

Malton Dispensary

Introduction

The 18th century saw the establishment in many towns of charitable institutions known as 'dispensaries' where medicines would be dispensed, anybody could get medical advice and from which home visits would be made. There were no wards or inpatient facilities. Most dispensaries were managed by a secretary and treasurer, administered by an apothecary, and medical services were provided by one or more surgeons. In general surgeons received no payment, deriving their income from private work but at some dispensaries honorariums were paid. The apothecary was a paid employee of the dispensary and would keep records of the patients seen,

treated and discharged, and dispense the prescriptions of the surgeons. He also kept schedules of the patients to be seen that day and the home visits to be made. In minor cases when surgeons were not available he would 'do the best he could'. Dispensaries were funded by 'subscribers' who agreed to pay so much per quarter or year towards the expenses of running the dispensary. Subscribers could recommend patients for treatment and elected among themselves those to serve on a management committee. It is likely that through making home visits, surgeons began to make the link between contagious diseases and overcrowding [1]



Dispensary Building on corner of Saville street and St. Michael street date c1943
(Source: Historic England Archive)

Getting Started

The Malton Dispensary has its roots in a meeting in the Town-hall in December 1831 [2].

MALTON DISPENSARY

AT a MEETING of the Gentry, Clergy, and Inhabitants of Malton, and its Vicinity, held the 13th day of December, 1831, at the Town-Hall, in Malton, pursuant to public notice, for the purpose of considering the best means of Establishing a DISPENSARY for the said Town and Neighbourhood,
HENRY WILLOUGHBY, ESQ, in the Chair:

IT WAS RESOLVED –

That a Dispensary be forthwith Established, and a Subscription entered into to defray the necessary expenses.

That a Committee be appointed to draw up regulations for the future management of such Dispensary.

That the Committee consist of the Medical Gentlemen resident in the town of Malton, and every Subscriber of a sovereign and upwards, and that they may be requested to make a report of such regulations as may seem expedient to them to a general meeting of Subscribers for approval, to be holden at the Town-Hall, in Malton, on Tuesday the 27th instant, at 12 o'clock, in order that the institution may be opened as early as possible.

That the proceedings of this Meeting be advertised in the York Papers, and by Hand Bills circulated in the neighbourhood.

That the Committee for drawing up the regulations do meet at the Savings Bank, in Malton, on Tuesday the 20th instant, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon.

H. WILLOUGHBY, Chairman

Appended to the above notice was a list of 'subscribers already named.'

Mr R. Smithson was the first secretary and in December 1831 he placed an advertisement for the first apothecary to the dispensary [3].

MALTON DISPENSARY – WANTED, an APOTHECARY for this Institution. All Applications must produce Testimonials of Character and Qualifications, and be Licentiates of the Apothecaries' Hall, Salary £50 per Annum, with rooms at the Dispensary, Coals and Candles. The Election will take place on Tuesday, January 17th, 1832. Application to be made, (if by Letter, Post-paid,) to the Secretary, Mr. R. Smithson, Malton.

It would appear that a Mr. Thomas Booth, formerly of the Bradford Dispensary, was elected to this position [4].

The dispensary occupied a building at the top of Saville Street at the junction with St. Michael street (Ordnance Survey map 1850). Oral history suggests the building later became the unemployment office and in the 1960s the offices of The Yorkshire Insurance Company.

During the first six years of the Dispensary 2,294 patients were treated [5].

Newspapers carried summaries of the quarterly reports showing the number of patients 'admitted' and discharged. In January or February of each year the annual meeting of subscribers at which accounts were presented and an annual summary of numbers admitted and discharged was reported.

The Annual Meeting of Subscribers 1838

The annual meeting of subscribers to the dispensary held in January 1838 reported the numbers of admissions, discharged, deaths, cured etc for 1837 together with a summary of the accounts, including an amount of £30 17s 6d spent on 'drugs and leeches.' The patient statistics were: Remaining on

the books 31st December 1836, 49, outpatients, 230; house patients, 95; total 374. Discharged – Cured, 190; relieved, 73; dead 15; own request, 1; non-attendance, 3; time expired, 69; remaining on the books at 31st December 1837, 25 [5].

The Annual Meeting of Subscribers 1854

The annual meeting of subscribers to the dispensary held in January 1854 reported the numbers of admissions, discharged, deaths, cured etc for 1853 Patients attending at the Dispensary, 185; visited at

their own homes, 69; remaining under treatment at the end of the year 1852, 31; total patients for 1853, 285. Of this number the following had been discharged: Cured, 81; relieved, 61; time expired,

94; transferred to parishes, 7; went to service, 2; died, 11. Total discharged, 257; leaving 28 under treatment at the end of 1853. Total number of

patients admitted since the establishment of the institution, 8007 [6].

Financial Issues

MALTON DISPENSARY.	
Report for September, 1855.	
	Patients.
Remaining at the end of August	26
Admitted.	
Out-Door Patients.....	10
Home-Patients	4
	14
Discharged.	
Cured	5
Relieved	6
Time Expired	3
Died	1
Transferred to Parish	0
Went to Service	1
Irregularity	0
	16
Remaining on the Books	34

Out-Door Patients (who attend at the Institution) are admitted on Mondays and Thursdays, at ten o'clock. Medicines are dispensed every morning, except Sunday, from ten to eleven o'clock; which is also the time for admitting Home-Patients, who require to be visited at their own residences. The income and expenditure of the Institution amount to about £150 a year; but, previously to the appointment of the present very efficient Secretary, a debt of nearly £30 had been accumulated. This was reduced last year, to £36, 17s. 3d.;—the Receipts for 1852, having been £151, 16s. 6d., and the expenditure £149, 2s. 6d.

There was a hint at the state of the finances of the Dispensary when in March 1854 a meeting was held at the Malton Institute on Friday March 24th of Subscribers to the Malton Dispensary. The aim was to derive means of placing the charity on a better footing following a report delivered by a committee appointed to investigate their affairs. Various economical suggestions were put forward and implemented to improve the financial state of the charity and to help self fund it a decision was made to charge adults 1/- and children under twelve 6d on presenting the ticket at the dispensary [7]. This issue was further alluded to in the monthly report for September 1855 [8] see left.

Funding the Dispensary

The Dispensary appears to have been funded by donations and subscriptions. (The list of initial subscribers was published in the York Herald [2]). A regular supporter in the late Victorian period being a Mr. Aspland who ran a steam 'switchback' or mountain railway in the Market Place and made generous donations [9].

In January 1877, members of the 12 Friendly Societies in Malton gathered for the first 'Dispensary Sunday'. This involved parading

through the town, meeting in the Market place, conducting collections on behalf of the Dispensary and attending the churches and chapels where collections were also made [10] In December of that year, the societies agreed to repeat the event – in April 1878 [11]

Other fundraising activities included bazaars and theatre performances by the Malton Amateur Dramatic Company [12]

The End of the Dispensary

Early in 1895 a meeting was held to discuss the idea of Malton having a 'Cottage Hospital' [13] However, a year later, at the annual meeting of subscribers to the Malton Dispensary it was reported that 'insufficient promises of support to the scheme of providing a new hospital had led the committee to suggest, as an alternative, that the present dispensary be re-arranged so as to provide a temporary accident ward . . .' [14]

When the Cottage Hospital opened in 1905, the Dispensary was still in use and evidently continued for some time. We do not know when it closed and what the trigger for this was, but the perception of its usefulness would have been influenced by the evolving social state.

In October 1856, Dr Rogers, former House Surgeon, . . . ' kindly presented a large octavo Bible to the Waiting Room . . . ' [15]

References

- [1] See The Origins and Growth of the Dispensary Movement by I.S.L. Loudon an article in the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* Vol. 55, No. 3 (FALL 1981), pp. 322-342 (21 pages) Published by The John Hopkins University Press
- [2] York Herald, 17 December 1831
- [3] Leeds Intelligencer, 29 December 1831
- [4] Yorkshire Gazette, 11 February 1832
- [5] York Herald, 10 February 1838
- [6] Yorkshire Gazette, 28 January 1854
- [7] The Malton Messenger, 1 April 1854
- [8] Malton and Norton Gazette and General Advertiser, 3 November 1855
- [9] Yorkshire Gazette, 6 June 1891 and 24 November 1894
- [10] York Herald, 30 January 1877
- [11] Yorkshire Gazette, 1 December 1877
- [12] York Herald, 5 June 1874
- [13] York Herald, 14 January 1895
- [14] Yorkshire Gazette, 7 March 1896
- [15] Malton & Norton Gazette, 25 October 1856