

Childhood diseases in the early 20th century (as revealed by the Kildwick School log book – 1907 to 1920)

These days, thanks to the widespread use of antibiotics and early-years inoculations, most childhood diseases are kept largely under control. They are irritants (albeit sometimes painful for individuals) rather than dangerous, or even life-threatening.

However, in the early years of the 20th century, this was not the case and the appearance of an infectious disease in a single child could quickly result in it spreading through the whole community. Sometimes with dangerous or even fatal consequences.

The Kildwick School log book for the period 1907 to 1920 shows how common these diseases were and the steps that the school and the local authority could take to prevent them spreading. Children could be excluded if they had siblings who were infected and, in the event of a serious outbreak, the Medical Officer of Health could order the school to be closed.

The log also reveals the start of what would become universal health care: with the gradual appearance of school medical inspectors and dentists, and a nurse examining children for head-lice.

1907

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| January 11 th | 13 children have been absent all week owing to illness; one of these due to mumps and two to measles. |
| February 12 th | One boy was obviously unfit to remain at school, so was taken home by the Monitor. |
| March 15 th | Six children have been absent all the week. Two of them are suffering from eczema.
<i>(Perhaps a polite way of saying ringworm ?)</i> |
| August 26 th | Re-opened school today after four weeks' holiday. Three children are excluded owing to scarlet fever and another case has proved fatal.
<i>(This was seven-year-old Helen Clough of Starkey Lane, Farnhill. Her teacher attended the funeral and the school sent a wreath.)</i> |
| August 30 th | Five children have been excluded all the week owing to infectious illness.
<i>(Presumably, the outbreak of scarlet fever was continuing ?)</i> |
| September 6 th | Five children have been absent all the week owing to infectious illness.
<i>(Still scarlet fever ?)</i> |
| October 4 th | One boy is ill with Scarlet Fever. His brother is consequently excluded from school. |

1908

- February 7th Two boys have been excluded all week owing to an ailment of the skin which a local doctor states to be infectious.
(Ringworm perhaps ?)
- March 6th One child is reported to be suffering from Scarlet Fever.
- March 13th One child is away owing to Scarlet Fever and another owing to measles.
- April 27th Attendance shows improvement, but two children are absent owing to a case of chicken-pox.
- August 27th Three children have been sent home, because they are suffering from some skin ailment.
- September 4th The attendance this week is adversely affected by the absence of three children owing to skin ailments and two owing to Scarlet Fever.
- September 16th Dr. Stansfield from the Public Health Department, Wakefield visited the school this afternoon and explained the procedure for Medical Examination.
- September 23^d Notices were sent out today to the parents of children who are to be medically examined.
- October 1st Mr. Stansfield, Medical Officer visited the school today and examined about 17 of the scholars. Notes were sent to the parents of children with defective eyesight, etc.
- October 16th Three children are excluded from school owing to two cases of Scarlet Fever.
- October 19th Five fresh cases of Scarlet Fever are notified this morning and forty children are absent from school owing to illness, etc. The fever cases have been reported to the School Attendance Officer and the Sanitary Inspector also.
- October 21st School closed today by order of the Medical Officer of Health.
Duration of closing – Four weeks commencing Oct 20th 1908.
The school was fumigated this afternoon and has since been thoroughly cleaned and colour washed.
- November 16th Reopened school after closure for four weeks. No. present 102
ten children are still in hospital with Scarlet Fever.
(Right up to the Xmas break, the headmaster noted a large number of pupils "absent all week due to illness".)

1909

- January 11th School reopened today after a fortnight's holiday. No. present 107
Seven children are still absent due to Scarlet Fever. Four of these should return to school next week.
- February 3rd Dr. H. Stansfield, Medical Officer, visited the school today and examined 12 of the children.
- March 1st Twenty-five children are away from school today suffering from influenza colds, etc.
(The headmaster would subsequently report 17 children away all week and 25 absent on Friday.)
- May 19th Dr. H. Stansfield visited the school today and examined a number of the children
- September 17th James Ernest Sharpe, a scholar of this school, died during the week. The teachers and scholars sent two crosses of flowers to the grave.
(No cause of death is recorded in the school log and, generally, attendance levels seem to have been high in this period. However, it may be significant that the school ceased swimming lessons at Glusburn Baths until the following summer.)
- October 18th Six children are away from school today, suspected to be suffering from whooping cough. A number of others are away owing to colds. Sixteen infants are absent today.
- October 21st Several more infants are away today with colds.
- October 22nd Eighteen children have been absent all week owing to whooping cough, etc.
- November 3rd Dr. F.E. Atkinson, MOH, visited the school this afternoon and noted the number of children absent owing to whooping cough viz. 21.
- November 4th Received a personal weighing machine and a measuring standard for use in connection with Medical Examination of school children.
- November 5th Twenty eight children have been absent all week owing to whooping cough, etc. Twenty five of these belong the Infant's Class.
(The same number of absentees was noted the following week.)
- December 22nd Dr. H. Stansfield, School Medical Officer, visited the school today and examined a number of children. Dr. Adams (C.M. Dept.) also came in the afternoon.

1910

- January 12th The children who have been medically examined were weighed today.
- May 25th Dr. H. Stansfield, School Medical Officer, visited the school today and examined 14 children.
- May 27th One child is reported to be suffering from measles and another suspected to be suffering from chicken pox.
- June 13th Fifteen children are absent this morning who are suspected to be suffering from Measles and three others are away due to brother's illness. The Attendance Officer was duly notified.
- June 17th Thirty one children are now excluded owing to measles in their homes. The Medical Officer of Health has been informed.
The School Attendance Officer visited on Thursday and noted names of absentees.
(The same number of absentees was recorded in the following week. Miss Sugden, one of the teachers, was also reported to be ill.)
- July 22nd Fourteen children have been absent all week. A number of these are away owing to measles.
- October 7th In the Infants' Class two children are away owing to ringworm and one owing to whooping cough.
- November 18th Three children have been away all week and are suspected to be suffering from Whooping Cough.
- November 23rd Dr. H. Stansfield, School Medical Officer, visited the school today and medically examined 18 children. Several parents attended.
- December 9th There are four cases of whooping cough and one of measles.

1911

- February 10th ... there are three cases of sores.
- April 29th Medical inspection today by Dr. Douglas (W.R. Medical Inspector). Several of the parents attended.
- December 8th Recreation Interval was taken this afternoon at 2:30pm in order that the children could attend the funeral of their little school-fellow, Lawrence Shuttleworth, who has died suddenly from blood-poisoning.
- December 21st Dr. A. Philip, School Medical Officer, visited the school and examined several children. He afterwards visited the various classes.

1912

- January 29th John Richardson, a five year old scholar at this school died in the Fever Hospital Skipton on Sunday, from a severe attack of diphtheria. Two children suffering from cold and sore throats were sent back home this morning.
- January 31st Dr. Atkinson, Medical Officer of Health, visited the school this afternoon and examined the throats of a number of children.
(Seven children were excluded with immediate effect and, the following day, a further 22 were excluded "until the return of the tests".)
- February 5th The tests taken by Dr. Atkinson (M.O.H.) proved to be "negative". The children previously excluded were re-admitted today. A number are still absent due to influenza and colds.
- April 17th Twenty five who are to be medically inspected on Friday next were measured and weighed today.
- April 18th Three children absent this morning are suspected to be suffering from Chicken Pox. Two others with rash on their bodies have been sent home.
- April 19th Eight more children are absent this morning suspected to be suffering from Chicken Pox.
Dr. A. Philip MD visited the school this morning and medically examined 17 of the children. He also excluded two children suffering from Chicken Pox.
- April 26th Eighteen children have been absent all week owing to Chicken Pox.
- May 2nd The total of absentees owing to chicken pox has now reached thirty.
(This was the peak of the outbreak which would continue for a further two weeks.)

1913

- January 6th Two boys are excluded suffering from Ringworm.
- February 28th Attendance this week has been low. Three children are absent suffering from Ringworm, and a number of others have severe colds.
- March 14th Dr. A. Philip, School Medical Officer, visited the school today and examined fifteen children. He also excluded from school two children suffering from Glandular Swellings.
- August 29th ... two are absent owing to ringworm sores.
- October 3rd A number of the children have been absent all week owing to colds. Some have glandular swellings.

October 15th Seven children have been absent all week. Five of these are suffering from mumps.

October 24th Five children have been absent all week suffering from mumps.

November 14th Ten children have been absent all week owing to mumps, etc.

November 25th Dr. A. Philip, School Medical Officer, visited the school today and inspected twenty-two scholars, in addition to special cases.

December 5th Eight children have been absent all the week owing to illness, chiefly cases of mumps.

December 8th Seventeen children are absent this morning suffering from mumps or severe colds.

December 12th There are nine cases of mumps.

1914

January 5th Three children are still absent suffering from mumps.

June 29th Four children are away from school today suffering from measles and one child is excluded because of his brother's illness.

July 3rd Eight children are now away owing to measles. They are chiefly infants and young boys.

July 7th Twenty one children are absent this morning owing to measles.

July 10th 42 scholars were absent from school today owing to measles in their homes. The School Dentist came today and attended to the teeth of four children. Seven who should have received attention were absent.
(This is the first mention in the log of a "school dentist".)

July 13th School closed – until midsummer holidays.
Dr. Atkinson, Medical Officer of Health, notified Divisional Clerk of closure.

August 28th All the children seem to have recovered from measles.

November 26th Nurse Stoddard visited the school today and inspected the hair etc. of a number of scholars.
(This is the first mention in the log of "nitty Nora, the head explorer".)

November 27th Nurse Stoddard again visited the school and examined about 50 children.

December 17th Nurse Stoddard visited the school today and saw a number of girls and one boy. A distinct improvement in the state of the children's hair is resulting from these visits.

1915

- May 14th Nurse Stoddard (WRCC) visited the school this morning and inspected a number of children. She pointed out to a number the importance of keeping their hair tidy.
- July 1st The School Dentist, Mr. Raeburn, came today and attended to the teeth of a number of children. The parents of 18 children had written accepting treatment; 8 declined and three took their children to their own dentist.
- July 2nd Mr. Raeburn again attended, at the Parish Room, and extracted children's teeth, etc. 10 children were dealt with.
- July 19th Dr. Brewer, the school Medical Officer, visited the school this afternoon and examined a number of children.
- November 5th ... six being away suffering from mumps.
- November 17th Nurse Stoddard (WRCC) visited the school and inspected a number of children.
- November 26th Several infants have been absent this week owing to Whooping Cough and Mumps.
- December 3rd Seventeen children have been absent all the week owing to Whooping Cough, etc. A number of others have been absent part of the week
- December 10th Thirty children have been absent all week owing to whooping cough.
- December 16th The Head Teacher received the following notice this morning from the Divisional Clerk: "The Infants Division is to be closed; order following..."
- December 24th School closed at 11:30am today for Xmas Holidays ... The usual Christmas dinner for children from houses with large families etc. was served. Thirty-four children were invited but ten were unable to come owing to Whooping Cough. Gifts were sent to these.

1916

- January 10th A number of the Infants are still absent owing to Whooping Cough.
- January 21st Eleven children have been absent all week owing to Whooping Cough, etc. These are infants and children in the lower classes.
- January 27th Seventeen children have been absent all week owing to Whooping Cough etc. There are also two cases of Ringworm, and one other girl is seriously ill in a nursing home.
(The outbreak of whooping cough continued into March. One of the teachers was also absent for an extended period with laryngitis.)

March 24th There are two cases of Chicken Pox and several of bronchitis following Whooping Cough.

(From about this point the log largely ceases to record weekly absences and illnesses. Only major outbreaks are recorded.)

May 17th Nurse Stoddart (WRCC) visited the school today.

September 4th S. Jacob Esq. MA LLD JP visited the school this afternoon and gave the older children a talk on "Health and the Prevention of Consumption".

November 2nd Mr. Raeburn, School Dentist, visited the school today.

November 10th Nurse Stoddart called at school today to see several children.

November 12th Dr. Brewer, School Medical Officer, visited the school this morning and examined a number of infants and nine older children.

December 1st Dr. Brewer, School Medical Officer, visited the school today to see and examine H. Mosley.

1917

September 4th Nurse Stoddart (WRCC) visited the school today to see certain children.

October 15th Ten children are absent this morning owing to cases of Chicken Pox in their families. School Attendance Officer called and took particulars.

October 29th 29 children are away from school today and 21 are suspected to be suffering from Chicken Pox. Five others are absent owing to brothers' and sisters' illness.

October 30th Four more children have got chicken pox. Three were attending school and had to be sent home.

November 2nd Dr. Atkinson, Medical Officer of Health, visited the school this afternoon and noted absences due to Chicken Pox.
Twenty seven children have been absent all week owing to Chicken Pox and relative's illness.

November 5th Infants Class closed today for three weeks on the order of the Medical Officer of Health. Children to re-assemble November 26th.

November 9th Fourteen children have been absent all week owing to Chicken Pox.

November 30th *(The infants have returned after the three-week closure period.)*
Eighteen children have been absent all week owing to illness, chiefly Chicken Pox. Fifteen of these are infants.

1918

- January 23rd Mr. Raeburn, School Dentist, visited the school this afternoon and saw 49 children.
- February 1st Nurse Stoddart (WRCC) visited the school this afternoon.
- February 11th Twelve children were out of school part of the morning and afternoon session to attend the Dental Clinic at the Glusburn Council School today.
- February 12th Seven children attended the Clinic today to receive Dental Treatment.
- July 11th Mrs S.E. Lawson (uncertificated assistant) is absent today owing to an attack of Influenza. 34 children are also absent.
- July 12th 56 children are away today owing to illness – chiefly influenza.
School closed from today for one week by order of the Medical Officer of Health.
- November 1st Twenty children are absent today owing to influenza, colds etc.
School Attendance Officer called and took particulars. Forms re precautions in influenza epidemics distributed to children.
- November 5th School closed today and throughout the week on the recommendation of the Medical Officer of Health.
- November 15th Eighteen children have been absent all week owing to influenza, etc. Other children have been absent part of the week.
- November 18th School closed by order of the Medical Officer of Health owing to prevalence of influenza. To remain closed for two weeks, viz. 2nd December.

1919

- January 6th Four children are [still] away due to Scarlet Fever; two boys are excluded suspected to be suffering from Chicken Pox.
- February 12th 45 children absent today owing to colds and influenza. 2 absent owing to German Measles.
Dr. Brewer (School Medical Officer) called this afternoon to see children who have been suffering from Ringworm.
- February 14th The Head Teacher (Thomas Appleby) was absent today suffering from severe cold and sore throat.
- February 17th School closed today for two weeks by order of the Medical Officer of Health.
- March 24th Dr. Brewer (School Medical Officer) visited the school this and examined several children.

- July 2nd Dr. Charles Smith, School Medical Officer, visited this afternoon and examined 20 of the children and inspected the rest. He certified that Fred Wilcock and Marion Sugden are not in a fit state of health to attend school and advised their parents to take them to be examined by their own doctors and by the Tuberculosis Officer at Keighley.
- August 23rd The Head Teacher received the following communication from the Divisional Clerk. "Dear Mr. Appleby, I have a letter from Dr. Atkinson this morning and he advises deferring the opening of the school for another week. Closing order to follow. He says there are several cases of measles at Farnhill."
- November 14th Dr. C. Smith (School Medical Inspector) and Nurse Stoddart visited the school this morning and inspected sixteen children.
- November 28th A number of the infants are still suffering the after-effects of measles, and in consequence their attendance is not good.

1920

- May 17th Owing to a number of cases of mumps the attendance this week has been low.
- May 19th There are a number of fresh cases of mumps. There are 13 cases of mumps and 9 other children excluded as a consequence. There are also 6 other children absent owing to influenza, sore throat, etc.
The Correspondent (Rev. C.E.V. Hodge) telephoned Dr. Atkinson, Medical Officer of Health. The latter recommended the closing of the school and promised to send an order later.
The order duly arrived closing the school until June 7th.
- June 7th School re-opened today after closure for mumps. There are still 12 cases of mumps and 11 other children excluded due to brother's or sister's illness.
- June 11th 17 children have been away from school owing to the fact that they or their sisters or brothers are suffering from mumps.
- June 18th The number of cases of mumps is lessening but 13 children are still away from school owing to this and other illnesses.
- November 22nd School closed today by order of Dr. Atkinson, Medical Officer of Health, owing to outbreak of diphtheria. To remain closed one week.
- November 29th School re-opened after being closed for one week owing to infectious illness. Dr. Atkinson came this morning, took swabs from the throats of the scholars and closed the school for the rest of the week.
- December 6th The school re-opened this morning. The Medical Officer reported that, of the 90 swabs taken, only 1 has given a positive result; viz: Kenneth Simpson.
- December 14th Dr. C. Smith, School Medical Officer, accompanied by Nurse Stoddart visited the school today and examined 27 of the children. He recommended the exclusion of Marion Sugden owing to lung trouble.

1921

- January 13th There is [another] case of diphtheria (Kathleen Snowden) and three children who have come into contact are also excluded from school.
- January 14th Three children are absent owing to fear of infection.
- January 28th Another case of diphtheria has been reported today (Annie Whiteoak).
- February 18th The seven children who have had diphtheria are all reported to be clear. Those who were in hospital have returned.
- April 12th Dr. W.B. Watson, School Medical Officer, accompanied by Nurse Stoddart visited the school today and examined about 17 children.
- July 18th There are several fresh cases of whooping cough and two or three children are excluded by doctor's orders.
- August 22nd School re-opened today after four weeks holiday. Ten children are still absent suffering from whooping cough.
- October 28th Dr. W.B. Watson, School Medical Inspector, visited the school today and inspected twenty scholars. Nurse Stoddart also attended.
Dr. Watson noted one case of an infant who is tongue-tied.
- November 9th Dr. W.B. Watson visited the school to examine certain special cases.
- November 21st The three children of the gypsy van-dweller Mr. S. Grey left the school today. The school doctor reports that in physical stamina and cleanliness they are quite up to the standards of the other children.
- December 2nd Dr. Lawrence (School Medical Officer) called to examine Robert Banks with regard to the latter being employed in delivering papers.
(The log does not report whether or not young Robert was found to be fit enough to be a paper-boy.)

Acknowledgements

The Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group would like to thank Kildwick School for permission to copy the school log.