

LINDEN, DIEDERICH WESSEL (fl.1745-1768; d.1769), medical doctor and mineralogist

Name: Diederich Wessel Linden

Date of death: 1769

Gender: Male

Occupation: medical doctor and mineralogist

Area of activity: Medicine; Science and Mathematics; Business and Industry

Author: Rita Singer

Diederich Wessel Linden was most likely born during the early eighteenth century in the small village of Hemmerde, Westphalia, Germany, the son of Thomas Linden, and his wife Mary. The circumstances of his upbringing remain obscure. However, it is likely he received some schooling that acquainted him with the foundations of mining and mineralogy. While identifying later in life as medical doctor and physician, there is no evidence that he received a degree from any university. In fact, in one of his publications, Linden proudly announced that he was not a learned academic.

Following his emigration to Britain in 1842, Linden first settled in London and made a living as physician and pharmaceutical instructor. During this time, he prepared his first publication, *Gründliche historische Nachricht vom Theer-Wasser* (1745), a German edition of a recent medicinal study by George Berkeley (1685-1753). In April 1746, Linden was granted a 14-year patent for the exclusive production of saltpetre according to his own method. Around the same time, he published his second book, a detailed commentary on a study of mineral waters by the German physician Johann Heinrich Schütte (1694-1774).

Possibly swelled by his early successes, Linden next petitioned for his naturalisation and his Bill was presented to the House of Lords on 18 April 1846, but it did not progress any further. It would take until 1762 for him to become naturalised through a Private Act signed by King George III. What is worse, any financial success from his patent or publications seems to have eluded him. Linden plunged so much into debt that he was committed to Fleet Prison on 20 January 1747 for a little over a month. By the spring of that year, he had quitted London for Wales.

By the second half of 1747, Linden had drawn up leases with the goldsmith Richard Richardson, Chester, and John Williams, Holywell, to develop mines at Caerwys and Prestatyn. As a result, he relocated to Holywell. It is around this time that Linden first drew public notice - and ire - from among British contemporaries, such as **Lewis Morris** and **Thomas Pennant**. With support from **Elizabeth Adams**, a Chester printer, and Thomas Cotham, a personal friend who had translated the German manuscript, Linden presented his first English publication, *A Letter to William Hooson, a Derbyshire Miner* (1747). In this pamphlet, he chiefly attacked Hooson as a hack and dilettante and labelled all British mining activities as in their infancy, comparing badly to the superiority of German knowledge and activities in this field. Unfortunately for the German newcomer, Hooson was an established name among British miners.

The combination of Linden's own, modest mining successes in Flintshire and his attack on Hooson drew Lewis Morris's attention who, in return, wrote scathing letters to his brother, **Richard Morris**, in London. Whereas the Morris brothers' remarks circulated privately or among their largely London-based coterie, Thomas Pennant produced an anonymised, albeit thinly-veiled character assassination of Linden in his *Tour of Wales* (1778) for his belief in and active use of divining rods.

Linden ventured into mining territory once more in 1750 with *Three Letters on Mining and Smelting*, largely describing the state of the art or lack thereof across north Wales. Not relenting on his previous evaluation of Hooson, nor his opinion on divining rods, this publication proved successful. It was republished several times and eventually translated into *Lettres sur la Minéralogie et Métallurgie pratiques* (1752).

The majority of Linden's written output, however, was dedicated to mineral waters. His first English text on the subject was *A Treatise on the Origin, Nature, and Virtues of Chalybeat Waters, and Natural Hot Baths* (1748) and includes a chapter on the mineral properties and medicinal value of St Winefride's Well. It is this and several later studies on mineral and hot wells that improved Linden's reputation among his British readership, although his medical and chemical expertise was doubtful even according to the standards of his own times.

A dedicated advocate for the medicinal value of mineral waters, he would publish several further studies over the following years, the most notable of which was his *Treatise on the Three Medicinal Mineral Waters at Llandrindod, in Radnorshire, South Wales* (1754). This account is noteworthy as the first of its kind regarding an infant spa culture developing in rural Wales at the time. Based on the impressive list of subscribers to this particular volume, Linden had clearly recognised the economic potential for Welsh towns to gain by reinventing themselves as modern spas.

During the 1750s, Linden's written output slowed down, while his earlier works would be reprinted several times. In 1753, Peregrine Bertie, third Duke of Ancaster (1714-1778) engaged Linden as an adviser to develop several of the estate's mining interests in the upper Conwy Valley, chiefly in the vicinity of Trefriw. Developing the mines from his new home in Llanrwst, Linden appears to have enjoyed initial successes; however, the mines never developed their envisaged potential. A few years later, Linden left his employment with Ancaster and removed to Brecon.

In Brecon, Linden set up a medical practice and settled into his new life. He participated in meetings of the Brecknockshire Agricultural Society, the first of its kind in Wales. Linden joined the society as an official member in 1757, presiding over one of the meetings in May 1759. During his involvement with the society, he also struck up a friendship with one of its founders, **Hywel Harris**, Trevecka. In April 1759, four men, Thomas Price and George Adney of Brecon, Evan Phillip of Llangammarch Wells and one Thomas Protherto separately accused Linden of physical assault 'with an intent [of] that most horrid detestable and abominable Crime of amongst Christians not to be named, called Buggery'. All four accusations were dismissed by the Court of Great Sessions.

After 1760, Linden's locations become uncertain, and it is unclear whether he had a permanent address. However, he remained in contact with his friends and acquaintances in Wales. In 1763, he spent time in London and exchanged several letters of advice with John Williams, Ancaster's mining agent in Denbighshire, regarding the still ongoing efforts to extract lead and copper in the upper Conwy Valley. In one of these, Linden cautioned Williams against using the Trefriw smelting house for lead and copper 'because it would poison the verdurer and the catel and all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and that [...] will not doe'. This letter shows Linden's conscientious side, warning that industry should not be carried out at all cost or without due diligence and care.

On other occasions, Linden would accompany clients to take the waters at Bristol, a habit which later resulted in a satirical character portrait in the novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) by Tobias Smollett (1721-1771). Linden continued publishing and writing letters concerning treatments with mineral waters. On two separate occasions in 1766, he was called upon to undertake *An Experimental and Practical Enquiry into the Ophthalmic, Antiscrophulous, and Nervous Properties of the Mineral Water of Llangybi, in Carnarvonshire* (1767). This publication would eventually be published posthumously in an abridged Welsh translation under the title *Hanes ferr o gynnedfau meddyginiaethawl dyfroedd Llangybi* (1771).

By 1767, Linden had settled in or near Shrewsbury. It is from here that he published his final book, *A Medicinal and Experimental History and Analysis of the Hanlys-Spa Saline, Purging and Chalybeate Waters, near Shrewsbury, etc* (1768). A year later he died in Shrewsbury under unknown circumstances and was buried at St Chad's on 25 August 1769.

As gleaned from his published works, his correspondence and the manner in which his contemporaries reacted towards him, Diederich Wessel Linden appears to have had a compulsive and pompous temperament. Convinced of his own accomplishments and opinions, he pursued his interest in mining and mineral waters with well-meaning passion and diligence - not infrequently to the dismay of others, more skilled and experienced in the same areas. Despite the strong reactions from critical quarters, Linden produced the most comprehensive pre-nineteenth century surveys of mining activities in north Wales and mineral waters in Wales and England at a time when there was little if any literature on those subjects available in Britain.

Author

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Diederich Wessel Linden (fl.1746-1768, d. 1769)

Accounts of Travel: 'Diederich Wessel LindenEuropean Travellers to Wales, viewed 12 April 2024

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