

[Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Bethnal Green Borough].

Contributors

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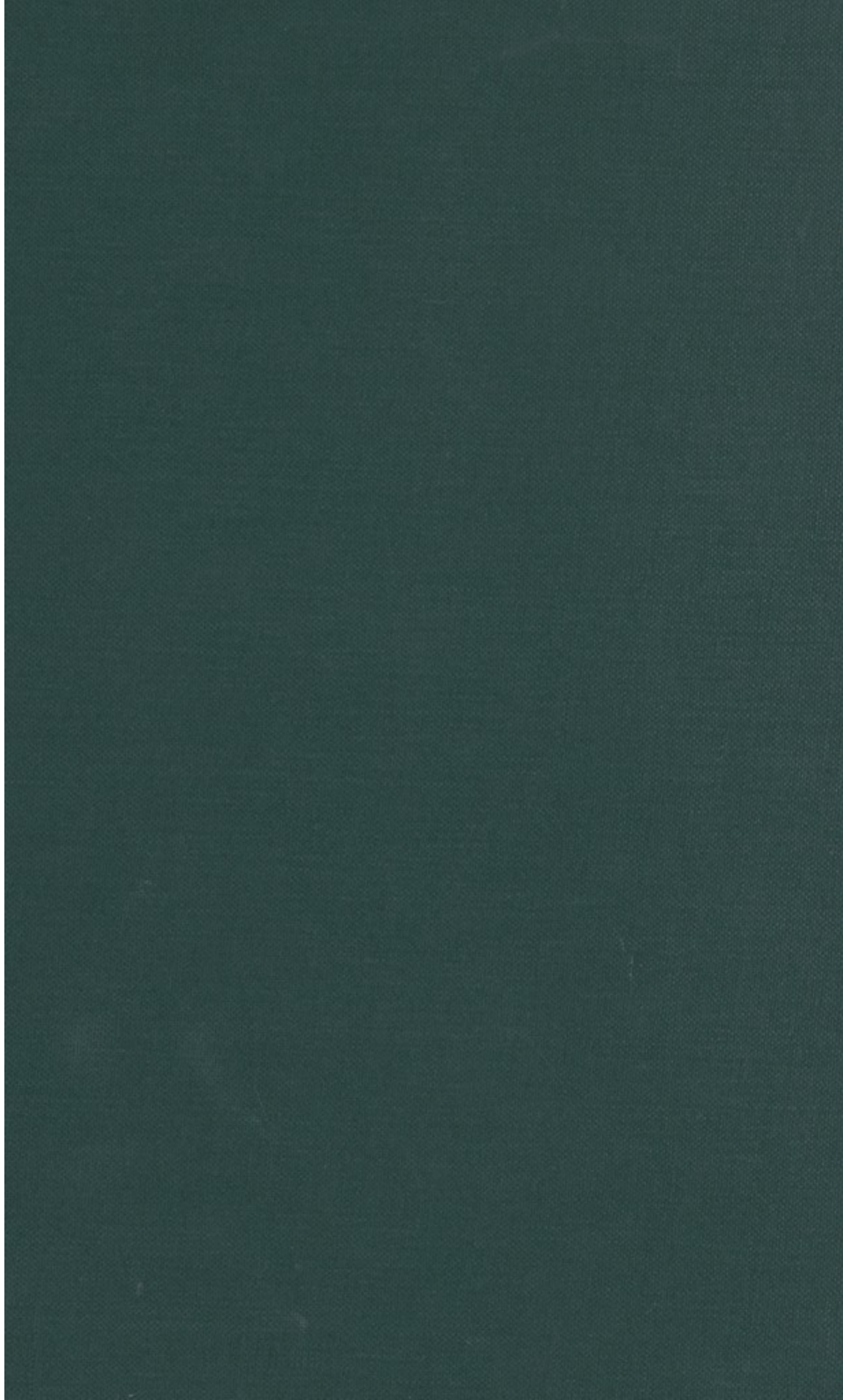
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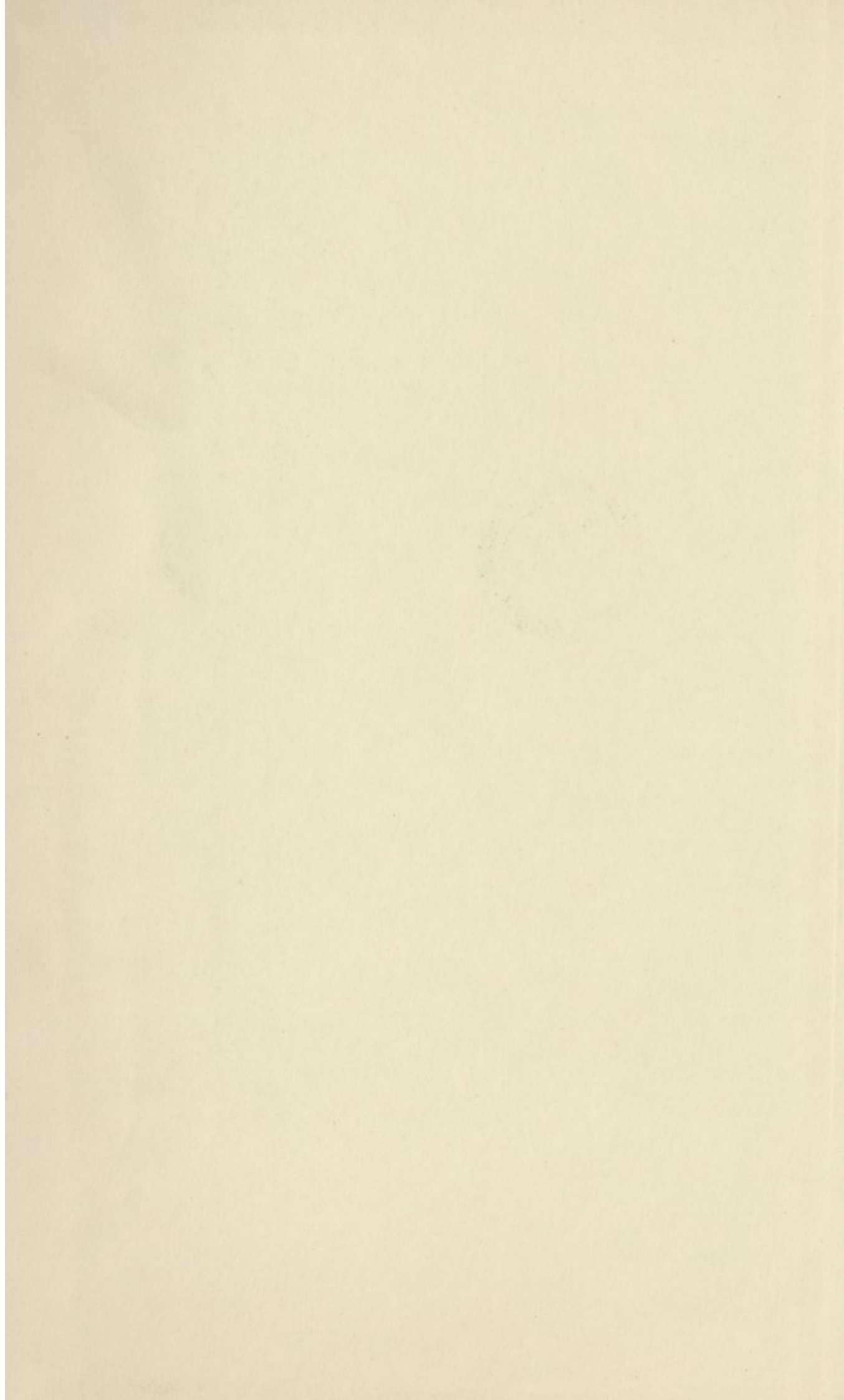
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BET 44

METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF BETHNAL GREEN

I N T E R I M A N N U A L R E P O R T

o n

the health of the Borough and

the work of the Public Health Department

during 1939

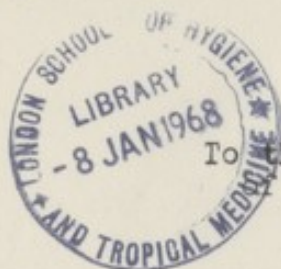
by

V Y N N E B O R L A N D,

M.B., Ch.B., B.Sc., D.P.H.,

Medical Officer of Health.

66849



To the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors
of the Metropolitan Borough of Bethnal Green.

28th October, 1940.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Notwithstanding the difficult circumstances through which this Department, in common with all the Council's services, has been passing during the past year, the necessary records had been compiled for the usual annual report. Having regard, however, to the expense, labour and paper involved in printing such a document at the present time and in pursuance of the suggestion of the Ministry of Health, I am substituting a brief interim report on a few essential matters, leaving a fuller account of the year's work until after the war.

VITAL STATISTICS.

The year was exceptionally favourable for low mortality and the general death rate was 11.5 per thousand of the estimated civil population and the infant death rate 51 per thousand live births. The birth rate reached its lowest point in the history of the borough at 12.8 per thousand of the population. Maternal mortality also kept at a low level at 1.7 per thousand total births (live and still). The Registrar-General has furnished two estimates of the mid-year population: civilian, for the calculation of death rates, 85,020; and total, for the calculation of birth rate, 90,130.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

Notifiable disease was also substantially less than in previous years. Diphtheria fell from 235 cases in 1938 to 138, Scarlet fever from 348 to 219, Erysipelas from 73 to 54 and Pneumonia from 130 to 90. The only substantial increase to note was Whooping Cough from 44 to 165 cases. On the other hand, Measles missed its expected biennial peak and only contributed 16 cases.

Tuberculosis appeared to share in the general improvement, 101 new cases coming to light, compared with 129 in the previous year. The work of the Tuberculosis Dispensary has been maintained with very little reduction or modification through the war, but there was some reduction in the work of the Tuberculosis Visitors, whose services were taken for A.R.P. First Aid in September. I regret it is not possible for me, consistent with the brevity of this report, to include the annual report of Dr. H.I. Howell, the Clinical Tuberculosis Officer, who offers in it a wise warning about the possible regression of Tuberculosis mortality as a result of the war and suggests the desirability of a systematic X-ray examination of the entire population between 15 and 25.

MATERNITY AND CHILD WELFARE.

Up to the end of August, the Maternity and Child Welfare services were carried on in full activity but the outbreak of war caused a great deal of disturbance of their normal functioning. There are only two Welfare Centres in the Borough and both had been earmarked as First Aid Posts. Their occupation for this purpose had the effect of closing Hereford Street entirely as a Welfare Centre and leaving available only the upper floor at Cornwall Avenue. Even more serious was the loss of the Health Visitors who, owing to the absence of other trained nurses, were transferred to the various First Aid Posts in the Borough. At the same time, the difficulties with regard to accommodation and their own circumstances prevented the temporary professional staff attending the centres. Notwithstanding all these adverse circumstances, Dr. A.M. Purce, the Medical Officer in charge, carried on with the assistance of the dispenser, clerk and storekeeper and essential clinics were maintained. Subsequently, two of the Health Visitors were released from First Aid duties to resume their normal work and at the end of the year the remainder were so released, and a Dental Clinic session was resumed.

FOOD.

The sampling of food for analysis, examination of food to check its soundness and the inspection of food premises to ensure their suitability and cleanliness were all actively carried on during the year, although the time of the staff was partly transferred to A.R.P. duties in the last 3 or 4 months. I am glad to record that the number of cowhouses in the borough has now fallen to 4 and there is only one private slaughterhouse left.

SANITATION AND HOUSING.

So far as it can be measured by statistics and notwithstanding the inevitable disturbance at the end of the year, the work of the sanitary inspectors during 1939 was fully up to the standard of previous years, no fewer than 37,393 sanitary defects of various kinds being remedied during the year.

The war has halted the substantial progress which was being made in the redevelopment of the borough but it may well be that the destruction which is now going on will be followed by a bigger and bolder conception in the rehousing of the people of East London.

SPECIAL WAR - TIME DUTIES.

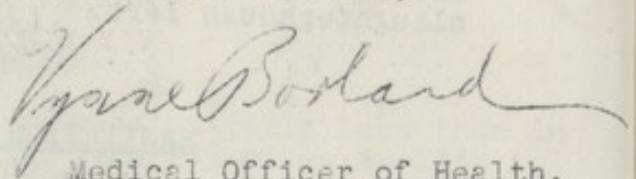
The war has placed heavy and responsible duties on the Public Health Staff not only with regard to First Aid organisation and Mortuaries but in numerous other matters, and these duties are being loyally and efficiently carried out.

CONCLUSION.

I think it well to guard the Council against attaching too much significance to the very favourable health statistics for 1939. Experience has shown that a high standard of health is a complex matter of many factors and there are frequent advances and setbacks in attaining it. The circumstances of 1940 are already sufficiently known to make it more than ever urgently important that the health services should be maintained in full vigour and if possible be extended in scope so that they at any rate may exert their favourable influence on the results for this and following years.

I am, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,



Medical Officer of Health.