

Typhoid outbreak 1900

Ewelme News, Spring 2000

The 20th Century opened with a serious matter troubling the Parish Councillors. They were concerned that the source of the typhoid outbreak, which had occurred the previous Autumn, had not been traced. The Minutes of the October 1899 meeting recorded, in the fine copperplate handwriting of the Clerk - Mr William Herman (the Schoolmaster), the decision to ask the Rural District Council to have the water and milk supply to the infected cottages analysed. If the cause was not traced, house to house visits were to be made to inspect the sanitary arrangements. The next entry on 13th March 1900 reads:-

“Typhoid Fever in village in previous year had not been traced to the water supply. Rural District Council to be told Ewelme Parish Council was against scheme to erect, at great expense, Waterworks for a small portion of Ewelme Parish because:-

- 1) Ewelme had the finest natural springs of pure water in the Kingdom.*
- 2) Due to the efficient cleansing by an energetic Sanitary Inspector the village now had better sanitary conditions than before.*
- 3) Everyone knew the outbreak was due to neglect, filth and stinks and not the drinking water supply.*
- 4) The proposed scheme was a ‘leap in the dark’ - 4 ‘fever’ cottages would not be reached by it, and 3 cottages which would were pronounced - ‘water pure’.*
- 5) Cottagers for whom it is proposed are against it as all except 5 have wells or springs of their own. EPC believed Waterworks would be an expensive and useless village encumbrance.*
- 6) EPC proposed to erect a Parish Pump on high ground in the centre of the village where a pollution free supply could be provided for 1/30th part of the cost of Waterworks.*
- 7) Analysis of Dipping Spring Water by Oxford County Analyst justified. EPC asking RDC to reject aforesaid scheme and appoint a committee to confer with EPC as to do all that is required by the Public Health Act.”*

Unfortunately, no more mention is made of the typhoid outbreak or the source - another example of sparse records frustrating the curiosity of modern readers.

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Mrs Winifred Thomas (81) was the grand daughter of John and Emma Burgess. John was groom to Rev Simcox and as such lived in the church-owned property Church Cottage (now known as Glebe Cottage) adjacent to the Common. Church Cottage became one of the ‘fever’ cottages in the 1899/1900 typhoid outbreak. Emma died in September 1999 aged 38 of the disease. Mrs Thomas said the family always believed that the well was the source of their infection. (John remarried and his new wife was Emily Warner who worked at Fyfield Manor. They made their home at the cottage now called ‘The Little House’ and one of his daughters was Edith Burgess. Whilst working at the White House for ‘Major’ and Mrs Horsley, Edith had the unfortunate experience of being present when Horsley murdered his wife and then committed suicide).

Ewelme Village Archive