

Plagues, Potions and Pills



A History of Health Care in Stamford Introduction

What is health?

- ***Mens sana in corpore sano*** - A healthy mind in a healthy body.
- ***A blessing that money cannot buy*** – Izaak Walton, 1653
- ***Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.***

This definition, ratified during the first World Health Assembly, has not been modified since 1948.

The subject of health – and the lack of it – is vast. It ranges from the most basic physical needs of food and water, shelter and warmth, through the many diseases and conditions which can afflict the human body, to the more intangible needs of mental and social health.

Disease is no respecter of class; rich and poor alike have died from plagues, poxes and fevers. But living conditions have always played a great part in health; overcrowded, dirty and damp housing perpetuates disease by harbouring vermin which are disease carriers, as well as making those who live in them more susceptible to disease.

Once science could prove the connections between disease and bad conditions - for example, between a contaminated water supply and the cholera outbreaks in the 1830s - living conditions began, very slowly, to be improved.

The desire to fight, mitigate and eradicate disease and infirmity has led to the evolution of medicine and the health profession– doctors, nurses, surgeons and scientists, and others more specialist and alternative. The great triumphs of 20th century medicine –the development of antibiotics, the eradication of smallpox, the many new vaccines and advances in surgery – are a tribute to their work.

In this exhibition we look broadly at the provision for health care in the local area, from early times to the present, and focus on what life was like before all the benefits of modern medicine and living conditions that we enjoy today.



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Early history

Hospitals in medieval times where the sick, the old or the poor were cared for, were generally run by religious orders. Monks and nuns grew and prepared herbal remedies.



The hospital of St Thomas and St John was the most important in medieval Stamford. It was founded about 1175, by the town bridge on the south bank, for the care of the sick, the poor and travellers. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1547 it was acquired by William Cecil, who soon afterwards started to build his almshouse on the site, and incorporated some parts of the hospital into the buildings.

St Giles Hospital was founded before 1189, to care for lepers. Its probable site was at the extreme south west corner of High Street St Martin's. It had become linked with St Thomas and St John's by 1482.



Alchemist's laboratory, From Norton's Ordinal of Alkimy (British Museum)

Materials of a medieval laboratory, including crucibles, mercury, sulphur and copper, were excavated at St Leonard's Priory in the early 1970s. The monks may have been practising alchemy, or preparing medical compounds.



St Leonard's Priory



The Dissolution lost or scattered much of this medical care, the carers, and the expertise. At this time also, the wool trade was in decline in Stamford, and this prompted the building of almshouses to house the poor and needy.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Browne's Hospital | established 1483, rebuilt 1870 |
| St Peter's Callis (All Saints Callis) | founded c.1466, rebuilt 1865 |
| Lord Burghley's Hospital | endowed 1597 |
| Snowden's Hospital (St John's Callis) | founded 1604, rebuilt 1823 |
| Truesdale's Hospital | founded 1700, rebuilt 1833 |
| Williamson's Callis | founded 1763 |
| Hopkin's Hospital | founded 1770 |
| Fryer's Hospital | founded 1832. |



Browne's



St Peter's



Lord Burghley's



Snowden's



Truesdale's



Williamson's



Hopkin's



Fryer's

All the buildings survive today, and five of them still provide sheltered housing. St Peter's Callis and Snowden's Hospital have become offices, and Williamson's Callis is a private house.



The term *callis*, meaning hospital or almshouse, may be a local corruption of the word *Calais*, and trade with the wool staple at Calais was the source of many local wool merchants' wealth.

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Plague

In medieval times plague was the most feared disease of all. The 14th century Black Death pandemic wiped out 20 million – almost 1/3 of Europe's population. Victims died in days in agony from fevers, abscesses and buboes (infected lymph gland swellings, usually in the groin or armpit). It was extremely contagious and could decimate a town or city within weeks. It had no respect for class or privilege, and there was no cure.



Illustration of the Black Death from the Toggenburg Bible, 1411

What caused plague? People believed that plague was God's punishment for sin. Physicians thought 'miasmas' of poisonous air infected those who inhaled them. It was actually caused by a bacillus in fleas that lived on black rats, which then transferred to humans.

The Black Death reached England by 1348 and peaked one year later. No Stamford mortality records exist for this time, but the town went into decline. Lincolnshire, East Anglia and London, were the worst affected areas – probably a 30% mortality rate.

Stamford was visited by plague in 1574, 1581 and 1641, but the worst epidemics came in 1602 -1604. The Corporation banned visitors to the town and plague victims had to stay indoors. Figures vary, but Burton's 1846 Chronology of Stamford asserts that 713 died. He also states that 500 or 600 died of plague in 1641.

Where were all these bodies buried? Plague victims may have been buried outside the town walls to avoid contagion.

Some Stamford institutions established because of plague:

- Edward Wells, a shoemaker, and his family all died of plague within 9 days in August 1604. He left his house and land to All Saints parish to create a school for *such children as shall be poor and freeborn in Stamford*. Wells Petty School became All Saints School in Austin Street.
- Richard Snowden, vicar of St John's church, died of plague in 1604. He left money to build an almshouse, Snowden's Hospital, for 7 poor widows.



A doctor wearing a plague mask by Paul Fürst, 1656

*Ring-a-ring o' roses,
A pocket full of posies,
Atishoo, atishoo,
We all fall down.*

- **pattern on the skin of a plague victim**
- **herbs carried to ward off the pestilence**
- **sneezing symptoms**
- **victim dropping dead!**



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18th and 19th centuries

Stamford's population expansion in the 18th and later 19th centuries put an increasing strain on housing, water supply and burial grounds.



Housing and sanitation

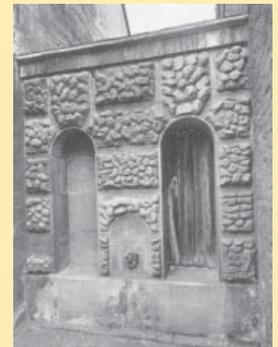
Until the 1875 Enclosure Act, building was not permitted on the common fields to the north and east of the town, and many people were crammed into the small tenements in the courts and yards. These were cheaply built of poor materials, on poor sites, damp, and overcrowded. They generally had no water supply or separate sanitation; each yard had a shared privy. From 1876, houses could be built on Northfields, considered to be a healthier area than the town centre. After the First World War, housing standards improved, and the courts and yards became regarded as substandard. Council housing was built with sanitation, water supply and lighting, and the courts and yards were gradually either demolished, or brought up to standard.

Water supply

In early times most people carried water home from the river and its springs; richer people had private wells. In 1726 there were 4 common wells in the town and 2 common conduits, one by St Michael's Church and one on St Paul's Street, which channelled water from a spring to the north east of the town. 14, St Paul's Street, Conduit House, actually straddled the water pipes, which as late as the 1930s were still wooden.

By the mid 19th century water was piped into the town from Wothorpe and there were various public pumps around the town:

- outside St George's Church
- at the east end of High Street
- within the meat market, now the site of the Library



The Bath House on Bath Row was built in 1823 for hot and cold baths, but the cost - 2s 6d for a hot bath, 1s for a cold one - was prohibitive for poorer families.

Burial grounds

By the early 19th century, the churchyards were becoming full, and in 1832 town centre burials were deemed "improper" in the time of cholera. There was even a proposal to build catacombs for 500 bodies under the new St Michael's Church in 1835. Discussions continued for some years, until the town cemetery was opened on "Cemetery Road" - now Radcliffe Road - in 1855, at the cost of £2,400.



Early photograph of the cemetery lodge.

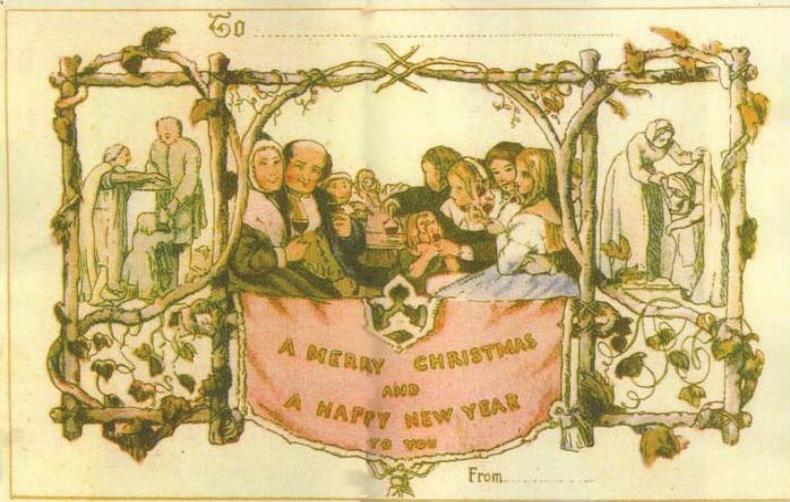


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Charities

There is a long history of private charities established to support the poor of Stamford.

In the 17th century there were several bread charities. Fisher's charity regularly supplied 6 penny loaves for the poor of St George's parish. Other donors were Antony Acham, William Bevil, Richard Warwick, and Sir Richard Cust. Francis Trigg endowed his charity in order to purchase 'good, sweet, and clean dressed barley....and distributed yearly among such and so many of the poorest and neediest householders and widows in Stamford, having charge of children or otherwise,' a practice now discontinued!



The 2 side panels on the first commercial Christmas card, 1843, show charitable giving of food and clothing.

Many ladies with property in the town also established charities. Winifrede Browne founded hers in 1648 for the benefit of poor persons living in the parish of All Saints and St Peter's and to provide weekly 12 penny loaves 'to be distributed amongst the poorest and most needful widows'. This charity still exists today for the benefit of the poor of Stamford.

From 1627 Roger Manners, Edward Curtis and Sarah King gave money for the distribution of coal.

of Exeter and Lady Sophia Cecil, in order to supply relief and financial support for poor married pregnant women in Stamford. The women had to give 8 months' notice and pay 6d a week to the matron during that period; she would then pay it back to them with an additional sum from the charity. There was also the use of blankets and linen, occasional medical assistance and after the confinement, clothes for the baby.

The Marchioness and Lady Sophia also established the Dorcas charity in 1816, to sell clothing to the poor at a very cheap rate. They operated the charity with a committee of 8 ladies, and annually distributed clothing to more than 70 families.

Stamford, September 27, 1816.
A CHARITY is intended to be established for Selling CLOTHING to Poor Persons at a cheap rate in the Town of STAMFORD and the Neighbourhood, under the patronage of the MARCHIONESS of EXETER, the LADY SOPHIA CECIL, and several Ladies of Stamford and St. Martin's.
Such benevolent persons as are disposed to promote the Institution, may receive information by applying to the following ladies.
MRS. AMPHLETT, Miss BOOTH,
MISS ATLAY, Miss M. WINGFIELD.

A ball was held yearly at the Assembly Rooms to raise funds for the benefit of both charities. In 1838 the Stamford Mercury reported that 225 attended the ball.

On the right is an extract from a Stamford Mercury of January 1818, detailing charitable gifts to the poor from the gentry.

We have our pleasing annual task of recording at this season the generous consideration of the higher orders in this neighbourhood for the poor round their respective mansions; and we believe we may with truth affirm, that there is not a corner in the kingdom in which the active benevolence of those who are blessed with the means of doing good, is more general, more effective, or more amiable.—On the 25d ult. the Right Hon. the Ladies Noel gave to 86 poor families of North Luffenham, a fat ox (weighing 70 stone), 14 quarters of potatoes, and 200 yards of flannel. The poor of that parish had also the usual gift of coals from the worthy Rector.—A liberal distribution of beef, bread, and money, was made by Mr. and Lady Mary Fludyer to the poor of Thistleton, Ayson, and Wardley.—A fat ox and several chaldron of coals were given by the Earl of Lindsey in the parishes of Uffington and Tallington.—Lord Gwydir, Sir Gilbert Heathcote, Sir John Trollope, Dr. Willis, T. Hotchkiss, Esq., and many other noblemen and gentlemen near us, have also with their usual generosity dispensed comfort and happiness to the poor around them, and added to their own enjoyment "the luxury of doing good."

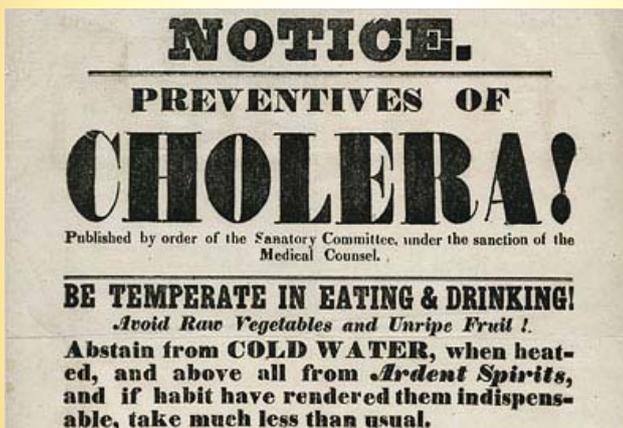


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Diseases

The Stamford Mercury index shows diseases in the local area between 1800 and 1844:

- **Smallpox:** outbreaks in 1806, 1822, 1827 and 1833. In 1806 smallpox vaccination was offered to the poor of each parish, paid from the poor rate, and there were vaccinations at the new Infirmary in 1829.
- **Rabies** (viral disease spread by bite from an infected animal): outbreaks in 1808 - 3 mad dogs destroyed; in 1809 - a child was bitten, 4 mad dogs were shot and any animals bitten were ordered to be destroyed also; in 1813, 1815, and 1838. Rabies was eliminated from the UK in the early 20th century.
- **Typhus fever** (louse-borne bacterial disease): outbreaks in 1808, 1810, 1815, 1825, and 1839.
- **Cholera** (highly infectious gastro-enteritis, one of the most rapidly fatal diseases): there were local outbreaks in 1825, in 1831 and 1832, and prevention suggestions were published.



There were 4 great cholera pandemics in the 19th century. The link between cholera and contaminated drinking water was found in 1854, and clean water and good sewage treatment slowly became a priority.



- **Fever:** many instances of *remittent* fever and *intermittent* fever, probably malaria, then endemic to the Fens. Epidemic of malaria in 1837, and *malignant fever* in White Swan Yard.
- **Scarlet fever** (streptococcal infection): 1809 and 1844.

Between 1838 and 1840, deaths from consumption (tuberculosis), breast cancer, puerperal fever (after childbirth), rheumatic fever, lockjaw (tetanus), brain fever, influenza, whooping cough, and typhus fever were all reported.

In 1983, Dr Eric Till recorded memories of his work as a local GP in the late 1920s and 1930s. Some diseases he had to contend with were: diphtheria, lockjaw, lobar pneumonia and rheumatic fever. He also encountered a (by then) rare outbreak of smallpox. The drugs available for treatment at that time were narcotics like morphia and liazene, and barbiturates. There were no sulphonamides until the late 1930s, and penicillin, the first antibiotic, was not available until 1945.





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Stamford and Rutland Infirmary

In 1823, Stamford surgeon Henry Fryer died, leaving the residue of his estate - £7,477 - towards the building of an infirmary in Stamford, on condition that it was built within 5 years. Stamford then had no form of communal medical care, although apothecaries and surgeons practised and fairs brought travelling dentists and 'doctors'.



J P Gandy's 'gothic' design was chosen for the new building, with an estimated cost of £4000, although the finished cost was almost doubled. Funds were raised locally through concerts, balls, fetes and bazaars, but the main contributions were private annual subscriptions. In 1826, when digging the foundations, the builder's men unearthed human remains, indicating the site of a former monastic church.



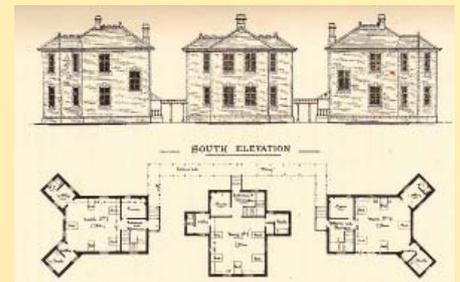
Two physicians, a surgeon and a matron were appointed and the Infirmary received its first in-patients on 5th August 1828. 10 men and 10 women could be accommodated. There was a surgery, consulting room, matron's room, surgeon's room, wash house, mortuary, laundry and – a brew-house! Each patient had a daily allowance of 1½ pints of beer.

Regulations were decided by a board of governors. No employee could have children or the care of a family, and staff had to be under 50 when appointed. No children under 8 (unless undergoing surgery) and no pregnant women were admitted, nor those '*disordered in their senses*', subject to fits, or having smallpox, itch, consumption or incurable dropsy. Cholera patients could not be accommodated.

To gain admission as a patient one had either to be a subscriber, or to know one who would recommend the patient. The more money a subscriber gave, the more patients she or he could recommend.

The isolation or fever wards, for care of infectious diseases such as diphtheria, typhoid and scarlet fever, were opened in 1879, in response to the 1875 Public Health Act.

There was a separate hospital for smallpox patients, first sited on Casterton Road, and later at Shacklewell Hollow, on the road to Empingham.



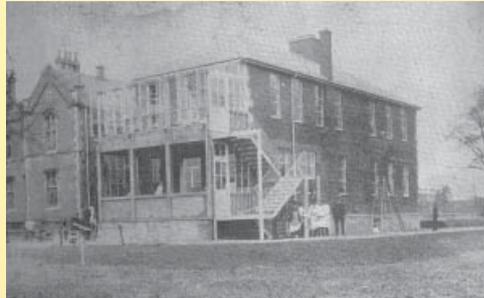
Clay ward, casualty and the operating theatre, in the 1920s.

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Early 20th century health care

In the 1920s Stamford Infirmary began to extend the original 19th century buildings. Princess Mary opened new maternity and children's wards in 1926, and Exeter and Ancaster wards opened in 1930.



The opening of the new hospital wards in 1926 by Princess Mary.



Charity was a major source of the Infirmary's income, with regular

collecting events and fund-raising dances. In 1931 the first annual Stamford Infirmary Carnival was held. The main event was the "Battle of Stamford", as reported in a national newspaper, the Daily



The 1931 Infirmary Carnival on Broad Street.

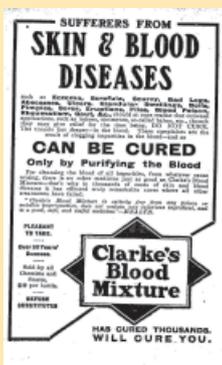
Sketch. The fund-raising continued until the advent of the National Health Service in 1948.

The cost of a stay in hospital was £1 1s – £2 2s a week, which many people could not afford. In 1931 the Infirmary introduced a contributory scheme for people to pay for their treatment. Subscribers paid either 1d or 2d per week.



Various clubs existed to provide families with some basic health insurance.

The Stamford and District Medical Club, established in 1871, was one which helped pay for medical attendance, advice and medicine during illness. The cost in 1917 was 6s 6d each, 4s for each child under 16, no charge for fourth or subsequent children. If anyone kept a cow, they had to pay an extra shilling. No-one who earned more than 21s weekly, and no unmarried female having illegitimate children, could belong to the Club.



Many pubs ran "sick and dividing" clubs. People subscribed about 3d a week which gave a small sick pay, perhaps of 5 shillings (25p) and any money left in the kitty by Christmas was divided out equally amongst subscribers.

The Stamford and District Independent Hospital Fund was set up to insure members against the expenses of hospital treatment, without specifying which hospital. Contributions were from 2d to 1s a week. The Stamford Nursing Home at 20, St Mary's Street, was established by the fund in 1932, and operated until 1950. It took medical, surgical and maternity cases. Costs were from £4 4s a week.

With the high proportionate cost of medical treatment, it is not surprising that many people relied on self-medication with patent medicines and remedies, and alternative therapies such as herbalism. "Doctor" E Day lived at 12 East Street,



and is listed as a herbalist in the street directories from 1892 until 1931. It seems he took over the herbalist business from his father, J Day, mentioned in the directories from 1885 until 1891.



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Later 20th century and the National Health Service.

As the 20th century progressed, the Infirmary was extended and improved. It had proved a valuable asset to the town, especially during 2 World Wars.

After the 2nd World War, the Labour government created the National Health Service, based on the proposals of the 1942 Beveridge Report. The new service was launched by health and housing minister Aneurin Bevan throughout the UK on 5th July 1948. The NHS was funded by general taxation, not by national insurance as is sometimes supposed.

The same doctors and hospitals provided services, but these were now free of charge. Everyone was eligible for care, including visitors to the country. The NHS in England and Wales aimed to provide Hospital Services, Primary Care and Community Services. This tripartite system was to continue until 1974.

NHS running costs soon exceeded expectations, so charges for prescriptions and dental treatment were introduced in 1952. The 1960s brought more health centres, more mental patients were discharged into the community and prescription charges were abolished, then re-introduced. Concerns grew that the tripartite system kept the 3 service areas too separate.

A reorganization in 1974 aimed to unite services within geographical areas via Regional Health Authorities; further restructuring came in 1982. This period brought the realization that unlimited access to the latest treatments could not be funded in the context of an ageing population - hence, studies into reforming the NHS began, and continue today.



In April 1993, the Peterborough Hospitals Trust comprised two hospitals: Peterborough District Hospital and Edith Cavell Hospital. In 2002, Stamford and Rutland Hospital joined them. In 2004, Peterborough and Stamford Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

became one of the first 10 Foundation Trusts in the country. It currently employs over 3,000 staff.

Today, Stamford Hospital has 24 beds and an operating theatre. It provides surgical and medical services, casualty, X-ray, physiotherapy and pathology services. It celebrated its 180th anniversary in 2008.

