, 2 March 1780;<sup>11</sup>  
Henry Duncan born on Saturday, 13 June 1778<sup>12</sup> and died on Wednesday, 25 March 1818;<sup>13</sup>  
Archibald born on Saturday, 4 December 1779<sup>14</sup> and died on Friday, 25 February 1820;<sup>15</sup>  
Mary Caroline born on Saturday, 2 June 1781<sup>16</sup> and died on Wednesday, 20 April 1785;<sup>17</sup>  
John born on Tuesday, 4 June 1782<sup>18</sup> and died on Thursday, 1 June 1848;<sup>19</sup>  
Johnstone born on Saturday, 14 August 1784<sup>20</sup> and died on Friday, 1 April 1785;<sup>21</sup>  
Caroline Johnstone born on Sunday, 30 April 1786<sup>22</sup> and died on Tuesday, 8 January 1867;<sup>23</sup>  
Janet born on Sunday, 15 July 1787<sup>24</sup> and died on Tuesday, 11 December 1827;<sup>25</sup>  
James born on Wednesday, 1 April 1789<sup>26</sup>  
Mary born on Sunday, 19 December 1790<sup>27</sup> and died on Thursday, 31 December 1868.<sup>28</sup>

Three of his sons (Henry Duncan, Archibald and John Goodsir) became surgeons in their own right, with Henry Duncan Goodsir serving in the military as a Surgeon in Malta and Sicily.

In the Anatomical Memoirs of his grandson Dr. John Goodsir was described as: "This big-nosed, long-headed, large-hearted disciple of Galen and Lucina was a fine specimen of the eighteenth century country medical practitioner, hatted, coated, booted, and spurred, a la mode. Wiry in build, thoughtful and successful in practice, aye ready with his 'mull', and aye ready to help a neighbor as well as to uphold the interests and character of 'canny Fife,' he was among the most popular of men."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Baptismal Record of John Goodsir, 23 April 1775, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0129

<sup>9</sup> Death Record of John Goodsir, 26 August 1789, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0052

<sup>10</sup> Baptismal Record of James Goodsir, 11 April 1777, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0139

<sup>11</sup> Death Record of James Goodsir, 24 March 1780, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0325

<sup>12</sup> Baptismal Record of Henry Duncan Goodsir, 13 June 1778, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0145

<sup>13</sup> Death Record of Henry Duncan Goodsir, 25 March 1818, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0284

<sup>14</sup> Baptismal Record of Archibald Goodsir, 4 December 1779, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0158

<sup>15</sup> Death Record of Archibald Goodsir, 25 February 1820, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0167

<sup>16</sup> Baptismal Record of Mary Caroline Goodsir, 2 June 1781, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0171

<sup>17</sup> Death Record of Mary Caroline Goodsir, 20 April 1785, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0051

<sup>18</sup> Baptismal Record of John Goodsir, 4 June 1782, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0174

<sup>19</sup> Death Record of John Goodsir, 1 June 1848, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0152

<sup>20</sup> Baptismal Record of Johnstone Goodsir, 14 August 1784, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0185

<sup>21</sup> Death Record of Johnstone Goodsir, 1 April 1785, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0051

<sup>22</sup> Baptismal Record of Caroline Johnstone Goodsir, 30 April 1786, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0199

<sup>23</sup> Death Record of Caroline Johnstone Goodsir Tosh, 8 January 1867, Kirkcaldy Parish Records, Statutory Deaths

<sup>24</sup> Baptismal Record of Janet Goodsir, 15 July 1787, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0212

<sup>25</sup> Death Record of Janet Goodsir Liddell, 11 December 1827, Glasgow Parish Records, Old Parish Records 644/01 0530 0033

<sup>26</sup> Baptismal Record of James Goodsir, 1 April 1789, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0224

<sup>27</sup> Baptismal Record of Mary Goodsir, 19 December 1790, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0030 0235

<sup>28</sup> Death Record of Mary Goodsir, 31 December 1868, Edinburgh St. George Parish Records, Statutory Deaths 685/01 0028

<sup>29</sup> Turner, W. The Anatomical Memoirs of John Goodsir, Volume 1. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black. 1868. p.7

Dr. Goodsir was listed in the Consolidated Schedules of Assessed Taxes in 1798. According to the schedule he was residing at Largo, Largo Parish and had to pay a tax on his windows of his home. He had eight windows and was taxed 2 pounds, 19 shillings and 6 pence on Saturday, 1 December 1798.<sup>30</sup>

Fig.2. 1798 Schedules of Assessed Taxes for Dr. John Goodsir, Largo, Largo Parish, Fife (Dr. Goodsir entry is fifth from bottom) Photograph Courtesy of Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk

### Scottish Medicine

Dr. Goodsir, as all other general medical practioners in Scotland, treated many diseases. Two peculiarly Scottish diseases of the eighteenth century were sibbens and croup.<sup>31</sup> Sibbens appeared first as a sore throat with glandular enlargement, and later produced on the skin pustules, which ulcerated deeply, together with hard knots of reddish colour, later developing into excrescences resembling raspberries.<sup>32</sup> It would eventually die out in time.

<sup>30</sup> Consolidated Schedules of Assessed Taxes, 1798-99 for Fife, Volume 11 (E326/15/11/31) Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk

<sup>31</sup> Comrie, John D. History of Scottish Medicine to 1860. London: The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum. 1860. P.188

<sup>32</sup> Comrie, John D. History of Scottish Medicine to 1860. London: The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum. 1860. P.188

Croup was an old Scottish name for an acute disease of the throat accompanied by harsh breathing and horse coughing.<sup>33</sup> It is a respiratory condition that is usually triggered by an acute viral infection of the upper airway.<sup>34</sup>

### **Medical Cases**

There are two medical cases that Dr. John Goodsir treated during the 1780s that are of great interest. In medical cases that needed consultation it was not uncommon for country doctors such as Goodsir to consult with other doctors. In these two specific medical cases Goodsir deliberated with the well-known medical lecturer and pioneer teacher of Chemistry at Glasgow University, Dr. William Cullen. Dr. Cullen (1710-1790) was a Scottish physician, chemist and agriculturist, and one of the most important professors at the Edinburgh Medical School, during its heyday as the leading center of medical education in the English speaking world.<sup>35</sup> Cullen established a successful private medical practice in Edinburgh much of it conducted, as was often the case in this period, through the medium of letters.<sup>36</sup>

In the first medical case that Dr. Goodsir consulted Dr. Cullen of Edinburgh involved a 70 year old, Mr. David Bethune of Kilconquhar/Balfour. In a letter dated Saturday, 6 January 1781 Goodsir wrote: "Dear Sir, about eight months ago I was desir'd [desired] to see Mr. Bethune of Balfour who had for some time before that date been complaining of an affection of his eyes, no external appearance of disease neither does the lens seem affected, but sees objects indistinctly, at times a dull pain in the forehead, vertigo which is sometimes so considerable as near to lose his balance in walking, with some degree of tremor of the head. From Mr. Bethune's time of life being I believe about 70, of a full habit, short neck and rather a large head, made me inclin'd [inclined] to suspect congestion in the head as the immediate cause of these symptoms. An Issue and Laxatives were proscrib'd [proscribed]; Rhubarb and White Mustard were employ'd [employed], accordingly the Issue was placed in the lower and back part of the neck. It has now been discharging near these eight months without any sensible effect. The next morbid affection in Mr. Bethune's case which demands attention is stomach complaints for which Mr. Bethune was under Dr. Cullen's some years ago and after many trials it seems wa [s] obliged again to have recourse to Rhubarb, a root which Mr. B. [Bethune] has need for symptoms of Dispepsia a number of years, now however the Rhubarb by its long continued use, the fate of medicines has lost its usual effect, for now Mr. B. [Bethune] finds it necessary to take Rhubarb once in the four or five days, whereas once in the 8 or 10 days formerly suffic'd [sufficed] not for costiveness but for uneasy feelings about his stomach. Mr. Bethune wants much to know if Dr. Cullen would advise for some time a Succidanium to the Rhubarb that he might not be obliged to use it so often; permit me Sir to say that if the affections about Mr. Bethune's head in some measure depend on the state of his stomach we will not have just so much dread of the consequence, at the same time the predisposition to disease in the head requires particular notice. Have repeatedly desired Mr. Bethune to take regular exercise in the open air, and as to diet he is not sensible of one thing being more disagreeable than another. There is a circumstance I have still omitted to mention Mr. Bethune's resting ill in the night and it seems he has been long accustomed [accustomed] to the practice and found benefit from it of taking a single mouthful of Brandy which gives ease and procures rest. Have advised him to use the tincture of bark in place of the brandy. For the most part and for a long time past Mr. B. [Bethune] has a free perspiration on his feet and legs every

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<sup>33</sup> Comrie, John D. History of Scottish Medicine to 1860. London: The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum. 1860. P.188

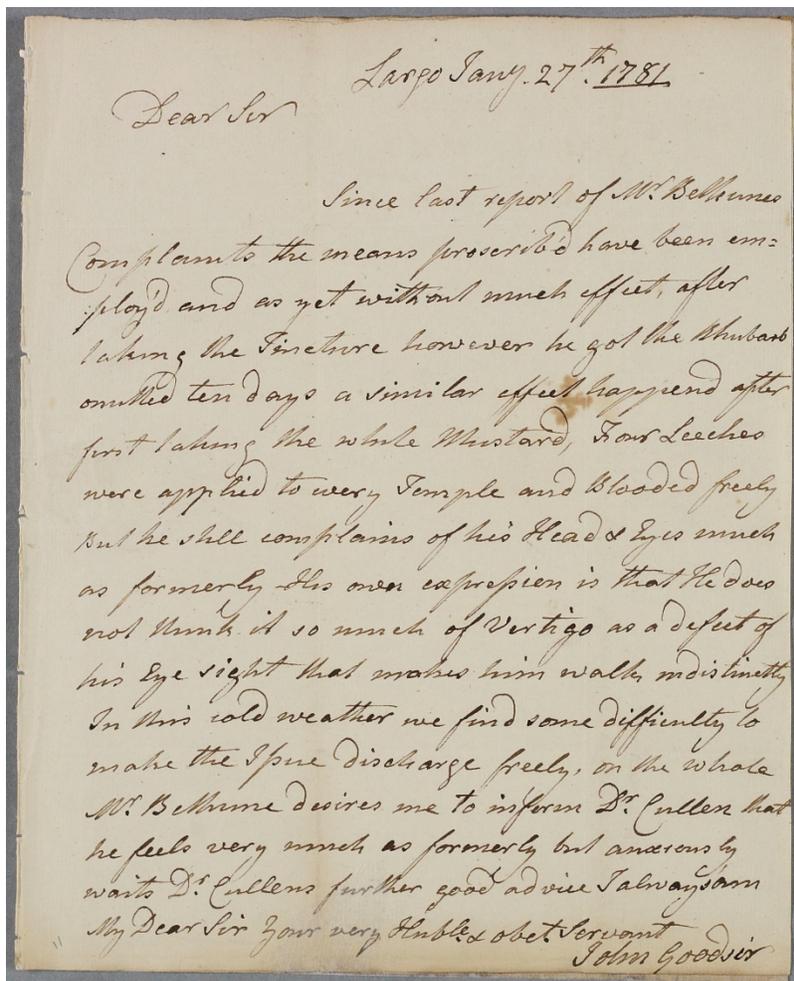
<sup>34</sup> Wikipedia.org. Accessed at: <http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Croup>

<sup>35</sup> Wikipedia.org. Accessed at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Cullen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Cullen)

<sup>36</sup> Cullenproject.ac.uk. Accessed at: [http://cullenproject.acu.uk/william\\_cullen](http://cullenproject.acu.uk/william_cullen)

morning which he takes care to encourage. With very much respect I am Dear Sir, your very humble and obedient servant, John Goodsir, Largo, January 6, 1781. Please direct for me at Largo by Leven."<sup>37</sup>

Goodsir writing to Cullen from his home at Largo, Fife wrote on Saturday, 27 January 1781: "Dear Sir, since last report of Mr. Bethune's complaints the means prescrib'd [prescribed] have been employ'd [employed] and as yet without much effect, after taking the tincture however he got the Rhubarb omitted ten days a similar effect happened after first taking the white mustard, four leeches were applied to every temple and bled freely but he still complains of his head and eyes much as formerly. His own expression is that he does not think it so much of vertigo as a defect of his eye sight that makes him walk indistinctly. In this cold weather we find some difficulty to make the issue discharge freely. On the whole Mr. Bethune desires me to inform Dr. Cullen that he feels very much as formerly but anxiously awaits Dr. Cullen's further advice I always am my Dear Sir your very humble and obedient servant, John Goodsir."<sup>38</sup>



Dear Sir  
Largo Janry. 27. 1781

Since last report of Mr. Bethunes  
Complaints the means prescrib'd have been em-  
ploy'd and as yet without much effect, after  
taking the Tincture however he got the Rhubarb  
omitted ten days a similar effect happened after  
first taking the white Mustard, Four Leeches  
were apply'd to every Temple and bled freely  
but he still complains of his Head & Eyes much  
as formerly His own expression is that he does  
not think it so much of Vertigo as a defect of  
his Eye sight that makes him walk indistinctly  
In this cold weather we find some difficulty to  
make the Issue discharge freely, on the whole  
Mr. Bethune desires me to inform Dr. Cullen that  
he feels very much as formerly but anxious to  
wait Dr. Cullens further good advice I always am  
My Dear Sir your very humble obed. servant  
John Goodsir

Fig.3. Dr. John Goodsir Letter to Dr. William Cullen, 27 January 1781, Photograph Courtesy The Cullen Project

<sup>37</sup> The Cullen Project. The Consultation Letters of Dr. William Cullen (1710-1790). Goodsir Letter 6 January 1781 (Doc. ID 1962) Accessed at: <http://cullenproject.ac.uk>

<sup>38</sup> The Cullen Project. The Consultation Letters of Dr. William Cullen (1710-1790). Goodsir Letter 27 January 1781 (Doc. ID 1972) Accessed at: <http://cullenproject.ac.uk>

On Thursday, 9 May 1782 Dr. Goodsir reported to Dr. Cullen the condition of his patient, Mr. Bethune further by writing: "Since you saw Mr. Bethune there is no change to the better on the contrary the symptoms of his disease are daily growing worse. Mr. Bethune has regularly pursued the plan proscrib'd [proscribed] him Drs. Cullen and Black without the least benefit as yet, he has not however got the proprietary elixir of vitriol as I had none of it nor my neighbours I get it from Edinburgh tomorrow. The pains in his bowels and back not about the region of the kidnies [kidneys] about the middle; for the last eight days have been so violent that he could not keep from crying especially in the after part of the day and thro' the night he cannot keep his bed but must sit in his chair. The reaching also has been very violent tho nothing comes up. Mr. Bethune compairs as I have never seen him under one of these fits, it is fruitless reaching from a vomit, is generally relieved after and is disposed to fall asleep. Miss Lindsay Mr. [Gregg?] told me yesterday at the time Mr. Bethune was reaching they felt the most offensive smell, tho he neither complained of bad taste or smell himself. Upon the whole Mr. Bethune's case is the same as when Mr. Lindsay left him but every bad symptom became worse, he is almost tired of proscriptions, his flesh and spirits are much exhausted. Last night as an antispasmodic I advised Mr. Bethune to try flannels wrong out of warm water applied to the belly when so violently pained and also I mention'd [mentioned] to him after so many fruitless trials of resinous purgatives that he might try one dose of Epsom salts he seem'd [seemed] to be afraid they not set on his stomach. I shall write you in a few days. With very much respect I am Dear Sir, your very humble and obedient servant, John Goodsir, Largo, May 9, 1782."<sup>39</sup>

The second medical case that is noteworthy is the medical case of Mr. John Bethune (Lindsay) (Lindsay of Wormiston). In a letter dated Monday, 2 March 1789 Goodsir wrote Cullen: "Dear Doctor, since last report Mr. Bethune's case is by no means more favourable, on the contrary the disease seems to be gaining ground. He got the vomit on Friday evening which made him reach near an hour but very little full vomiting. The Ipecacuahn got into his bowels and has produced several loose stools since. Difficulty of breathing rather increased, urine also less free, turbid and a copius lateritious sediment. Appetite still imparid [impaired], little drought however. The edeomatous swellings on his legs considerable towards bedtime. With all these symptoms together with the irritable state of Mr. Bethune's stomach and bowels ill fitted to bear medicines for the evacuation of water by the kidnies [kidneys], I confess therefore that I am not a little alarm'd [alarmed] at Mr. Bethune's present case. This comes on purpose with a servant that either of Doctor Cullen's will set off for Kilconquhar House immediately, or if that cannot be obtained that Dr. Robertson who also it seems attended Mr. Bethune in his last illness at Edinburgh should come. With every much respect, I am Dear Doctor, your very humble obedient servant, John Goodsir."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The Cullen Project. The Consultation Letters of Dr. William Cullen (1710-1790). Goodsir Letter 9 May 1782 (Doc. ID 2206) Accessed at: <http://cullenproject.ac.uk>

<sup>40</sup> The Cullen Project. The Consultation Letters of Dr. William Cullen (1710-1790). Goodsir Letter 2 March 1789 (Doc. ID 6283) Accessed at: <http://cullenproject.ac.uk>

Philong. Monday March 2?  
1789

Dear Doctor

Since last report M. Bethunes  
Case is by no means more favourable on the  
contrary the Disease seems to be going ground  
He got the Vomit on Friday Evening which  
made him reach near an hour but very little  
full vomiting. The Speacuation got in to his  
Bowels & has produced several loo stools since  
Difficulty of Breathing rather increased  
Urine also less free, turbid & a copious later:  
itious sediment - Appetite still impaired, little  
Brought however. The Oedematous swellings  
on his Legs considerable towards Bed time  
With all these Symptoms together with the  
irritable state of M. Bethunes Stomach and  
Bowels ill fitted to bear Medicines for the Ea:

Fig.4. Dr. John Goodsir Letter to Dr. William Cullen, 2 March 1789, Page 1, Photograph Courtesy of The Cullen Project

Evacuation of water by the Kidnies, I confess  
therefore that I am not a little alarm'd at  
Mr. Bellhorne's present Case

This comes on purpose with a servant that  
either of Doctor Cullens will set off for  
Inchony. House immediately, or if that  
cannot be obtained that Dr. Joseph Robertson  
who also it seems attended Mr. Bellhorne  
in his last illness at Edinb. should come  
with very much respect

I am Dear Doctor

Your very Hble. & Obedt. Servt.  
John Goodsir

Fig.5. Dr. John Goodsir Letter to Dr. William Cullen, 2 March 1789, Page 2, Photograph Courtesy of The Cullen Project

On Thursday, 19 March 1789 Goodsir updated Cullen on his patient's condition by writing further: "Dear Gentlemen, I wrote yesterday the report of Mr. Bethune's case since Sunday last which was very favourable at present nothing new has occur'd [occurred] that requires to be mentioned except on Wednesday from dinner to eight o'clock in the evening Mr. Bethune pass'd [passed] near a Scot's pint of limpid urine. This he attributes to the squill pills, continues to take them. This morning Friday free and easy, pass'd [passed] a good night. All the symptoms as yesterday. Has not however, pass'd [passed] so much urine this last as some preceeding nights. No drought at the same time. Shall make a report in a day or two. With much respect, I am Dear Gentlemen, your very humble servant, John Goodsir. Saturday morning near 9 o'clock Mr. Bethune has just now got out of bed and going to breakfast and has made a better breakfast than he has done for many months."<sup>41</sup>

Edinburgh March 19<sup>th</sup>  
1789

Dear Gentlemen

I wrote yesterday  
the report of Mr. Bethunes case since  
Sunday last which was very favourable  
at present nothing new has occurred that  
requires to be mentioned except on Wednesday  
from dinner to eight o'clock in the evening  
Mr. Bethune pass'd near a Scot's pint of  
Limpid Urine. This he attributes to the  
Squill Pills continues to take them -  
This morning ~~Sunday~~ <sup>Friday</sup> free & easy, pass'd  
a good night - all the symptoms as yester-  
:day, has not however pass'd so much Urine  
this last as some preceeding nights - No  
Drought at the same time -

Fig.6. Dr. John Goodsir Letter to Dr. William Cullen, 19 March 1789, Page 1, Photograph Courtesy of The Cullen Project

<sup>41</sup> The Cullen Project. The Consultation Letters of Dr. William Cullen (1710-1790). Goodsir Letter 19 March 1789 (Doc. ID 3482) Accessed at: <http://cullenproject.ac.uk>

Shall make a report in a Day or  
two - With much Respect

I am Dear Gentlemen

Friday  
~~Thursday~~ Mar. }  
near 9 o'clock -

Your very Hble. Servant  
John Goodsir

M<sup>r</sup>. Bellune has just now got out of bed  
& going to Breakfast - and has made  
a better Breakfast than he has done  
for many months

Fig.7. Dr. John Goodsir Letter to Dr. William Cullen, 19 March 1789, Page 2, Photograph Courtesy of The Cullen Project

By Thursday, 26 March 1789 Bethune's condition steadily continues to be progressing favourably: "Dear Gentlemen, I was favoured with yours on Sunday last in answer to Thursday and Friday's report since that date Mr. Bethune's case upon the whole still continues favourable within these six or seven days past however he has had some degree of cough and at times rather a shortness of breathing, blowing as he calls it. Urine pretty much proportion'd [proportioned] to what he drinks, this last night however rather diminished. No drought, bowels kept easy with the half gram of Squills which he has taken three nights successively. Edematous swelling on the limbs greatly diminished, pulse this morning 96. Continence much better his face filling up in good spirits. His food and wine has their natural taste and goes well down. Some nights past Mr. Bethune has slept ill, turned restless and dumbled about, buy says he does not find fatigued in the morning. Mr. Bethune has got the electuary this morning which he has not taken for three days past. Formerly it was given every second day now propose to give it only every third. This however will be regulated according to symptoms. I am with much respect, Dear Gentlemen, your very humble and obedient servant, John Goodsir. Kilconquhar, March 26, 1789."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The Cullen Project. The Consultation Letters of Dr. William Cullen (1710-1790). Goodsir Letter 26 March 1789 (Doc. ID 3485) Accessed at: <http://cullenproject.ac.uk>

Dear Gentlemen

I was favoured with  
yours on Sunday last in answer to Thursday  
& Friday's Report since that date Mr. Kethume's  
Case upon the whole still continues favourable  
within these six or seven days past however  
he has had some degree of Cough and at times  
rather a Shortness of Breathing Blowing as he  
calls it Wine pretty much propounded to  
what he drinks, this last night however rather  
diminished - no Draught, Bowels kept easy with  
the half gram of Squills which he has taken  
three nights successively, A demotous swelling on  
the Limbs greatly diminished, Pulse thus mod.  
96 - Countenance much better his Face filling up  
in good Spirits - his Food & Wine has their nat:

Fig.8. Dr. John Goodsir Letter to Dr. William Cullen, 26 March 1789, Page 1, Photograph Courtesy of The Cullen Project

natural taste and goes well down - Some  
night's past Mr. Bethune has slept ill, turned  
relaps & dumbled about - but says he does  
not find fatigued in the morning

Mr. Bethune has got the Electuary this  
morning which he has not taken for three  
days past - formerly it was given every second  
day now propose to give only every third. This  
however will be regulated according to Symptom

I am with much respect

Dear Gentlemen

Pileon? March 26<sup>th</sup>  
Saturday Morn - 1789

Your very Obedt. Servt.

John Goodsir

Fig.9. Dr. John Goodsir Letter to Dr. William Cullen, 26 March 1789, Page 2, Photograph Courtesy of The Cullen Project

By Thursday, 23 April 1789 Goodsir wrote Cullen: "Dear Gentlemen, I was favoured with yours of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Current yesterday, since the report of Mr. Bethune case on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The Symptoms have been pretty much the same as mentioned that day, in that report which was wrote from Kilconquhar it was mention'd [mentioned] that Mr. Bethune had that morning of his own accord taken the electuary which operated very freely 7 or 8 times in the evening I found him a good deal fatigued, and had but a poor night disturbed with breathlessness, and some degree of cough. Tuesday morning, still rather flagged which continued thro' the day, urine still in small quantity no drought, dryness in the mouth better, swelling of the limbs and thighs the same, appetite not so bad, some degree of hoarseness and cough and did not sleep well thro' the night from frequent returns of difficult breathing which he now observes to come on immediately when put in a horizontal position. Wednesday morning all symptoms the same as yesterday, except I think the Oedematous swelling on the thighs rather increased. Pass'd [Passed] a poor night, coughed and expectorate a good deal, and was out of bed between five and six this morning Thursday, no change of symptoms. Since Monday Mr. Bethune has taken the Nitre and Squills regularly, the former from 15 to 29 grains and the latter from one to one and a half in the day, urine sometimes we think a little increased at other times in very small quantity. Takes above two hours exercise in the carriage daily. I have constantly urged Mr. Bethune to continue regularly and to increase the Squills and Nitre as his stomach will bear them and that the griping effect of the Squills which sometimes they do, I have this day prevaild upon him to take the Laudanum to obviate that. As the disease evidently so gaining ground Mr. Bethune is now resol'd [resolved] soon to set off for Edinburgh, till that time shall persist with the present plans as the however is not yet fixed upon shall be glad to hear from you in course. With very much respect, I am Dear Gentlemen, your very humble servant, John Goodsir. April 23, 1789. Should have mentioned that there is a small portion of the blister formerly applied to Mr. Bethune's breast kept open. Have proposed to heal it up gradually. Mr. Bethune this morning Thursday has made a pretty good breakfast and otherwise looking fresh."<sup>43</sup>

Goodsir not only treated diseases but also delivered newborns, set broken bones, treated ailments and many other afflictions of the time. The *Aberdeen Journal Newspaper* dated Thursday, 5 January 1893 described doctors like Goodsir as: "In dress, surgeons were often rough and shabby, style and fashion being out of the question. An old engraving shows a clever representation of one who wears a battered cocked-hat, like an old admiral, an old rough coat, and great top boots, and who is seeing a patient before mounting on horseback to go his rounds."<sup>44</sup> Dr. John Goodsir would also make his rounds in the dark of night. According to the *Glasgow Herald Newspaper* of Saturday, 26 December 1868: "To obviate the dangers of traveling by night, the Doctor carried a lantern fastened by a strap above his knee. The bull's-eye of the doctor's lantern was often signaled in moonless nights, heralding the comforting assurance of an obstetric deliverance."<sup>45</sup> Goodsir would also write medical essays in Duncan's *Annals of Medicine* which gained him a reputation in the Edinburgh circle.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The Cullen Project. The Consultation Letters of Dr. William Cullen (1710-1790). Goodsir Letter 23 April 1789 (Doc. ID 3504) Accessed at: <http://cullenproject.ac.uk>

<sup>44</sup> *Aberdeen Journal Newspaper*, 5 January 1893 p.2

<sup>45</sup> *Glasgow Herald Newspaper*, 26 December 1868 p.2

<sup>46</sup> Turner, W. *The Anatomical Memoirs of John Goodsir*, Volume 1. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black. 1868. p.7

## The Baptist Preacher

When Emperor Constantine established Christianity as his state religion in 313, he instituted the connection between the political and the religious, a combination which has ever since been used to justify political and military adventures by associating these with religious fervor. Dissenters, and the Baptists in particular, would have none of that. They have always opposed 'state' religions, and have been persecuted for their stance. They have no hierarchy, no Pope, bishop, Presbytery or any other kind of supervisory body. Most countries of the world do have bodies known as Baptist Unions, as does Scotland, but the Baptist Union of Scotland is actually a cooperative body, which Baptist churches can join or leave as they see fit.

Largo, which had been a fishing village until the fish stocks in Largo bay ran out, was, by mid-eighteenth century, a weaving community - the remains of one of the old weaving sheds was there until recently and may still be traced. Weavers were notoriously independently-minded, often questioning the settled order of things – many social upheavals could be traced to weavers and shoemakers, people who discussed amongst themselves and learned from each other. It also has to be remembered that, unusually for the time, Scots were literate. However, the Baptists of Largo were not the first to leave the established Church of Scotland. Two earlier Presbyterian groups had already seceded, and had later united to form the much more evangelical United Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

According to the Anatomical Memoirs of John Goodsir: "His piety in time became as noted and demonstrative as his physic: for after leaving the 'the Established Church,' and having had experiences of the 'Independents,' he [Goodsir] joined the Baptists at Largo."<sup>47</sup> A Baptists congregation with about twenty members formed themselves into a Baptist Church at Largo in 1790, with Dr. Goodsir and Thomas Paterson as lay pastors.<sup>48</sup> The characteristics of the Baptist Church were as noted for all Baptists, no hierarchy, local autonomy and believers' baptism as against infant christening, the congregation being led by two (occasionally more) elders. The elders were not ordained clergy, although the Statistical Account designates them as such.

In 1809 Dr. Goodsir bought the Baptists a building to use as a meeting house, the congregation having previously met in a somewhat dilapidated building nearby.<sup>49</sup> Goodsir's church, with its moulded door bearing the date of its foundation, still stands virtually on the seafront, by the harbor and behind what is currently the Crusoe Hotel. That church was what came to be known as a 'Scotch' Baptist Church.

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<sup>47</sup> Turner, W. The Anatomical Memoirs of John Goodsir, Volume 1. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black. 1868. p.7

<sup>48</sup> Yuille, George. History of the Baptists in Scotland. Glasgow: Baptist Union Publications Committee. 1926. p.147

<sup>49</sup> Eunson, Eric and Band, John. Largo and Newburn-Religion from the Eighteenth Century. Ochiltree, Ayrshire: Stenlake Publishing. 2000



Fig.10. Crusoe Hotel, Lower Largo, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2003 Michael T. Tracy

### **Death of Dr. John Goodsir**

Dr. Goodsir served the Church gratuitously for 25 years as Pastor.<sup>50</sup> His wife, Agnes Johnston Goodsir died on Friday, 26 January 1816 at Largo, Largo Parish, Fife at the age of 67.<sup>51</sup> Dr. John Goodsir died on Friday, 29 November 1816 at the age of 70.<sup>52</sup>

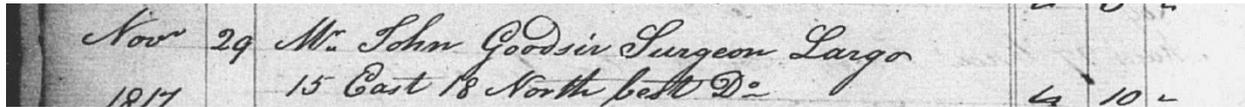


Fig.11. Death Record of Dr. John Goodsir, 29 November 1816, Largo Parish Records, Crown Copyright

There is a memorial plaque in the Largo Parish Church which reads: "John Goodsir, Surgeon and his wife, Agnes Johnston 1816," along with other members of the Goodsir family.

<sup>50</sup> Eunson, Eric and Band, John. Largo and Newburn-Religion from the Eighteenth Century. Ochiltree, Ayshire: Stenlake Publishing. 2000

<sup>51</sup> Death Record of Agnes Johnston Goodsir, 26 January 1816, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0174

<sup>52</sup> Death Record of John Goodsir, 29 November 1816, Largo Parish Records, Old Parish Records 443/0040 0166



*Fig.12. Goodsir Family Memorial Plaque, Largo Parish Church, Largo, Fife, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2003 Michael T. Tracy*

Dr. John Goodsir was one of Fife's earliest medical doctors and his career spanned over 40 years. He looked upon his profession as an extended series of duties whether it was delivering newborns, tending to the sick or caring for the infirm. Truly a pioneer of his time, Fife can be very proud of one of its own. Goodsir was also a preacher of the faith and occupied the pulpit for 20 years at Largo Parish, Fife. He purchased a Baptist Church for Largo with his own monies and served the Church as well. A man who not only tried to heal the sick, but was indeed, a healer of the soul. In grateful esteem and recognition by his distant cousin, Michael T. Tracy.

*Viva enim mortuorum in memoria vivorum est posita (The life of the dead is retained in the memory of the living)*

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