

# 1918 Pandemic in Cambridge

## The Calm Before The Storm

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### Cambridge Daily News Monday 24 June 1918 - Our London Letter

“Spanish influenza” is the latest threat held over our heads by the scaremonger. One or two towns in the North have been visited by a curious epidemic, and I am told that there are several cases in London. The name will probably stick, although the ailment is neither Spanish nor influenza. “It is merely,” so a doctor assures me, a coincidence of influenzic colds and the gastric and intestinal troubles that have arisen from unfamiliar diet.” For the fear that there might be a recurrence of the virulent influenza which first made its appearance in this country about thirty years ago there seems to be no evidence at all. But some parts of London have, I believe, had the novelty of quinine queues. “There won’t any bad epidemics,” my cynical medical friend assured me, “doctors and drugs are both too scarce.”

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### Cambridge Daily News Tuesday 25 June 1918

Inquiry at several hospitals in the thickly populated districts of London on Monday shows that, as far as these institutions were concerned, the influenza epidemic is not regarded as serious, and few cases have been treated. The London Hospital reported that one or two cases had been dealt with, but the number was not above the normal, and the Great Northern a similar answer was given. Elsewhere the epidemic continued. There are said to be over 1,000 cases in Wales. At Woking the hospital is crowded and temporary huts have been opened. In Preston it is estimated that 30 cent, of munition workers are prostrated. In the Midlands and West of Ireland many towns and villages have been attacked. The work of mines and factories has been seriously interfered with. No deaths have occurred.

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### Cambridge Daily News Wednesday 26th June 1918 - Our London Letter

London appears to be suffering in patches from what is called the influenza epidemic. The East and North-East are practically immune, while the West is suffering badly. The disease is really a very mild affair, though it is distinctly uncomfortable while it lasts, and those who remember the rigours of the first appearance of epidemic influenza in this country will feel that the same term can be applied to the present trouble on the principle of applying it to “anything with sneeze it.” Cinnamon and quinine have suddenly been discovered necessities of life to a great many people, as they are credited with prophylactic properties, and, at rate, they give nervous people the feeling that they are doing something. The best recipe is, of course, to beep generally fit, and nothing is more lowering than worrying about the prospects of catching the disease. Some ingenious people are trying to blame the Germans for it. The weather and warbread are also under suspicion.

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### Cambridge Daily News Monday 1st July 1918

INFLUENZA SAFEGUARDS. While the spread of influenza continues there are few deaths in comparison with the number of people attacked.

Dr. Niven, the medical officer of health at Manchester, who recently issued a handbill setting out precautions against influenza, is now laid up with the malady. A temporary influenza hospital has been taken at Northampton.

About a dozen deaths attributed influenza are reported towns in the Rosendale valley, Lancs. Many working people have been attacked at Newcastle and Sunderland, in the Black Country, and in Wales. From the Royal Small Arms Factory, Enfield, 500 case are reported.

A medical correspondent gives the following rules:

Keep the mouth shut.

Eat vegetables and fruit (if it can be got)

Avoid indigestion

Go into the open air.

Smoke very little; smoking lowers nerve power and the resistance off the nose, mouth and throat to infection

Be cheerful.

Don't go into crowds

Watch over-fatigue

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## Cambridge Daily News Thursday 4th July 1918

Cambridge and County Practically Immune  
CADETS THE WORST SUFFERERS

From inquiries made on Wednesday we learn that Cambridge and the County are little affected by the so-called Spanish influenza which has caused such ravages in certain parts of the country. The chief victims are the Cadets at present stationed in the town, who have suffered enormously. Medical opinion is agreed in advising all people to keep away from crowded buildings, stop avoid visiting infected persons, and to keep the body in as great a resistant condition as possible by leading a healthy life.

### THE BOROUGH

A representative of the Cambridge Daily News on the track of the elusive "flu" yesterday inquired for Dr A J Laird (Borough Medical Officer of Health) only to learn - another of "life's little ironies" - that he had been somewhat severely smitten by influenza himself and was unable to see anyone.

Mr. Wallis, of the Borough Public Health Department, interviewed, said that though there had been a few cases in Cambridge, there was not what he would call an epidemic.

"Nothing to be alarmed about?" our representative queried. "Not in the least" replied Wallis. "Speaking of Cambridge generally, there is nothing much out of the ordinary."

"Are the schools affected" was the next question. "As far as I know," said Mr Wallis "hardly at all. There is certainly no likelihood of any school being closed."

Asked for his opinion on the rapid spread of the "flu" in certain parts of the country, he said he could not say whether it was ordinary influenza or not. "The best thing to do," he remarked, "if any person feels it coming on, is to go to bed at once."

In conclusion he recommended an article in a London paper which stated that the first and obvious measure against influenza was to avoid infection as far as possible and to keep fit. "If attacked," the article continued, "the only thing to do is to go to bed. The sooner one goes to bed the quicker will be the recovery and the the better the chance of escaping serious complications which include bronchitis, pneumonia, afflictions of the heart, kidneys, eye, ear and nerves. Many people are crippled in health for years after an attack of influenza and it is generally because they elect to fight the disease instead of yielding to it and going instantly to bed."

Calling at some of the largest establishments in Cambridge including the Guildhall, the County Hall, and Messrs Sayle and Co we were informed that there is absolutely no truth in the rumours

that these have heavily suffered. These establishments are entirely immune. On interviewing several chemists in the centre of town, however, our representative learned that there is at present a great rush on tonics and cures. A large number of the purchasers being Cadets. Quinine is chiefly in demand.

## THE COUNTY

In the County a very favourable position is reported. The County Medical Officer of Health (Dr. Frank Robinson), when interviewed, explained that influenza was not notifiable. As to the general position, he said "I think there has been a good deal of influenza in the town but as far as I can learn, the county has hardly suffered at all. Except in one school - and even in that school it was not proved to be influenza - schools have not suffered."

"Is there anything strange about this Spanish flu," he was asked. "People call it fancy names" he answered but it is not strange: it is influenza."

As to the means of prevention, he said "The way to avoid it is not to keep dodging in and out of the houses of people who have got it - avoid infection. Many people do not seem to have the sense to do this. There is another point; people commonly do not keep isolated as long as they ought do. They about in public, and into picture palaces and theatres. Infection may very easily be caught from them. I personally should advise people to keep out of crowded buildings."

The advisability of keeping in the open-air as much as possible being mentioned, Dr. Robinson remarked: "Yes, it is wise for two reasons. It keeps up the general standard of health and prevents people from congregating in crowded buildings. My advice is: lead a healthy life, keep yourself in as strong a resistant condition as possible, avoid visiting people who are suffering from it, and do not crowd in the public buildings."

"Although there is nothing to be alarmed about, people ought to be careful just now, for the weather is colder than usual. Keep warmly clothed for the danger of influenza is that that you may contract pneumonia. If people will be sensible they will be all right."

## THE MILITARY

Hearing that there had been a large number of sufferers among the military, our representative visited the 1st Eastern General Hospital, saw Col. J. Griffiths (Officer Commanding). Among the ordinary troops, he said, there had not been much infection, but he thought that among the cadets stationed in Cambridge there were many victims. A certain aerodrome had been also largely affected. Questioned as to the nature of the influenza, Dr. Griffiths said that was of the ordinary type; it lasted a few days, with violent headaches, and the patient then recovered.

Following up Col. Griffiths' statements, our representative next visited Cadet Headquarters, and we learned that there has been an "enormous amount" of "flu" among the Cadets. The "King's Regulations" casting its shadow over all fountains of knowledge, however, the Pressman could extract no details.

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## Cambridge Daily News Saturday 6th July 1918

So far the epidemic of influenza shows no signs of abating. An eminent medical authority lays stress on the importance of treating the complaint seriously, otherwise, like measles, it may leave after-effects which will weaken the constitution. The best advice to victims is to stay at home and treat it as an infectious disease which, if neglected, may be dangerous to yourself and others. Such a run has been made upon chemists for various remedies that in many instances they are sold out. Since it was stated in the Press that quinine and cinnamon possessed curative properties there has been a demand for these articles which a West-end chemist describes as "terrific." It is not a question of diminishing supplies, but of complete exhaustion.

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## Cambridge Daily News Tuesday 16th July 1918

“Spanish flu,’ which began as a disease, is becoming a habit. That is the inevitable result of daily newspaper reports of the progress of the epidemic. An overworked doctor assured me this week that everybody who feels a little seedy persuades himself that he is suffering from the malady. Sometimes they go to bed, and there is no particular harm done. Others dose themselves with abnormal quantities of quinine and summon the doctor to deal with deafness, noises in the head, and the other classic symptoms quinism. “It ought to be posted on the hoardings,” said doctor, “that it is possible to have headache without having influenza.” I have heard — from another source — that the quickest recoveries are made by those who do not call in a doctor. But that is merely to echo the acrid cynicism of Diderot, who said the best doctor is the one you run for and that you can’t find.

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## Cambridge Daily News Saturday 27th July 1918

The influenza, epidemic— to give it its popular name, though the “best authorities” dissent - appears to be subsiding in London. The death-rate is, however still high, and many business houses are disorganised. Chemists declare that the demand for quinine and cinnamon has greatly declined. Whether these drugs have saved anyone from attack seems doubtful. Certainly many people who have taken them have had the additional infliction of the prevailing malady, while their use in treating the disease has been almost confined to those who practise self medication. A doctor with a large working-class practice tells that, in his view, iron is the ideal prophylactic. He has many patients who take iron regularly, and they have all escaped the epidemic though their condition might be expected to predispose them to disease.

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## Cambridge Daily News Wednesday 9th Oct 1918

There is very real regret here that Marshal Joffre's visit should have been postponed through the successful strategy of the influenza bacillus. The revival of the epidemic all over Europe is very disquieting, for the earlier attacks occurred in warm weather, and patients were not exposed to the rigours we are now undergoing. A great many cases of the disease have occurred in London in the last few days, and ??? experiencing another rush ??? quinine, the favourite drug of those who do their own doctoring. The particular danger of a winter epidemic of this kind is of course, the possibility of pneumonic complications. A serum has been prepared which is said to have good results in these cases. Ingenious persons have discovered a new argument against a General Election, which they say would mean great number of public meetings and a rapid spread of the disease.