

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL  
Ivry, Lady Freyberg

## SMALLPOX and the Suffolk Connection

February 2021

In a recent 'Ipswich Icon' in the East Anglian Daily Times, John Norman the prolific and very knowledgeable Chairman of Ipswich's leading civic body, The Ipswich Society, told of the early days of vaccination.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century smallpox was so common that few people escaped the infection. The search for a suitable method of prevention or cure became paramount. Following the lines of some well used Chinese treatment Doctor Robert Sutton whose practice was in Kenton near Debenham treated patients by making a small insertion in the skin with a lancet and introducing the virus into the wound as a result of which his patient would experience a less severe form of the pox and would then build antibodies and become immune. He termed this the Suttonian System of Variolation. At seven guineas a time it became a profitable business. In 1763 his son Daniel left his father's practice keen to set up inoculation centres nearer to centres of population but civic leaders in Ipswich were sceptical and advised against immunisation so he set up in Ingatestone in Essex. It was a success but he was still keen to have a centre near Ipswich so he hired Freston Tower overlooking the Orwell and appointed Dr Buckle of Holbrook to run it.

[In his historical novel called 'Freston Tower' Richard Cobbold (1797-1877) #106 on the web family tree, claims it to have been built by Lord de Freston for his daughter Ellen so that she could study a different subject each day. The first floor was given over to Reception, the second to Tapestry, the third to Music, the fourth to Painting, the fifth to Literature and the sixth to Astronomy, but being a novel this may be more imagination than fact.]

Despite Daniel's success in inoculating 500 people in Maldon without a single re-infection hundreds of quacks brought the process into disfavour and variolation was made illegal by the Vaccination Act of



*Freston Tower*



*Adela Harriette Cobbold*

1840 which was largely based on Dr Edward Jenner's 'Method of Vaccination' published in 1798.

The next major outbreak of smallpox hit Ipswich in around 1872 and at the forefront of the campaign against the virus was Adela Harriette Cobbold (1837-1917), daughter of the Provost of Eton and wife of John Patteson Cobbold (1831-1875) who had been Mayor of Ipswich in 1867/68, the year which saw the opening of the new Town Hall. From about this time, but the date and the author are unknown, the family archive has yielded the following advice on vaccination which seeing it is about 150 years old is strikingly familiar.

### Sanitary Precautions during an epidemic of Smallpox.

This disease, once so deadly as to be the worst scourge that ever decimated the human race has been remarkably modified in modern times by the introduction of vaccination. As an instance of the severity of the disease in the unvaccinated it may be mentioned that at the end of the last century almost the entire population of the Canadian Indians were carried off by this fever in six months.

Vaccination is not a protection for the whole of life, neither is a previous attack of Small Pox a protection against a second attack but by vaccination in adult life an almost absolute protection is insured. So great a preventative of the disease is it that in an experience of nearly 40 years no single nurse at the Small Pox Hospital has contracted the disease. Parents should therefore insist that every child be vaccinated at the age of 15. When it breaks out parents should remember they owe a duty to the community as well as themselves. Let no people go from an infected house to school or any other confined place.

As a general guide for nursing cases of Small Pox it must however be stated that clean linen is of the greatest importance. A fire should when possible be kept in the room (more for ventilation than warmth). It is a great mistake to keep the room too hot; it is far better to keep it moderately cool. The air of the room should be changed as much as possible by opening the windows at intervals for a few minutes.

The patient should be kept indoors until the crusts are all detached. Warm baths and carbolic acid soap lessen the fear of carrying the disease to others. The linen of the bed and body linen should, as soon as removed from the body, be immediately soaked in water and before being washed should be further steeped in a pail of water with a



*John Patteson Cobbold*



*The New Town Hall POLKA*

wineglassful of Chloralum in it for 24 hours and carbolic acid soap should be used for washing the linen. The best method of disinfecting a room in which Small Pox has been is to close the doors and fumigate it with Sulphur. Great care must be taken in this process, other fullest directions should be obtained before using it.

***Anthony Cobbold***

***(During the Covid 19 Pandemic of 2020/2021)***