the socially deprived found their way there. Luton's first workhouse was in part of the buildings of Langley Mansion House in Castle Street and remained there until 1766 when a new one was built by the parish in Park Street. Dunstable's was in High Street South on the north side of the Swan Inn.

To these and similar institutions came the chronic sick, the poor - known as paupers - and the elderly. There is also evidence to show that some women were sent to the workhouse for their confinements.

Epidemics such as the plague or smallpox caused such a financial burden on the parish that pest houses, to prevent further spread of disease, were provided. Luton had one built in 1724 on the Great Moor.

Bedfordshire was fortunate in having such philanthropic men as Samuel Whitbread, father and son, who helped provide Bedford with an Infirmary in 1803; and in 1812 Bedford Asylum, only the second in the country. Both the parishes of Luton and Dunstable were quick to take advantage of these facilities and took out subscriptions. Patients were regularly sent there when in need of hospital treatment, travelling usually by horse and cart. They were soon sent from the Infirmary if found to be incurable but the mentally ill, although sometimes recovering, tended to become long stay patients and their fees became an increasing burden on their family and the parish.

The Elizabethan Poor Law System was humane but the organisation and care given was too variable. The new Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was intended to end outdoor relief. Those who could not or would not work were to be housed in a well organised, large workhouse under the control of a Board of Guardians. Following inspection locally of all the old parish workhouses it was decided that none were suitable for conversion or extension and so plans were made for a purpose-built Union Workhouse for 300 paupers from the various parishes, in Dunstable Road, Luton.

Conclusion

There is a tendency amongst some historians of nursing to omit from their analyses any account of the pre-nineteenth century growth of hospitals and other institutional provision for the care of the sick. The introduction of nursing services in any locality was the result not only of national developments, including registration and training, but also of local experiences, needs and aspirations. This overview of the development of institutional care in one area suggests that nursing reforms, when they did come, had to accommodate the complexity of existing local provisions. Only if they did so could they fully succeed.

NOTES

(1) Knowles-Brown, J. (1969) The Historical Background to the Parish Church of St John the Baptist, Farley Hill, Luton. Privately published, Luton. See also, Austin, W. (1928) History of Luton. County Press, Newport, Isle of Wight