

THE CHIPPING DOCTORS

The "official" doctor for Chipping in 1873, was **Henry Patchett**, J.P., L.R.C.P., Salford House, Blackburn, who was given a salary of £25 a year by the Board of Guardians for serving as Medical Officer for Chipping vaccinations.

His unqualified brother **William Patchett**, actually performed the vaccinations. According to a directory of 1865, William Patchett was at the Talbot Inn as innkeeper and surgeon. On the 1871 census of Chipping, he was living at Kirk Lee Farm and styled "assistant surgeon" and he gave Ribchester as his place of birth. On the 1881 census he was still at Kirk Lee and a "medical assistant". By 1891 William had died and his son **Richard Patchett**, surgeon's assistant, was at Kirk Lee.

In directories in the late 1890s until 1901, a **John Patchett**, "surgeon", probably unqualified, was at Kirk Lee. Further into this century, **William Patchett**, probably a son of the first William, ran a shop in Talbot St, and also pulled teeth.

There was a proper doctor in Ribchester, **Richard A. Patchett**, who qualified in 1874, and he practised in Chipping. According to a medical directory of 1920 he was the official Medical Officer for vaccinations in Chipping. There was another **John Patchett**, at Great Harwood for about 40 years, who qualified in 1875.

Chipping people also consulted the Longridge doctors at Newtown -- 3 generations of **Edmund Eccles**, and in 1907 a **Dr Jukes** of Longridge.

Medical treatment must have been available throughout much of the last century from the Watson family who lived at the house at the west end of the Oddfellows Club Row in Chipping. **Lawrence Watson** was styled "surgeon" when he died in 1837. His son, **James Burscough Watson**, was variously described as surgeon, chemist, druggist, dentist, grocer and oil merchant on the censuses. In 1869 he was admitted to the register of the Pharmaceutical Society. It is known that he gave treatment to inmates at the Chipping Workhouse and Bleasdale Reformatory. When he died in 1900 he had been an Oddfellow for 68 years, though probably not officially employed by the Oddfellows as their surgeon.

Medical care in Chipping, however, was much improved by the Oddfellows when they decided to employ their own doctor. By the end of the last century in order to claim sickness benefit from the Society, members were required to produce certificates from properly qualified doctors. This was obviously difficult and inconvenient, so in January 1900 the Oddfellows advertised for a qualified residential medical practitioner.

Dr Richard Craven was appointed in 1900 and he seems to have lived in Chipping. He was followed in 1904 by a **Dr Henriques**.

Then in summer 1905 **Dr Robert Harrison Birtwell** was appointed and he stayed for 40 years. He lived at first at Brick House and in October 1909 he moved into the new house built for him by the Oddfellows at Brookside near Startivants. In 1908, any Oddfellow who wished to be on Dr Birtwell's list paid 1d per week and 6d per bottle of medicine (prepared by the doctor).

Dr Birtwell died 3rd February 1945.

CHIPPING'S DOCTOR FOR 40 YEARS

THE death of Dr. R. H. Birtwell, on Saturday, ends a notable medical career. For the last 40 years he had been resident doctor in Chipping. Dr. Birtwell was aged 76 years. At the funeral at Chipping Parish Church, on Tuesday, many former patients were among the large number of mourners.

Dr. Birtwell has not always been a doctor.

He was educated at Lancaster Royal Grammar School and, on leaving, entered the teaching profession. At the same time he was working for his B.A. degree, which he ultimately gained. After several years of teaching Dr. Birtwell was attracted by the medical profession.

He studied at the Universities of Manchester, Aberdeen and London, and later at Guy's Hospital. His first practice on qualifying was in Gloucester, but, wishing to see something of the world, he took an appointment in German South Africa and stayed there two years.

At the time of his return to England the Chipping Oddfellows were advertising for a doctor, and so Dr. Birtwell came to Chipping and quickly built up an extensive practice, extending beyond Chipping parish into the Whitewell, Bleasdale and Longridge districts.



DR BIRTWELL, IN 1923

Information from directories, newspapers and censuses, the Clitheroe Board of Guardians Minutes and the Chipping Oddfellows Resolution Book (DDX 814/2/1) at the Lancs Record Office. Watson family information from Mrs P.P.Starkie.