

Church, Court Granville and Cholera – 170 years ago

“We lament to state that the Cholera broke out in Alnwick on Sunday with the fearful virulence and in four days eighteen fatal cases occurred casting a deep gloom over the town and neighbourhood. The medical men of the place have been unremitting in their endeavours to alleviate the suffering of the poor patients and to stop the progress of the disease.”

Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury 29th September 1849

In all, from 12th September until 24th October 1849 there were 139 deaths from Cholera in a then population of 6,000, mostly in the Clayport Street and Green Bat areas. The cholera victims were visited daily, the dead were removed; their clothes were destroyed and their houses were cleaned. Monies were raised by the town to alleviate their destitution and suffering.

The Rev. Court Granville (1808-1871) held the incumbency of Alnwick from 1846-1854 and played an important part during the “dreadful plague of cholera.” “He not only sat next by the bedside of the suffering, administering to their bodily wants, but one day when 21 persons had died during the night, he continued to read the Burial Service, though the rain fell in torrents.”

The Rev. Court Granville served the parish for eighteen years and made a deep and lasting impression. He worked tirelessly to benefit and improve the life of the townsfolk. He “delighted in doing good” and died at Chatton in 1871. His funeral service was attended by over 500 before he was transported by train from Alnwick station to his family burial ground in Warwickshire. A memorial window was installed in St. Michael’s above the



choir stalls to recognise, among his many achievements, his founding the choir. This window was moved to the outer wall in 1890 to make room for the new organ, it's no longer visible from inside the church.

Sarah Ann Peary, born in Alnwick in 1822, was an eye-witness to the cholera epidemic. In 1931 at the age of 109 she recalled in an interview for the local newspaper that she saw the cholera victims being collected by the cart load. They were then taken for burial to the parish churchyard where newly filled graves were covered with quicklime. Church records show the purchase of this lime.

The Rev. Court Granville was born in 1808 in Staffordshire and died at Chatton in Northumberland in 1871. He was educated at Cambridge University and ordained in 1835. Before coming to Alnwick he was Vicar of Myfield in Staffordshire. He married Charlotte Augusta Leopolina Murray, the sister of the 6th Duke of Athol.

He was appointed to St Michaels in 1846 and left to become Hon Canon of Durham Cathedral in 1851. In 1854 he moved to Thaxted in Essex but returned in 1858 to replace Rev Orde. He stayed until 1869 when he took up the living of Chatton and died there in 1871.

He attended, and spoke at, the Enquiry into the cholera outbreak and sanitation which met at the Town Hall on Wednesday 24th October 1849 and chaired the Committee expressing the residents' wishes to the Board of Health on the 26th in the eighteen main points for a new burial ground.

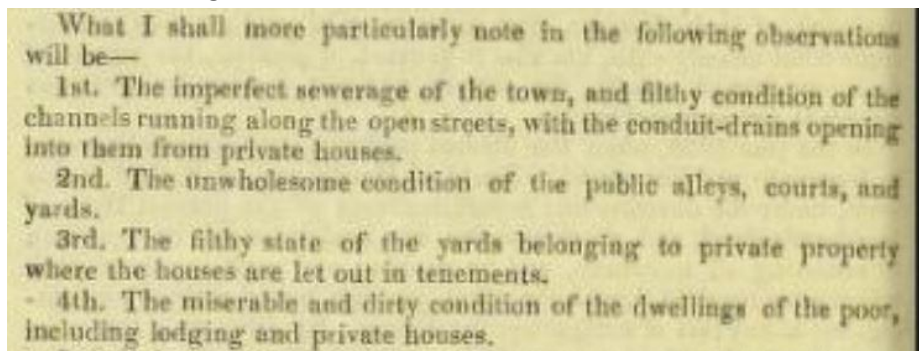
Among his other achievements, he started the National schools in Alnwick. and was gazetted Chaplain, 2nd Northumberland (Percy) Volunteer Artillery on May 5, 1860.

By the end of October 1849 the town was believed to be cleansed and free of the "miasma" along with the dirty conditions in some parts of the town. Cholera was blamed at the time on the dirty poor, living in unsanitary conditions, of whom some had intemperate habits. Following the outbreak the Board of Health between 1852-1855 carried out works to usher in a supply of clean water to the town and to provide removal of sewage. The churchyard which had become overcrowded was closed in 1856 to new

burials, and the new cemetery on South Road, designed by Mr F. R. Wilson, architect, opened.

Under the Public Health Act, the Board of Health conducted an Inquiry into the "Sewerage, Drainage, and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants, of the Townships of Alnwick and Canongate in the County of Northumberland" and issued a report in 1850 by Robert Rawlinson, Esq, Civil Engineer, Superintending Inspector.

This drew on a street-by-street inspection reported in November 1847 by John Davison, Surgeon, which began "In consequence of the long prevalence of contagious diseases in the town of Alnwick..." and referred to the previous outbreak of cholera in Newcastle and Gateshead in 1832. The situation in Alnwick was not good, as Davison had outlined in his initial observations.



Doctor John Snow, born in York in 1827, at the tender age of just 14 obtained a medical apprenticeship with William Hardcastle in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It was in 1832, during this apprenticeship, that Snow first encountered a cholera epidemic in Killingworth. He treated many victims of the disease during this outbreak and became very accustomed to its clinical presentation and how it seemed to spread.

The first case of cholera in England was reported a year earlier in 1831. At that time, it was thought that cholera was spread by 'miasma'. Miasma theory held that disease was spread by a poisonous form of 'bad air' that was emitted from rotting organic matter. This theory was supported by several leading figures in public health at the time, including Florence Nightingale.

During Snow's investigation of the cholera outbreak in Soho in 1854 where more than six hundred people died, identified the cause was due to a water supply being contaminated by sewage. On Snow's advice, officials removed the pump and the epidemic was soon contained. Officials began a complete renovation of the city's water and sewage systems. As a result, there were no more outbreaks of cholera. In 1849 Snow published a pamphlet, "On the Mode of Communication of Cholera." Because of his pioneering work Snow became known as the "father of modern epidemiology." His methods forever changed the way illness, on a widespread scale, would be managed.