

Chapter 23: The Family's Health

Quite a lot of grandad's diaries appears to be focused on his own health and that of his family. This is perhaps not surprising as he had himself suffered ill-health earlier and had been rejected by the military on grounds of health. In addition, his mother and both grandma's parents died during this period. Grandad usually noted that someone was ill and rarely recorded symptoms or diagnoses but there were some exceptions (see text box).

During this period, grandad had episodes of ill-defined poor health. During the first World War, he had taken a range of medications. In 1919, he started taking "Clarke's Blood Mixture" an [unproven medicine](#) containing mainly water, a little sugar, a miniscule amount of alcohol and traces of chloroform and ammonia. In April, he bought a big bottle of this for 11/6 although apparently the ingredients cost pence only. He had some more prolonged periods of poor health, including in February and March 1929. Again, it is not very clear precisely what the problem was but grandad was off work for two months and he worked mornings only for the following three months.

Specific illnesses in this period

In both 1919 and 1932, his brother Cyril had quinsies and, in 1920, Cyril broke his jaw. In 1921, another brother, Len, had kidney stones and was in hospital for six weeks and off work for five months. In 1922, grandad's nephew Leonard had typhoid fever. He was very unwell for around two months and the family engaged a nurse for him. Also, in 1922, grandad's niece Olive had measles and, in 1928, her brother Roy had scarlet fever. In 1929, grandad's mother was diagnosed with gallstones and this was the illness from which she subsequently died. Grandma's father died of a stroke in 1937. Various family members had different coughs, colds and "flu" over this period.

Grandad may have struggled with some of the medical terms. In 1931, he noted that grandma had "bronkinis" (perhaps bronchitis?). The next year, he simply referred to this as "bronc".



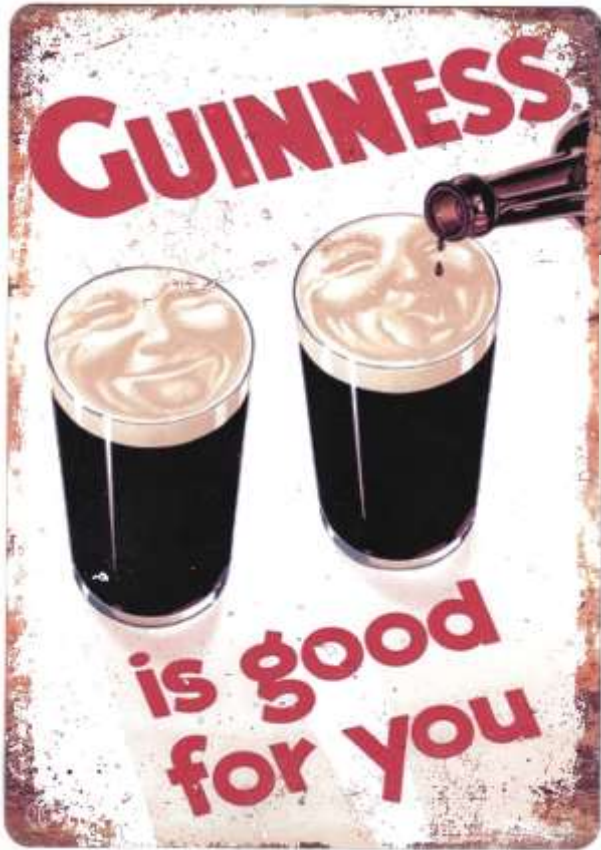
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Clarke's blood mixture selection of bottles (left) and advert (right). The bottles vary in colour and have different marks on the bases (TBM, 7119 and A175 2 UGB). They have the same marking on the front (World Famous Blood Mixture) and sides (Lincoln on one side and Clarke's on the other)

In general, grandma's health seemed better than grandad's but, in 1931, they were both unwell for a prolonged period, particularly grandma. Again, I am not sure precisely what the problem but it was severe enough for grandma to move back in with her parents for a while. Grandad's solution for his ill-health that year was to have a glass of stout! Indeed he bought a case of it!!¹ Grandma was particularly unwell in April and May, so at the beginning of June, her parents moved in with them. Although she seemed to improve in July, she became unwell again in August and September. It must

¹ As a confirmed teetotaler, I think he must have been convinced that stout was good for him. This is not perhaps surprising as Guinness was marketed for many years as "*good for you*". When I worked as a junior hospital doctor in the 1980s, we were allowed to prescribe stout or sherry but rarely did! Apparently, this was particularly done on surgical wards and was still happening (in the USA) in [2002](#).

have been bad, because on this occasion, grandad's brother, Cyril and his wife, Minnie, came to live with them. This arrangement continued for just over a week and then both grandma and grandad moved in with grandma's parents and Olive, grandad's sister, had their house.² Whatever, the problem was, it seems that she had largely recovered by November 1931.



*Left – replica sign advertising that Guinness is good for you
Above – vintage bottle opener with the same slogan*

Almost all family members had problems with their teeth and by the start of this period, when grandad was in his early 20s, he already had some dentures. This period preceded the formation of the UK's National Health Service so the family needed either to pay for medical treatment or had to contribute to some form of health insurance. Grandad noted doing the latter. It seems he started doing this in November 1920 and expanded this to include mum in 1938 by paying an extra 2d per week.

Sometimes, friends or family members were so ill that they had to go to hospital. In March 1929, grandma's mother was in hospital. When grandma visited her, she saw grandad's friend Billy Clover there. He was still there in April and grandma and grandad visited him. Grandad did not make any comment on the severity or nature of Billy Clover's illness but he died on 2 October 1929 and was buried on the 5th of that month.

Grandad first noted that grandma's mother, Jane Cirket, was ill in February 1937. In March, they brought her bed downstairs. At various times over the days that followed, mum and grandma, grandma's brother Ray or grandad stayed overnight with grandma's parents at their house, Elstow. On 2 April 1937, at 2am, Ray "fetched" grandma as her mother was worse. Dr Rowe came to see her the next day but she died at 9.40pm on 7 April 1937 aged 68. She was buried on 10 April 1937. From that point, grandad, grandma and mum went to live with grandma's father at Elstow. In July 1937, mum, grandma and her father went for a week's holiday in Skegness. On the last day, 10 July, around 1.30pm, grandma's father had a stroke. Ray and Winnie went in the car and, two days later, they

² I am not sure of the exact arrangements here who owned the house etc. who paid rent to whom! But, see Chapter 24 for more detail.

brought him home. He died on 13 July 1937 around 7.30pm aged 69. It was only just over three months after his wife's death. He was buried on 15 July 1937. Given that Sarah Parkin died in 1930, this meant that one of mum's grandmothers had died before she was born and her maternal grandmother and grandfather died before she turned three. Her only surviving grandparent at the end of this period was grandad's father.



Views of the grave of Charles and Jane Cirket