Health in the Hormeads

There are many facets to the subject of the health of a community. Some elements are personal, such as hygiene and a state of affluence sufficient to permit a household to have an adequate supply of hot water and cleaning materials, while some influences are external, for example, contamination of water supplies, the bringing of contagious diseases by visitors and animals, and later in our history the activities of local authorities. All these factors contributed to the well-being, or otherwise, of Hormead residents.

Direct evidence is supplied by the burial registers, which inevitably are quoted frequently here. Indirect evidence comes from a variety of official sources and background material. In consequence the information is patchy, both in content and at different periods of our history. Even the best evidence, from the parish registers, is extremely variable according to the interest of the vicars keeping them. There are many years in which the name and date of the person receiving burial is the only information given. One vicar was in the habit of writing 'died suddenly' with no cause being stated. Another vicar wrote 'died accidentally', also of little use for few of us venture to die deliberately, but there are many such entries nevertheless.

The effort to be clean and decent before the advent of piped water, easy heating of that water and a cheap supply of soap, was considerable. Prior to the roads being metalled early this century the accumulation of mud on ones person and clothes must have constituted a major daily problem. In an almost permanent state of winter dirt or summer dust, it must have been easier to blame Londoners, travellers and vagabonds coming to the village for the epidemics and physical troubles of all kinds, than to clean up at home. Before reviewing the kind of diseases and problems brought from outside, it will be salutory for us to remind ourselves of some of the difficulties experienced by villagers in less healthy times.

The main water supply was from wells, clearly marked by a 'W' on the O.S. maps. Provision for their shared use was always meticulously stated in deeds of conveyance of property since their good maintenance was essential for the comfort and safety of all users. They varied considerably in depth (Stonebury 180' and Mutfords 80') and the early system of winching elm buckets up by hand was replaced by engine power, both oil and petrol, only where a lot of use of one well merited such a luxury, as on farms for watering stock. Piped water, conveyed to a pump placed outside houses at intervals along the roadside arrived in the villages in 1934. An additional standpipe was provided at Park Cottages, Little Hormead, in 1948 with a plan to install the supply inside the houses four years later. So it was not until after the second world war that the whole village had piped water indoors.

The location of ponds was also shown on maps. They were important for watering horses and cattle, and are still found in the grounds of old farmhouses such as Little Hormeadbury, Hormead Hall, Balons, Hare Street House and the Old Swan Inn where a copious supply was needed for the smithy and foundry business there during the last quarter of the 19th century. The pond at The Swan was also used by plough horses working in the fields west of Hare Street, for their mid-day watering. Horses in the main street used the pond where the walnut tree now stands in the grounds of The Warren. If the horseman allowed his charges to stir up the sdeiment of this pond with their feet, he was soon in bad odour himself with his fellow villagers. Hare Street Pond, as it was called, was referred to frequently in the Parish Council Minutes up to 1950. It was forever needing cleansing; the cause of complaints that the roadman had swept his refuse into it; that someone had obstructed access so that water carts could not back into it to take on water; or the brick wall protecting it was eroding. Then, when at last there came a chance to get rid of it because piped water had come to the hamlet, the residents actually voted against ridding themselves of this perenniel nuisance on the grounds that they 'stilll thought it of use in case the water mains were damaged by enemy action' (P.C. Minutes 25.3.1941). After the war, it was filled up and the clerk to the parish council no doubt reflected the relief of all concerned when he wrote, 'this is the 31st minute on the subject' (20.10.1948) expecting it to be the last. He was wrong, as it happened, for other minutes record the filling in of the pond.

In Great Hormead there was a pond at the top of Horseshoe Hill on the site of the allotments; another by Thatched Cottage, known as Wick's Pond because the Wick family lived in the cottage for so many years, (c.1824-1918). This was said never to dry up and was always the last pond in the village to get low in summer.

The nasty habit of throwing litter into ponds is not new. In the Herts County Council Papers for 1912 there is a notice of a meeting of 31 May: 'Horseshoe Lane, Great Hormead. The Parish Council also ask that the pond situated upon the side of the road at the top of this hill should be cleared of the refuse now in it, and that a notice-board should be erected warning the public from using it for the purpose of depositing refuse.'

Our ancestors were also much pre-occupied with the state of their ditches. In 1613 'In Little Hormead a ditch of William Greene's in the highway leading from Furneux Pelham to Buntingford is vere noisom.' (William Greene owned Greene's farm, later re-named Bull's farm). The court in Hertford, 1627, was still upset about Little Hormead's common way being 'greatly ruined through default of scouring a watercourse in the highway there andthat Jonathan Thurowgood of Little Hormead yeoman and all those whose estate he now has in a meadow called Ballance Mead next adjoining to the said highway ought to scour and amend the said watercourse whenever necessary.' Nor did Great Hormead residents escape the court's admonishment: 1671 'Indictment of William Cage of Great Hormead for not repairing a watercourse in a ditch leading under Hare Street Bridge.'

There are many ditches and culverts still in the villages – more than one having the name of Black Ditch. These muddy channels have a habit of emptying an unaccountable quantity of stones, sand and water onto the village roads during a rainy period. In the 19th century the school quite frequently closed early when it was observed that the water in the ditches was rising, or if it rained hard for any length of time. Some children would have been unable to reach the further parts of the village when the road through Great Hormead was awash. We have had some spectacular inundations in recent years, especially in 1987, recalling the words of a vicar who wrote in the Parish Magazine July 1917: 'Thanks to the two great storms in Hormead during last month, there will be no need for anyone to hanker after the sea-side; the roads and pathways are so full of sand and pebbles, we can easily imagine ourselves Hormead-by-the-Sea.'

Part of the long ditch by the side of the Hare Street to Great Hormead Road was filled in during the summer of 1907. In Great Hormead, culverts were put in place in January 1961 but the parish council lthen expressed doubt as to their efficiency. They were proved correct, and the HCC Road Surveyor agreed that flooding was primarily due to the impediment caused by the culvert of smallest diameter. The Hormead ditches, with or without culverts, apparently have always presented problems too great for the ingenuity of any road surveyor to solve. Their difficulties cannot have been eased, however, by a parish council complaining that to pipe the water the whole length of the ditch would essentially alter 'the character of the village'.

Apart from being dangerous when in flood, the condition of the drains and ditches were thought to have a bearing on the state of health of nearby cottagers, particularly after a case of scarlet fever was diagnosed in Hare Street in the summer of 1921, but at that date this might have been an inspired guess.

A number of properties in the villages are moated, the moats being fed by natural springs which keep the water relatively fresh. Moated houses include Hormead Hall, Mutfords and Stonebury.

The Quin ran much deeper on the surface in days gone by, whereas its waters run mainly underground now. This source can only have been used by animals, for the fields, and as a reserve supply for humans, for no dwelling house is placed on its banks within a couple of fields' distance. This is due, no doubt, to the manner in which the Quin floods quickly during a heavy rainstorm covering the Meads to a depth and extent which surprises those used only to see it reduced to a sluggish trickle most of the time.

Water too plentiful and water in short supply were only two of the basic problems our predecessors had to deal with in order to keep clean. Lack of soap was another. Home

made soap, based on lye made from ashes and boiling fats such as mutton fat, with perfumes added in the form of oil of lavender and rose leaves, was used by the less wealthy. It was made commercially, in balls, in England from the 14th century but it was not until Andrew Pears began making his transparent soap in 1789 that it was purchased universally. From 1785 to 1800 the consumption of soap increased by 41.7% in Britain. The villagers probably continued to make most of their own and bought large cakes of soap at local markets only when it could be afforded.

If lack of an adequate supply of soap and water contributed in a negative way to the poor health of the village, the total lack of hygiene in the matter of disposal of refuse was a positive hazard. All refuse, kitchen, dining-room, chamber pot contents, hearth waste, everything, was flung indiscriminately onto the dung heap just outside the back door. Some people would have created another pile outside the front door too, had not the surveyor of the highways kept a sharp eye on them. When the heap became too 'noisome' it was carried off to the farmyard or garden patch. Seepage from the heap into a nearby well was not unknown, and where it occurred, cholera could spread rapidly to all the families sharing the same pump. Cholera came to Britain from Russia in 1831 and continued to be a fatal infection until the Public Health Act of 1875 compelled water companies to provide a constant supply of water to houses in towns – villages had a much longer wait. This same act instigated the modern system of refuse collection from premises on appointed days and each occupier was ordered to place their refuse in a 'moveable receptacle' or dustbin.

Water closents were known in Elizabeth I's time but did not come into general use until the 19th century. In the country, women used the cow byre and the men the stables during the day, with chamber pots under the beds at night. Small privies at the bottom of the garden were a 19th century sophistication and in the Herts County Record Office there is a tiny slip of paper (ref:D/Eb 73973) bearing witness to Little Hormead suddenly becoming 'clean and decent': '1865 Wm Wyman debtor to T. Thorogood to building privies to Little hormead £7-0-3½d'. Regrettably, I cannot report a similar improvement for either Great Hormead or Hare Street. Indeed, night soil' was being collected once weekly as late as 1947.

It was estimated that main drainage for the Hormeads would cost £25,000 in 1948 and that was 'about twice the sum the government would permit the Rural District Council to spend.' So, cesspools, drains and ditches were to continue to be the depositories of waste until the early 1960s. When work finally commenced on the village sewerage scheme, the necessary digging operations were found to be the perfect excuse for 'not entering the Best Kept Village Competition' in 1961. Even when the work was finished, the scheme was incomplete for five houses up Bell lHill and those at the far ends of both Great and Little Hormeads were excluded.

Hot water on tap was an undreamt of luxury for most of the village until recent times. Electricity was supplied to the villages about 1930. In Great Hormead this amenity has cost the villagers at the northern end of the village very dear, for an unsightly line of pylons strides across the countryside. When a second line was proposed in 1961 to carry a new 400,000 volt line about 200 yards from the existing 132,000 volt line, there was an outcry. This went unheeded by the Ministry of Fuel & Power and Herts County Council did not back our own council in protesting against kit. Despite a public enquiry, the line was laid in 1962, as originally planned.

Diseases

Being situated in the open countryside, the Hormeads were considered to be healthy places in comparison with the towns, and London in particular. This belief was so firmly held that in the 16th century some Londoners sent their children out to foster parents in the Hormeads to be nurtured and brought upo. It is not know how many children benefitted from this arrangement, but we do know about cases that were anything but successful. These were recorded in our parish burial registers and no doubt distort the true results of this careful forethought on the part of wealthy Londoners. The following entries show the period when this practice was in favour, and include some of the Hormead foster parents' names.

1582 Matthew Holte son of a London citizen, who was nurtured by John Poitwins, was buried 26 September
1592 Margaret Briscoll of London, 'nutricia' buried 1 June
1592 Francis Tyson son of a Londoner, 'nutrici' buried 12 July

Part of the reason for sending weak and sickly children to the country was to try to avoid contact with the plague. This swept through the metropolis at irregular intervals and was greatly feared. Bubonic plague had entered this country in August 1348 and reached Hertfordshire a year later. The disease was spread by fleas carried on black rats. It was known from the beginning as the 'Black Death' because black spots appeared on the skins of its victims. The spots quickly became areas of putrid, rotting flesh, and it was deeply distressing to see a relative literally disintegrate physically with no remedy available.

The famous outbreak of 1665 was not the most serious, but the last major epidemic. No mention of that particular outbreak was made by the Vicar in the Hormead registers, but two earlier epidemics were so distressing for the village as to cause comment in the burial registers. The first two were children of the Viccas family of The Bell in Hare Street:

1603 Joan Viccas daughter of John and Joan, buried 13 August, who died of the great pestilence (pestilentia grav.) 12 August
1603 Thomas Viccas son of aforesaid John and Joan, buried 25 August. 'ex peste morien'.

The Edmonds were closely related to the Vickers and kept the 'Doggeshead in the Potte' (later re-named Three Jolly Butchers), also in Hare Street. They might have caught the plague from London visitors to the inns. By whatever means the contagion was spread, it spelt even greater tragedy for the Edmond family:

1603 Thomas son of Henry Edmond, buried 'ex peste' 29 August
1603 Sarah daughter of Henry Edmond, buried 10 Sep.
1603 Elizabeth, daughter of Henry Edmond, buried 12 Sep.
1603 Margaret, wife of Henry Edmond, buried 12 Sep.
1603 Henry Edmond himself, buried 15 Sep.

Yet another relation, 'Agnes daughter of Elizabeth, a widow, was buried 3 October 1603' and then, at last, something positive appears to have been done. The evidence comes from the last Edmond burial to occur in that fateful year of 1603: 'Elizabeth Edmond widow & relict of John, buried 'in pomario pestis gra.' On 19 October. This was immediately followed by the entry: 'Maria Warner was buried 'in pomario' as aforesaid Elizabeth'. These two women had been isolate 'in pomario' and with them the entries of deaths 'de peste' cease.

In Roman days, an open space, or 'pomoerium' was left, either just inside or outside the walls enclosing a town. This open space was kept for isolation purposes, and the reference in our Great Hormead burial registers clearly suggests that a place, perhaps a small house, on the edge of the village, had been allotted for the purpose of isolating persons suffering from the plague. Opposite St Nicholas church in Great Hormead a footpath runs across the fields toward the Little Hormead parish boundary. The footpath is called Pest House Lane and meets the land bounding Sparksfield where there was once a small house next to the present dwelling of Mrs. Fussell. This was known as The Pest House, and survived under that name up to, and including, the censuses and electoral registers of 1868 where John Chalmers Wisbey owned 'copyhold houses and land Pest Houses'. The ruins of this house were still visible in the first decade of this century.

Early in 1608 an unknown man fell down dead by the side of the road at Silkmead just north of Hare Street. He was buried where he fell in the ditch, probably from fear that he carried the plague and by bringing his corpse into the village, the dreaded disease

might also have entered the village. Despite all precautions, however, the plague reached the Hormeads some four months later:

1608 John Day, sonne of Thomas, buried 17 April de peste
1608 Thomas Day, son of Thomas, buried 30 April de peste
1608 Agnes Day, daughter of Thomas, buried 7 May de peste
1608 Robert Coulte son of Nicholas and Elizabeth buried 14 May de peste

Young Robert may have been a playmate of Thomas Day junior and caught the infection before the Day family was isolated by the overseers. It was one of the duties of the Overseer of the Poor to insist that no-one went into or out of a house where the plague was present, and to enforce isolation. Further London visitations of 1625, 1636 and 1665 are not reflected in our Hormead registers. The bubonic plague was carried by the small back rats which thrive in slums and crowded areas of towns. These black rats were extirpated by the larger brown rats which came in ships to England in the 1720s. This is believed to be one of the main reasons for the plague dying out in England.

Its place as an epidemic was taken in the 18th century by smallpox. At the end of the century, Jenner published his conclusions on experiments with cowpox vaccine (1798) and by 1853 vaccination was widely used in England resulting in smallpox being reduced to occasional outbreaks. Smallpox occurred in the Hormead area in the 1740s:

LH 1740 16 Aug. Elizabeth, wife of William Bennett, died of the smallpox
GH 1745 18 Nov. Robert Smith, a young man, who died on the Sm.P. at Braughing.
GH 1746 28 Aug. Daniel Walls died of Small P.
GH 1748 7 Feb eorge Welch, son of George Welch, died of sm.p.

The last occurrence noted as fatal in the registers was in 1808: John Corbet son of William and Mary, died of the small-pox and was buried 8 Dec.

Smallpox continued to plague and mark people until our own time. Shoe-maker and repairer Frederick Moule (died 1901) was a victim and he was convinced that a very unsavourly pair of boots belonging to a Londoner that he was brought for mending had been the carrier of the disease. He was very ill with it and afterwards grew a large bushy beard to help hide some of the disfiguration the disease had caused.

The main killers of the 19th century were typhoid and cholera. When outbreaks occurred the patients were dealt with in the same way as smallpox victims, but the overseers also tried to make villagers more hygiene-conscious and to persuade them to whitewash their houses and have a good clean out. During one outbreak of cholera, the national authorities became so alarmed that clergy in every parish were urged to pray for relief. A form of prayer was sent to the clergy to be read in November 1831 supplicating 'the Divine Mercy to avert the Pestilence'. On 14th April 1833 a day of Thanksgiving was appointed for the cessation of the cholera. The disease had, once again, spread outwards from London into Hertfordshire and other counties contiguous with the capital, but not prevalent in the Hormeads. Cholera occurred again in 1848 by way of London, Hertford, Baldock and closer to home. The outbreak resulted in a series of Public Health Acts designed to prevent the spread of the disease but it raged through 1849 in Herts, and at Westmill, Mary Hammond aged 70 died – the last of an ancient family that had owned much land and property in the Hormeads and Hare Street for two and a half centuries. Her son-in-law had brought the cholera to Westmill from a trip to London, and he was a Hayden whoo had moved to Westmill from Hare Street (where they owned the Old Bakery and also the Beehive) on marrying Susan Hammond, daughter of Mary. Susan and her husband also died.

Children were particularly vulnerable. With infant mortality so high, there was an urgent need to have them baptised as soon as possible after birth. In fact, some were baptised and buried the same day, within a short space of time after birth. Twins were even more at risk, and the one set of triplets in our baptismal register soon reappeared in the burial register: '1757 Joseph, Jacob and Martha, children of Francis and Ann Bullman (of the Doggeshead in the Pot) all three at one birth, baptised 13 July'. Joseph was buried 24 July, Jacob and Martha on the 28th July. The previous year the same parents had twins, both of whom died.

Childish ailments that we regard now merely as unpleasant were often both frightening and fatal. The School Log Book, kept from 1868 onwards, chronicles a series of epidemics of scarlet fever, mumps, measles and influenza that closed the school down for two or more weeks at a time. In December 1884, an outbreak of measles proved lethal: 'Once a great epidemic of measles smote all the village. The streets were empty of all the little ones, the Sunday-school was not held, the very day-school was shut up...Some adults were laid up too, including the single policeman of the village. Nor was it a visitation free of fatality, six adults died and six children'. (The Nonconformist Independent, December 3, 1888 'Our Village Congregationalism, Hormead: a study of self-help'.) In the burial register for 1884, there were 18 deaths, compared with the annual toll in the rest of the decade of a figure half that number. The 1884 deaths included three six-year olds (including two in the Scripps family), two Driver children, two in the Bull family and 8 entries for Hare Street residents including Hannah Norris aged 31 who was buried the same day as her daughter, 5 day-old Mary. The village policeman recovered.

Adults most at risk, the mentally sick and the elderly, posed particular problems for which a poor rate partially provided an answer. Relief of the poor was first officially legislated for by means of a rate levied on house-holders in 1597 by an Act of Parliament. Four years later, another Act provided for the appointment of overseers of the poor elected by the parish from one of its residents whose responsibilities included seeing that the sick and aged and others temporarily or permanently unemployed were not left to starve. Work and wages were to be provided for the unemployed and sick. Many further Acts followed, catering for additional contingencies and regulating types of pauperism, all indicating the disturbing growth of the number of poor. We have a few records of overseers' expenses and accounts, e.g. 1697 Little Hormead spent £12-7-10 on its poor. At this time a pauper burial cost 6d, and the poor were being given 1/- a week subsistance allowance.

The mentally sick were put onto the poor rates from the earliest days and proved to be a singularly difficult group of paupers to deal with because their needs were special and the attention they required was constant and long term. The overseers had to find a place for them in the workhouse among the other poor or send them elsewhere to an asylum. Separate asylums were not available until the second half of the 18th century. Few references in the Hormead records refer to them, two early ones being:
GH burial 1599 John 'innocens' son of Henry Hawke sen. Buried 26 July.
The Hawke family were relatively well-off as yeomen farmers.
GH burial 1617 'Agnes Perry Anc[ills or maid-servant] et innocens' buried 21 March.
The maid was evidently capable of supporting herself by work. How many there were in the village not so fortunate, we do not know, but the Rev. Charles Colson mentioned a 'lunatic' at the Brick House mid 19th century.

Great and Little Hormead each had a small house maintained by the village rates for their poor, the Little Hormead Town Houses being the first to be built. In the Herts Quarter Sessions Book 4, under 30 March 1668 is an 'Order that the inhabitants of Little Hormead shall pay the rates for the building of a Town House lately erected on the waste of the lord of the Manor by the consent of the inhabitants.' The Little Hormead Tithe Map (1839) shows property number 81 as being owned by the Parish authorities, 'a tenement and yard occupied by Ann Wheeler and others 0.0.6' i.e. of 6 perches in area. In the 1841 census Ann Wheler and Catherine Long were each living in their one-roomed house, both aged 70. By 1865 both of these houses had two rooms and were sold by the parish authorities and conveyed to William Benson Wyman of Stonbury by the Guardians of the Poor. In the first part of the 20th century these cottages were known as the Mangel Clamp because the long low thatched single-storey cottages reminded the villagers of the shape of the clamps in which their mangels were stored during the winter months. There are known today as Thatched Cottages.

The first record of a Town House in Great Hormead occurs shortly after the 1723 Workhouse Act permitted parishes to build and manage workhouses:

GH burial 11 Dec 1741 The widow Dines from the Town House, an ancient woman. 16 Dec 1741 Richard the husband of Susannah Brookes from the Town House.
Was the Town House new, and the villagers rather proud of it, so that it was specifically mentioned in the parish registers? In the 1823 Enclosure Award it was numbered 148 owned by the 'Overseers of the Poor' on ground measuring 16 perches. It was still present on the 1919 O.S. map, well forward of Bury Farm House and to the east of the present Old Stores. It was pulled down in the 1920s by Mr. Weir, then owner of Bury Farm.

The Workhouse was at Buntingford, at Bridgefoot, erected after the 1834 Act when parishes were grouped together in unions, each under a Board of Guardians, elected on a rate-paying franchise. Buntingford had a Union by 1839, the first burial of a Hormead resident of the workhouse being noted in the GH register of 1844. It is variously known in the old records as the Buntingford Workhouse or The Union. James Wilcox of Hormead Cottage was its Clerk for a number of years about 1854. The system of workhouses was abolished in 1948 when the Welfare State was created.

A clear indication of the stress under which some poor, ailing villagers suffered in days gone by occurs in a sad little episode of 1727 when, 'In accordance with a justices' warrant, William Brooks overseer of Little Hormead seized the following goods and chattels of Mary Wrenn widow who had forsaken her children and left them chargeable to the parish:

2 beds & bedsteads with blankets bolsters and pillows	£1-10-0
3 trunks or boxes, 5 sheets, 3 chairs and a stoold & a looking glass	10-0
The Wearing Apparell belonging to her late husband	£1-15-0
A Cupboard & dresser 24 Earthen plates & dishes, 2 pewter dishes, 6 pewter spoons, 5 porringers, 4 salts & 9 trenchers	16-0
A gridiron, spit, cleaver & chopping knife, a warming pan, a Lanthorn, a Fireshovell, a pair of Tongs & Bellows, a Candlestick, 6 Potts & pitchers, a Table, 2 stools & 5 chairs, 15 Vessels, 2 Tubs, 2 Brass Kettles, 2 skillets & an iroon pot, a frying pan, a kneading trough, a wheel & reel, a fork & sith, a weedstook, a spade, a Bill and a Hatchett, and Glass Bottles	£2-2-0
Wood for fireing	£1-0-0

Order that the goods be kept until the next session when the court will make some order concerning them.'

Apart from what she might have taken with her when she fled, Mary Wren's wordly goods were valued at a mere £7-13-0d.

Accidents

Accidents can befall anyone at any time – not just the poor, sick or elderly, even though they may be more prone to them. The burial registers record a number of accidents, the most surprising feature being the number of road accidents with carts and wagons, for we tend to think of road accidents as being a phenomenon of the motor vehicle era. Thomas Edward was killed by a cart running over him in 1743 and John Cranville by a waggon running over him in 1850. 'Killed by a waggon' or 'Killed by a card' occur five more times, while James Hicks was killed by a fall from a cart in harvest, 1852. George Boswell, 14 years old, may have got in the way while trying to help and killed by a horse treading on him, May 1857.

Accidents in chalk pits while digging chalk to spread on thge heavy clay land, seem to have been a farm labourer's special occupational hazard. At Great Hormead, John Bygraves was buried in 1580 after 'he was diging of chalk in the said pitt the banke fell on him and killed him.' In Little Hormead 'William Hart – a boy about 15 years old, was killed by a chalk pit falling on him' and buried 2 February 1752. They were supposed to shore up the banks with timber as they burrowed into the layers of chalk, but probably became careless.

Another fall, this time in a garden, gave rise to an amusing remark on 8 September 1599. The vicar solemnly recorded: 'Michale More maritus relict. Agnet. Un eiusde. Mich: morte mulctotus est viz: 7 die Septembris as he was gathering of peares in a peare tree [where else?] he fill downe out of it, and so ended his dayes with a spedie death.'

The windmill took a victim, though whether its machinery or sails were the cause is not stated: 1684:'Daniell the sonne of Mr Thornton Cage and of Margaret his wife was buried June the 19th kild with the mill.'

Children seem to have suffered most from accidents in the home in the days before fire-guards and other safety precautions. Henry Bull, aged 3, met with a particularly unpleasant accident while his mother was making the home-brewed beer in June 1684: 'He fill into a kettle of scaldinge wort and so was scalded to death.' Two other children were scalded to death and Agnes Ginn was 'burnt to death' when only three (GH burial 9 August 1864). We are left to conjecture exactly what happed in 1676 whenn 'Marie the wife of Cristofear Masone struck dead with In hure house in A tempas, and was buried june the 26th' – was her house struck by lightning?

Little concern or evidence of provision for safety measures is evident before this century. It was a case of every man looking out for his own safety. There is one delightful episode, however, when concern for the health and safety of our village postman was made the excuse to get a foot-bridge both widened and lengthened:

'Main road Great Hormead to Furneux Pelham. Proposed Improvement of Footbridge. A letter dated 13th January 1913, has been received by the Clerk of the County Council from the Postmaster of Ware stating that the road between Great Hormead and Furneux Pelham is frequently flooded during the winter, and the postman in crossing often has to wheel his bicycle through the stream, as the footbridge is not wide enough to enable him to walk across with his cycle beside him, and that occasionally he has to step into the water to get on to the footbridge. The Postmaster adds that as there appears to be some risk to the postman's health, and the official bicycle does not last so long as it would otherwise do, he would be glad if something could be done in the matter.
The footbridge referred to is formed of a single plank 1 foot wide and 10 feet long. I think it would be well to increase the width of the bridge and also the length to lengthen it. The cost would only be about £8.'

It must have been quite a feat to cycle over that plank with the mail bags on his shoulders – paying due care and attention to the 'official bicycle' at the same time.

Longevity

Barring accidents, I was once told by a villager, 'You can live as long as you like in Hormead.' In former days, if you survived childhood, this may have been true for there were many octogenarians and nonogenarians in the registers. We currently have four nonogenarians in Great Hormead – Mrs. Fountain, Mr. F. Haggar, Mr. F. Bull and Mr. F. Scripps. I have traced only three centenarians, however:

1638 'Vidua Haldinge aetatis 102 velcirciter sepulta fuit April 16.' So impressed by this 'ancient lady' was the vicar that he lapsed back into Latin to record her death some twenty years after most entries in the register were in English.
1734/5 28 January. 'Thomas Barker from Anstey, aged 103'. Now, that's cheating!
1817 30 March Mary Nightingale, aged 101.
Since national registration of births, marriages and deaths, with the issuing of certificates, did not occur until 1837, we have every right to suspect a little exaggeration on some people's part, but if you cannot exaggerate a little when you are in the vicinity of 100 years old, when else?
Long life – and good health – to all Hormeadians.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the staff of the Local Studies Library and the Hertfordshire Record Office for their assistance with documents quoted in this pamphlet. I have transcribed the parish registers (1538-1938 for Great Hormead, and 1588-1938 for Little Hormead) and arranged them in family order for ease of reference, and these are now in the Local Studies Library, County Hall, Hertford. I am also pleased to have an opportunity to thank all those villagers who have given me information about the village prior to 1978. to the photocopiers of this pamphlet – a very special 'Thank you'.

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