

Typhus fever in Armagh - 1817

by Gerard McAtasney

On 2 December 1817 the Belfast Newsletter reported that a fever hospital had been established in Armagh on 1 October. By November 590 patients had been treated of which number sixteen died. One month later local medical attendant, Dr. Colvin was reporting “the very happy consideration” that the total number of patients in the hospital amounted to just one-quarter of the level experienced one month before. He added further that “the decrease holds good throughout the city”. (Belfast Newsletter 16 December 1817).

The decline of fever, as with its appearance, varied from area to area. While it continued in the district of Newry for some months to come by early 1818 it had all but disappeared in Armagh. The Belfast Newsletter was pleased to insert the following from the physicians of the town in its edition of 3 February 1818:

The city of Armagh is so free from typhus fever at present, that the fever committee are enabled to shut up the fever hospital. Fever still continues in a considerable degree in the country for some miles around Armagh, but is much less prevalent than formerly. There were 18 people received medicine for fever, from the Infirmary, on the 20th of January. There is no case of fever in gaol except one person from cold and may relapse.

Thus, while the typhus fever epidemic may have been short-lived, at its height it proved a vigorous pestilence. The following death notices have been extracted verbatim from the Belfast Newsletter and illustrate how, over a period of four months, even those most exalted in Armagh society were not immune to the effects of this epidemic. During this time, churchmen, teachers and wealthy businessmen were among those who succumbed, proving, as always, that disease did not discriminate as to religion or social standing.

5 September 1817

On the 31st ult. at Bessbrook, near Newry, of a typhus fever, **Joseph Nicholson**, in the 59th year of his age: a man whose memory will be held dear by a few select friends.

On Thursday last, **Mr. Hugh Rice**, of Newry, merchant. Every aid of medicine, every care of friends, and every devoted attention of conjugal affection, was exerted in vain, to rescue from the grave, another lamented victim to the malignant disorder so prevalent at present.

At Armagh, of typhus fever, on the 28th ult. In the 36th year of his age, **Mr. Samuel Maxwell**, one of the most esteemed, beloved and useful inhabitants of that city. So deeply was the loss of this invaluable man felt by all his fellow-citizens, that the shops, on his decease, were universally closed through the town and all business suspended till after his interment.

26 September 1817

On Tuesday the 16th inst. of a typhus fever, the **Rev Samuel Close**, of Elm Park, county of Armagh. The death of this pious and truly benevolent divine, is universally mourned as a public loss to society. Providence had favoured him with a heart which felt for the miseries of the indigent, and had amply endowed him with the means of relieving their anguish. During the late distressing times he was the refuge of the unhappy. His charity, more than commensurate to his immense wealth, was actively employed in works of benevolence, and to him multitudes owe their existence, who but for his timely aid must have perished of want.

On the 16th inst. **Master John Wm. Johnston**, eldest son of Dr. Johnston, of Newry.

30 September 1817

At Crieve, much regretted, on the 24th inst. of a typhus fever, aged 55 years, **Mrs. Magill**, wife of Wm. Magill, Esq. – a woman of the most exemplary piety and charity, whose life was spent in the exercise of all the Christian virtues.

4 November 1817

At Armagh, on the 28th instant, of typhus fever, in the 63rd year of his age, the **Rev. Thos. Carpendale**, D.D. master of the royal in that city. In the death of this invaluable man, the country has sustained an incalculable loss. He was eminently qualified to fulfil the duties of the literary department, over which he presided, with so much honour to himself and permanent advantage to society. Possessed of a tenacious memory, comprehensive intellect, classic taste, profound erudition, pleasing manners, and a pure heart, he exhibited to his pupils a noble example of those exalted attainments with which he laboured incessantly to enrich their minds. He taught them to unite the manners of the gentleman with the classic knowledge of the scholar, and the sound morality of the Christian; and they have thus been enabled to distinguish themselves most honourably in the university, the bar, the pulpit, and the senate. Amiable in private life, princely in spirit, benevolent in thought and deed he was a genuine Christian divine, whose every act was productive of some public or private good. It is needless to pursue this theme further – for who in this country can be ignorant of the name of Thomas Carpendale, or fail to associate with that name, whatever is virtuous or laudable.

On 29th inst. of typhus fever, at Armagh, **Major-Gen J Burnet**, commander of the northern district and a lineal descendant (we believe) of the famous bishop Burnet. The affability, kindness and liberality of this excellent officer had

exceedingly endeared him to the people of this country. In the late lamented season of sickness and of dearth, his generosity was unbounded, and he took an active and efficient part in the establishment of the fever hospital in the neighbourhood of Armagh. In that city he is lamented as a public loss. How much more will he be deplored, where his virtues are better known!

Of typhus fever, at Armagh, on the 24th instant, **Simon Langley**, Esq. J.P. – a gentleman highly esteemed by every rank in society. In his official character he was highly useful to the community, by his activity, vigilance, and impartial administration of justice. In private life, his social qualities endeared him to a numerous circle of friends and acquaintances, who knew him well, and therefore esteemed him highly. Just and honourable in his general intercourse with the world – in his own family his conduct merited peculiar approbation. As a husband, a father, a friend, his solicitude and affection conferred happiness on the objects of his regard, whilst they excited in his own heart those pure sensations, which are the genuine results of active benevolence. In the late distressing times, he was active in assisting the poor, to whom he was always a liberal benefactor.

In the 78th year of her age, **Mrs. Mary Campbell**, relict of the late Rev. Wm. Campbell, D.D. Vicar of Newry.

On the 21st inst. In the 27th year of his age, of a typhus fever, which he caught whilst administering the pastoral offices of religion to one of his flock, the **Rev. James Dolan**, R.C. Curate of Dundalk. His funeral, as might be expected, was truly solemn and respectable. All the clergy of the town and neighbourhood, the physicians, &c. with scarfs (sic) and bands, together with the respectable and grateful flock, attended in the procession, every face depicting the melancholy loss. The shrieks and lamentations of the convalescent poor, to many of whom he administered, during their illness, spiritual as well as temporal consolation, were distinctly and loudly heard – the town appeared in one common mourning.

18 November 1817

In Armagh, of typhus fever, **Mrs. Mary Atkinson**, wife of Edward Atkinson, Esq. M.D. a highly esteemed and amiable lady.

In Armagh, on Thursday last, of typhus fever, **Robert Atkinson**, Esq. a gentleman, whose excellent heart and correct conduct, rendered him a most estimable member of society.

At Armagh, on Saturday the 1st inst. Pescod Turner, Esq. of typhus fever, for many years a surgeon of his Majesty's 4th regiment, or King's Own.

2 December 1817

On the 8th inst, of a typhus fever, at Lough – harbour Cottage, county Armagh, the **Rev. Henry McIlree**, Minister of the Presbyterian Congregation of Keady.

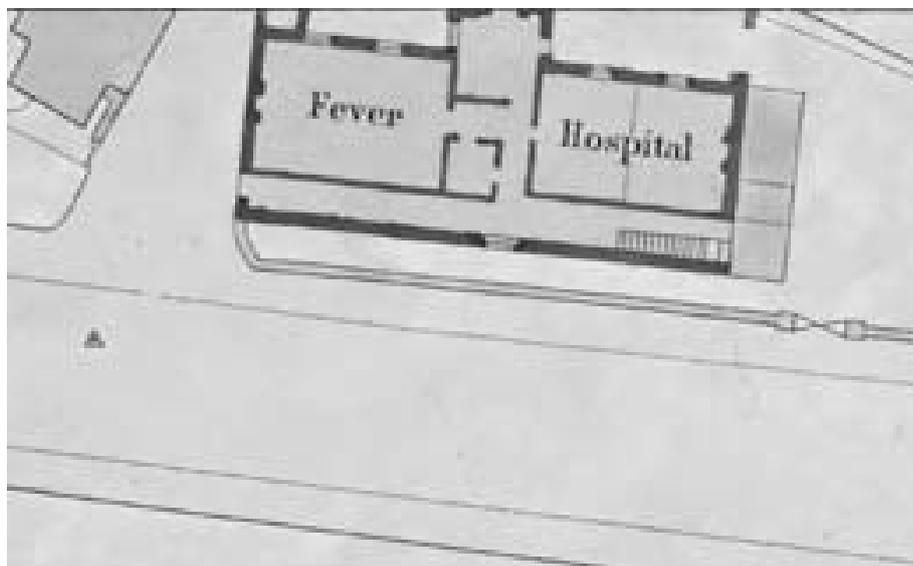
9 December 1817

At Verner's Bridge, on the 1st inst. Of typhus fever, in the 49th year of her age, **Mrs. Hart**, wife to William Hart, of same place. In the relative duties of wife, mother, and friend she might be equalled, not surpassed. She has left a numerous offspring to deplore their irreparable loss.

At Tandragee, on Monday, the 1st December inst. In the 79th year of his age, **Alexander Patton**, Esq. Surgeon and Apothecary, whose very extensive and successful practice for upwards of half a century is the best proof of his professional merit, but to eulogise a man so generally known and so highly esteemed, is superfluous.

19 December 1817

At Armagh, on the 9th inst. of typhus fever, **Mr. Francis Bennee**. His integrity of mind, his steadfast probity, and his public spirit, had procured for him the respect of all who knew him; while as a husband, a father, and a son, his conduct was exemplary and amiable. The loss of this valuable man will be long deplored, not only by a disconsolate widow and three children, but by a grateful community, who have lost a worthy member, and the poor a sympathising friend. It may with truth be asserted, that he died the noblest work of the creator – an honest man.



Armagh Fever Hospital as depicted on an 1862 plan of the city.