

WHILTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Illnesses in Whilton's Past

In July 2008 when there were celebrations of sixty years of the National Health Service, we looked at the poor and how they fared in the past in Whilton. We have records of some with ill health.

One of these was Reuben Kenning, who was born here and who reported that about 1787, when he was old enough to start work, his mother took him to Mr Denny's of Muscott, *"hearing that he wanted a lad to drive plough, to offer him as such, but the weather being bad Mr Denney would not take him at that time, but would send for him, that about the spring of the year the said Mr Denney did send for him and employed him to drive plough and other business which he had for him to do. While he was there he was taken ill with an ague and with his master's leave he came to his mother at Brington but returned in a very short time to his place again, after then he was ill again with a humour in his eyes when he asked his master's leave to come again to his mother till he was well. He returned again to his master in ten days, after that he was ill with a humor in his eyes again and with his master's leave came to his mother again in Brington, after a short time returned to his master Mr Denney again - that he continued with the said Mrs Denny four years and half that his said master in consideration of his service gave him clothes and sometimes money but he does not recollect how much."*

On the whole people lived and died in the parish, using folk wisdom and medicine with little recall to doctors. Just occasionally there might be a need for specialist help. During the eighteenth century we have records that four of the poorer inhabitants of Whilton were patients in Northampton Hospital. For such poor people to be taken on the long journey and then to be in-patients, there would have been expenses, either borne by the parish or a private sponsor.

Two of the patients were from the same family, and perhaps shared the same symptoms. In June 1745 Thomas Andrew was admitted suffering from sciatica. He was 57 years old and stayed in hospital for nine months. When he was discharged, his condition was recorded as being relieved. In December 1772, William Andrews, aged 56, was admitted, also with sciatica. Six months later he too was discharged with his symptoms relieved. If this was the William Andrews sometimes described as "labourer" and sometimes as "pauper", then he survived for a long life, dying in Whilton in 1798.

Mary Jellis of Whilton was admitted at the recommendation of Reverend John Cadman. Mary was only 20 and had been suffering from epilepsy for a month. She was in hospital from April to November 1761 and was discharged cured. Unfortunately there is no record of the treatment given! The last patient recorded from here was Elizabeth Berridge. She was 30 and her illness was not recorded, but she died in the hospital in January 1838.

By this time the poor of Whilton were being sent to the Daventry Workhouse. The parish paid according to how many of its residents were inmates, and thus the admission of a whole family could be significant for Whilton. The early 1880s can illustrate this. Thomas Linnell of Whilton was 82 when he entered the Workhouse in 1880. He was described as “not able bodied” and came to end his life there.

In the next year the Dodd family arrived. Fanny, a laundress, clearly pregnant with “infant Dodd” brought with her Ellen and Charles, identified as “illegitimate children of inmate”. Ellen and Charles had both been born during previous stays in the Workhouse. “Infant Dodd” died after 7 ½ weeks, but the family remained inmates for a year or two, with one period away. In fact “infant Dodd” had a name. He was buried in Whilton as George Arthur. The Dodd family had old Whilton connections. Fanny was probably brought up by her grandparents, Thomas and Hannah Andrews of Whilton. Thomas Andrews was very likely descended from the Thomas and William Andrews who suffered from sciatica in the 1700s.