

FLUORIDATION IN ANDOVER HAMPSHIRE

Illness caused, legal proceedings taken against Andover Council, defeat of Councillors and abandonment of fluoridation after two years

Fluoridation was recommended to the Andover Borough Council by its Medical Officer of Health, and approved by the Council in 1956, and sodium fluoride began to be added to the water in July 1956. Andover was one of the original so-called "study" areas chosen by the Ministry of Health to test out fluoridation.

This measure was strongly opposed by a retired Andover dental surgeon, Mr McClelland, on three grounds: (1) it was not ethical; (2) it was a poison which accumulated in the bones and tissues; and (3) it would not have the effect that the proponents said it would. He said "cleaning teeth after foods, such as sweets, chocolates, etc., would have a much more beneficial effect. To force everybody to take sodium fluoride was a very grave and dangerous thing to do, and the overall effect would be to make the children's teeth more brittle and so in later life make it more difficult for the dentists to fill them".

What was more immediately serious was that many people began to be ill. They complained that they were affected in one way or another by the addition of fluoride to the water, the two most common complaints being nausea and diarrhoea.

FORMER MAYOR MADE ILL

One of these was Mrs Olive Harvey, then of 78 Junction Road, Andover. She was a former Mayor and Councillor of Andover. She gave up council work in 1954 when troubled with an ulcer, but recovered subsequently. Then in 1956 she went on holiday and came back feeling very well, but within a few days of returning home she became unwell with nausea, which went on continuously. Mrs Harvey is a very down-to-earth woman. While she knew that sodium fluoride was a very strong poison, she dismissed entirely the idea that 1 part per million in the water could possibly affect her. She consulted her doctor, but his medicine made no difference. At the end of three weeks she had to stop work. For the next week or so she rested, but nothing seemed to make any difference, and she could not sleep.

A friend suggested to her that perhaps the fluoridated water was to blame, and so Mr Harvey obtained a supply from a well at Andover Down. This did the trick and within a few days Mrs Harvey was back to work, the nausea quite gone.

PRIVATE WELL SUNK

Her husband then decided to sink a well in their own garden. This was done and cost about £200.

During the time that Mrs Harvey's bore was being sunk and she was still getting water from Andover Down, her daughter offered to fetch it. She got talking in the town and as the time was getting on and she knew that her mother was waiting for the water, she filled the container from the tap and said nothing. Next day, once again Mrs Harvey felt sick and was much troubled at the expense of the well, which looked as if it would be of no avail. Her daughter then confessed that she had filled the container from the tap.

DIARRHOEA

When the well was sunk literally dozens of people asked if they might have some of the well water as one or other of their families was made ill with fluoride. For example, Mr Ward, of Junction Road, Andover, was told, long before fluoride was added to the water, that he should drink a jug of water a day for his gall-bladder trouble. After fluoride was added, he developed acute diarrhoea, which was so bad that he lost his job. On changing to well water, he became well again.

Several weeks after sinking the well, Mrs Harvey and many other families were using water from her bore, the officials pointed out that she had not had any plans passed, so her husband sank another pipe outside the original one. This made it necessary once more to cement the top. When this was done the first time the men working on the job pumped a large milk churn full of well water for people to help themselves from.

The second time, on a Saturday, once more a large churn was filled with water and a notice attached to the pump not to use it until the cement was set. A Mrs Waite and Mr Ward, both of Junction Road, took water from this churn thinking, as did Mrs Harvey, that it was pump water as before. Mrs Waite felt sick on the Sunday and on the Monday came and thanked Mrs Harvey for her kindness in allowing her to obtain well water, but she said that once more she felt sick and so it could not be the water.

Mrs Harvey was herself feeling ill and also worried when she thought that perhaps the water was not from her well. On the Monday when the men came to fetch their tools, she asked them about the water left in the churn. One immediately said how sorry he was, as the water in the churn was from the tap and not well water.

Mr Ward's diarrhoea had started again and this, with Mrs Waite's and Mrs Harvey's experience, made them absolutely sure that it was in no way their imagination.

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CYSTITIS

An instance of a different complaint was Mrs Clewen, of The Crescent, Andover, who began to suffer with cystitis, and who went to three different hospitals but they could not help her. They could find no cause for her trouble. She came back home and tried well water, and she became fit again.

One woman was so ill that her doctor asked her husband to get a supply of well water for the chemist to mix her medicine with. She was then able to keep the medicine down and soon recovered from her trouble. She always obtained well water after recovering.

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS TAKEN

Heavy opposition to fluoridation began to develop and it was decided to call a public meeting. Thirty to forty was the average attendance for public meetings in Andover, but on this occasion about 700 turned up, overflowing the hall. It was decided to form an Anti-Fluoridation Association to fight fluoridation both as an election issue and in the High Court.

COLITIS

Funds were subscribed, Counsel were engaged and legal proceedings against the Andover Council were started. Then the fluoridationists decided to hold a meeting and four speakers from the Ministry of Health addressed the meeting, which was also filled to capacity. At this meeting a Mr Mason, of 5 Fair's Avenue, Andover, asked the panel a question: "Would the panel agree that, if two glasses were filled with water, one of which was fluoridated and one pure water, one could not smell, taste or see any difference?" The panel readily agreed that was so. Mr Mason then offered himself as a guinea-pig, for he would be able to tell them within 5 to 6 hours, as fluoridated water in the taps in Andover gave him acute colitis. Mr Mason's challenge was, however, not accepted by the panel.

An Andover doctor suggested to Mrs Harvey that she ask the following question: "Can the Ministry of Health wonder why there is such scepticism regarding their advice after the episode of the grey powder given to the mother of babies at the clinics?"

One of the panel admitted that sometimes mistakes were made but that fluoride was entirely different.

FLUORIDATION COUNCILLORS LOSE SEATS

A third of the Council stand for election each year, and in 1957 and 1958 Councillors who favoured fluoridation were opposed at these elections and lost their seats, thus terminating fluoridation in the summer of 1958.

The High Court action was due to be heard shortly afterwards but, as the issues had been decided at the Polls, at the Ministry of Health's request and offer to pay costs, the action was stayed on terms.

It was agreed that, before Andover water could again be fluoridated, the Council would have to give the Association six months' notice so that the action could be heard.

Mrs Harvey said that one of the most difficult tasks she has ever had to perform was to persuade a group of working men to desist from their intentions. These men were so incensed at what fluoride was doing to their families that they had collected tools to demolish the fluoridation plant, and were on the way to do so. It was with the utmost difficulty that Mrs Harvey managed to restrain them from this and to persuade them to have a little more patience for the fluoridation to be stopped legally.

SYMPTOMS OF FLUORIDE POISONING

In a 14-year research conducted at Passaic General Hospital, New Jersey, by Reuben Feltman, D.D.S., and George Kosel, B.S., M.S., fluorides were given in measured doses to more than 1,000 expectant mothers and young children. In one per cent of these cases undesirable side effects were found. "Skin rashes, headaches, epigastric distress varying from slight discomfort to bloody vomiting were among the symptoms." The symptoms disappeared when the fluoride medication was stopped. When the fluoride is in the water supply the treatment cannot be stopped unless a water supply without fluoride can be used, which is ordinarily impossible and, in any case, an unwarranted burden on the patient. Consequently, as the symptoms are similar to symptoms due to other causes, doctors would find it difficult to determine whether the fluoride or other cause was to blame.

The cases mentioned above occurred after a short period of taking fluorides. Much more serious effects have been found after fluoride water has been consumed for 30 or 40 years. In Spain nearly all the inhabitants over 40 years of age in a district where the water supply had only 1.18 parts per million of fluoride were found to be suffering from a disease resembling rheumatism which was frequently accompanied by deformity especially affecting the spine. Similar observations have been made in India. These are only a few of many illustrations of poisoning from long continued ingestion of very small amounts of fluoride.

NB David J Borrett tells the story in detail in his book - *Something in the Water—The Anti-Fluoride Campaign in Andover, 1955 -1958*. The book is available from Andover Museum - 01264 366283.