

# Dr. Arthur Mussen - the village doctor

The obituaries printed at the time of the death of Arthur Mussen in 1931 (Lisburn Standard Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1931 & Belfast Telegraph Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1931) provide a valuable insight into his life, although they state that he was a son of the “late Arthur Mussen, of Hillhall, Lisburn.” This is contrary to all other available records, including the marriage records of Dr. Mussen, that state he was in fact the son of William Mussen a farmer.

We are informed in the obituaries that Dr. Mussen was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 1842. His early education was received at Thompson’s and White’s Academy, both of Lisburn. On leaving White’s Academy he entered Queen’s College, Belfast in 1859. The College is now known as Queen’s University. He graduated in 1863 (M.D.) The obituaries state that he obtained a further degree of M.R.C.S. (England) in that year. He was later admitted a Licentiate of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow. During his college career he served an apprenticeship at the pharmacy of Dr. John Campbell, Lisburn. Dr. Gawin Orr, a lifelong friend and colleague of Dr. Mussen was also apprenticed at the same pharmacy.

In 1865, at the age of 23 years, Dr. Arthur Mussen was appointed medical officer of the Glenavy dispensary district which was part of the Lisburn Union. “In that capacity discharged his responsible and onerous duties with a faithfulness and considerateness for the poor and the suffering which gained for him the affection of the entire community.” (Lisburn Standard, Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1931). Dr. Mussen would hold that position for 45 years.

In addition to his appointment as a medical officer in the area, Dr. Mussen would be responsible for the registration of all births and deaths that occurred in the district, and he acted as the Registrar. The system for the registration of all births, marriages and deaths began in 1864.

The Belfast Newsletter dated 17<sup>th</sup> July 1868 reports the quarterly return of the marriages, births, and deaths in the Glenavy area. It includes the marriages registered during October, November, and December, 1867; and the births and deaths registered during January, February, and March, 1868. “Glenavy - Births, 43; deaths, 18. Births above the average; deaths considerably below it.”

An extract from the Belfast Newsletter on St. Patrick’s Day 1877 gives us a partial insight into a case that Dr. Mussen would have been involved with both as a doctor and as a registrar of deaths.

“Glenavy - A most malignant form of scarlatina attacked a family of 7, 4 of whom rapidly succumbed. There is reason to suspect that the introduction of the disease was due to the purchase of some second-hand clothing, while the fatal issue is mostly attributable to the imperfect sanitary construction of the house, causing ‘under water’ to rise from the foundation and floors during the late heavy rains. Proper care taken in drainage originally would have obviated all this.”

We know from records dated 1816 that there was a village apothecary in Glenavy and two others in the village of Crumlin. Apothecaries provided not only medical treatment, but were used for prescribing medicine and possibly some minor surgery.

The Reverend Charles Watson, the local Church of Ireland vicar at St. Aidan’s Parish Church, Glenavy (1885 - 1897) in his 1892 publication titled “Glenavy Past and Present”, records that “the local physician, who also acted as Dispensary Doctor and Coroner was Arthur Mussen, M.D., J.P., who lived just outside the village in what had been the old ‘cholera house.’ ” This house was also known as “The Cottage.” Unfortunately there do not appear to be any other records in existence to provide any further information of the old cholera house. There are some physical attributes

remaining at Dr. Mussen’s former home, indicating that there had been some form of medical activity

on the premises possibly prior to the occupation of Dr. Mussen. Prior to the purchase of “The Cottage”, Dr. Mussen is recorded in local valuation records as having rented a property consisting of a house, office, yard and garden from William James Johnston. This property appears to have been “Hopecroft”, located at Main Street, Glenavy. (VAL/12B/8/4A-D - PRONI)



“The Cottage” once occupied by Dr. Mussen would later be named “Turvey Cottage” by the Houston family who came to reside there in later years.

A photograph appears in Charles Watson’s book and it indicates that the dispensary was situated in a house to the church side of Glenavy Protestant Hall. At the time the photograph was taken the houses, including the Dispensary were owned by Thomas A. Irvine. The row of houses were completely renovated in the late 1880’s. Today this building still exists, and is to the upper side of a row of similar 2-storey houses referred to locally as “Bolton’s Row.”



Glenavy Dispensary about 1892 taken from “Glenavy Past and Present” compiled by the Reverend Charles Watson, M.A., B.D., T.C.D.

Records existing from the 1870 period indicate that Dr. Mussen had purchased a number of properties

in Glenavy village that were previously owned and rented out by an Esther Wallace. (VAL/12B/8/4A-D - PRONI). Esther Wallace died in 1871. One of the windows in Glenavy Parish Church was dedicated to Esther Wallace by Mrs. Mussen. A report in The Lisburn Standard dated Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> October 1894 makes the following reference to this window. "The south window has an Irish cross on the top and two side lights filled with roses of Sharon, and contain the words - Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Unfortunately this window was destroyed in the fire of 1938. There is a reference to the destroyed window on a memorial plaque located in the entrance porch at Glenavy Parish Church.

The well-known McKeown family, who resided in the village at Sunnyside were typical of a local family who were under the care of Dr. Mussen. Mona McKeown (1904 - 1985), the daughter of William James McKeown (1870 - 1936) briefly mentions Dr. Mussen in her published childhood memories.

"Attendant on all our births was the gruff old Dr. Mussen, coroner for South Antrim. A good and kindly doctor, he nonetheless struck terror into the hearts of most children, with his blackthorn stick and strident voice. He was assisted on such occasions by what was known as a 'handy woman' or, in Scots parlance, a 'Howdie', an unqualified midwife, but approved by the medical profession in those days."

Some of the older residents in the area recall hearing stories from their parents about attending the surgery at Dr. Mussen's house and having teeth extracted.

The street directories from 1892 & 1894 inform us that Glenavy Dispensary was open on Saturday from 10 - 12 o'clock. Medical Officer - Arthur Mussen, M.D., The Cottage, Glenavy.



One of the original medicine bottles from the Glenavy Dispensary

Dr. Mussen, being a well-known and trusted person about the neighbourhood, was used by some of the inhabitants as a named executor in their last will and testament. They include: Ann Jane Farr, Ballyvannen died 11 09 1886 Probated 06 12 1886, Alexander Addison, Lurgill House, Ballinderry died 24 02 1892 Probate 11 03 1892, and Margaret Downey Ballynacoy died 09 03 1885, probated 11 05 1885. (Will Calendars - PRONI)

Dr. Mussen would attend to many ill patients on their deathbeds in the district. The recording of his fees are commonly found in the administration documents relating to the estate of the deceased.

The following newspaper extracts give us an interesting insight into some other facets of Dr.

Mussen's work and some of the problems that existed in Glenavy Village.

At a weekly meeting of the Lisburn Board of Guardians held in the boardroom of the Lisburn Workhouse on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1897 a letter, submitted to the clerk by Dr. Mussen, was read out concerning an ongoing matter of drainage and sewage in the village.

*"Glenavy, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1897. Gentlemen, - I am not prepared to pronounce the nuisance in Glenavy as being injurious to the health of the inhabitants, although I would be very glad to see it abated. I think the overflow from Mr. Ferris's yard could, with the consent of his neighbour, Mrs. Armstrong, be conducted to the river at a smaller cost than laying drainage pipe down the street. All the other nuisances could be abated by the alteration of the position of the manure heap. A. Mussen, M.D."*

It was reported that "Mr. William Higginson said he had attended the meeting of the Dispensary Committee on last Saturday, and in company with Mr. Lorimer and Dr. Mussen had inspected the nuisance complained of. He believed there was nothing of an offensive nature existing there that could not be removed by the tenants. He could not agree with the doctor that the nuisance was not injurious to health; it was, in his opinion, a very offensive nuisance, and ought not to be there. Regarding the statements contained in Mr. Allen's letter to the Board, he thought they were slightly misleading, especially that part where it was alleged that the County Surveyor would sanction the county passing a sum of money for gully-traps, &c. Such was not a fact. He (Mr. Higginson) had objected there and then, but the Court ruled that the question was not before them, and could not be considered until there was a further report from Dr. Mussen. In the nature of things it would be impossible for surface water to be on the street at Glenavy, but he (Mr. Higginson) observed during his visit a manure heap placed against a wall near the edge of the street and directly opposite the Methodist church, and he understood the liquid from that source flowed past Miss Johnston's house, which was certainly very offensive.

The Chairman (Mr. John Morton J.P.) replied - If any individual in Glenavy, or anywhere else, makes a report to us of the existence of a nuisance, it is our duty to send our sanitary officer to make an inspection, and if he finds a nuisance does exist, we immediately notice the offending parties to have it made right, according to the recommendations of our officer. The chairman here read the section of the law bearing on the subject.

It was finally agreed to request Dr. Mussen to furnish a further report, and that his attention be directed to the law relating to "nuisances only" and "nuisances that are dangerous to health." (Lisburn Herald, Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December 1897)

A further letter referring to "The Glenavy Nuisance" from Dr. Mussen to The Lisburn Board of Guardians was read out at their meeting held on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1897 .

*"In further reference to the question of the sewage of Glenavy village, I beg to state - what I meant to convey in my first report - that the evil-smelling odour, and the unpleasant appearance which the streets sometimes presents, undoubtedly interferes with the comfort of life of some of the inhabitants, who are often complaining of these annoyances. Under section 107 of the Public Health (Ireland) Act this distinctly constitutes a nuisance, although not absolutely dangerous to health. The remedy is an expensive one, and will require to be well considered by your Board. I should be extremely happy to assist in abating this nuisance." The Clerk (Mr. William Sinclair) said if the Board would adjourn the matter, he would see Dr. Mussen on the subject. The matter was agreed." (Lisburn Herald, Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December 1897)*

The debate continued into 1898. The following were read to the Lisburn Board of Guardians in January 1898.

*"16 Bow Street, Lisburn, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1898.*

*Re Glenavy Nuisance.*

*Dear Sir - I expected to have heard from you regarding this matter upon which I wrote you some time ago. I have been following the matter through the local press and I am therefore in touch with what*

*has taken place. I may state that my client has called today and has informed me that Messrs. Lorimer and Higgins on - two of the poor-law guardians for the district - called with her and suggested a remedy for the nuisance, namely, that Mr. George Ferris should get the consent of Mrs. Armstrong to allow him to bring a pipe through her garden, emptying itself in the mill race. My client assented to this arrangement as it would be a better and cheaper one for remedying the nuisance, and I understand that Dr. Mussen is of the same opinion. It is highly desirable that this matter should be carried out with as little delay as possible, and I would therefore thank you to bring it before the Board of Guardians today and oblige. Yours faithfully - Joseph Allen."*

*"Wm. Sinclair, Esq., Clerk of Union, Lisburn.*

*On the suggestion of the Clerk, the consideration of the matter was adjourned for a week, when it is expected a report will be received from Dr. Mussen, who is attending to the matter." (Lisburn Herald, Saturday January 8<sup>th</sup> 1898)*

Three further letters were read out during the following month at board meetings.

*"To the Rural Sanitary Authority of Lisburn Union.*

*As consulting sanitary officer, and as medical officer of health, we hereby report to you that we have examined the nuisance flowing down the Glenavy street from Mr. George Ferris' farmyard, and we recommend that a glazed pipe be laid down the centre of Glenavy Street to catch the entire drainage of the village. Or, as an alternative, we recommend the removal of Mr. Ferris' manure shed to his stackyard. Signed this 28<sup>th</sup> day of January 1898.*

*Mat. B. Mackenzie, M.D., consulting sanitary officer. A. Mussen."*

*"To the Poor-Law Guardians of Lisburn Union. Glenavy, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1898.*

*Gentlemen, - I beg to inform you that Mrs. Armstrong has refused to allow the drainage from my yard to be discharged into her premises. I also beg to say that I intend to alter the site of my manure heap after I have drawn the present supply out to my farm. I will put the pit in my stackyard. I expect the soil will then take up all the drainage, so that none will go down the street at all. This will be very inconvenient to me as it takes the manure pit a long distance from my stables and my byre. The overflow has been going on from my yard as at present from time immemorial. I never knew it causing any disease. - I am, yours truly, George Ferris." (Lisburn Herald, Saturday February 5<sup>th</sup> 1898)*

*"Dr. Mussen, Glenavy, reported - On February, 14<sup>th</sup> inst., I examined the premises of Mrs.*

*McKavanagh, to which I presume this complaint refers, and I recommend that all the surface water from her yard be diverted through her gateway on to the street and that a wall be built round the manure pit to retain the sewerage matter.*

*It was resolved to serve a notice, allowing the offender thirty days to comply with the recommendation of the medical officer." (Lisburn Herald, Saturday February 26<sup>th</sup> 1898)*

Things would not always run smoothly for the village doctor. In 1905 the following letter from Dr. Mussen, J.P., was read out to those present at the Lisburn Board of Guardians meeting relating to Medical Officers' Holidays.

*'The Cottage, Glenavy, County Antrim, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1905.*

*Sir - Mr. Sinclair, clerk of Lisburn Union has drawn to my attention a letter from the Local Government in which it is stated that I went on my holidays before the leave was sanctioned by the Board. I am happy in saying that there was a slight misunderstanding in the matter. I did not mention any date. Mr. Sinclair, therefore, wrote me asking me when I wanted to go. I replied saying anytime, that day of required. However, I did not go as some urgent cases kept me from getting away. I heard nothing more of the matter till I saw the letter from the Local Government Board. I am of course much obliged to the Board for sanctioning my holidays although it was irregular, and you may rest assured that even if I had gone before your sanction arrived I would have taken good care that the wants of the sick in my district would have been properly looked after, as I had arranged with my neighbour Dr. Heuston to see to all my cases, but unfortunately I have been kept close to my work till*

*now, which is rather rough on a man of 40 years' service. I am, sir, your obedient servant. A. Mussen.*'  
The Local Government Board, in reply, said their letter of 7<sup>th</sup> was based on the information contained in the official queries, in which it was stated that the temporary substitute would have charge of the Dispensary District from the 4<sup>th</sup> inst. To the 1<sup>st</sup> proximo." (Lisburn Herald, Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> October 1905)

The Lisburn Herald dated 29<sup>th</sup> October 1910 reports the proceedings at the weekly meeting of the Lisburn Board of Guardians. "The clerk read the following:-

*To the Guardians of Lisburn Union.*

*Gentlemen- it is with feelings of sincere sorrow and regret that I feel compelled to place in your hands the resignation of my appointment as medical officer, etc., of the Glenavy Dispensary District - a position I have had the honour, and I may say the pleasure, of holding for the past 45 ½ years- a record service I believe. For some time past, through failing health, I have become painfully aware of my utter inability to do adequate justice to my patients and myself. I feel, therefore, that I am adopting the proper course in retiring in favour of a younger and more energetic man. I can assure you that I will carry into my retirement the warm feelings towards your Board for the expressed appreciation of my services. My superannuating I leave in your hands, feeling perfectly assured that you will give it that fair and generous consideration which has always characterised the dealings of your Board with its officers. - I am, gentlemen, your obedient servant,  
A. Mussen, M.D."*

"The Chairman said he was sure there was only one feeling amongst the members of the Board after hearing Dr. Mussen's letter, and that was one of deep regret at losing the services of a very valuable officer - one who had always discharged his duties with the highest sense of the responsibility of his position, and kindly feelings towards the poor. Any man who knew Dr. Mussen was aware of the great kindness he had consistently shown to the poor - many of the indigent got assistance from him and were never charged for it. The poor had nothing but the most kindly regard for him, and they would bitterly regret the loss of his services.....The Clerk said that, on behalf of the official's and himself, he wished to heartily endorse the sentiments that had just been expressed. He had been closely identified with Dr. Mussen for a great many years, and a more obliging official he did not think the guardians had in their service. In the course of his career as dispensary medical officer, the poor had at all times spoken splendidly of Dr. Mussen's kindness in coming out at all hours of the night to give them the relief wherever possible."

On the recommendation of Dr. Mussen, the Board resolved to accept Dr. Norman C. Patrick to temporarily perform the duties of the office.

The Board of Guardians subsequently advertised for a Medical Officer for Glenavy Dispensary District in the local press. The salary was advertised as "£100 per annum, together with the usual Registration and Vaccination Fees." A further £15 per annum would be payable by the Lisburn Rural District Council. It was advertised that "candidates must possess the qualifications prescribed by the Local Government Board for Ireland" and "a candidate qualifying as a Medical Practitioner after the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1906, must possess a Certificate of Proficiency in Vaccination in accordance with the Regulations of the Local Government Board."

The London Gazette dated 17<sup>th</sup> January 1911 records the following: "Factory Department, Home Office, January 16<sup>th</sup> 1911.

The Chief Inspector of Factories gives notice that, in consequence of the resignation of Dr. A. Mussen, an appointment as Certifying Surgeon under the Factory and Workshop Act at Glenavy, in the County of Antrim, is vacant." Dr. N.C. Patrick took over this position but resigned on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1913. (The London Gazette 12<sup>th</sup> August 1913)

The Chief Inspector of Factories appointed Dr. T. West on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1913 to the position. (The London Gazette 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1913)



Tenders for the erection of a dispensary residence in Glenavy in 1911 were invited by the Board of Guardians, Lisburn. In 1912 it was reported that work was underway. Eighteen years later the subject of the Glenavy Dispensary Residence was still making the headlines in the local newspapers.

“Discussions were ongoing within the Board of Guardians at Lisburn regarding the repairing of the dispensary doctor’s residence at Glenavy. Miss Stannus said that during all the time she had been a member of the Board - nineteen years - the Glenavy Dispensary had been frequently under discussion. In her opinion from all she had heard about it, it would be silly to expend money on repairing it. Mr. Ballance said that when it was offered for sale privately there were three offers for it, one of £630. Dr. Mussen’s residence, where he had carried on his dispensary work for 30 years, had been purchased for £1000. Ultimately, Mr. Dick gave notice that at the meeting of the Board on 14<sup>th</sup> January next, he would move that the resolution regarding the repairs to Glenavy Dispensary residence be rescinded. He wanted the thing finally ended.” (Lisburn Herald, Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December 1929)

A series of seven articles were written by William McLeavy about Glenavy. They were published in The Lisburn Herald. This extract from The Lisburn Herald dated Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April 1923 includes a passage on Dr. Mussen.

“At this juncture I feel a great blank would occur and a missing link in my narrative of Glenavy if I omitted to refer to the present Doctor Arthur Mussen, J.P., whose associations with its life and environment date back for 58 years. Although not a native of the village, even could not claim any connection by ancestral ties, yet his close touch with all its social improvements justly warrant a few remarks from my pen. I know it is not customary procedure to eulogise a person and his deeds while living, but rather to leave all the good things you have to say for his obituary notice. The veteran Doctor, as he is now familiarly styled, came to Glenavy as Dispensary Doctor quite a young man. His only previous experience was a short period under that famous surgeon, Dr. Thompson, of County Antrim Infirmary, as assistant to him. Coming at a period when the village and surrounding country was very popular his dispensary work entailed arduous and incessant work, yet he was able to cope with it, in addition to an ever increasing private practice, even extending outside his dispensary area. It would be incredible that this could be done now without the aid of a motor car; yet the Doctor surmounted all with a few small ponies for about half the emoluments accorded to the present staff of the Dispensary Doctors. During his uninterrupted term of over 40 years he made many friends and very few enemies.”



Dr. Mussen’s original name plate from his surgery, in the possession of family members.

In the Irish Motor Directory dated 1911-1912 we find a section relating to registered car and cycle owners, recorded by county. In County Antrim there were a total of 146 cars and 156 cycles registered. “IA 108” referred to a car registration plate owned by Dr. Mussen. In the surrounding district there were only two others listed in the directory.

“IA 195” - a car registration owned by Thomas Hill Scott, Crumlin and “IA 349” - a cycle registration owned by Rev. John McLaverty, C.C. Aldergrove, British.