

THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC 1918 - 1919

The crowded conditions on board the fleets moored at Scapa Flow and Rosyth in the early autumn of 1918 encouraged the spread of the virus. The men going on leave took it throughout Scotland, to the densely populated areas of Glasgow, Clydeside, Edinburgh and the Forth Valley towns such as Linlithgow. Schools were closed and Golspie was not alone in having no bread because all the local bakers were ill and neighbouring towns couldn't spare any. The sheer number of reports caused widespread rumours and panics. By November, *The Scotsman* carried regular reports from all round the country. Schools and Sunday Schools were closed. Public places like Edinburgh's Waverley Market and picture houses were regularly fumigated

From Scotland, the outbreak spread to England and influenza was declared a notifiable disease by Parliament. However, at the beginning of November, the Local Government Board of Scotland issued a circular to local authorities in which they state, with regard to compulsory notification, that the difficulties of enforcing notification "*are out of all proportion to its practical value. It is competent for the local authority to provide treatment in hospital for cases of influenza occurring in their district and if vacant accommodation, suitably detached, is available in the infectious diseases hospital, the Board would raise no objection to its use*".

Shops (apart from chemists which were besieged) were largely empty of customers and businesses were short staffed or closed. Many farms were severely affected – at one farmstead a dozen were laid up. By the beginning of December the outbreak in Edinburgh was abating, but it still raged in Lothians and the Borders and by then, many other countries were experiencing severe epidemics and 'flu continued to affect many parts of Britain. Throughout the Christmas and New Year period, the schools remained closed.



The dead and the dying

After a winter of unseasonably damp and humid weather, an exceptionally cold March seemed to contain the spread and by April, other stories were occupying the Newspaper columns.

THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC IN THE BORDERS

The *Southern Reporter* of 24th October reported that many town and villages of the Borders were affected, with public schools closed in Hawick, Selkirk and Coldstream and many businesses in Peebles badly affected: a large number of cases at Duns with schools closed and no Sunday services. At Eyemouth 600 cases and Berwick likewise.

Already, by 1st November 1918, the Kelso Chronicle was reporting that the Public Schools in Kelso were closed, some businesses *are only being carried on with difficulty* and the deaths of Mr John Brown, saddler and Mr Andrew Walker, engineer (a partner with J&R Hogarth & Co, Shedden Park) were recorded.

A week later the Chronicle reported:-

... There is scarcely a business in the town that is not seriously affected ... the cases are numbered in the hundreds [and] great strain is put on an already reduced medical staff. The oldest inhabitants cannot recall a time of such a scourge ... or when a funeral has been a daily occurrence...

Kelso Chronicle 8th November 1918

The day before, The Scotsman had reported that '*...so many of the town's mothers were sick that a ladies committee had been established and was operating a soup kitchen [at Roxburghe Hall] to make sure that local children received something hot to eat.*' This Committee included Mrs Middlemas, Mrs Allan Stevenson, Mrs Turnbull (Bellvue), Mrs Henderson (Colville House), Mrs Fleming, Miss Reid, Miss M.E. Johnston, Mrs Bulman, Mrs Robarts and Mrs Hamilton (Convenor).

The 'flu and pneumonia cases were being taken to the Fever Hospital and the sick included Provost Stevenson and the Duchess of Roxburghe and her son. By 14th November, eight or nine burials per week were being recorded. Strangely, this same issue reported that some parts of the district such as Yetholm, were practically free from the epidemic.

Many shops had to close because their staff were off sick. This was a particular problem with grocery shops, because people still had to be registered with a named shop. When a shop closed, their registered customers had to make a special arrangement with the Food Office to allow them to go elsewhere. At least two thirds of the staff at the Laundry were off sick.

The half yearly Communion in the Presbyterian Churches due on the first Sunday in November had been abandoned or postponed and ordinary services were poorly attended. Concerts were postponed and the cinemas in Kelso close.