

Notes on the Kildwick Typhoid Epidemic – 11

The Aftermath

In this Note we will look at the events that occurred after the official end of the Kildwick typhoid epidemic: the continuing demands for a full inquiry; the arguments over who should pay what for their medical care; claims for compensation; and evidence that the sufferers were eventually “bought-off”.

The “official” end of the epidemic

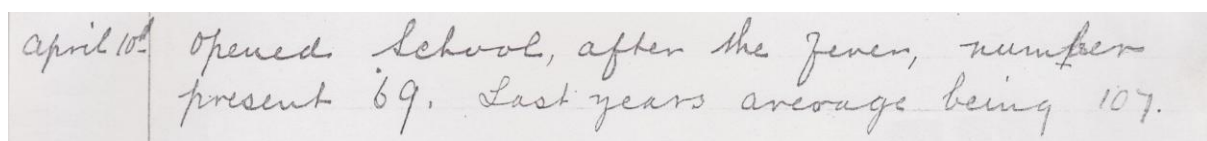
The Kildwick typhoid epidemic ended officially on March 18th 1899 when Dr. Atkinson, the Skipton Medical Officer of Health, presented his Special Report to the Rural District Council. He said that this report¹:

... was the one that the Council had been awaiting for some time because it could not be completed until the outbreak was finished. It was a complete history of the epidemic from beginning to end. It was, moreover, a complete answer to any request for an inquiry.

In fact, the epidemic was not over and the tone of finality adopted by Dr. Atkinson was somewhat undermined by the note added to the end of the newspaper report:

It should be stated that two further cases have occurred in Farnhill and Junction which are not embraced in the above list. The medical attendant, Dr. Fletcher, considers that they are traceable to the epidemic, but Dr. Atkinson holds a contrary view. The death of Mr. Abe Petty on 17th last is not taken into account in the special report.

Kildwick school finally re-opened on April 10th, after being closed for 10 weeks. However, as was recorded in the school log book, attendance was much reduced.



April 10th opened school, after the fever, number present 69. Last years average being 107.

Figure 1: Entry in the school log book

Even as late as July 28th 1899, the Craven Herald reported that a woman who had been attending a sick resident in Kildwick had been admitted to the Isolation Hospital at Morton Banks.

Perhaps the last death attributable to the epidemic was that of Charles Hargreaves of Kildwick, whose home was close to the Tillotson/Baldwin household and who died in June 1900, aged 44², having never fully recovered from the infection. In 1906, both the Tillotson children and Hargreaves family are recorded as being in receipt of money from the Rycroft Kildwick Winter Silver Charity³.

Continuing calls for a public inquiry

We have already described in a previous Note in this series how John Barritt, supported by many of those affected by the epidemic in Kildwick, led calls for a full public enquiry. These calls continued even after the end of the epidemic.

An angry discussion at Skipton RDC – 15th April 1899

At the Rural District Council meeting on April 15th 1899, Councillor Fletcher proposed that the Council should support the calls coming from Kildwick for a public inquiry but he found no support for his motion, with the following comments representing the views of most of the council members⁴:

Col. Maude: What would be the good of an inquiry ?

Councillor Usher: I am quite satisfied ... Our officers have done everything that could be done.

Dr. Atkinson, the Medical Officer, suggested that the question of whether or not to hold an inquiry should be left to the Local Government Board or County Council and if the people of Kildwick wanted an inquiry they should ask elsewhere.

Col. Maude then went so far as to suggest that the residents of Kildwick, were themselves to blame for the epidemic:

It had been asserted that there had been inhabitants at Kildwick who for six or seven years had had grave doubts about the purity of their water supply. Yet not one of them had ever come forward to the council or their officers with a complaint ... He considered that if there was any blame, it attached to those people who had been drinking the water, who had doubts about its purity, and yet never made a single complaint ...

It was certainly nothing to do with his old army friend Major Wilson, and John Barritt should stop his agitating⁵:

It had been said that these cottagers dare not have complained, or they would have had to leave their houses. He considered that this was a grave reflection on any landlord, and especially such a landlord as Kildwick had. He thought that it was a great pity that they should rake up this scandal. The bottom of it all seemed to be that a certain family were determined to take proceedings against somebody, and they wished the Council to do the dirty work of finding out the person for them.

The Council decided to make the Local Government Board and County Council aware of the situation in Kildwick but accepted the view of Col. Maude that:

... for this Council to ask for an inquiry would be a distinct reflection on their officers.

Councillor Fletcher responded:

I should like to stigmatise this as a ridiculous piece of nonsense. We are shirking this business as much as we can. We dare not have an inquiry, it seems to me –

At this point general uproar ensued and it took some time for order to be restored, but this was the final word from the council on the question of an inquiry.

The campaign continues in the press – April/May 1899

By the time the presses rolled at the end of the week, both the Craven Herald and the Keighley News were carrying a letter written by John Barritt to the Bradford Observer, dated 17th April. He said he was writing:

... to ask Colonel Maude to explain his meaning when he said, "He thought it was a great pity that they should rake up this scandal".

Does he mean that it is a scandal for people to make known their desire for an inquiry into such a terrible and disgraceful affair as the outbreak at Kildwick ... or does he mean it would be a scandal to rake up the action, or want of action, of the Medical Officer of Health and others ? ... It is certain that Skipton Council dare not face an inquiry if it can be avoided.

It is also untrue that only one family is anxious for an inquiry, as there are many more than myself who will use every means in their power to bring out the responsible parties.

I feel it is the bounden duty of a father to those gone to leave no stone unturned until the fullest inquiry is made, and I can assure colonel Maude that if Skipton Council is so cowardly as to shirk the ordeal, someone else will persevere in the endeavour for justice.

If Colonel Maude and his friends could only have had a good dose of Kildwick water for a few weeks before Saturday's meeting, the Council would never have needed asking to do the dirty work of finding out the culprits, but would have unanimously asked the Local Government Board to appoint an early date for an inquiry.

We do not know what Colonel Maude thought about this letter from John Barritt but, from the Eshton Hall papers held by the West Yorkshire Archive Service, we get some idea of what Major Wilson, the landlord of the Kildwick estate thought. In a note to J. W. Broughton, his land-agent in Kildwick, dated April 21st 1899, he says⁶:

... I wish Mr. Barritt would act a little more and jaw a little less. But I suppose that writing to the press does not win him any support but will rather tend to alienate sympathy.

In fact, John Barritt's campaign was about to suffer a serious set-back.

On May 12th 1899 the Bradford Observer carried a letter signed by “Sufferer”, extracts of which appeared a week later in the Craven Herald. From the content it appears that the Kildwick epidemic had been raised at a meeting of the Local Government Board and that the request for a full inquiry had been dismissed⁷:

If ever there was a case of might against right this is one, as the same treatment has not been meted out to rich and poor alike. The epidemic was brought about by most gross carelessness, and when we have asserted our rights as citizens to demand an inquiry into such a calamity we have met with rebuffs from both the Local Government Board and the district council.

The writer then goes on to comment on the death-rate:

... if we have a death-rate of 300 per thousand and an alarming percentage of other sufferers, can any sane person say that there is no need for a public inquiry ? ... It would seem that as the unfortunate victims are only respectable working people, the lives of their dear ones who have been destroyed (mostly in the prime of life) and the sufferings of the people are not worthy of any attention from the mighty powers that rule.

Note: The writer exaggerates to make his or her point. About 50 people fell ill, which was around 30% (300 per thousand) of the population of Kildwick; but several of these were from outside the village: including pupils who attended Kildwick School from Farnhill, for example. In addition, only a proportion of those who fell ill actually died. The death rate was around 6% of the population of Kildwick.

Some “lively interchanges” in Kildwick – 23rd May 1899

The annual ratepayers meeting took place in Kildwick on 23rd May 1899. In the chair was Mr Smith, a member of Skipton Rural District Council, who had voted against the need for a full inquiry at the Council meeting on April 15th. It seems he was given a rough time⁸:

... A number of questions were afterwards put to the chairman concerning his attitude with regard to the agitation for an inquiry into the typhoid epidemic. Mr. Smith stated that he had opposed the inquiry because he thought it would involve unnecessary expense and would produce no public good. His view was warmly challenged, and Mr. Smith was promptly informed that in a matter of this kind he should try to reflect the feeling of the ratepayers and not his own private views. Some rather lively interchanges took place.

“Warmly challenged”, “promptly informed”, “rather lively interchanges”; these sound like newspaper code for a near riot.

But it was all to no avail. There would be no public inquiry.

Who should pay the bill for medical care ?

From the very start of the outbreak, newspaper reports were reassuring people⁹:

... 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 in its first discussion of the epidemic at the start of February 1899¹⁰:

... 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.

These statements appear unambiguous. The council “would do everything they could to help”, so this means that they would foot the bill for medical care, doesn't it ?

The full cost of care becomes known – April 1899

A few months later however, as the epidemic subsided and the bill for care became due, the situation was less clear. At the Rural District Council meeting on April 15th 1899⁴:

The Clerk reported that the accounts had come in for the nursing at Kildwick, and it was for the council to determine what attitude they would adopt in payment of expenses in connection with the outbreak. Anything the council had ordered they would have to pay for, and it remained to be determined as a matter of principle whether the council would pay for other expenses incidental to the outbreak. Some of the patients had to be treated at the Keighley and Bingley Joint Hospital under an agreement the council had with the hospital authority, but owing to the hospital getting full several patients could not be sent there and the council must determine what they would do in regard to those patients who remained at home.

During discussion it became clear that the sum of money involved was quite considerable: between £500 and £600. The revelation of the sum involved seems to have given the Chairman of the council pause for thought about how generous they could be:

The Chairman said the council were undoubtedly liable for the nursing that had been procured through their officers, but he could not say for the nursing that had been done in private houses.

The Clerk thought a resolution duly entered on the books that the council pay all medical and nursing expenses in connection with the outbreak would be sufficient.

Col. Maude: If the council don't pay, who will !

The Clerk: Then the patients themselves will have it to pay.

Councillor Robinson didn't see how the council could avoid paying.

The Chairman: The point is whether we have to pay for nursing in private houses –

The Clerk: ... the principle is what has to be decided – whether you will pay the whole of the expenses, or whether you will make distinctions.

At this point in the proceedings, Col. Maude made a comment that would sour the atmosphere for the rest of the meeting; he:

... suggested that the matter be postponed pending the decision as to a public inquiry. If the council were to be put to the expense of engaging barristers, and so forth, to represent them before an inquiry, then he thought they would not be inclined to be so liberal in paying for patients who could afford to pay for themselves.

Returning to the issue subsequently, Councillor Fletcher noted:

Col. Maude holds a pistol to the heads of the Kildwick people and says “If you demand payment for your nurses, then there is no inquiry.”

Further discussion having been postponed, the matter was next raised at a meeting of the Sanitary Committee, on April 29th, at which it was reported¹¹:

It is understood that bills were presented from the Keighley and Bingley Joint Hospital board for about £300; from Dr. Fletcher of Crosshills, for attending cases, of 130 guineas; and from nurses engaged in private houses, for £35 or £36. The consideration of the matter was postponed for another month, pending further inquiries and a report on the matter.

The Council's legal responsibility – June / July 1899

By the time of the Skipton RDC meeting on June 10th, the council's legal responsibility had been clarified and a somewhat firmer view was taken¹²:

The Chairman observed that he had seen the auditor, and as a result of the conversation he (the Chairman) was of the opinion that it would be a dangerous experiment if the council paid anything out of the ordinary way. It would have to go before the Local Government Board and there was a certain amount of doubt to it.

Councillor Collinge thought the council should be very careful in the matter of paying.

Councillor Marsden: It would be a risky job to sign a cheque.

Councillor Horn: The cheque ought to be signed by those gentlemen wi' plenty o' money.

Note: The final comment was possibly a reference to Major Wilson, the landlord of the Kildwick estate.

A month later, the council produced what it thought was a definitive statement on the legal aspects of its responsibility. The Clerk said¹³:

... the council had no authority to pay accounts other than those for which they had made themselves primarily responsible through their officers. ...[and] if the council made any payment for work done and for which they were not legally responsible, those members signing the cheques would be surcharged.

Councillor Greenwood asked if it was the imperative duty of the council to provide adequate hospital accommodation in case of an outbreak similar to the Kildwick affair.

The Clerk: The Act says we "may" provide such accommodation. Though the council were paying for the maintenance of patients in the Morton Banks Hospital, that did not prevent the council, if the thought proper, from proceeding against the parties treated for the recovery of the expenses, and the same thing would apply to those treated at the Kildwick temporary hospital.

Councillor Mosley said that some of the Kildwick people maintained that when Morton Banks hospital was full they were told by the council's officers that they must get someone in to nurse at home and that they would be recouped the expense.

The Chairman: Give us a case !

Councillor Mosley: Mr. J. Barritt.

The Chairman: Does he say that he was told so by one of our officers ?

Councillor Mosley: He says so.

Councillor F. J. Wilson could not see how the medical officer and the surveyor could do anything else but tell the people that they would have to provide for their cases to be nursed at home; but that could not be taken in the nature of an order.

The Chairman concluded by saying that they were all deeply sympathised with the Kildwick people, but they were not there to deal with sentiment... They must keep to the law.

Councillor Smith said the present position of affairs was unfortunate for one or two families he could name.

The Clerk added that there were some applicants who could afford to pay the bill, and there were others who could not afford. He was quite satisfied however, that the council had no authority to pay the bill.

So, the council's legal advice had forced them away from "doing everything they could to help those who were suffering" to simply advising those affected by the epidemic to expect a bill for their care. But did they really think this would be the end of the matter – particularly as they had named John Barritt as one of those who might be expected to pay ? Barritt, who was already at the head of those calling for a public inquiry?

The response to the Council's position – August / September 1899

By the time of the August meeting of the council, both Dr. Fletcher of Crosshills and John Barritt had written to the council disputing their decision. A new figure had also entered the debate; namely Sam Heyworth of Kildwick, who had put in a claim for payment of medical expenses in respect of his wife's treatment.

Councillor Fletcher suggested that John Barritt had information regarding the arrangement of nursing care that the council had not investigated and wanted to address the council in person¹⁴:

Councillor Fletcher said he (Barritt) was in a position to inform the council that there were many things in connection with the nursing which had not been reported to the council.

The Chairman: You mean to say that more could be paid, and still keep within the law ?

Councillor Fletcher replied that such was his meaning ... and that the Clerk should look into the question, and see if they could not do a little better than they had done. The object of Mr. Barritt coming before the council was to explain certain details he (Councillor Fletcher) had hinted at.

The council then agreed that both John Barritt and Sam Heyworth would be allowed to attend a special meeting of the council, to put their cases in person.

The meeting took place on August 19th 1899 and was reported in the Keighley News¹⁵:

The two gentlemen were granted separate audiences, and were informed that the result of the committee's deliberation would be communicated to them later. It is understood that the feeling of the committee was in favour of paying as much of the expenses incurred by Mr. Barritt as the Council could legally do. The committee also recommended the Council pay an amended bill amounting to £60 sent in by Dr. Fletcher. This is considered to embrace the whole of the items which the Council can lawfully bear.

Note: There is no mention in the newspaper reports of any payment to be made to Sam Heyworth, but this is not the last we will hear of him in this story.

In order to decide their liability the Council needed to see details of the cost of the nursing care obtained by John Barritt; but there was a problem, as Dr. Fletcher and Mr. Barritt had both employed Nurse Paul and it appeared to be difficult to apportion the cost of her time between the two of them. In a letter dated September 1st, reported at the Council meeting later that month, Barritt suggested how a rough figure might be arrived at. He wrote¹⁶:

The council paid at the temporary hospital [set up in Kildwick Parish Rooms] 15s per week per head, in addition to the rent of a cottage, laundry and other allowances. He therefore reckoned the cost, at the very lowest, 20s per week per head, and the account showed 18 weeks, making a sum of £18 for maintenance.

The Chairman then directed the Clerk to investigate the matter further.

The matter is concluded quietly – October 1899

The following month, a short notice in the Craven Herald signalled that the matter had been brought to a close¹⁷:

The Sanitary Committee, having considered all the circumstances of the case, now recommended the payment of £20 as the council's proportion of the nursing expenses originally charged to Mr. John Barritt in regard to the outbreak of typhoid fever at Kildwick.

The recommendation was confirmed without comment.

This was more than six months after the official end of the epidemic.

Claims for compensation and evidence of a pay-out

The decision by the Rural District Council not to pay private medical expenses associated with the typhoid epidemic must have left a number of people out-of-pocket.

There is evidence from the Eshton Hall papers that Major Wilson was anticipating having to pay some compensation. The following is an undated note from Wilson to his land-agent in Kildwick, J.W. Broughton⁶:

... the best way of raising the money for Kildwick's compensation ... I think £500 from the improvements [budget ?] would seem to be the simplest means

In a separate Note in this series we have described how Wilson made a rather ill-judged attempt to offer what he termed “practical sympathy” to sufferers in the form of small payments, but £500 is in a completely different league; obviously a major compensation scheme was being considered.

In fact, it seems that the claims that were made were against John Brigg:

Wilson to Broughton (12th June 1899)

Perhaps you would keep me informed about the position of the law business as between The Sufferers and Mr. B[rigg].

We can't be sure precisely who it was that was pursuing compensation but, as we will see, one of them must have been Sam Heyworth.

Earlier in this piece we noted that Wilson did not have a very high regard for John Barritt. His views on Sam Heyworth weren't altogether positive either:

Wilson to Broughton (22nd April 1899)

[He is] vapourising about the epidemic... He would seem to have got off a good deal better than many, without in any way trying to minimise the trials of his wife's illness.

After Skipton RDC turned down Heyworth's claim for the reimbursement of his wife's medical expenses following his interview on August 19th 1899, it seems he made a legal claim against John Brigg. This was still on-going as the year drew to its close:

Brigg to Wilson (17th December 1899)

Mr. Heyworth is still dissatisfied and has sent another letter from Messrs. Brown and Wood demanding £250 instead of £150.

Earlier in this piece we saw that Skipton RDC estimated the full cost of the epidemic would be between £500-600. So £250 is surely more than required to simply reimburse the medical fees for one person – Heyworth must surely have been looking for some sort of financial compensation ?

Heyworth wasn't the only person paid compensation by John Brigg. It seems the Petty sisters, who had lost their mother and brother in the epidemic, must have been given an inducement to leave The White Lion:

Brigg to Broughton (6th September 1900)

The Miss Pettys will not hear of leaving The White Lion and, in the end, Mr. Brigg has given them a sum of money, on the same conditions as the other people, so I hope that we shall hear no more about it.

and, just a few days later:

Brigg to Broughton (10th September 1900)

... the Miss Pettys have not yet signed the deed as two of them were away from home when I called.

Note: The reference to Mr. Brigg in the third person in the first of these and in other documents in the Eshton Hall Collection was initially confusing, but it appears that Brigg's son, John Jeremy, was acting as his father's secretary during his illness.

The final document from this period, dated September 1901, confirms that John Brigg did indeed buy-off those who may have made further trouble, and it even tells us how much it cost him:

Brigg to Broughton (7th September 1901)

... I have paid over £2000 on account of the Fever besides my own expenses and in most cases have obtained legal signatures exonerating the Major who in case of law would have been liable in the first instance ...

£2000 was a massive sum for that time and raises the question why did John Brigg pay out so much when he believed that the legal liability was with Major Wilson ? We'll probably never know; but perhaps he was responding to the opinion of his neighbours that he was responsible for the entire affair ? That was certainly the view of "Sufferer", the writer of the letter to the Bradford Observer dated May 12th 1899, part of which we have already quoted. The letter concludes⁷:

Not one word of sympathy or regret comes from the lips of any councillor either for the death of the ten persons now lying in the old churchyard at Kildwick, or for the 42 other sufferers; and not one of these cases would have happened had Mr. Brigg remained where he had contracted the disease until he had been convalescent.

Did John Brigg, perhaps, believe this too ?

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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- 2 Information from the record of burials in Kildwick Church and personal communication with Rosemary Hargreaves, Charles Hargreaves' grand-daughter
- 3 Kildwick parish records: Rycroft charity 24 Mar 1906; NYCC records, ref PR/KLD/17/2/2 (microfilm #2941)
- 4 Craven Herald, April 21st 1899
- 5 Keighley News, April 22nd 1899
- 6 The Eshton Hall papers are available from the West Yorkshire Archive Service (<http://www.archives.wyjs.org.uk/>), reference 68D82/5.
- 7 Craven Herald, May 19th 1899
- 8 Keighley News, May 27th 1899
- 9 Craven Herald, February 3rd 1899
- 10 Keighley News, February 4th 1899
- 11 Keighley News, May 6th 1899
- 12 Craven Herald, June 16th 1899
- 13 Craven Herald, July 14th 1899
- 14 Craven Herald, August 11th 1899
- 15 Keighley News, August 26th 1899
- 16 Craven Herald, September 8th 1899
- 17 Craven Herald, October 6th 1899