

The Cholera Outbreaks of 1832 and 1849



In the year 1832, a disease called “Asiatic Cholera” arrived in Ireland for the first time. It began in India in August 1817, spreading throughout the sub-continent. It reached Moscow in 1830 and continued westward through France, Belgium, Holland, England and then Dublin. Cholera is a tiny microorganism that usually enters the body through the mouth. The most common source of infection is water contaminated by the excreta of another cholera sufferer. It kills by dehydration, and it kills rapidly, usually in three or four days, but sometimes within a few hours. Medical knowledge of the disease was extremely limited at the time. The doctors believed that cholera travelled in a fog, which they called a “miasma” and so recommendations including ventilations of hospitals and homes and the burning of tar and camphor to clear the air. Other remedies included bloodletting, purging, emetics, stimulants, injection of warm water in to the veins, calomel mixed with opium or laudanum. A simple infusion of water and saline would have stopped the dehydrating and ultimately saved the lives of those infected by the disease. The Barracks was evacuated and the soldiers were housed in tents in a field on the Limerick that is still remembered as The Camp Field. Because of the need to keep the tents on high ground and to avoid overcrowding, there was a need to expand this camp in to lands of the Glebe but the Rev. Young refused to give permission. Between 9 June and 23 July 1832, the disease took a very heavy toll in the parish of Clare Abbey, mainly in the village. There were 274 cases of cholera and 103 deaths were recorded. It is believed that the majority of the victims were buried in the lower part of the cemetery in Old Clare Hill where they lie in unmarked graves. Some of the victim’s names are recorded on gravestones as shown on page 37.

During the Famine, a further outbreak of cholera hit Clare Castle on 28 March 1849. Between that date and 23 April, a total of 46 cases were reported. At least 17 people died including a man namd P. Corbett and a Miss Roughan. The victims were probably buried in a mass grave in the lower part of Old Care Hill cemetery. In July 1958, a human skeleton was found during excavations for the sewerage system in the Quay Road. The discovery was made beside the footpath on the right of the road facing the quay. Across the road was a hospital during the time of the Famine. Today the building is a series of eight houses. The

skeleton was deemed to be that of an elderly person and was reinterred in Old Clare Hill Cemetery. The recorded deaths from the cholera outbreak of 1832 refer mainly to the people of the village and the Barracks. But Cholera Hill in Killerk would indicate that people outside of these areas were affected by an outbreak of the disease in some period. In the 1937 Schools Manuscripts of the Folklore Collection for Co. Clare, Willie Neylon of Killerk writing on the Famine “there was a street of houses on the road I come to school and they all died of Cholera”.



Grave 87

Sacred | to the mem | of Mary Ann | daughter of Quarter Mas | ter Serg. Currie | 68 Light
Infantry | who died June 2nd 1832 aged 6 months



Grave 117

to the memory of | Marian wife | of George MacBeath, Esq | Quarter Master | 68th Lt Infantry |
who departed this life | 13th June 1832 | aged 58 [*Note: George McBeath died on 13 June 1832 and is
buried in Ennis Abbey per JP*]



Grave 48A

Sacred | to the memory | of James Read Esq., late Surgeon of his Majesty's | 68th Regt. Lt. Infantry |
who died at Clare June 11th 1832 | aged 46 | having fallen victim to | the then prevailing epidemic |
whilst in the zealous performance | of his professional duties. This stone was erected by his brother
William Read, 68th Light Infantry

Extracts from Old Clare Hill Graveyard, Clare Castle as transcribed by Clare Roots

Society