

## Epidemiology

William Norman Pickles (1885–1969) was, for most of his life, a general practitioner in the village of Aysgarth, Wensleydale in the North of England, a relatively remote area in the early part of this century with many of the doctors' visits made on horseback or on an ancient motorcycle. The story of Pickles' life, how he became, among other honours, the first President of the Royal College of General Practitioners, is told in Pemberton's book *Will Pickles of Wensleydale*. It may seem curious that Pickles, a country GP, should rank with other great men in epidemiology: Jenner who worked on smallpox, Budd on typhoid fever, Snow on cholera, yet it was the remoteness of his practice combined with his own acute observation and accurate recording that enabled him to contribute so significantly to epidemiology.

Pickles' observations were mostly of infectious diseases including dysentery, Bornholm disease, infectious hepatitis and influenza; his methods were to note the date of onset of disease in each individual patient and then to look for the 'short and only possible exposure'. In this way he traced the spread of disease round his practice, determining the routes of transfer, incubation periods and effect of previous exposure on immunity. It was the restricted opportunities for travel amongst the dalesmen which reduced their exposure to disease and made the tracing of contact simpler than in a more urban practice. Pickles' most celebrated publication *Epidemiology in Country Practice* was first published in May 1939 and was hailed as 'a model for research in social medicine'.

It seems appropriate, 50 years later, to see how that model has been applied. The four following invited papers explore aspects of epidemiology.

W. C. NOBLE  
*Editor*

### REFERENCES

- PEMBERTON, J. (1970). *Will Pickles of Wensleydale. The life of a country doctor*. London: Geoffrey Bles.  
PICKLES, W. N. (1939). *Epidemiology in General Practice*. Bristol: John Wright.