Glossary of old medical terms

A

Afrighted  Frightened to death. Probably a stress-induced heart attack or stroke
Ague  Any intermittent fever characterised by periods of chills, fevers and sweats. Most commonly identified as malaria.
Apoplexy  Stroke or the paralysis resulting from a stroke

B

Bad Blood  Syphilis
Bilious fever  A term loosely applied to intestinal fevers and malarial fever.
Black Death  Bubonic plague
Bladder In Throat  Diphtheria
Bloody Flux  Dysentery involving a discharge of blood
Brain fever  Meningitis or typhus
Break Bone Fever  Dengue fever

C

Camp Diarrhoea  Typhus
Camp fever  Typhus
Canine Madness  Rabies
Canker  A severe, destructive, eroding ulcer of the cheek and lip. It commonly followed one of the eruptive fevers and was often fatal.
Child Bed (Fever)  Infection in the mother following birth of a child, probably due to staphylococcus
Choak  Croup
Cholera Infantum  A common, non-contagious diarrhoea of young children, occurring in summer or autumn.
Cholera Morbus  Illness with vomiting, abdominal cramps and elevated temperature. Possibly appendicitis
Cholera  Death frequently occurred in three to five days.
Choana  Involuntary twitching of the muscles and uncoordinated movements.
Chrisome  A child in the first month of life
Cold Plague  Ague characterised by chills
Colic  Convulsive pain in the abdomen or bowels.
Commotion  Concussion
Congestion  An excessive or abnormal accumulation of blood or other fluid in a body part or blood vessel
Congestive Chills / Fever  Malaria
Consumption  Tuberculosis
Contagious Pyrexia  Dysentery
Corruption  General term for infection
Cow Pox  A non-fatal disease similar to smallpox, affecting cattle and transmissible to humans. Used to produce the first vaccinations.
Cramp Colic  Appendicitis
Croup  Any obstructive condition of the larynx or trachea, characterised by a hoarse, barking cough and difficult breathing. It occurs chiefly in infants and children.
Cut of the Stone  The surgical removal of a bladder stone.
D
Day Fever  Fever lasting one day
Diphtheria  A serious infectious disease that attacks any mucous membrane, although it normally affects the throat or nose.
Distemper  Disturbed condition of the body or mind; ill health, illness; a mental or physical disorder; a disease or ailment
Dock Fever  Yellow fever
Domestic Illness  Mental breakdown, depression
Dropsy  Abnormal swelling of the body or part of the body due to the build-up of clear watery fluid
Dysentery  A term given to a number of disorders marked by inflammation of the large intestine and attended by frequent stools containing blood and mucus

E
Eclampsia  Historically used as a general term for convulsions. Today identified with convulsions arising from toxaemia accompanying pregnancy
Eel Thing  Erysipelas
Effluvia  Exhalations or emanations, applied especially to those of noxious character
Emphysema  A chronic, irreversible disease of the lungs, characterised by shortness of breath, hacking cough, cyanosis and a "barrel-shaped" chest
Enteric fever  Typhoid
Epilepsy  A disorder of the nervous system, characterised either by mild, episodic loss of attention or sleepiness or by severe convulsions with loss of consciousness
Ergot  A fungal disease of edible grasses. When ingested, the fungus can infect humans, producing either convulsions or gangrene.
Erysipelas  An acute streptococcal infection of the skin characterised by a spreading, deep-red inflammation.

F
Fainting Fits  Probably a euphemism for epilepsy
Falling Sickness  Epilepsy
Fistula  An unnatural communication between two different body structures.
Flux  Dysentery
French Pox  Syphilis
Frogg  Croup
Furuncle  Boil

G
Galloping Consumption  Pulmonary tuberculosis
Gangrene  Massive tissue death due to injury, disease, or failure of blood supply
Gathering  A collection of pus
General Paralysis of the Insane  Syphilis affecting the brain
Gout  Painful inflammation caused by a build up of uric acid in the tissues.
Great Pox  Syphilis
Green Fever  Anaemia
Green Sickness  Anaemia
Grip, Gripe or Grippe  Influenza
Grocer's Itch  Skin disease caused by mites in sugar or flour

H
Hectic fever  A daily recurring fever with profound sweating, chills, and flushed appearance, often associated with pulmonary tuberculosis or septic poisoning.
Hives  A skin eruption of wheals that result from an allergic reaction. Severe allergic reaction can cause death from anaphylactic shock.
Horrors  Delirium tremens
Hospital fever  Typhus
Hydropsy  The full name of dropsy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Ichor</td>
<td>Leakage of fluid from a sore or wound.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Impostume</td>
<td>Abscess</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infantile Paralysis</td>
<td>Poliomyelitis (polio)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermittent Fever</td>
<td>Illness marked by episodes of fever with return to completely normal temperature; usually malaria.</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td>Jail fever</td>
<td>Typhus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jawfain</td>
<td>Literally a fallen jaw also referred to as a locked jaw. Possibly tetanus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>King's evil</td>
<td>Scrofula</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kink</td>
<td>Fit of coughing or choking</td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Leprosy</td>
<td>A chronic bacterial disease affecting mainly skin and nerves. If untreated, there can be progressive and permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Livergrown</td>
<td>Possibly Rickets. John Graunt observed that Bills or Mortality showing many deaths from Rickets showed few or none Livergrown and vice versa.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lockjaw</td>
<td>Tetanus</td>
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<td>Long Sickness</td>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
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<td>Lung Fever</td>
<td>Pneumonia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lung Sickness</td>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Malignant fever</td>
<td>Typhus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Malignant Pustule</td>
<td>Anthrax</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Malignant Sore Throat</td>
<td>Diphtheria</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Melancholia</td>
<td>Severe depression</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Membranous Croup</td>
<td>Diphtheria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meagrom, Megrim</td>
<td>A severe headache, often limited to one side of the head</td>
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<td>Miasma</td>
<td>Poisonous vapours thought to infect the air and cause disease</td>
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<td>Milk Fever</td>
<td>Short lived fever which sometimes accompanies lactation, probably a staphylococcus infection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Milk Leg</td>
<td>Thrombosis of veins in the thigh usually seen after childbirth</td>
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<td>Morbilli</td>
<td>Measles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morbus Cordis</td>
<td>Heart disease. A catch-all phrase for death by natural causes when the exact cause was not evident</td>
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<td>Normal</td>
<td>Gangrene</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Morpewh</td>
<td>Blisters resulting from scurvy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mortification</td>
<td>Gangrene, necrosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Necrosis</td>
<td>The death of tissue</td>
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<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Oedema</td>
<td>Fluid retention, dropsy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society
Chorley Branch Education Group
Talk Handout
Further Steps

P
Palsy Paralysis or difficulty with muscle control
Paroxysm Convulsion
Pernicious Anaemia Anaemia caused by vitamin B12 deficiency
Pertussis Whooping cough
Phthisis Tuberculosis
Pink Disease Disease of teething infants due to mercury poisoning from teething powders
Plague Any infectious disease with a high mortality rate, although will often mean bubonic plague
Planet-struck Any sudden severe affliction or paralysis
Pleurisie / Pleurisy Inflammation of the pleura, the membranous sac lining the chest cavity. Symptoms are chills, fever, dry cough, and pain in the affected side.
Pneumonia Inflammation of the lungs with congestion or consolidation
Porphyria Rare metabolic disturbance that may cause mental damage in young children. It produces convulsions and delirium.
Potter’s Asthma Tuberculosis
Pox Syphilis
Puerperal Death due to childbirth
Exhaustion
Puerperal Fever Infection after giving birth, probably a staphylococcus infection
Puking Fever Milk sickness
Purples This is a rash due to spontaneous bleeding in to the skin. It may be a symptom of some severe illnesses, including bacterial endocarditis and cerebrospinal meningitis.
Putrid fever Typhus
Putrid sore throat Ulceration of an acute form, attacking the tonsils

Q
Quinsy An acute inflammation of the tonsils, often leading to an abscess

R
Rag-Picker’s Disease Anthrax
Remitting Fever Malaria
Rising Of The Lights Generally considered to be croup. However, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as hysteria and John Graunt suggests that it may be an inflammation of the liver, similar to livergrown (q.v.)

S
Scarlet fever or Scarlet Rash An infectious fever, characterised by a widespread scarlet eruption
Scouring or scowring Purging of the bowels, probably diarrhoea or dysentery
Screws Rheumatism
Scrivener’s Palsy Writer’s cramp
Scrofula or scrofula fugax Primary tuberculosis of the lymphatic glands, especially those in the neck. A disease of children and young adults, it represents a direct extension of tuberculosis into the skin from underlying lymph nodes. It evolves into cold abscesses, multiple skin ulcers, and draining sinus tracts.
Scrofula mesenterica An internal non-pulmonary tuberculosis, resulting in a swollen abdomen, loss of appetite and a pale complexion
Scrofula vulgaris An itchy rash associated with hospitals. Most probably a streptococcal infection
Scurvy A disease caused by severe vitamin C deficiency
Ship fever Typhus
Sloes Milk sickness
Small Pox Highly infectious viral disease producing pustules.
Softening of the Brain Stroke
Sore Throat Distemper Diphtheria or quinsy
Spanish Disease Syphilis
Spanish Influenza The variant of influenza that was responsible for the 1918 pandemic
Spotted fever Meningitis or typhus
St Anthony’s Fire Skin disease caused by toxins from ergot infection. Sometimes used for erysipelas and other diseases producing a reddening of the skin.
St Vitus Dance Chorea
Strangury Painful urination. It may occur after labour, but is more often the result of disease in the bladder or urethra.
**Stuffing**
- Croup
  - Vomiting from over eating or gluttony

**Surfeit or surfeit**
- Malaria, typhoid or encephalitis

**Swamp Sickness**
- Infectious and often fatal disease affecting England in the 15th century

**Sweating Sickness**
- Death of an infant when teething. Children appear to have been more susceptible to infection during this time, although malnutrition from being fed watered milk has also been suggested as a cause.

**T**
- **Teeth**
  - An infectious, often-fatal disease characterised by respiratory paralysis and tonic spasms and rigidity of the voluntary muscles, especially those of the neck and lower jaw. The bacterium enters the body through wounds.

**Tetanus**
- A disease characterised by whitish spots and ulcers on the membranes of the mouth, tongue, and throat caused by a parasitic fungus. Thrush usually affects sick, weak infants and elderly individuals in poor health

**Tissick**
- Cough

**Typhoid**
- Typhoid fever is contracted when people eat food or drink water that has been infected. It is recognized by the sudden onset of sustained fever, severe headache, nausea and severe loss of appetite. It is sometimes accompanied by hoarse cough and constipation or diarrhoea

**Typhus**
- An acute, infectious disease transmitted by lice and fleas

**W**
- **Wolf**
  - A rapidly expanding growth, probably a malignant tumour

**Worm Fit**
- Convulsions associated with teething, worms, elevated temperature or diarrhoea
Old Medical Term Websites

1. Rudy’s List of Archaic Medical Terms
   - www.archaicmedicalterms.com

2. Old Archaic Medical terms and Clinical names for diseases
   - www.genproxy.co.uk/old_medical_terms.htm

3. Old Medical terms for use by Genealogists
   - freepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wakefield/definitions/defmedic.html

4. Glossary of Old Medical Terms - Craig Thornber
   - www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss.html

5. Medical Terms - Web Sites for Genealogists

6. Old Medical Terms - Fenton Historical Society
   - fentonhistsoc.tripod.com/id121.html

7. Old Disease names and their modern definitions
   - www.disease.pricklytree.co.uk/