

Notes on the Kildwick Typhoid Epidemic – 7

Medical treatment of the villagers

This note looks at the medical treatment that was available to the villagers of Kildwick, Farnhill and the surrounding area who fell ill during the epidemic. A separate note describes, in some detail, the treatment of Mr. J. J. Brigg MP, of Kildwick Hall.

Introduction

It is important to note that at the time of the Kildwick typhoid epidemic there was no National Health Service. In the normal course of events, if you fell ill and required a doctor you *paid* for him to attend you, at your home. If hospitalisation was required, you could expect to receive a bill to cover the cost of your stay and that of any medical services provided. For most people, then, resort to a doctor was only something that happened in the most serious of illnesses.

But around this time a statutory requirement for the notification of certain infectious diseases, including typhoid, was coming into force in the UK¹. This allowed for local council medical officers to direct the treatment of individuals, although quite what was to happen in the event of an epidemic amongst people who couldn't afford medical treatment is by no means clear.

From the very start, however, newspaper reports were reassuring people²:

***KILDWICK – Serious Typhoid Outbreak** – ... The best nursing assistance has been obtained, and the council's officers have been assiduous in relieving the suffering in every way in their power.*

A similar stance was taken by Skipton Rural District Council at its first discussion of the outbreak³:

***Meeting of the Rural Council – The Outbreak Explained** – ... At the outset, the chairman expressed the sympathy of himself and his colleagues with the families of those who had fallen victim to the epidemic and stated that the Council wished it to be known that they were doing, and would do, everything they could to help those who were suffering from the disease and to prevent it from spreading further.*

What was the treatment ?

These days typhoid is easily treated with antibiotics. In 1899, however, no such antibiotics were available. An early form of vaccine, derived from heat-treated bacteria, was developed in 1896 but this was not widely available until the start of WW1⁴.

At the time of the Kildwick outbreak, the treatment for typhoid fever was basic and amounted simply to bed rest, nutritious food, and clean water. The reasoning behind the notification and hospitalisation of cases was more to do with removing patients from an environment where they may cause secondary infections than access to any specialist treatments available only in hospitals.

Where were people treated ?

During the course of the outbreak, patients were treated in three locations.

- In hospital – that is, at the Keighley and Bingley Joint Isolation Hospital, known as Morton Banks.
- At home – looked after by their family and visiting doctors
- In the temporary hospital, created in the Kildwick Parish Rooms

Morton Banks isolation hospital

For most of us, our view of Victorian hospitals has been coloured by gothic novels and films. We tend to assume that they were places of last resort; places lacking even the most basic hygiene, where you were as likely to acquire an illness as you were to recover from one.

Morton Banks was not like that.

Built in 1896 as a joint development by Keighley and Bingley councils, Morton Banks was a modern, state-of-the-art, isolation hospital⁵. The building was one of only 28 designated isolation hospitals in the provinces and was erected on unused land belonging to East Riddlesden Hall. Its catchment area covered Keighley and Bingley and, if space allowed, beds were also made available for cases coming from further afield.

In 1899 Keighley suffered a major outbreak of scarlet fever and, during the course of that year, Morton Banks admitted a total of 414 patients, of which 309 were cases of scarlet fever.

Nevertheless, they did find room for 26 cases of typhoid from the Skipton Rural District area⁶ – and at least 20 of these were admitted from the Kildwick outbreak between 15th January and 18th March⁷ (it is possible that more were admitted subsequently). But it wasn't enough, and at various times during the epidemic some patients from Kildwick and the surrounding area were refused admission due to a lack of capacity.

Treatment at home

A number of cases were treated at home, either by their own family or by professional medical staff employed to attend. In some cases this was because there was no room for the patient to be admitted to Morton Banks (the members of the Barritt family, for example³), in others it was because the patient was simply too weak to be moved⁷, and in some cases it seemed to have been because families thought their loved ones might get better treatment if they paid for it.

In practice, this latter hope turned out to be misplaced: of the 10 who died in the epidemic, four died at Morton Banks (Stanley Baldwin, Mary Ann Tillotson, Martha Petty, and Marjorie Tillotson), while six died at home (Mary, John and Sarah Barritt; Margaret and John Sugden; and Abraham Petty).

Most of the cases looked after at home were attended by the local physician, Dr. Fletcher of Crosshills⁸. Others brought in medics from further afield; in the case of the Barritt family, for example, it is known that they were attended by Dr. Fletcher, a professional nurse who was in constant attendance, and Dr. Rabagliati who was called in for consultations from Bradford³ – no doubt bringing his rather unconventional theories on diet and disease cures with him^{9,10}.

Temporary hospital – Kildwick Parish Rooms

At the time of the Special Meeting of Skipton Rural District Council on February 1st, Dr. Atkinson the Medical Officer, believed that the last cases in the epidemic would have presented themselves before 10th February¹¹. His calculation was based on the fact that the source of the infection had been cut-off on January 20th, and that there was not much fear of typhoid appearing after three weeks had elapsed³.

So when, on February 8th, Dr Atkinson received notification from Morton Banks Hospital that no further cases could be taken, he was not unduly concerned; a view reflected by the Craven Herald¹²:

Notice has been given that no further cases can be received at the Hospital [Morton Banks] from outside the Keighley Union at present ... Under other circumstances [this] would have placed the rural council's officers in a dilemma; but in view of the fact that today completes the period of incubation, no further outbreak, so far as the village is concerned, is expected.

Unfortunately, new cases kept occurring: one on the 14th, three on the 16th, and two on the 17th. So, at the Rural District Council meeting on the 18th, Dr. Atkinson reported⁷:

... he had inspected the old school at Kildwick, to see whether it could be utilised as a temporary hospital in the event of the Morton Banks hospital not being available. The large room, he found, was suitable in every way for a small hospital, and the necessary arrangements might be made, such as employing nurses who were already on the spot, getting appliances, and furnishing the room.

Replying to Councillor Amcotts Wilson, the Medical Officer said that the place would afford accommodation for six patients, and that there were at present three cases which might properly be removed there.

Councillor Amcotts Wilson moved, and Councillor Simpson seconded, that the medical officer and inspector be empowered to take the necessary steps to make the old school fit for the accommodation of patients, and use their own discretion as to what is required.

Councillor Mosley said some objection had been raised to the school being adapted for hospital purposes on the ground that the nurses could not be accommodated.

The Medical Officer replied that the nurses would live off the premises and be accommodated elsewhere. There would be no difficulty on that ground.

The temporary hospital, established in the old school building (now used as Kildwick Parish Rooms), was kitted-out quickly and the first six cases were admitted on 22nd February⁷. This was reported as follows¹⁴:

The Parish Room in Kildwick has, notwithstanding strenuous opposition from adjoining householders, been fitted up as a temporary hospital, and eight beds are provided in the upper storey. Six of these are now occupied by four children, a young man from Farnhill, and a boy from Junction ... The hospital has a staff of three nurses and is under the general superintendence of Dr. Fletcher.

Subsequently, Dr. Atkinson acknowledged the importance of the temporary hospital⁷:

... In consequence of the later notifications, and the inability on the part of the Keighley and Bingley Joint Hospital Authority to take further cases, we obtained the sanction of the district council on February 18th to the proposal to use the Old Kildwick School Building as a temporary hospital in order to minimise the risk of the occurrence of secondary cases at those houses where the nursing was not in skilled hands. The furnishing, &c., of this hospital was completed and six cases moved in on February 22nd.

The premises made an excellent little hospital for the purpose, containing eight beds with three nurses in attendance.

All excreta were cremated in a furnace below the hospital, without removal from it, and all liquids dealt with in Foster's patent pills treated with St. Bede Disinfectant, and removed daily to be burned by the scavenger.

Note: For information on St. Bede disinfectant, see

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2422266/pdf/brmedj08895-0024a.pdf>



Figure 1: The temporary hospital established upstairs in the Old School, Kildwick – now the Parish Rooms

The photograph on the previous page shows the infirmary room at the temporary hospital, with two of the professional nurses. The nurse seated at the rear of the room, facing the camera, is Nellie Ingle; the gentleman in the bed next to her, nearest the window, is William Watson, whom she subsequently married. See the Appendix.

The temporary hospital stayed open until the end of the epidemic¹³:

The Surveyor reported that they had closed the Hospital at Kildwick on 29th March, the patients [had] been removed on the 28th, and after fumigation he had had all the furniture packed up and sent to Winterburn Hospital to be stored. Before doing this the officer in charge had written to all the people who had sent gifts of furniture to the hospital as to their wishes regarding the disposal of the articles given and they replied agreeing to Mr. Rodwell's suggestion that the goods should be stored at Winterburn for future use if necessary. He further reported that he had given orders for the room used as the Hospital to be cleaned and the walls re-papered, etc. Mr. Rodwell's action in this matter was approved.

Appendix – Notes on the life of Nellie Ingle

Note: The Farnhill and Kildwick History Group are very grateful to Mrs. Ruth Ward for the information used in this Appendix. Ruth knew Mrs. Watson, as she then was, and was given the original of the photograph, included on page 5 of this piece, by her.

Having recently completed her training as a nurse, the 20-year old Nellie Ingle arrived at Kildwick and Crosshills railway station from London in February 1899, and asked the way to “Kildwick Hospital”. It must have come as some surprise to her to be directed to the Kildwick Parish Rooms.

From then until the temporary hospital closed at the end of March, she nursed those who could not be treated at the isolation hospital or remain at home. These included William Watson, the Farnhill barber and, before the end of the year, they had married.

The Watsons set up home in Main Street, Farnhill. Will Watson, or Willie Barber as he was widely known, ran a barbers shop from the front room and Nellie sold sweets.



Figure 2: Mr and Mrs Watson, outside their home in Main Street, Farnhill – photograph dated June 1930

For many years Nellie also performed the role of village nurse and midwife.

William died in 1945. This from the Keighley News, April 21st 1945:

***Hairdresser's Death** – The death occurred on Friday week of Mr. William Watson, of Main Street, Farnhill, aged 74 ...*

He met his wife, who survives him, in rather remarkable circumstances. In 1899 he was one of the victims of a typhoid epidemic. The Kildwick parish room was converted into an emergency hospital, and Mr. Watson was one of the patients. In February of that year the present Mrs. Watson was one of the nurses who arrived to attend to the patients, and he married her later in the same year.

Nellie Watson died in 1978, in a nursing home in Crosshills; she was 99.

What next – can you help ?

Do you or your family have any additional information on the Kildwick typhoid epidemic ? If so, the Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group would like to hear from you. Please email history@farnhill.co.uk

References

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- 3 Keighley News, February 4th 1899
- 4 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1281610/>
- 5 Isolation or Isolated ? Morton Banks Hospital. Frank Atkins, MA Thesis in Social and Cultural History; School of Cultural Studies; Leeds Metropolitan University, 2006
- 6 Borough of Keighley 18th Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health– Year Ending 31st December 1899
- 7 Craven Herald, March 24th 1899
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- 9 <http://chestofbooks.com/health/nutrition/Diet-Theory/Chapter-XI-The-No-Breakfast-Plan-In-Theory-And-Practice.html>
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- 11 Craven Herald, February 24th 1899
- 12 Craven Herald, February 10th 1899

13 Minutes of Skipton Rural District Council Sanitary Committee Meeting – April 1st 1899, held at the North Yorkshire County Council Record Office, Northallerton

14 Keighley News, February 25th 1899