



Medical and Scientific Wiltshire

Probably the oldest and most well-known contribution to this section albeit with speculation could be the mystical stone circles of Stonehenge and Avebury which some believe could have been used as a way of determining the time or for other scientific purposes by ancient druids. Others believe they are a beacon for alien spaceships many sightings of which have been recorded in the Salisbury Plain/Warminster areas.

On a more serious note Wiltshire has certainly had its fair share of medical and scientific pioneers over the years.

Below we take a look at a few of those of note.

Bowood

The laboratory of the experimental scientist, Joseph Priestley, who worked here from 1773-1780 can be found at Bowood House, the home of the Marquis of Lansdowne. It was here on 1st August 1774 that Priestley isolated the gas subsequently recognised as oxygen.

Later the laboratory was used by John Ingen-Housz who discovered photosynthesis and was an exponent of variolation against smallpox. Ingen-Housz died in 1799 and was buried in a vault in St. Mary's Church, Calne.

Britford with East Harnham

This is an extract from the parish registers:-

The Cholera made its appearance in Salisbury in the month of July this year and committed great ravages. From July 8th to August 31st more than 200 deaths took place, not of poor people only, but chiefly of respectable trades-people. At East Harnham only 3 people died of cholera. Procured a medicine of Lord Folkestone for our people, the dose, a wine-glassful costs four and half pence. Up to this time I have paid £6 for this medicine. indeed nearly all our people have been attacked with Diarrhoea and Bowel complaints. The medicine has done vast good and I here not it down: viz. 1 pint of peppermint water; 4 oz. of tincture of rhubarb; 2 tablespoons of Magnesia; 6 drops of laudanum. The quantity of laudanum to be increased according to the degree of pain and the age of the patient. The dose - a wineglassful every hour. August 31st 1849. Observed as a fast day in Salisbury on account of the cholera.

Common Cold Research Unit 1946-1989

East Harnham's claim to fame has got to be the Harvard Isolation Hospital. Originally it was built because the Americans thought the outbreak of WW2 would mean epidemics in England. This did not

happen, so this hutted hospital was donated to the Medical Research Council, who decided to open it as the Common Cold Research Unit. It existed from 1946-1989. There is now a housing estate where this hospital once stood appropriately named Harvard Heights.

The unit advertised for volunteers, who were paid a small amount, it was promoted as an unusual holiday opportunity! People were infected with the cold virus and stayed for 10 days. They were allowed to go out for walks in the countryside but residential areas were out of bounds. Some people came back year after year, and others liked the area so much they sold up and moved to Salisbury.

Devizes

Parnella House, 23 Market Square, Devizes was the home of Local surgeon W. Clare in 1825. The house having been built in the 18th century features a carved image of the Greek God of Healing Asculapius who was the son of Apollo and was taught healing practices by the centaur Chiron.

Great Bedwyn

This was the birth place of Thomas Willis the 17th century Oxford physician. The cottage he was born in still stands although there is no visible signs of its significance. Thomas Willis was born in 1621 and was important in the development of anatomy, neurology and psychiatry. He was a founder member of the Royal Society.

Highworth

Residence of James Ayscough, Optician and inventor of the fore-runner of modern sunglasses. James was born in 1718 in Berkshire but moved to Highworth when his father was appointed vicar in 1720. He relocated to London where he experimented with the use of tinted lenses to correct sight imperfections and invented the hinged armed spectacles that are still used today. He also designed other scientific equipment such as telescopes, microscopes, magic lantern lenses and even the female thermometer.

Marlborough

St. Peter's Church has a memorial in the Lady Chapel to Dr. Edward Cressett, a physician who died in 1693, aged 108. Is this a record for England's oldest doctor? Another record holder must be the local GP practice in which members of one family, the Maurices, have practised for over 200 years.

Melksham

A spring discovered in 1815 launched the town as a spa but its popularity was short-lived, eclipsed by the proximity of Bath. The only remaining evidence of its former success is a line of Georgian villas seen on the right as one approaches the town from the direction of Devizes.

Purton

Neville Maskelyne was an eminent astronomer becoming Astronomer Royal during 1765-1811. He carried out much research into the exact values of the degrees of longitude and latitude using the lunar distance method. Much of his work carried out at Greenwich Observatory thus giving much weight to the adoption of Greenwich Mean Time as an international norm. Maskelyne Crater on the moon was named in his honour.

Ramsbury

The village pub was once a rendezvous for travelling veterinary surgeons which is how it acquired the name "Bleeding Horse".

Salisbury

Amongst the many exhibits at the museum in Cathedral Close is a reconstruction of a GP's surgery - a consulting room and waiting room from the 1940's complete with wax-work figures. The surgery originated in Amesbury and belonged to Dr Philip Neighbour. It was located in a coach house to the rear of his home. Surprisingly, the consulting room lacks a desk and chair for the doctor who rests himself against an examination couch whilst interviewing his patient.

The shrine of St. Osmund (d. 1099) can be found under the eighth arch of the south aisle of the cathedral. Here is an example of healing holes (q.v. St Albans and Whitchurch Canonicorum) whereby diseased persons could expose themselves to the healing power thought to emanate from the saintly remains contained within a casket known as a *feretrum* which was placed on top. The structure originally stood at the east end of the cathedral but was thrown out during the Reformation and used as a tomb for Lord Stourton who was hanged for murder in Salisbury market place in 1556.

Swindon

The GWR Medical Fund Hospital, now a community centre, was opened in 1872 for accommodating sick railway workers and, in 1892, it amalgamated with the company's welfare services in a building on the corner of Faringdon Street and Milton Road to form an early polyclinic, or medical centre which provided eight consulting rooms, a dispensary, a dental surgery, an ophthalmic clinic and ENT department together with physiotherapists and chiropodists. Early in the present century, the centre was equipped with an X-ray apparatus.

Tisbury

Sir Christopher Hinton, constructor of Calder Hall Atomic Power Station was born 12 May 1901 in Tisbury. He was a highly respected nuclear engineer who began his engineering career with the Great Western Railway at Swindon. He was instrumental in the construction and design of many of the nuclear power stations around the country today.

Urchfont

There are three plague graves in a field about one mile from the village. Two men died of plague during an outbreak in the mid-seventeenth century and were buried by a friend who is reputed to have dug a third grave for himself in which he was buried when he subsequently succumbed to the infection. It is not possible to view them at present without pre-arranging a visit because they are in the middle of a pig farm.

Wellow

Florence Nightingale is buried in the churchyard at West Wellow which is crossed by the Hampshire/Wiltshire border - the churchyard is divided into East and West Wellow, East being Hampshire and West being Wiltshire. Florence Nightingale was famous for her devoted nursing service in the Crimean where she insisted that cleanliness in her wards would aid the recovery of her patients. Her theories led to many of her methods being adopted in hospitals worldwide. She founded a college of nursing based at St. Thomas's Hospital in London and all new nurses take the Nightingale Pledge when they qualify.