

**Report to the General Board of Health on a memorial from the ratepayers against application of the Public Health Act to Northallerton / by William Ranger, Superintending Inspector.**

**Contributors**

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**PUBLIC HEALTH ACT,**

(11 & 12 Vict., cap. 63).

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**R E P O R T**

TO THE

**GENERAL BOARD OF HEALTH,**

ON A

**MEMORIAL FROM THE RATEPAYERS**

AGAINST

THE APPLICATION OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH ACT, TO

**NORTHALLERTON,**

By WILLIAM RANGER, Esq.,

SUPERINTENDING INSPECTOR.



LONDON :

PRINTED BY W. CLOWES & SONS, STAMFORD STREET,

FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH ACT (11 & 12 Vict., cap. 63).

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*Report on a Memorial from the Ratepayers against the Application of the Public Health Act to Northallerton.* By WILLIAM RANGER, Consulting Engineer.

13, Suffolk Street, Pall Mall East, London,  
January 24th, 1851.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

IN obedience to your instructions, I have the honour to lay before you the following Report on a Memorial, signed by several of the Ratepayers of Northallerton, and which was drawn up at a meeting held by the persons whose names are attached to it.

Before entering upon a consideration of any of the allegations contained in the Memorial, I may remark that they have been forwarded at a period long subsequent to the 20th June last, which was the latest date allowed by the Public Health Act for the presentation of statements to the Board respecting any remarks or recommendations in the Report on the sanitary condition of the town of Northallerton.

The first allegation contained in the Memorial is to the following effect:—

“That some of your Memorialists who signed the petition to your Honourable Board to institute an inquiry into the sanitary condition of Northallerton were, at the time they signed the said petition, ignorant of its provisions, and signed the same without due deliberation.”

With respect to the above statement, it is not my province to remark upon the conduct of persons who sign a petition for an important object, without knowing or caring to learn its purport before they attach their names to it. It is plain, however, that if there had been much desire on the part of these ratepayers to know what the effect of their petition really would be, they might easily have found out, because a whole year elapsed between the time when the petition was forwarded for an enquiry and the date of the enquiry itself, the former having been sent to the Board on the 27th October 1848, and the latter having been opened by me on the 10th October 1849. During the time I held the enquiry no questions were put to me as to the powers or the provisions of the Act, the effect it was likely to produce upon the town, or the cost which its application would impose upon it; and, until the present Memorial was forwarded to the Board, no statement was made, either verbally or in writing, to doubt or call in question



any of the contents of the preliminary Report. I may mention that some of the ratepayers, who now petition for the application of the Act, were active at the time of my enquiry, furnishing me with information, and giving evidence of defective sanitary condition of the town.

To proceed, however, to the chief object of my Report, which is to show whether the town of Northallerton is or is not in such a condition as to need the introduction of legislative enactments for its improvement.

The first test which I take is that of the mortality, and, referring to my Report, I find that its average amount is 22·1,000. Now this is at least an average rate, as compared with other towns and rural districts, amongst which Northallerton must be classed. In such localities the minimum rate of mortality is 19·10, the maximum 24·80, and the mean 22·20. The necessity of sanitary regulations becomes, however, still more apparent, when the various causes of death are analysed. From the return of the Registrar of the District I find that the deaths from all causes, from September 1847 to October 1849, were 184; and of this number no less than 54, nearly one-third, were from zymotic diseases, or those which mainly owe their origin to a neglect of proper sanitary precautions. The Memorial further states,—

“That the steps taken in reference to the sanitary condition of the town of Northallerton are unnecessary and uncalled for, inasmuch as great improvements have been made since the Nuisance Removal Act came into operation through the instrumentality of the Board of Guardians. That it is the opinion of this meeting that sufficient power is already vested in the authorities for effectually draining, cleansing and improving the sanitary condition of the town.”

With regard to the first of the above two resolutions, it may be perfectly true that the Board of Guardians have made improvements by the aid of the Nuisance Removal Act; but this Act, by its name implies, is only intended for an emergency, and to give power to remove periodically whatever is found to be hurtful to the public health. It gives the Board of Guardians no power or means to prevent the perpetual recurrence of similar nuisances, or to lay out permanent works for cleansing or improving the town. These can only be constructed under the provisions of the Public Health Act; and I think the extracts I shall give from my Report will prove that the most serious existing nuisances are precisely such as can only be effectually removed, or entirely prevented, by the formation of a permanent local governing body.

In many towns local acts of more or less efficiency are in force to effect the same objects as those of the Public Health Act. It is true that in the majority of cases they have almost fallen into disuse, either from the indifference of the persons chosen to administer them, or from the inadequacy of the Acts themselves.



effect those improvements for which they were originally framed, but they have, in some degree at least, served as substitutes for the more practical and stringent enactments of the Public Health Act. Northallerton, however, is wholly destitute of any Local Improvement Act, and, save the Poor Law Guardians, there is no public body of any kind to attend to the condition of the streets or dwelling houses, or to take any steps for the improvement of the general sanitary condition of the town. This is, in my opinion, a very sound reason why the Public Health Act should be put in force in the district, and a Local Board elected to administer it.

I refrain from quoting from the Report isolated cases of sickness, over-crowded dwellings, or offensive and unhealthy localities; but the following extracts, relative to the defective privy and sewer accommodation, will, as I have already said, prove, that to remedy such deficiencies more powerful means must be found than those contained in the Nuisance Removal Act:—

*Mr. Hodgson*, surgeon, stated—

“ I have resided in the town 40 years. The privy and cesspool system are *exceedingly bad*, and the situation of the privies prejudicial to health, as well as tending to preclude the people from acting upon principles of common decency. These privies, with open soil-pits, are in some cases directly in front of the houses, and in others they are placed under the sleeping-rooms. *A privy well placed forms the exception, rather than the rule.*”

*Mr. Walton*, surgeon and medical officer to the Union, stated,—

“ The privy system is highly offensive, fluid excrement flows upon the surface, and soaks into the ground, as well as into the walls in several cases. In one instance the occupiers of a house are even without a privy, and the situations of those that do exist are very objectionable.

“ It is the practice generally with the poorer class to keep pigs near their dwellings, and they continue to do so, notwithstanding typhus of a malignant type has prevailed amongst them, particularly in *Atkinson's Yard*, *Smith's Yard*, *New Row*, *Pearson's Yard*, *Body's Yard*, *Hunter's Yard*, and *Broad's Yard*. Every effort has been made to remedy the existing state of things, but they have been unsuccessful.”

With respect to the state of the drains and sewers, the *Rev. T. Stewart, M.A.*, Vicar of Northallerton, forwarded me the following written communication, at the time the enquiry was held:—

“ Being unable to attend and give evidence with regard to the matters of your enquiry, I am anxious to draw your attention to two points amongst the rest, if it is permitted me to do so in writing.

“ 1st. There is the *open drain*, which runs from the east side of the town to the west, receiving into itself the sewers of many public and private buildings in its passage, and then winding sluggishly through the fields for a considerable distance, till it meets a larger stream and is absorbed into it. This was originally the bed of a small stream from the hills on one side of the town, and still a little water trickles



along it, while once or twice in a year a torrent rushes through it and overflows its banks. In general, especially during the summer months, its bottom consists of a filthy deposit of stinking mud, and its streets of discoloured, offensive liquid; all who pass up and down the public street, or cross it by the paths, perceive it. Those who live near it are the inmates of the Union Poor House. The lower part of the Vicarage garden is rendered useless through the exhalations from which often ascend to the house itself and fill the rooms with the odour. I wish you not to be deceived as to its real state by examining it, after perhaps a fall of rain or snow. I beg the favour of your inspecting it from the beginning of its course at the east side of the town through the whole of it, by the side of the Poor House, between the gardens, under the wall of the Vicarage garden, and through the fields, and then say whether such a nuisance ought to continue. You will find that no power exists in any body to abate or remove this nuisance; to effect it by voluntary effort has been tried repeatedly, but always failed. It was this, in connexion with the generally defective drainage of the town, which caused myself and others to look forward with anxiety to the passing of the Public Health Act, and immediately to make application for it to come into force in our own case."

*Mr. Fowle*, also, in speaking of the sewerage, said,—

"I find the noxious gases arising from the gully holes in the streets so very offensive, that I am obliged to close the windows of my houses. The sewers in their present condition are nothing more than cesspools."

*Mr. Smith* gave the following evidence on the same subject:—

"At the south end of the town a sewer (about 400 yards in length with 12-inch semi-circular tiles) was made in 1832, with its outfall into an open ditch, and finally into the Willow Beck.

"There are 20 untrapped gully-holes communicating with this sewer, a considerable portion of which is laid level, and from being constantly choked, the surface waters and sewage flow back into the yards of the houses."

*Richard Nicholson* also stated:—

"I have filled the office of Assistant Surveyor of Highways for more than 20 years, and generally about once in two years have been obliged to open the sewers, when I have found them in some instances entirely full of solid deposit, and in others partially so. Each of the sewers I was from time to time obliged to open and clean out occupied upon an average 7 men, each about 3 days."

I may mention that I found, from personal inspection, that all the sewers finally flow into the Willow Beck. In those portions of the town where there are no sewers, the foul water is either thrown into the Beck, or upon the surface, except from a block of houses on the west side of the main street, from which the refuse water finds its way into a large cesspool or tank: into this, an overflow drain has been laid, and extended into the Sun Beck, in the adjoining pasture fields. With regard to the removal of solid refuse matter, the plan pursued at the time of my enquiry was to employ the foreman of the Surveyors of the Highways to



cleanse the streets and deposit the soil and refuse outside of the town: but he does not extend the process of cleansing to any of the numerous courts, passages, or yards in front and close to the houses occupied by the poorer and working classes, and where heaps of manure and refuse abound.

With respect to the present mode of water supply, I found that the occupants of the houses were generally obliged to fetch it in pails from yards at various distances from their dwellings. Some of these wells, I found at the time of my inspection, were polluted with sewage water from the overflow of the neighbouring drains.

I think that the above evidence will be sufficient to prove, to the satisfaction of every unprejudiced person, that there is great need for the application of the Act, and that until the town is brought under the supervision of the Board, it is impossible that the existing evils of a scanty water supply, and a deficient system of sewerage and of privy accommodation, can be effectually or completely removed.

The last statement in the Memorial is this:—

“That if the Public Health Act be carried into effect in the town of Northallerton, it will be attended with considerable and unnecessary expense to the ratepayers, and that your petitioners therefore humbly pray that your Honourable Board will take the premises into your earnest consideration, and *not* carry the provisions of the Public Health Act into effect in the town of Northallerton.”

As to the expense attendant upon the working of the Act, the laying out of efficient drainage and sewerage, and making provision for a plentiful supply of water, must of necessity involve considerable cost; but all experience proves that no outlay of money is so well made as that which provides the means of public health, and that the neglect of such precautions is as sure to be attended by an increase of local taxation, as that good sanitary regulations will cause a large reduction in existing burdens; and I think that, in this instance, the Memorialists are labouring under a complete misconception of the effect of the application of the Act.

Before closing my Report, I wish to mention two subjects, which, though not attended to by the Memorialists, have formed a ground of objection to some persons, who have otherwise been in favour of the Act. In my Report I recommended that no person should be qualified to become a member of the Local Board unless rated to the relief of the poor at the sum of 30*l.* annually. Certain of the ratepayers have objected to this qualification, and proposed that 20*l.* should be the sum named. I cannot, however, agree to this proposed alteration, for I consider the amount I originally named not more than sufficient, under ordinary circumstances, to ensure the proper carrying out of the provisions of the Public Health Act.

In conclusion, I beg respectfully to repeat the opinion which I



expressed in my preliminary Report, that much benefit will be conferred upon all, but particularly the poorer classes of Northallerton, by the application of the Act; and I therefore venture to recommend that the Board should take the necessary steps for the issue of the Order in Council to that effect.

I have the honour to remain,

My Lords and Gentlemen,

Your most obedient humble servant,

W. RANGER.

*The General Board of Health,  
Gwydyr House, Whitehall.*