

THE NATIONAL ANTI-VACCINATION LEAGUE

**THE BRIGHTON
SMALLPOX OUTBREAK
1950-51**

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In the evening of December 27th, 1951 an ambulance brought to Bevendean Infectious Diseases Hospital, Brighton, a man, Mr. Bath, aged 53, vaccinated in infancy, and re-vaccinated in 1916, who was seriously ill. When the Hospital Medical Officer saw the case, she at once suspected smallpox. She remembered that the man's daughter, Miss Bath, vaccinated in infancy, had entered the Hospital ten days earlier with a diagnosis of staphylococcal septicaemia. She telephoned to the Brighton M.O.H. who visited the Hospital. Matter from the suspected cases was sent to the laboratory in London and next day confirmation that the cases were smallpox arrived. Miss Bath was sent to Dartford Isolation Hospital ; her father was too ill to be moved and he died next day, December 29th, in Bevendean Hospital.

Inquiries revealed that an R.A.F. Officer had been staying with the Baths. This man, vaccinated in infancy, in 1943, and in October 1949, flew from Karachi by way of Malta and landed at Leuchars, Fifeshire. From there he travelled to Brighton on November 29th 1950. *The Lancet's* correspondent (6/1/51) said he felt ill during the journey and went to bed on reaching his destination. Later a sparse rash developed. He is said to have made three railway journeys to Scotland. No person other than those in the Bath household appears to have been infected by him. He was seen by a doctor but smallpox was not suspected. He was taken from a house in Portslade to Dartford Hospital on December 28th, apparently quite well and kept there for a few days.

A Portslade friend of Miss Bath, who had looked after her during the four days she was at home ill, was also taken to Dartford on December 28th, the rash in her case having developed on December 26th. She had been vaccinated in infancy.

'On December 29th, a 63 year old worker at the laundry to which the R.A.F. officers' clothes had been sent developed a rash and next day she was sent to Dartford. She had been vaccinated in infancy.

So of the first five cases two were vaccinated and re-vaccinated persons, one of them re-vaccinated only 13 months before he contracted smallpox in India and the other three had been vaccinated in infancy. One of the re-vaccinated, Mr. Bath died.

For ten days Miss Bath was in a ward at Bevendean Hospital where it is alleged there were seven unvaccinated nurses at work. When the presence of smallpox in Bevendean was confirmed on December 28th, all the staff employed there were vaccinated on that day or the next, except nine who were on leave and who were vaccinated on the 30th. All the patients, too, were vaccinated.

Delay in diagnosis causes infection in Hospital and laundry.

The delay in diagnosing Miss Bath's case (and the original case of the R.A.F. officer) allowed the spread of the infection to the hospital and the laundry. Miss Bath was a supervisor at the Telephone Exchange and appears to have infected another worker there and also her Portslade friend and another. There were 13 cases from the hospital (6 of them fatal) and six from the laundry (2 of them fatal). There were only four cases not belonging to the hospital, laundry, or telephone exchange and all these were contacts of hospital cases. One was a young man who went out with a nurse who died. The others were in one house and were also contacts of a hospital case. There was not a single original case in Brighton.

Vaccinal condition of the Cases.

The table on page 6 published in (*The Medical Officer*, 3/2/51), gives particulars of the 29 cases, 10 of which were fatal. It will be seen that eleven of the cases were over 30 years old and seven of them over 40. Only three were under 10; one of them, a baby aged one year, was a patient in the Bevendean Hospital suffering from measles. 9 of the cases were recorded as having been vaccinated in infancy, two others are down as re-vaccinated, and 18 are down as unvaccinated. Mr. Bath's vaccination in 1916 is not mentioned. (This is the third case in the list).

17 of the 18 cases entered as "unvaccinated" were vaccinated as soon as it was known that there had been a case of smallpox in the Bevendean Hospital.

Of the 22 vaccinated after exposure to infection, all but three had a "successful" result, but they all developed smallpox. In

one of the three "unsuccessful," the operation was done again with success, nevertheless smallpox developed a week later and the man died.

In addition to Mr. Bath, 9 of the patients died. 8 of them had been vaccinated (six successfully), two one day before smallpox developed; one 2 days before; two 3 days before; one four days before; one 12 days before; and one 14 days before. As this last vaccination was thought to have been unsuccessful, the man, a 54 year old gardener at Bevendean, was again re-vaccinated, the second time successfully. Smallpox developed a week after this second re-vaccination.

Vaccinal condition of fatal Cases.

Dr. Ricketts, who had had very considerable experience of smallpox, declared that vaccination during the last four days of the development of smallpox "only adds to the patient's troubles." Two R.A.M.C. officers in India suggested in *The Lancet*, August 19th, 1944, that the vaccination of five soldiers at the time they were already incubating smallpox had aggravated the smallpox. Two of them died—one of haemorrhagic smallpox which developed 11 days after vaccination. May not the heavy deathrate at Brighton have been in part due to the vaccinations performed so late in the incubation stage of smallpox?

Did vaccination add to possibility of fatal result?

The intervals between vaccination and the development of smallpox in eleven of the cases are seen to be: two of 15 days (cases 25 and 27), one of 14 days (case 23), three of 13 days (cases 18, 19 and 24), two of 12 days (20 and 29), two of 11 days (cases 26 and 28), and one of 10 days (case 21). In case 28 vaccination resulted in "no take." In case 23 re-vaccination on 29/12/50 resulted in "no take"; repeated on 5/1/51 it was successful.

In addition to Mr. Bath and the gardener (fatal re-vaccinated cases) a 53 year old re-vaccinated woman died. She had been vaccinated in infancy and was re-vaccinated on January 1st. She developed a rash on January 4th, and was taken to the smallpox hospital the same day. The re-vaccination in this case is said to have been "unsuccessful." Formerly an unsuccessful re-vaccination was said to show immunity from smallpox.

BRIGHTON SMALLPOX OUTBREAK.

Case No.	Initials	Age	Sex	Date of Rash	Date of Removal to S.P. Hospital	VACCINATION STATE	
						Before exposure	After exposure to Smallpox Infection
1	C.H.	34	M.	3/12/50	28/12/50	Infancy 1943, 1949	—
2	E.B.	25	F.	14/12/50	28/12/50	Infancy	—
3	H.B.*†	53	M.	23/12/50	28/21/50	Infancy	—
4	I.F.	31	F.	26/12/50	28/12/50	Infancy	—
5	J.L.	63	F.	29/12/50	30/12/50	Infancy	—
6	A.R.*	28	F.	30/12/50	30/12/50	Unvac.	29/12/50
7	C.C.*	28	F.	31/12/50	31/12/50	Unvac.	30/12/50
8	P.M.*	17	F.	31/12/50	31/12/50	Unvac.	28/12/50
9	C.N.	23	F.	31/12/50	31/12/50	Infancy	—
10	C.R.N.	28	F.	2/ 1/51	2/ 1/51	Infancy 1935	28/12/50
11	I.M.*	38	F.	2/ 1/51	2/ 1/51	Unvac.	29/12/50
12	F.H.	24	F.	2/ 1/51	2/ 1/51	Unvac.	30/12/50
13	E.R.*	43	F.	2/ 1/51	2/ 1/51	Unvac.	29/12/50
14	E.B.*	53	F.	4/ 1/51	4/ 1/51	Infancy	1/ 1/50‡
15	F.D.	47	F.	6/ 1/51	6/ 1/51	Infancy	30/12/50
16	J.C.	27	F.	8/ 1/51	8/ 1/51	Unvac.	9/ 1/51
17	M.S.	21	F.	9/ 1/51	9/ 1/51	Unvac.	30/12/50
18	I.B.	19	F.	10/ 1/51	10/ 1/51	Unvac.	28/12/50
19	D.N.	19	F.	10/ 1/51	10/ 1/51	Unvac.	28/12/50
20	E.S.*†	48	F.	10/ 1/51	10/ 1/51	Unvac.	29/12/50
21	S.S.	9	M.	9/ 1/51	9/ 1/51	Unvac.	30/12/50
22	D.E.*	20	M.	10/ 1/51	11/ 1/51	Unvac.	—
23	J.A.*	54	M.	12/ 1/51	12/ 1/51	Infancy	29/12/50‡ 5/ 1/51
24	M.I.	24	F.	11/ 1/51	11/ 1/51	Unvac.	29/12/50
25	B.P.	21	F.	12/ 1/51	12/ 1/51	Infancy	28/12/50
26	S.M.	1	M.	9/ 1/51	10/ 1/51	Unvac.	29/12/50
27	M.D.	40	F.	12/ 1/51	12/ 1/51	Unvac.	28/12/50
28	J.C.	6	M.	21/ 1/51	21/ 1/51	Unvac.	10/ 1/51
29	J.H.	18	M.	22/ 1/51	22/ 1/51	Unvac.	10/ 1/51

* These patients died.

† Confined in isolation in Bevendean Hospital.

‡ No take.

After the first 5 or 6 smallpox patients had been taken to Dartford Journeys to Hospital made in ice and snow. the Foredown Hospital above Portslade was opened for the reception of smallpox patients. The Chairman of the South-East Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board said this was forced on them because snow and icy roads at the time of the initial outbreak made it dangerous for patients seriously ill to undertake the journey.

The Brighton Medical Officer of Health admitted that he told the Press about the outbreak so that as many people as possible should know about it. He considered his policy rewarded him by nearly 100,000 people getting vaccinated. However the Minister of Health told Mr. Viant on February 18th, 1951 that only 164 persons in private houses were quarantined at some time during the outbreak. Obviously only these 164 people were thought to be in any danger of developing smallpox. The vaccination of 100,000 people was quite superfluous and was actually opposed to the expressed policy of the Ministry of Health who for some time have deprecated mass vaccination. Of the 164 persons quarantined at Brighton only two people in one family developed smallpox. When the Medical Officer of Health for Hove issued his annual report for the year 1951, he said that the vaccinations performed in Hove had been quite unnecessary as there had not been a single smallpox case in Hove. The Brighton M.O.H., the Press, and the B.B.C. had alarmed the public so much that about a third of the population of Brighton and Hove lost their heads and rushed to be vaccinated. Some were, in effect, coerced into vaccination, for instance although not a single smallpox case occurred in any Brighton school, the M.O.H. sent a letter to the parents of a number of Brighton schools warning them not to send their children to school unless they had been vaccinated. This circular aroused such a panic in some quarters that mothers were refusing to send children to school at all and some demanded the closing of the schools. Smallpox outbreak publicised to get people vaccinated.

It was the constant reiteration of the word smallpox in the daily and weekly papers that caused such apprehension, coupled with suggestions by employers, especially the Post Office and British Railways, that all employees should be vaccinated. An examination of the table shows that 5 cases went to the smallpox hospital on December 28th, 1950, two on December 30th, three on December

31st, four on January 2nd, 1951, one on January 4th, one on January 5th, one on January 8th, two on January 9th, four on January 10th, two on January 11th, three on January 12th, one on January 21st, and one on January 22nd. What justification was there for the working up of a panic? Every case as it developed was sent to the Isolation Hospital; Bevendean Hospital was put into quarantine; there was not a single smallpox case amongst the general population of Brighton. Yet there was all this ballyhoo. It is clear from the M.O.H.'s admission that people were told about the smallpox on purpose to frighten them into getting vaccinated, and for no other reason whatsoever.

Two-thirds of the population withstood all this disgraceful panic-making official and Press activity but the scare that had been worked up damaged the town's reputation as a seaside resort.

Vaccination
caused much
illness.

The vaccinations performed caused an enormous amount of illness. 75 per cent of the workers of a big firm in Brighton were away from work suffering from the effects of vaccination. Half the staffs of some shops were away with bad arms. Bus workers and telephone operators were very much affected by the vaccination they were told to undergo and staffs were depleted. While the operation was not compulsory, the fear engendered by the M.O.H., the Press and the B.B.C., coupled with the pressure put on them by supervisors, etc., made many submit who, had things been normal, would have refused. So great was the fear aroused by the statements issued by the M.O.H. that a lorry driver told a firm's factory manager in London that he could not deliver goods in Brighton as Brighton was a closed area and if he did get in he would not be allowed out again. The Brighton M.O.H. found himself obliged to deny the report and to assure everyone that there were no restrictions on people going in or out of Brighton and that it was important that all deliveries should be made. He pointed out that all direct contacts of smallpox cases were immediately put in quarantine until the period of incubation was over. It was, however, his panic-arousing statements that started all these foolish rumours.

THE ARCHIVE COLLECTION

THIS LITERATURE WAS COLLECTED
FROM VARIOUS SOURCES
OVER THE YEARS OF MY RESEARCH
ON VACCINATION
WHICH STARTED IN SEPTEMBER 1991.

FORTUNATELY I RECEIVED
SEVERAL DOCUMENTS
AND BOOKS FROM INDIVIDUALS
WHO HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN
THE ANTI-VACCINATION LEAGUE OF GREAT BRITAIN
DURING THEIR LIFE TIME.

THE LATE DR GORDON LATTO, WHO SERVED AS THE MEDICAL
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE LEAGUE DURING THE MID 1900s.
ALSO, IAN & MONIQUE STIRLING TO NAME A FEW.

ALSO THANKS TO JOHN WANTLING, AN INDEPENDENT
RESEARCHER, FOR PATIENTLY PHOTOCOPYING
NUMEROUS ARCHIVE PUBLICATIONS & FORWARDING
COPIES TO ME BACK IN THE MID-NINETIES.

I HAVE SCANNED THESE PUBLICATIONS & LITERATURE
TO PRESERVE THE WEALTH OF INFORMATION
CONTAINED WITHIN THESE DOCUMENTS
IN THE HOPE THAT THEY WILL BE CIRCULATED
& MADE AVAILABLE TO ANYONE WHO WISHES
TO STUDY THE HISTORICAL DATA
SURROUNDING THIS SUBJECT.

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