

Some Facets of Isle of Wight Medical History

By Alan Champion.

"These notes have been collected over several years."

Early Years

Some medical care was provided in the Infirmaries of Monasteries but the treatment was only given under very restrictive rules. The first hospital on the Isle of Wight was the Leper Hospital at Gunville in the 13th century, which was maintained by St. Augustine's Priory at Carisbrooke and treated by the monks. Isabella de Fortibus made a regular allowance of one silver mark a year for the hospital.

Medieval doctors are described in:

'The Medical Practitioners of Medieval England' By Talbot and Hammond.

John Reyne, a leech, of Newport, Isle of Wight, was one of a group receiving a pardon from King Henry VI for any offences committed between 16 August 1448 and 20 November 1451, the date of the pardon. (C. P. R. 1446-52.p 507.) This is the earliest reference to a named medical professional that I have found for the Island.

On the Isle of Wight, several apothecaries had premises in Newport by 1650/1.

- I. Thomas Silvester, *Will 1610 B 65 0865* Buried Newport 4th Dec 1609.
- II. Richard Warder *Will 1720/ A/111*
- III. Anthony Maynard, *Will P. C. C. wills 1657-1660 Fol.464* I think that Anthony Maynard's mother Elizabeth took over her husband's practice until her son, Anthony, could take over. She issued a token in her own name.
- IV. 1689 Anthony Maynard *City of London and the IOW Fol. 113 Vol xi 1686 –93 Principle probate registry , Somerset House. P 187 St Martins Ironmonger and IOW Hants 1696/ AO68/1-2.*
- V. Thomas Junning (Jenning) *Will 1662?ADO/1-2* and Jane his wife.

Physicians and surgeons also came to Cowes and Newport about this time. 2 Licences to practise were issued. They were able to visit the rich in their homes, travelling at first on horse-back and later by carriage along roads which were often in a very poor state of repair and with numerous gates along the way.

Whitehead quotes on page 80. "The roads we travelled over were either uneven rocky ground or full of loose stones; and the gates were set so thick across the highways that we never saw the like in England. I was told by an apothecary that he got up one night and took horse, in haste, to visit a patient not two miles off, and had fifteen gates to open on the way."

From the Gentleman's Magazine; A visitor to Bonchurch in 1753

The following medical men were practising in Newport in the 17th Century. These details are from the Card Index at the County record office and other local sources.

- Dr James of Newport Queen Elizabeth's physician circa 1590 Son of Mark James, merchant and bailiff of Newport.
- Benj. Jolliffe (and ? James), surgeon(s) of Newport 1791
- Thomas Hearn, Surgeon, Newport about 1670.
- William Loving, Surgeon, Newport 1670
- John Hearn, Surgeon, Newport 1710.
- Lynn Dr., Surgeon of Cowes 1799 Friend of George Morland
- Marriott J. H., Surgeon of Ryde. 1837
- Dr George A. Martin, Ventnor. 1836
- Dr R Marwood, M.D., Newport. 1795
- Maywood, Physician Newport. 1791
- Dr Thomas Ogle, Carisbrooke. 1804
- Dr George Pedder Brading. 1792
- Rookley, John. Surgeon, Newport. 1702.
- Alicia Gilbert of Pan married Mr John Rookley, Surgeon of Newport. "Upon Oct.5th. 1702 Mr Gilbert of Pan, near Newport to Northwood and not being at home he procured the key of the church from the sexton and he himself married his eldest daughter to Mr John Rookley of Newport, surgeon."
- Simes (Simms) George, surgeon. Brading 1839
- Smith James. Chyrigeon, Newport 1730 In 1698 James Smith was at the corner house The Falcon, High Street. From "Newport pubs" Kevin Mitchell, p.286 Buckle and Drew Docs at the CRO
- Spreetz George, Surgeon Northwood 1777
- Swan Robert C. Surgeon St James's St Newport
- Syme Hugh, Surgeon, Newport 1791

- Charles Tarrant, Surgeon, Brading. 1771
- Tuttiett John, Surgeon, Quay St., Newport, 1839 Father of Maxwell Gray, author
- Waterworth, Thomas, Surgeon, Newport. 1790
- Kernot. Surgeon, Gloucester House Cowes. 1839 Prop. The Medical Hall, High St.
- Millidge. Chemist High St Newport 1840 'Leeches 4d each'.
- William Jones, Surgeon at Cowes 1745.
- Thomas Juning. Apothecary Newport 1642.
- Dr James Player Lind. Westmont Ryde. 1839

Facets of Island Medical History from 'A History of Newport, old and new. 2003

Medical attention at the House of industry. It would appear that this aspect of all the organisation was in general beyond reproach, but it was a very lucrative position. In the 1770 Messrs Barlow and Son plus a Mr Bassett were appointed surgeons and apothecaries for the ensuing year at the salary of £175. The scourge of the 18th century was smallpox and some sufferers were brought into the House. Others were treated in their homes but if a mother died leaving children a woman would be sent from a house to take care of them. In 1790 a sum of not exceeding £210 was allocated for the purpose of erecting a brick building where smallpox patients could be received. Doctors will well paid for their skills as can be demonstrated in the report that Mr Waterman was given five guineas from amputating the hand of William Fry, a servant in husbandry to the Reverend Worsley of Whitcomb. Bearing in mind that in the absence of anaesthetic, alcohol being all that was available, perhaps the money should have been given to the patient. The first signs that the health service of sorts existed were demonstrated in a minute of 1823. Information given the all paupers who give being all within two miles radius of Newport could visit the House of Industry's surgeons at the dispensary in Castlehold between the hours of eight and ten in the morning. By 1832 this assistance was extended to the whole of the Island.

1814: That Martha Macket a nurse in the House, be dismissed from her situation for having admitted soldiers into the house at night, permitting them to bring liquor and to spend the night with prostitutes under punishment. In 1826 the Committee is requested to set aside some particular room or rooms for the occupation of the loose women who may be admitted to the House.

Lunatics and Idiots

For almost half a century care of the mentally ill and those born mentally retarded played little part in administration of the House of Industry. That they were present there is no doubt just part of the composition of society, but literacy was widening the gap and the care of the mentally incapable was to become an administrative problem.

A solution seemed to be at hand when Dr Finch of Lavestock, Wiltshire made an offer to take care of all lunatic paupers of the Island. This offer was accepted with the proviso that one of the surgeons of the House and Industry would visit Lavestock quarterly. In December 1819 the visiting surgeon was refused permission to see the patients in their cells and realising that all was not well they were withdrawn and returned to the Isle of Wight.

By now however legislation had been introduced making it illegal to retain lunatics in the House and a separate building known as the Carisbrooke Lunatic Asylum was constructed. By 1852 there was more legislation brought in requiring that lunatics should be housed in a County Asylum and that Isle of Wight did at this time not have one they were transferred to Knowle Hospital at Fareham. Whitecroft, our local asylum would not be opened until 1896. A special ferry was chartered in March of 1853 at a cost of £7-7s-0d when 13 male and 29 female patients were transferred. Idiots however could be retained by the House of the industry and remained there well into the 20th century. In October 1926 the institution advertised for a female attendant to working the imbeciles, with a salary of £40 per annum plus living apartment washing rations and uniform all included.

As in the beginning as previously stated all parishes had individual poor houses but once the House of Industry had been established all the islands destitute were channelled within its walls. The title however makes it clear that only the very young, the sick and the aged would receive "board and lodging" free of charge. For those capable of work no avenue was left unexplored. The Board of Guardians rarely refused opportunities to supply local Labour although they did show more humanity than many others did up and down the country. Classic example of this was the case mentioned of Valentine Gray, apprenticed to a Newport chimney sweep. He was a workhouse boy but did not come from our local establishment his origin being in the workhouse at Gosport. To their credit the Island authorities refused such placements to other chimney sweeps or publicans, but the latter will rescinded in the middle of the 19th century when unemployment reached unmanageable proportions. Another opportunity that was declined was to send young children to the spinning mills. One

excellent source of income was however to put girls out to service, and the masters then subsequently abused many of these. That was no problem for by paying a sum of money to the Guardian's the girl could be returned to the workhouse and no questions were asked, in fact in many cases the girl was supplied.

Idiot starved to death in the Isle of Wight Workhouse

Such a headline as that above would today caused uproar, not only because the cause of death but for the language used, but in 1877 it was quite common indeed even around 20 years later when the Asylum was opened up Whitecroft was described as "a home for lunatics". Nevertheless the death of this poor unfortunate in 1877 caused a great deal of local scandal and sent shock waves through the body of 'gentlemen' which made up the Board of Guardians, the authority that looked after the poor within the workhouse.

Edwin Cooper came from Brading where he lived with his mother, she gave evidence that she was only allowed two shillings a week and nothing in the world coming in besides. Some friends of hers had persuaded her to place a sum in the workhouse where they said he would be well looked after; she would be would visit him on a regular basis. At the time that a sum was at home she stated she was unable to earn any money so reluctant me she had agreed to having admitted. At this time the difference between an idiot and a lunatic was that the former was allegedly born of feeble mind as opposed to the latter developing symptoms after birth. Who among those who gave evidence on his demise was the male nurse Mr James Wilson, Mrs Emma Booker who was in charge of the idiot ward plus a very well respected local medical officer Mr Loftus Beckinsale They all testified that in their opinion, the patient was treated in a fair and reasonable manner. However, this clashed with the fact that at the time he was admitted on a 26th February and the time he died just one month later his physical appearance had changed dramatically. Following an autopsy carried out by the formidable Mr Barrow, the surgeon from Ryde, he was asked by the Coroner to stage his opinion as to the cause of death. "Starvation" he stated. Whereupon there followed months of local acrimony and finger-pointing that ended with an inquiry by the local government Board.

The report at the end of May was devastating for the Board of Guardians and it recommended that the immediate dismissal two nurses, Wilson and Booker for gross dereliction of duty and the censuring of the workhouse master and called for the resignation of Mr Beckinsale. They further stated that they had no jurisdiction to direct punishment, but the deputy medical officer, who just happened to be Mr Beckinsale's

son, stated that he would never have any subsequent appointment conformed by their Board.

They ended with the statement that it was their opinion that the management of the Infirmary generally had not been sufficiently controlled by the Medical Officer or within the knowledge of the master of the workhouse or the Guardians themselves. That the Board was made up of a group of almost 50 local men of power and wealth this was scathing criticism.

The board requested a meeting with the inquiry team but they were unable to convince them to change their decision. There was a also a half-hearted attempt to defy the decision to dismiss Mr Beckinsale who had been Medical Officer to the Board for over 30 years, but it was proposed and seconded by misguided members that he be reinstated. As all the appointments had to be confirmed by the same group of officials that had just dismissed him, it was real act of stupidity and misguided loyalty that, from time to time, even today, is taken by those invested with power.

1911 The Isolation hospital at Fairlee

Now the site of our Hospice. Dr Gibson was in charge with Matron, Miss Peppercorn.

The Medical Register of 1779 was the first systematic record of British doctors and on page 72 the following Isle of Wight Doctors are given:-

- **Newport-** Messrs Rich Cowlam* and Ed. Oriel Cowlam*, Messrs James* and Benjamin Jolliffe and Mr Richard Bissett.
- **Cowes-** Mr Rook Thorold and Mr George Spretz.
- **Brading-** Mr Charles Tarrant.
- **Godshill-** Mr Richard Ebrill.
- **Yarmouth-** Mr Francis Deacon.

* These three doctors expressed a willingness to vaccinate patients against smallpox in the Salisbury Journal of 1767.

Arnold Forster in “At War with the Smugglers”, page 99, mentions ‘Old Cowlam’ of Newport, Surgeon and Apothecary, who he hopes will help him with an epidemic of Measles in his family.

In 1830 it was suggested that a doctor should be provided by the Board of Guardians of the Poor in each of the rural areas but because of the remoteness of Ventnor and the

Undercliff and the poor pay I can find no evidence that one was provided here. Pigot's guide 1830 gives the following:

'Surgeons'

- **Brading**- George Sine.
- **Cowes, West and East**- John Davids, High Street and Charles Day, High St.
- **Newport**- James White Basset, St James' St. Robert Bloxam*, High St.
William Buckle, Pyle St. Cass Buckler, High St. William Lemprière, Medina Ave. Robert Swan, Corn Market. Thos. Lawrence Waterworth, High St and Sandrock Cottage. Robert Wavell, Quay St.
- **Ryde**- William Houghton. Banks, Union St. William S. Joberns. George Pedder, Upper Ryde. George Pedder, Jnr. Union Street.
- **Yarmouth**- Jno. Clark, gent. Surgeon.

*Robert Bloxam M.D. came from Warwickshire to Newport about 1910. His family motto was "Dum Spiro Spero", 'While I have breath, I hope'. This was later the motto of the Royal National Hospital.

In 1830 'Philo Vectis', wrote in "The Isle of Wight Tourist and Companion" at Cowes "The Happy Return" laden with tin was wrecked on Warden Ledge in 1827. The master had put into Yarmouth to obtain assistance for a female in labour on board, and the vessel later drifted on this dangerous bank. Mr Wavell of Newport* whose benevolent ardour, in his profession had led him to visit the woman a second time (contrary to the advice of the boatmen,) fell a victim of his honourable assiduity, and was drowned; but most of the crew were saved.

*Robert Miller Wavell, Quay St., Newport. M.D. Edin. 1825. M.R.C.S.E. 1827.

Hospitals

The nearest Hospital was the Winchester County Hospital founded in 1736 and was funded by private subscription and was the first of its kind out of London. (Provincial Medical Directory 1847) Records of the transfer of inmates from the I.o.W. House of Industry to Winchester County Hospital exist.

Portsmouth, Portsea and Gosport General Dispensary and the South Hants Hospital, Southampton also treated Island patients at a later date. The Isle of Wight Infirmary, Ryde, opened in 1849.

Ventnor's first hospital was the National Hospital for Consumption later the Royal National Hospital for Diseases of the Chest which was founded in 1868 and opened in 1869. Dr Eric Laidlaw has written a comprehensive history of the hospital, which closed in 1964. In 1904 the Ventnor and Undercliff Isolation Hospital was opened, and it was used for infectious diseases until 1942. In 1939 patients were still being taken to this hospital by horse(donkey) drawn ambulance.

Report of the Infirmary Committee 1845

Until 1849 the only hospital available to islanders were at St Mary's Newport (for paupers only) or at Winchester. In 1845 influential citizens first mooted the idea of an Infirmary in the Ryde. In particular Mr Dodd, a surgeon from Chichester who had come to the island for the benefit of his health (he was consumptive and died before the hospital was built), devoted himself to the project. It was then estimated that a £300 a year would be needed to keep just 10 beds going and the committee was formed to raise funds. A gift of land was made by Miss Player and Captain and Mrs Briggstocke; and by November 1848 a building, designed gratuitously by Thomas Hellyer, the architect of Holy Trinity and St John's Churches was largely complete. By this time the fund subscribed reached £1,600, In the course, however, of the month of July,1849 it was opened for the reception of cholera patients and 21 persons were received and placed under medical treatment during the month. It is hoped that the clergy of the island will preach sermons annually on behalf this important charity, from which considerable addition to the funds may be anticipated".

Some criticism at was levelled at the choice of Ryde as the centre but as the original report of 1845 had pointed out, the situation of Ryde, well known for its salubriety, its proximity to the sea, affording as it does every facility for a hot and cold sea water baths, and the fact that it within a range of 12 miles it is had nearly 36,000 inhabitants, forming four-fifths of the whole population of the island quotation marks provide its justification enough for the choice. The value of the institution was proved by its constant and increasing pressure on its resources. In 1866 accommodation ran to 36 beds. Two new fever wards were then added in 1872. Improvements and extensions continued. In 1899 Queen Victoria opened a children's wing. Another new wing was added in 1907 and an operating theatre in 1910, X-ray and pathological departments followed later. By 1937 accommodation had reached 88 beds and by 1947, 117.

Source: Wootton Bridge Historical
<http://woottonbridgeiow.org.uk/>