HEALTH AND WELFARE

In the days before the National Health Service, the medical services which villagers received was very different to what they are now. Also the way different illnesses are treated has changed over the years. Mrs Mary Fell recalls an illness she suffered as a child...

> "When I was eleven or twelve I had rheumatic fever very badly and even in fine weather I was wrapped up in cotton wool and blankets from head to toe. When it was hot my Dad used to carry a mattress down from upstairs and they'd put it down and lay me out in the sun."

Even something as natural as childbirth has had it's thoughts on aftercare of mother and baby changed radically from those of the early to mid 1900's. Mrs Gill recalls...

> "When you were having a baby you had the midwife, you didn't have the doctor or the nurse, you had the midwife. She laid you out and she brought you in. She was the sort of woman you went to if you were in trouble. She'd come and help. There'd be no-one else attending. After ten or fourteen days you'd get out of bed. If you got out of bed on the second day, oh, all the village would talk about it, how disgusting, a woman to get up after having a baby and come to the gate. Of course, you didn't see the babies. They were all covered up. They were all in long frocks and they didn't see the light of day for at least a fortnight. They were wrapped up, faces and everything. It was a major event when they went into short clothes at about six or eight months old."

Todays baby clinic has replaced the 'Welfare', where free milk and orange juice was dispensed to mothers of babies and young children. Mrs Neal recalls...

> "Every Tuesday Mother had got to be there in the Village Hall. Mother used to go to Welfare and she used to do the babies. Father used to go aswell to fetch some of the ladies that lived over the other side of the hill. One of which was Mrs Duffy and every year she produced another child. Father used to roar because he went over one day to fetch her and all the children to Welfare, you know they'd got to be examined by the nurse and the doctor and so on. They used to get a cup of tea and a buttered scone.

Anyway,she got in when Father went for her and she threw this bundle in the back of the cart and said,'Here's another bloody Duff.'She'd had another one and just threw it in the cart.My Mother,Mrs Payne,and Mary French,I believe,actually began the Welfare.It was every Tuesday afternoon and it was quite a social occasion.Everyone took their babies,there was tea and cakes and it was an afternoon out.They put their best clothes on and you'd see all the prams going down the village and back again when it was all over.They closed us down to move them to Southam because there were fewer babies and everyone had more transport."

Personal attitudes have changed too.The 80's slimming and fitness craze would have been unthinkable for women in the early 1900's...

"No women talked about slimming,because if you went away on holiday the major thing was to put on weight.Some of them,I can tell you,could hardly get through the doors they were so big. They were huge,they'd have to go sideways through the door."

Mrs Nora Balsom was a nurse in the twenties and thirties and she tells us what life was like then...

"I was nursing for about twelve or thirteen years, I was a Sister in the end.It's all changed now,I went into hospital and I was surprised.They had me up just about as soon as I'd had the operation.We didn't,we used to watch them till they'd had their stitches out.I only went to a village school and although I could read and write and that sort of thing,I wasn't well enough educated really but I worked hard and the sister tutor,who was very good to me,well,with her help I did pass all my exams with a struggle,even though I did have to sit my midwifery twice.It was 1923 when I started training. When I was nursing in the hospital you weren't allowed to look after anyone you knew.You had to tell Matron if someone came in you knew and she would move you to another ward.I didn't like the childrens ward,I didn't like them being ill.The first job I had was to carry this baby to the

mortuary and,of course,I howled all over the kid. I got told off for that,you're not supposed to get emotionally involved.

I was in a concert and I was playing the part of a nurse.This boy told me I looked nice in the uniform so I thought,'Oh,good',and I decided I'd be a nurse.Terrible reason,really,but I never regreted it,I really enjoyed it.

After I was married I went to work in the workhouse.It was all old people and homeless people and children.I was the Matron there and I had to see that everyone did their work.Some of them were a bit mental,they lived in a world of their own."

Mrs Balsoms husband was in a form of Welfare work too,as the relieving officer...

"My husband was the relieving officer.That's a bit like a social security man these days,the same thing only claims were assessed by the relieving officer.We were at March in Pembrokeshire and it was mostly people that worked on the land there. They'd grow strawberries,vegetables,that sort of thing and if it was bad weather everyone would be wanting the relieving officer because they weren't getting any money.They'd come to the house,I'd dread a wet day,a wet week was terrible.But he managed,he was good,he never lost his cool.I was the one who did that."

Although there was a lot more childhood illnesses,diptheria and scarlet fever were common,children still got up to as much mischief as a child of the eighties.Mrs Gwyther remembers her childhood tricks...

"I can remember climbing up on somebody's roof.There used to be two old houses on the way up to the church. One had a sloping roof and there was an outbuilding which had a corrugated roof that sloped right down. Well,you could walk up it and put a bag over the chimney.That would make the lounge fill with smoke. But we never did anything harmful to anyone.We used to get a clip round the ear."

Mr Esmy Dowling remembers the games and pastimes of his childhood...

"In the late twenties and early thirties at the village, for the lads in the school they had what they called 'a bird and tree' for the shield. The village won it twice, what's happened to it I don't know. Each year whoever won it held it for twelve months and the name of the school was on it. Each individual member of the team was commemorated, they had a coin similar to a five shilling piece made from silver or cupra metal. Whoever did it studied one bird and one tree which I think was a worthwhile method of understanding the countryside.

There was no playground at school so we used to play football on the road and a game called 'Tip Cat' which consisted of a toggle off a duffle coat and a piece of stick. You got one corner of the toggle down and then you banged it along the road with the stick to see how far you could get it, which, looking at it from a sensible point of view, had it hit anyone in the eye it would have blinded them but, as far as I know, no one ever got hurt with it.

Another game was some of the older lads would stand across the road and you'd got to try to get past them without being caught. Now at that particular time everybody wore a collar stud and this game consisted of getting caught by the scruff of the neck and unloosening your collar stud then you'd help catch the rest till everyone was caught.

At the steps leading up from the village green, a lot of the lads had things made from cotton reels with lugs off a tractor with a candle and elastic bands and they'd wind them up and they'd walk up the bank.

Nearly every lad had a pen knife which we used for making whistles etc. not for offensive purposes and quite a number would carve their initials on a tree or a fence which didn't have a harmful effect.

Toys, I can remember having metal aircraft and a set of Meccano. At Christmas you had your usual stocking and oranges, sweets, nuts, apples, that sort of thing.

What a lot of children collected was cigarette cards. I collected virtually thousand upon thousand of them. If you saw a fag packet you bent down to see if the card was in it. A lot of them were very interesting, flowere, birds that sort of thing. You learnt a lot off cigarette cards. Another thing was sportsmen and cricketers. At one time I could tell you

every 1st Division football player and the same with cricket. I can still reel off Arsenal's pre-war team. One or two corn merchants in the village, if the fella was interested there'd be loads of cigarette cards in the windscreen or the side."