Preface

It has been my pleasure as well as my loving duty to work on this book, which brings to a wider audience the groundbreaking doctoral thesis of my dear, late friend, Dr Greg Wells (1947–2017). For as long as Greg had made Stratford-upon-Avon his home (since 1985), he was devoted to Hall’s Croft, and to learning about the medical practice of John Hall. Like Hall himself, Greg dedicated his life to the improvement and progress of his fellow humans.

Greg transcribed the whole of Hall’s Latin manuscript (some 191 pages), and then translated it into English. His bilingual thesis can be consulted at the University of Warwick. In identifying Hall’s Latin borrowings from the medical textbooks of his contemporaries, Greg’s original work makes a substantial contribution to our knowledge of early-modern libraries, and establishes the first of its kind in Stratford-upon-Avon.

This first complete translation of Hall’s *Little Book of Cures* reinstates material omitted by earlier editions. There is, for example, the Bishop of Worcester, whom Hall treated for ‘scorbutic arthritis’ (Case 164) – but also for extreme melancholy (earlier editions omit the reason for this: the bishop’s son had committed murder). For the first time, it is now possible to read about Hall’s conversations with his patients, his prayers for their recovery, and his thanksgivings for their cures. Of Richard Wilmore of Norton Curlieu, Budbrooke (whom Hall had treated for ‘astonishing worms’ when

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Wilmore was 14 years old), Hall writes: 'I saw him in passing two years later and asked whether he ever felt any corrosion of the stomach or passed worms. He replied that he had been free of all pain and torment since that time. Praise God' (Case 77).

Although he relied on the recipes and remedies of others, Hall occasionally made his own potions. To Mrs Richardson (suffering from uterine wind, Case 122), he administered, among other things, 'snail water (my own compound)', and records, 'she recovered her lost strength wonderfully, and said this divine water far surpassed potable gold, and she wished never to be without it because, she said, it was the equal of anything. She was thus completely cured, and after the death of her husband remarried and bore an heir six years later.'

This volume is published in association with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust whose charitable objectives include conserving and presenting the family homes of William Shakespeare, including those sites most associated with John Hall: Hall's Croft and New Place. We are delighted and proud to be presenting a book which brings to life the work, intellect, faith and social interactions of Shakespeare's son-in-law.

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