

346 Canterbury Road
Ringwood, 3134

Dear Les,

This is the result of my study of William Mitchell's shorthand diary. I have thoroughly enjoyed the project, especially having worked on diaries in my own family, including one containing shorthand, which I discovered - after having solved it myself - was in Samuel Taylor's system. I enjoyed reading all William Mitchell's diaries and seeing the photos on the website. He looks just as I would have expected from the diaries! John's Moore family was living and mining in Chiltern in the 1870s, then selected land in the Riverina, and later had a farm near Wangaratta, all of which is not far away from the Mitchell family. So it was all interesting to me.

If this were my family diary, I would put with it some general explanatory notes about the diary and the shorthand, such as I have included here, and I would transcribe it in one of the ways I have suggested. But I am aware that it is not my family diary and that William's family might perhaps not care for an outsider offering opinions, and for this reason I have avoided writing in the first person. I hope that what I have written might be useful, but in any case, I have enjoyed doing it and am grateful for the opportunity. Naturally I would be interested to hear of any future developments with the diary.

Incidentally, after writing it all, I discovered that the page numbering in the print copy of the diary that Barbara passed to me does not exactly match the numbering on the CD you sent me! The CD is actually one ahead, so the page numbers I've quoted, which refer to the print copy, have to be read as the following page on the CD! I've put a note in to that effect.

Regards,

Bill

William Mitchell's diary 1888-9

When William Mitchell wrote this diary he was suffering from the diabetes that led to his death. At the time diabetes was little understood and the only treatment was through diet. During the 19th century however chemical tests were developed to measure the amount of sugar in the urine and kits for this purpose were available. William Mitchell seems to have had such a kit. The testing involved heating a small amount of urine in a test tube, observing the colour and the sediment, and measuring its specific gravity. One adjusted one's diet according to the results.

In this diary William Mitchell recorded the results of his daily urine tests, the amount of urine he had passed in twenty-four hours, and the food he had eaten at each meal. For convenience he recorded the meals in shorthand, some of it in English letters - probably mostly the initial of the food item - and some of it in symbols.

Where William got these symbols from is not known, but they appear to be from one of the numerous shorthand systems in use in the 19th century. It is difficult to find examples of many of these systems and, as each new one borrowed from previous systems, many of them are similar. Some of the symbols William used are found in one system while others are not. His symbols for "the" and "that", for example, have the same meanings in Samuel Taylor's system, but other symbols he used do not occur in Taylor. Bibles, prayer books and sermons were often produced in shorthand and it is possible that William had one of these. He must have had at least some sort of list of symbols.

In any case William Mitchell does not seem to have been fluent in writing shorthand, as he did not spell whole words in it, but simply took a set of symbols and assigned his own meanings to them. He had done this in the earlier diaries, and listed their meanings on page 36 of the first diary and again on the last page of diary 3 (18790926 – 18800122). Some of these same symbols, with some new ones, he used in this diary also, *but with different meanings*. Travelling around looking for farming land, William found it useful to have symbols for words like "selection", "horse", "creek" and "road", but recording his diet needed a whole new vocabulary, and the same list of symbols had to be used. Unfortunately William did not list their meanings in this diary, so even if one found a shorthand system containing all these symbols one would still have to guess the meanings he assigned to them.

Nevertheless, without knowing the exact meaning of each symbol or letter, it is still possible to make some sense of the diary. It is obvious that one dot stands for breakfast, two dots (:) for dinner (lunch) and three for tea. The SP or S followed by figures and the references to "cooking brown" and "sugar" are connected with the urine test, and the figure in pints is the quantity of urine passed. Careful study of the text allows some reasonable guesses to be made about the foods. (A list of foods recommended and not recommended appears on page 88, but it is not clear at what stage William was given this or how strictly he followed it.)

As well as monitoring his diet William was seeking other remedies for his illness. Among the jottings on page 23 he has apparently copied a prescription, starting with the Rx symbol, ending with the dosage, and including codeia (= codeine), extract of nux vomica, belladonna and possibly birch-bark (betula = birch). On page 27 another jotting mentions "uva ursi" and "buchu". Uva ursi, or bearberry, and buchu are shrubs whose leaves are used in herbal medicine, particularly for urinary problems.

William was also putting his trust in Warner's Cures: the Safe Cure, a general cure-all; the Safe Pills; and the Diabetic Cure. American H. H. Warner made his first fortune as a manufacturer of fire- and burglar-proof safes and later used the word "safe" in his patent medicines. His remedies were very popular and there were factories in several countries, including one in Melbourne. The medicine bottles are now prized collectors' items. It is possible that Warner's also provided urine analysis, as William mentions on page 52 that he "sent water to Warner" and on page 49 that the number of his case in Warner's register was 1291.

In the end none of these things helped William Mitchell very much and he died not long after this diary ends.

Page numbering

The page numbers quoted in these notes are taken from a numbered print copy of the diary. The numbers on this copy however are *one behind* the numbers on the accompanying CD. For example page 42 in the printed copy is page 43 on the CD. Therefore to find a page quoted on the CD it is necessary to look at the page immediately *following* the page number quoted.

Shorthand symbols

Plain language diaries

{ the
 9 there
 9 selection
 | that
 r creek
 \ were *
 / cattle
 — road
 X crossed
 f come
 p paddock
 @ horse

These symbols and their
 meanings are listed on
 page 36 of the first diary
 and on the last page of
 the third diary (18790926-
 18800122)

* Also used as "where",
 which William spells "were".

Shorthand diary

t
 r
 \
 —
 X and X
 f
 O
 7
 or
 ^
 ..
 D
 ° (breakfast)
 : (dinner)
 : (tea)

4

Possible meanings of some symbols

These are suggested meanings of some of the letters and symbols in William Mitchell's shorthand diary, with supporting evidence and validity gradings. Only the symbols for the three meals can be regarded as totally valid, but B validity indicates that the evidence suggests that this is probably the meaning, while C indicates a fair possibility.

• = breakfast

• = dinner (lunch)

• = tea

m = mutton (B val.)

p. 49 the m was stewed for : (= lunch) with dumplings in it

p. 51 m caper sauce

p. 50 and before going to bed had boiled m (soop) (*brackets in original*)

p. 56 m pie

p. 43 cocoa and a little cold m

T = toast (B val.)

p. 36 before going to bed T

p. 29 @ fathers T and beef tea

B or b = bread (B val.)

Either B or T appears frequently at any meal.

p. 53 cocoa and B

p. 50 fried b

p. 65 m (mutton) B l (butter) in the train

p. 56 piece B

l = butter (probably C val.)

Frequently follows T (toast) or B (bread).

f = fowl (B val.)

p. 28 Sun for breakfast stewed fowl... : (= lunch) f n ...

ee = beef (B val.)

Usually the first item in a meal, followed by probable vegetables. Since B has been used for bread and f for fowl it seems William has here taken the middle letters of the word instead of the first or last.

5

n = bacon (B val.) (Not to be confused with n)

Often at breakfast but also at other meals. Often with the symbol 7 which appears to be eggs. Since he has already used B for bread William has probably used the last letter of the word instead of the initial.

7 = egg (B val.)

Appears frequently at breakfast, often with n (bacon) or T (toast).

p. 44 (breakfast:) T fried 7 n (Toast, fried egg, bacon)

— = potato (B val.)

Almost always follows m, f, ee or other symbol likely to be meat, followed by probable vegetables.

p. 51 mashed —

p. 57 m — onions

.. = lettuce (B val.)

Appears frequently, at any meal.

p. 29 worked in the garden planting ..

p. 44 (lunch:) .. ee (beef) at quarterly meeting in Wodonga, (tea:) 7 (eggs) T (toast) | (butter) ..

p. 42-43 (tea:) T (toast), | (butter), .. (lettuce). The worse night I have spent for many years vomiting & purging milk a little sour and curdled in my stomach with letuce for tea.

n (not to be confused with n (bacon)) = possibly cheese (C val.).

Usually follows T (toast) or B (bread), with or without | (butter).

† = possibly some sort of meat or main dish, perhaps mince, sausages or similar.

Appears as first item in a meal, followed by probable vegetables.

O = tomato (C val.)

Appears to be a vegetable. T has already been used so last letter has been used.

X = probably a vegetable. Also appears as \hat{X} .

Meanings of other symbols have not been identified.

Transcription

With the suggested meanings inserted, the first two pages of the diary (pages 28 and 29) and pages 42 to 44 read as follows. Brackets enclose words that are suggestions only and do not actually appear in the text.

Pages 28 and 29:

Thursday 5 July 1888 drinking a good deal skim milk etc & passing water accordingly of SP abt 30

Friday 6 in the morning SP28 & I expected to reduce it by night by not drinking & care abt diet at bedtime SP 41 very discouraging, evidently drinking causes thirst

diet

7th Sat. rooster, cabbage, B & T, watercress & letuce SP28

8 Sun for breakfast stewed fowl toast & a little b & butter 28 Dinner: (fowl, bacon, potato, bread, butter, toast) Tea: (toast, butter, ?cheese, lettuce, fowl, bacon) S31 cup of cocoa essens before going to bed

9th Monday S36 Breakfast: (toast, butter, bacon) Dinner: (potato, fowl, bacon, toast, ?cheese) cocoa essens S31 Tea: (toast, butter, ?cheese, lettuce) S31

10 tuesday S28 Breakfast: (egg, bacon, toast, ?cheese) have felt db thirst through night & morning but not troublesome & drank nothing Dinner: (potato, mutton, bread, ?cheese) Tea: (unidentified item, toast, butter, ?cheese, mutton) drank little through the day between meals chiefly water, not been much thirsty worked in the garden planting (lettuce)

11 wednesday S36 Breakfast: (unidentified item, toast, bacon, butter, ?cheese) Dinner: (toast, butter) @ Fathers(toast)& beef tea Tea: (toast, u.i., bacon, potato, ?cheese) S31

12 thursday S40 Breakfast: (u.i., toast, ?cheese) Dinner: (u.i., potato, ?cheese) Tea: (toast, butter, egg, u.i.) S36

13 S36 Breakfast: (u.i., toast, butter) Dinner: soop, (toast, ?cheese) Tea: (toast, butter, u.i., ?cheese) S34

Pages 42 to 44:

24 September 1888 S34 1/2 cooked brown no sugar so far as I can judge Breakfast: (mutton, u.i., toast, butter) Dinner: (mutton, potato) Tea: (mutton, toast, butter, lettuce) S31 5 1/2 pts

25 S32 Breakfast: (u.i., mutton, toast, butter) Dinner: (mutton, potato) Tea: (egg, toast, butter, lettuce) 6 pts

26 S37 Breakfast: (u.i., bacon, egg, toast, butter) Dinner: (mutton, potato, toast, butter) S32 1/2 Dinner: (u.i., mutton, lettuce) weight 148 lbs

27 Breakfast: (egg, u.i.) Dinner: (mutton), herrings, (potato, u.i.) Tea: (mutton, bacon, u.i., lettuce)

28 S30 Breakfast: (u.i., bacon, egg) Dinner: (mutton, u.i., toast, butter) Tea: (toast, butter, lettuce) the worse night I have spent for many years vomiting & purging milk a little sour curdled in my stomach with lettuce for tea

29 S31 Breakfast: (u.i., egg, toast) Dinner: (potato) Tea: (toast, butter, lettuce) exceeding week in the morning but improved through the day no appetite for dinner & eat very little

30 S40 Breakfast: (egg, toast, butter) Dinner at Pooleys corned beef only Tea: herrings, (egg, lettuce, toast) S36 before going to bed cocoa & a little cold (mutton)

1st Oct S31 Breakfast: (potato, egg, bacon) Dinner: (fowl, potato) Tea: (egg, toast, butter, lettuce) S26

2 S28 Breakfast: (egg, toast, butter) Dinner: (potato, mutton) Tea: (egg, toast, butter, lettuce) S25

3 October 1888 S30 Breakfast: (toast), fried (egg, bacon) Dinner: (mutton, potato) Tea: (mutton, toast, butter, lettuce) S25 weight 146 lbs

4th S28 back felt very bad last night I think it in consequence of handling the calves too much strain on the back, weak this morning Breakfast: (egg, toast, butter, mutton) @ 1PM S29 Dinner: (mutton, potato) Tea: (mutton, lettuce)

5th S28 Breakfast: (egg, toast, butter, u.i.) Dinner: (mutton, bacon, toast, ?cheese) Tea: (toast, butter, ?cheese, mutton, bacon), solid S30

6 S31 Breakfast: (egg, u.i., toast, butter) Dinner: (lettuce, beef) at Quarterly meeting in Wodonga Tea: (egg, toast, butter, lettuce)

Alternative transcription

Another (but perhaps less interesting) way to transcribe this diary would be to transcribe the words in English and those symbols whose meanings are obvious (the three meals), and to indicate the unknown food items with dashes, either one for each item or one for the whole meal. This at least provides some structure and gives an idea of what the diary is about. So, for example, pages 42 and 43 might look like this:

Page 42:

24 September 1888. S34 1/2 cooked brown no sugar so far as I can judge Breakfast: - .
Dinner: - . Tea: - . S31 5 1/2 pts

25. S32 Breakfast: - . Dinner: - . Tea: - . 6 pts

26. S37 Breakfast: - . Dinner: - . S32 1/2 Tea: - . weight 148 lbs

27. Breakfast: - . Dinner: - herrings - . Tea: - .

28. S30 Breakfast: - . Dinner: - . Tea: - . the worse night I have spent for many years vomiting &

Page 43:

purging milk a little sour curdled in my stomach with letuce for tea

29. S31 Breakfast: - . Dinner: - . Tea: - . exceeding week in the morning but improved throughout the day no appetite for dinner and eat very little

30. S40 Breakfast: - . Dinner at Pooleys corned beef only. Tea: herrings - . S36 before going to bed cocoa & a little cold -

1 Oct. S31 Breakfast: - . Dinner: - . Tea: - . S26

2. S28 Breakfast: - . Dinner: - . Tea: - . S25

you are here: > Home > See > Medicine and Health > Clinical Diagnosis

IMAGE: Russell urine test case, with a urinometer, 1900.

> Back to medium image > Back > Previous > Next



Picture number: 10289225

Credit: Science Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

Caption:

Made by Allen and Hanbury, London. By the 19th century uroscopy - the simple physical inspection of a urine sample, was giving way to urinology - the analysis, often chemical, of the dozens of substances in urine. The 'chemical profile' of urine can help diagnose numerous illnesses of the blood, kidneys, digestive system, and hormonal glands. This urine test kit includes a urinometer, which measures the specific gravity, or density, of urine (it can be used in the diagnosis of diabetes), a wick burner to heat urine, and litmus papers for acidity testing.

In Collection of: Science & Society Picture Library

Subject(s) > Medicine & Health > Clinical Diagnosis

Related to:



Russell urine test case, with a urinometer, c.1900.

> Back to medium image > Back to list > Previous > Next

Fig. 56. This is a facsimile view of "Warner's Hair Care" bottle, the "Title is in half ink. The Composition is in half ink. The bottom is Black on White. Always use the bottles you may have Perfect Hair." The bottle is shown with a label that reads: "Warner's Hair Care. The Title is in half ink. The Composition is in half ink. The bottom is Black on White. Always use the bottles you may have Perfect Hair." The bottle is shown with a label that reads: "Warner's Hair Care. The Title is in half ink. The Composition is in half ink. The bottom is Black on White. Always use the bottles you may have Perfect Hair."

[illegible]

1849

10. 10. 1845

4 years 2 months

3	6	5	6		
	5		6	13	0
18	0	11	0	13	4
				9	0
1	9	9	3	7	
	9				

Q. coccinea Sp
Ext. Nuc. Vom Sp
— Balladium Sp
Ac. Curbolden Sp
W. f. m. Polula
2. D. S.
U. l. t. o. j. i. i.

Thursday 5 July 1888
drinking a good deal skim
milk etc & passing water
accordingly of P.S. abt 30
Friday 6 in the morning P.S. 29
& I expected to reduce it by
night by not drinking &
care abt diet at bed time

P.S. 41 very discouraging,
evidently drinking causes
thirst, det

7th Sat. ^{water cress & lettuce} rooster, cabbage B & Y P.S. 28

8 Sun for breakfast stewed fruit 29
toast & a little b & butter

: f n - b 1 T

: T 10 - - f n S 31

cup of cocoa essens before
going to bed

9th Monday S 36 • T 1 n
: - f n T n cocoa essens S 36

: TIN ... S31

10 Tuesday S28 • TNTN

have felt do thirst through night
& morning but not troublesome
& drank nothing

: - m b n

: \ TIN m drank little

through day between meals
chiefly water, not been much
thirsty worked in garden
planting ..

11 Wednesday S36 • YTNIN

: T1 with others T & tea : TYN - N

S31

12 Thursday S40 • YTN : Y - N

: T17 \ S36

13 S36 • YTI : soup TN

: T1 \ N S34

14 July 1888 Saturday

S 37. T M T O I : T I ; - m T O

15 . n - T O S 38 show sugar free
before dinner took first dose of
Warners Safe cure : m T O : - m T O

16 Monday . - m T O S 38 : m - B O
; \ B O

17 Tuesday ^{S 38} m n B O : m - B O
; \ T I O

^{wed.}
18 S 38 in Albany : B I + got
warners diabetes cure + took first
dose in (shop)

19 S 38 . m n B O : m -
; B T O ~~W~~ \ S 26

20 Friday S 35 • B b n 7
: m - x : m - x S 30

21 S 34 • n 7 B b : m n - B
: f B n have drank milk since
taking Warners ~~delecta~~ cure

22 Sunday S 40 • n 7 B. at noon
S 27 : x 0 f : f B n after tea S 33
have drank less than usual to day (milk)
did not need to get out of bed last night
as usual to make water.

23 S 40 • x 0 n 7 T : f T B
: inspect T .. n S 38

24 Tuesday S 38 • n 7 : m -
Six o'clock S 34 : ee T ..

25 S 37 • n 7 T. @ 12 o'clock S 27
: - m : 1 m T a S 30

26 July Monday. m or x
60. det S 31. m T A 1

27. S 38. m T went to
Parker's sale had a good drink of
milk before starting & drank
nothing untill I came home
again. Thirsty all day but
not excessive, eat 2 poached
eggs on the road home only.

:- m T A. S 27. drank abt
1 quart of milk after tea &
had a cup of cocoa before going
to bed. passed a deal of water
& felt considerably thirsty
had to get out of bed twice
to make water the second time
I dressed.

28 July Saturday. . m or x 6 ~~15~~