

HEALTH

Memoirs of how the villager accessed Health care

Tape 1 -

Doctors at Benson and Dorchester. Boys would collect subscriptions from Benson. Doctors would bill better off and take burden from poorer families. Jack Winfield said he would pay the doctor's bill last as he would not incur a heavy penalty by delay.

Before the NHS families subscribed to Clubs ie Compton Pilgrims to cover large bills and hospitalisation.

Tape 2 -

Doctors Surgery one day a week from Watlington in the old post office.

District Nurses – Nurse Salter of Benson in 1954.

Before NHS had a medical scheme 6d a week.

Tape 3 -

Watlington doctor held a surgery at Greenways Store once a month.

Benson doctor at village hall. Drs Birch and Harris.

District nurses – 2 – Hutchins and Smedley.

Natural remedies – goose fat on a string for diphtheria, forced down throat and pulled back!

Mr Cherrill collected prescriptions from Wallingford.

Tape 4 -

Dr Millar first woman doctor to practice in the area. But she had already been in Benson with her husband for 7 or 8 years before practising herself, so she was accepted. Only one old gentleman refused her services. GP's could practice as GP's the day after they qualified. Felt people were healthier due to no central heating. Clothing not washed so much and more clothing worn to beat the cold. Asthma is a worrying new development now. The attitude towards medicine and doctors is very different. They were put on a pedestal which was not a good thing. What worries her now is that people are better educated and have some understanding of their illness but on the whole their scientific knowledge is very bad and consequently they ask questions from a fair degree of ignorance. Extra education has not been on the scientific side.

Doctors – three practices attended Ewelme, Wallingford Benson and Watlington. Watlington had a medical officer appointed by the Trustees. Benson practice had about half the patients, Watlington 1/6 and Wallingford 1/6. The gentry went to Wallingford and the poorer people to Watlington which had a drop in surgery which used to be Johnson's Stores ie the old post office. Dr Truscott and Dr Stroud.

Benson surgery didn't have a drop in surgery but Ewelme were enterprising and had baby clinics. Very few children until the new houses were built. Dr Millar started children's clinics in 1960 held in Reading Room once a month. Grew with the building of Chaucer Court. Stopped about 1980 by local authority due to the cost. Then it was held at RAF Benson.

Home Births – RAF Benson expanded in 1955 from under 100 houses to its present size. Baker Avenue produced many babies. In one year Dr Millar's husband had 200 deliveries about 150 at home or at St George's Hospital in Wallingford. Few infant mortalities. One remembers one woman dying in childbirth.

Benson had population of 1400 people in 1955. Tremendous expansion in 1960 to 4,000. Ewelme remained static as they didn't build old peoples bungalows or low cost housing. Almshouses contracted from 13 – 9 until new ones built. Benson surgery consulted on building of new almshouses as by then the patients went to Benson surgery.

District Nurses – Nurse Salter and another from Dorchester. Nurse Salter was brilliant as a midwife and she had a car when the Millar's arrived in 1953 but had 'cycled until that time.
Natural remedies – alternative medicine very much out of favour.

NHS – became more complicated over the years. One man organised the service in Oxfordshire very efficiently and all done by hand. Subscriptions free until 1960 when it cost 1/-. From 1947 to 1960 everything was FREE. More people called doctor under NHS than before, often inappropriately. Polio, measles, whooping cough etc. TB had practically disappeared by 1953. Bad flu in 1957. Chicken pox in 1958.

Hospitals – Poor Law Hospital in Wallingford St Marys. Chronic nursing done there. Everything deal with in surgery unless a dire emergency. There was a surgery in Castle Square, Wallingford Hospital built by public subscription in 1933 called Community Hospital and cost £3,800. Under NHS taken over and became a satellite of Reading. Resented because it needed a referral by a Reading Consultant. Cottage hospital opened in 1972 run by GP's. Emergencies went to Radcliffe or Reading.

Sunday surgery stopped in early 1970s. Appointment system spoilt the meeting of friends in the surgeries for a chat.

Tape 6 –

Doctors – Drs Birch and then Dr Harris before the Millars. Dr Ann Millar had a baby clinic in the Reading Room. Walked to Benson for children's Welfare Clinic once a week (cod liver oil and orange juice distributed).

Saved a few pennies a week to pay midwife at Watlington Hospital for the first child.
District Nurses – Mrs Salter and Mrs Hutchins, both sisters.
NGS – Had a TB grant – about £4 every 2 weeks.

Tape 7 –

Dr Birch came from Dorchester and afterwards Dr Harris.
District Nurses – Commander and Mrs Hampden of the Old Mansion raised money for nursing assistants. Nurse cycled everywhere. You always called the nurse when ill.

Tape 8 –

Dr Birch came on a horse. He came from Preston Crowmarsh and had a surgery at the White Hart in a private room. Then - Dr Harris, Dr Andrew Millar and Dr Anne Millar.
People didn't call the doctor out until a few days into the illness. It was not something people did easily.

Midwives - delivered most children at home.

Natural remedies – featured dandelion for tummy problems and bladder such as cystitis. Prunes and rhubarb. For pain a measure of brandy was recommended which was procured from the pub in an eggcup.

NHS – relief when introduced, now feels worried as it had declined and growing old is a desperate worry. Her father paid into a club at 1d a week which went some way to alleviate the worry of possible unemployment or sickness.

Remembers epidemics of scarlet fever, yellow fever and measles and whooping cough. Isolated to bedrooms if infected.

Tape 10 -

Dr Birch and then Dr Harris from Dorchester – the surgery was near the Castle Inn in Benson, across the road in the cottages.

Had 4 children in hospital in Watlington where there was a resident midwife. Paid 2d a week into a hospital fund.

Sewage came to the Hut in 1960. They had bonfires in the garden to get rid of the rubbish.

Tape 11 -

Doctor came from Wallingford. Dr Birch from Dorchester would visit the school. People rarely visited doctors and had their own remedies such as castor oil and syrup of figs.

Not aware of polio affecting the village. Family called Kent suffered from TB and had to go to the sanatorium. They lived in the Banks near the watercress beds. Only one child at home and the rest sent away. Doctor would tell TB sufferers to sleep in a shed in the garden as it was healthier to sleep outside.

Tape 12 -

She laid out some people who died. She had worked in Great Ormond Street and so when someone asked if she could help just after the war, she went along. There was no transport to the doctors surgery. The nearest doctor was in Dorchester and he came in the mornings to Miss Wood's house. There was also one from Watlington that came to Greenways Stores once a week to do a surgery and the Watlington doctor looked after the Cloisters.

She also helped the nurse to deliver babies at home.

Tape 16 -

Midwives - Mrs Wells, midwife from Benson, was going to attend her but her mother had complications with her first child and had to go to hospital.

Tape 19 -

Dr Birch was the practising doctor who lived in Dorchester. Often he wasn't paid and got about on a bicycle. If you sent for him he never failed to come. Norah had asthma at three yrs old and he was wonderful. Came in the middle of the night. One didn't call a doctor out unless things were desperate. My father fetched him on his cycle. Had pneumonia when she was 12. Medication was so much whisky and raw egg every two hours and the doctor warned her parents she might not get through it.

Mrs Brighting - midwife lived in Ewelme in cottage near Mins and cycled everywhere.

Measles and whooping cough were common but no-one died of it. Isolation ward at Wallingford Hospital for scarlet fever. Typhoid, 2 cases in Ewelme, one was where Mrs Miners used to live and Mrs Warner had it. Both recovered. Water brought it about. Bucket lavatory often dumped into stream and ground got polluted. Seen them dumping right by the cressbeds which was sold at Covent Garden. District nurses helped. Almshouse nurse Mrs Tihini? also and Sister Annetts [or Bennett?] who wore a bonnet and Sister Babcot. [I think she was Anette Babcock]

Privies actually placed across the stream so the pollution was high, hence typhoid.

Her father at Tidworth where there was an epidemic of polio and meningitis. Had to sleep with windows open and many died. Rose Munday's son had meningitis but got over it. William Munday's son also had polio but he recovered completely.

The Hanscombe's at the Lamb before it was pulled down. Sarah Hanscombe had TB and she was in bed in the garden. Fresh air was the cure. Sarah and sister now live at Maidensgrove. Father developed lead poisoning from decorating job. The treatment was convalescence at Eastbourne and he came back as gardener at Eagle-Botts.

No benevolent societies although her mother paid into the Radcliffe Hospital, so much a week, to cover these eventualities.

Tape 20 –

From the perspective of a Social Worker working in the area she said her job had changed enormously from the time she started to retirement.

Lot of tied housing, poor wages, poor transport, no birth control or very little. We had a Catholic medical officer of health which affected this, it was fragmentary.

There was the growth of family planning clinics although not in this area. Pill just coming in and could be got, at a price from somewhere in Reading. This affected the poor enormously because if they ran out before pay day it was dicey. A lot of families she looked after were, 4, 5 6 or 7 children. Changed dramatically about late sixties and families were smaller because eventually the pill was prescribed. Most families made great efforts to care for their children but it placed a lot of strain on the parents. Very few 'bad' parents. Their wages barely stretched to 7 children. They were always in debt. No supermarkets then and they owed the village store as a rule.

Mothers and children in the village were marooned. Any vehicle owned by the family was taken by dad to get him to work. By and large wives did not work but might have done a bit of cleaning or domestic work, bar work etc. Just the strain of day to day living played havoc on their marriages sometimes. Not many on state benefits, most were working. Most took jobs just to get the housing but hated the work and weren't good at it. Most mums had babies in hospital by then. Sprinkling of single mums. Saw the dying out of mother and baby homes and felt they were pretty dreadful and not the place for a vulnerable person anyway. Mindful of workhouses, scrubbing floors etc. Took part in adoptions but preferred mums to keep their babies.

Worked closely with health visitors. Other problems included children at risk. How have problems changed from the beginning of your career to the end? Said the facilities for mentally handicapped were abysmal. Everyone went to a sub-normality hospital near Sonning. People were inappropriately sent there. More sharing of the care now. Support of families much better. Respite exists now. Most people want to look after their own. Most care in the community done by relatives and most relatives want to do it with support though.

Tape 22 –

Had a Dr Walter from Wallingford who was very good and used to visit. If her mother thought the doctor was necessary she used to send a message via one of the two carriers. Once he came out to her sister who had a fever and also came to her once. Her mother paid into a scheme called the 'Compton Pilgrims' which paid for the doctor. A sort of insurance. Covered doctors and dental fees. Teeth were also examined at school (pre NHS) by a dentist.

People generally had babies at home, with a local midwife (some not trained). Her mother had Mrs Thornton, at Manor Cottage. They didn't use anaesthetic, but people did go to hospital in an emergency.

There was a district nurse at the almshouses. Lucy remembers going to see her about her throat at the time when Dr Harris was at Benson.

Hot onions were used as a remedy for earache. They contain lots of sulpholamide which is very good for the ears. You par-boil the onions and put the heart in a small bag, stick it in the ear and it really works. Onion soup good for colds, plenty of vitamin C.

They also made their own blackcurrant drink from fruit grown in the garden – boiled them up, sterilised them and put wax on top, and drank as a syrup.

Tape 23 -

Used Dr Birch from Dorchester. Asked other villagers to telephone for a visit if it was urgent, otherwise went to his surgery. Had to pay the doctor when he called.

Remembers the Old Mill House, Mrs Bowles, had a butler and his wife working there. They had a son, Harry Gilpin, who died of meningitis in 1926. Does not remember other children getting it.

Tape 24 -

Health - he insists cleanliness kept them healthy. Mother a stickler for cleanliness. They had a water pump outside the front in Green Lane, if that ran dry had to go to the brook.

Doctor Birch came from Dorchester and had a surgery in Benson. Only time he remembers going to the doctor was when his brother closed two of his fingers in the mangle - father rode him down on his bike for treatment. The villagers donated 1d a week to a doctor's fund, but it was often not paid up if they had not visited the surgery. The doctor found he was not quite paid up enough to afford the treatment at the time.

Tape 26 -

At Dorchester in 1969. Then Dr Ann Miller and her husband, who were part of the Dorchester Group - opened a surgery at The Mill Stream in Benson.

Tape 28 -

Anne and Andrew Miller in Benson and the RAF Baby Clinic run by Anne Miller. Andrew terrified everyone, very domineering unless you were pregnant. He loved his pregnant ladies - Judy said.

Tape 30 -

He was born in 1928 in Ewelme. He was considered a 'blue' baby and the rector (Mr Humphreys) arrived with 'holy water' from the font to christen him with the same names as his father. Mabel Figg (an old colleague of his father) walked from Aston Rowant via Lewknor and Watlington and arrived in the afternoon to visit his mother. She immediately said '*this isn't a blue baby its a bad case of wind*' slapped him on the back and he was fine after that! The doctor of the village at the time was Dr King-Edward an Irishman. It is not known whether the doctor was present at the birth.

Tape 41-

Health - Dr Birch came from Clifton Hampden and he had a house in Dorchester. Surgery was at a Mrs Lane's at Birmingham Yard in Benson.

File 56 -

We were as far as I remember healthy, if one of us caught a childhood illness, we all got it, that was the way it was done. A man came to the pub to give us our haircut, hand clippers, none of this electric then.

File 72 - Roger Kent

I was seven years old when we had a bathroom and toilet added to our cottage, previously it was trip to an outbuilding past the other cottages for the loo and a zinc bath that hung on the fence at the rear, to be brought in on a Friday evening for bath night in front of the kitchen range. Clothes washing was done in a copper standing over a fire in a lean-to shed by the back door.

Mrs Webb No. 3 The Bank - was the only person that I've known to die of Lock Jaw (Tetanus) One day she came along to my mother and said that she couldn't open her mouth. She ended up in Wallingford hospital, never to recover. Mum visited her every week before Mrs Webb finally died. It was thought the tetanus resulted from a scratch from one of the raspberry canes in her garden.