

Dr. Reginald Farrar's report to the Local Government Board on the sanitary circumstances and administration of the borough of Pontefract.

Contributors

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ON
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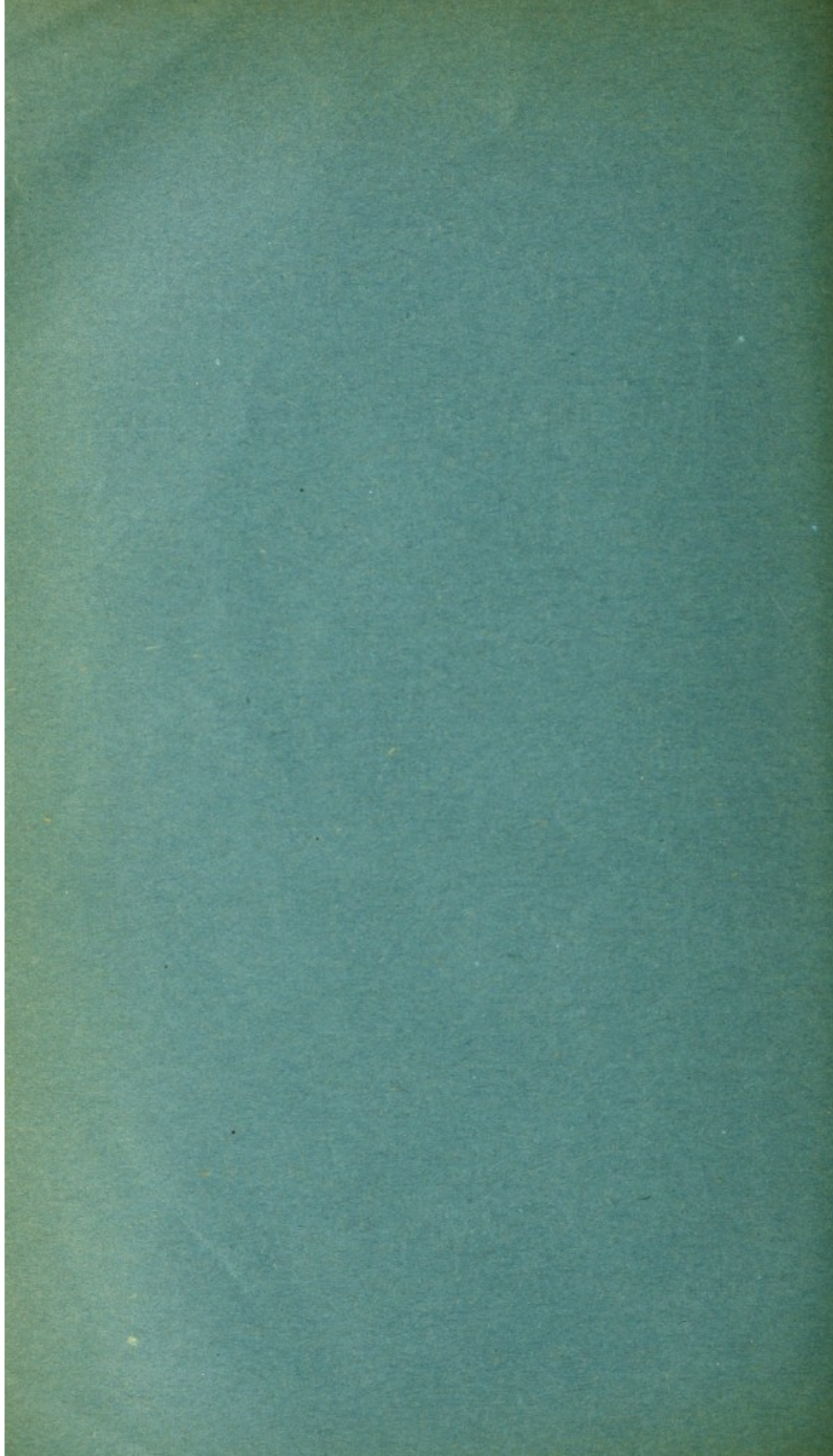
Dr. Reginald Farrar's Report to the Local
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Dr. Reginald Farrar's Report to the Local Government Board on the Sanitary Circumstances and Administration of the Borough of Pontefract.

ARTHUR NEWSHOLME,
Medical Officer,
23rd March, 1910.

In 1907, Mr. Huddart, the Board's assistant inspector in the Medical Department, made inquiry into the sanitary circumstances of the Borough of Pontefract with special reference to the arrangements for the discharge of the duties of inspector of nuisances. In consequence of the conditions revealed in Mr. Huddart's report, it was determined that, when opportunity occurred, further inquiry into the sanitary circumstances of the borough should be made by one of the Board's medical inspectors. I received instructions accordingly, and made my inspection in February, 1909. The sanitary condition of the borough was reported on by the late Mr. Spear in 1886, in connection with the cholera survey of that year. In 1902, a detailed report of the sanitary condition of the Pontefract Union, including the Borough of Pontefract, was submitted by Dr. Kaye, medical officer of health for the county, to the West Riding County Council, and printed by their order.

The Borough of Pontefract is situate in the Union of Pontefract, in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The boundary of the borough has an irregular outline, being contiguous on the west with the Featherstone Urban District, on the extreme east with a portion of the Knottingley Urban District, and on the north and south with portions of the Pontefract Rural District.

The borough is situate mainly within the watershed of the River Aire, but parts of it dip on the west to the River Calder, and on the south to the River Went.

Geologically the borough lies on the magnesian limestone and coal measures; there is an outcrop of sandstone on the west.

The area of the borough is 4,078 acres, the population at the census of 1901 was 13,427, and is estimated by the medical officer of health as having been 16,124* in the middle of 1908. The present rateable value of the borough is £64,159, and its assessable value £47,352. A penny rate for sanitary purposes produces £187.

The borough is ancient, having possessed the privilege of the burgh mote in the reign of Edward the Confessor; the first charter was granted in 1484.

Pontefract has been noted since about 1649 for the cultivation of liquorice, and Pomfret cakes, and other forms of liquorice sweetmeat

* Judging by the number of persons entitled to be on the burgess roll in the middle of 1908—2,308—the town clerk considers the medical officer of health's estimate of population to be excessive, and estimates it at 14,617.

are still manufactured at one large factory and a few smaller factories in the town, though imported liquorice extract is now mostly used for their manufacture. The other principal industries are agriculture, brickmaking, malting and coal-mining, which last has been the chief cause of the rapid growth of the population of the town during the last half-century.

There is also a Brigade Dépôt for about 700 soldiers and officers of the West Riding Regiment.

The following table gives the vital statistics of the Borough of Pontefract as compared with those of the "smaller towns" of England and Wales* dealt with in the Registrar-General's Annual Summaries :—

		Estima- ted Popula- tion.	Birth- rate.	Death- rate.	Diarrhœa Death- rate.	Fever Death- rate.	Infantile Mortality per 1,000 births.
Borough of Pontefract.	1908	16,124	32·3	15·1	1·18	0·25	131
Smaller towns of England and Wales.	1908	—	26·0	14·0	0·52	0·08	124
Borough of Pontefract.	Mean of 7 years, 1902-1908	15,085	31·3	15·4	1·09	0·21	148
Smaller towns of England and Wales.	Mean of 7 years, 1902-1908	—	26·8	14·7	0·57	0·10	134

It will be noted that the vital statistics of Pontefract compare unfavourably on the whole, and particularly in respect of infantile mortality and of the death-rates from diarrhœa and "fever," with those of the "smaller towns." This fact may not improbably be connected with insanitary conditions, and especially with defective methods of excrement and refuse disposal, referred to at a later stage of this report.

The number of inhabited houses in the borough in the middle of 1908 was 2,835, as against 1,765 in 1891, and 2,526 in 1901. The number of persons per inhabited house in 1901 was 5·3; on the present estimates of population, as estimated by the medical officer of health, the figure is 5·7. The population resident in public institutions, the workhouse, barracks, and hospital is about 900 persons: the population is chiefly aggregated in the town but there are several outlying groups of houses, as Grove Town, Lady Balk, and Newtown.

Housing Conditions.—In 1901 the proportion of tenements in the borough with less than five rooms was 43·9 per cent. and with five or more rooms 56·1 per cent.

The following table gives details of the occupancy of tenements with less than five rooms in 1901.

* *Note.*—The "smaller towns" for the years 1904-08 are those having populations at the Census of 1901 of between 20,000 and 50,000, and for 1902 and 1903 of between 25,000 and 50,000.

HOUSES, ROOMS, AND OCCUPANTS, (PONTEFRACT BOROUGH).

Size of Tenement.	Number of Tenements occupied respectively by												Total.	Percentage of total tenements.
	1 person.	2 persons.	3 persons.	4 persons.	5 persons.	6 persons.	7 persons.	8 persons.	9 persons.	10 persons.	11 persons.	12 or more persons.		
1 room	5	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	0.4
2 rooms	41	43	31	31	19	7	5	2	3	—	—	—	182	7.2
3 rooms	7	39	38	33	31	14	15	9	5	1	—	2	194	7.7
4 rooms	21	87	116	138	99	92	76	44	30	22	2	4	731	28.6

I do not think there is at present any very serious amount of overcrowding in the borough, I only came across one instance in the course of my inspection. During the seven years 1903-1909 30 cases of overcrowding have been dealt with by the sanitary authority.

The houses fronting the main streets present a pleasing appearance, but, as the medical officer of health writes in his report for 1901,—“In a town of such antiquity we are confronted by a complexity of alleys and yards which do not conform to any of our modern sanitary ideals.”

Dr. Kaye in his report of 1902, to which I have alluded above, commented severely on much of the working-class housing in the borough. Some of the worst house-property of which Dr. Kaye gives particulars in his report has been repaired or remodelled. For instance, the dilapidated houses in Addingley's Yard have been demolished and replaced by “through” houses with good curtilages and water-closet accommodation: repairs have been effected to houses in Lemon Alley, Crown and Anchor Yard and other insanitary areas: others of the insanitary houses mentioned by Dr. Kaye have been demolished or have fallen into disuse.

There are still, however, many occupied houses in a condition which should properly be held to render them unfit for habitation. These include houses in Swan Yard, Micklegate Yard, Primitive Chapel Yard, and Robinson's Yard in Horse Fair, Leng's Yard, Freeman's Yard, and Newtown. Structural repairs to these houses should be carried out, and some of them, particularly one or two of the Newtown houses, should be closed forthwith until repaired and made habitable.

Some of the older houses, as those of Barton's Buildings, are built back to back: not a few houses are damp from being built with backs partially below ground level.

The majority of the insanitary house property is ancient, but some comparatively modern property, such as Newtown and Grove-town, is badly designed and constructed of inferior material.

Several of the yards on both sides of Horse Fair are wholly derelict, and the houses in them in various stages of ruin. The demand for satisfactory houses being very great, the north side of

Horse Fair particularly affords opportunity for reconstruction of houses on modern lines, and so planned as to afford adequate light and air-space.

But though there is much old and unsatisfactory property remaining in the town, on the other hand, not only have reconstruction and repairs, as indicated above, been carried out in many instances, but a fair number of good working-class houses have been built during recent years. In the Friar's Wood district, Eagle Cottages and the cottages in Southend Terrace and Friar's Wood Terrace may be cited as good examples of this class of house, and in the same district there are some good cottages in course of erection at Church View. The number of new houses erected in the borough since 1902 is 167.

Water Supply.—The water supply of the borough is satisfactory, being derived by pumping from a well at Roall,* about eight miles to the east of Pontefract, in the Bunter beds of the New Red Sandstone. The well is 10 feet in diameter, and 104 feet in depth to the pump suction; at this level are driven headings east and west, in which are four boreholes, two of 300 feet, one of 258 feet, and one of 128 feet. The water, after passing through a sand settling tank, is pumped through a 12-inch iron main to two covered reservoirs built of brick lined with cement concrete at Park Hill. The capacity of the reservoirs is respectively 367,000 and 555,000 gallons, and their top water level is 175 feet above O.D.

The consumption of water in the Borough of Pontefract amounts to a daily average of about 26 gallons per head, in addition to what is supplied by meter for trade purposes.

The water is laid on to the more modern houses, but several of the older courts are still supplied from stand-pipes, which, as Dr. Kaye points out, in many cases discharge over gullies provided for the reception of slops and liquid refuse. Dr. Kaye considers it conceivable that germs liberated from the gullies and from the filth-sodden soil surrounding them may thus gain access to the inside of the taps, and contribute to the occurrence of outbreaks of water-borne disease which have from time to time occurred in the borough.

Sewerage and Sewage Disposal.—The town is properly sewered and the sewage is carried to outfall works at Ferrybridge in the Pontefract Rural District, which were constructed in 1903. Here it is mixed with lime as it passes through baffling channels by which it is led to two settling tanks, having an aggregate capacity of 430,320 gallons, equal to two and a half days' normal dry-weather flow. After leaving the settling tanks it passes through one or other of four bacterial filter beds of crushed clinker and sand, graded and 5 feet in depth. These filters are designed to treat 150 gallons of sewage per square yard daily. Sewage up to three times the normal dry-weather flow is treated in them, storm water

* NOTE.—The Roall well is the property of the Corporation, but supplies also the Knottingley Urban District, the village of Ferrybridge in the Pontefract Rural District, and the villages of Ackworth, Wentbridge, Kirk Smeaton, Little Smeaton, Hessle, and Hill Top in the Hemsworth Rural District, a total population (including Pontefract) of about 20,000, an average of about 634,000 gallons of water daily being pumped from the well.

to the amount of six times the average dry-weather flow being passed through three other beds $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet in depth and designed to treat 500 gallons per square yard daily. Storm water in excess of this amount is passed without treatment into the beck.

The sludge from the settling tanks is conveyed underground to an elevator in which it is lifted by an oil-engine and conducted by shoots to clinker sludge filters. The sludge filters are formed of a layer of screened clinker of an average thickness of 2 feet, with an upper layer of fine ashes 6 inches in thickness, and are under-drained with sanitary pipe drains laid 10 feet apart; the liquid strained from the sludge filters is pumped back into the salmon ladder carrier and again treated along with the crude sewage. A new reservoir for sludge was being constructed at the time of my visit.

The disposal works are close to the high road, but no offence arises from this proximity, and I am informed that not a single complaint was made to the Council in this respect during the whole of 1908. The effluent, which appears to be satisfactory, and which is tested from time to time by the West Riding River Board, is passed into the Wash Beck which flows to the River Ouse, *via* the Goole and Knottingley Canal.

In addition to domestic and municipal drainage the sewage includes the drainage from the Prince of Wales Colliery, one brewery, and one fell-monger's establishment.

Excrement and Refuse Disposal.—Excrement is disposed of chiefly by water-closets, but also to a very considerable extent, especially in the older working-class property, by dry conservancy, in pail or pan-closets and midden-privies. The number of water-closets is increasing, about 100 privies having been converted into water-closets since 1906. The water-closets at the time of my visit formed 72 per cent. of the total sanitary conveniences. In some of the remodelled working-class property, as in Star Yard, trough-closets have been installed.

At Grove Town and in some other parts ash pail-closets are in use. In the Friar Wood district there are 92 midden-privies having a receptacle of moderate size, with the floor 3 inches above the ground level, properly covered in, and so constructed as to secure proper admixture of ashes with the excrement. Privies of this type are unsatisfactory as compared with proper water-closets, but are less objectionable than those with large open receptacles. At Newtown and in many of the older courts are to be found midden-privies with large receptacles, calculated to hold several weeks' or even months' accumulation of refuse, generally uncovered, and often in bad repair. These are often placed in undue proximity to dwellings, and I noticed several, for instance in Leng's Yard and in Paradise Yard, so full of accumulated refuse as to favour the blowing about of their contents into the houses. In such cases the tenants often complained strongly of the stench arising from these objectionable structures. In many the receptacles are not covered, and their floors are below ground level, an arrangement which leads to soakage of organic filth into the soil. During 1907 and 1908 the sanitary authority dealt with more than 30 of such midden-privies, roofing them over, raising the floors to the adjoining ground level, and rendering them in cement. The

type is so bad that it would be better to abolish them altogether, rather than to adopt minor improvements which tend to perpetuate them.

Under Section 111 of the Pontefract Corporation Act, 1906, the Corporation have power to require any existing closet accommodation (other than a water-closet) to be altered so as to be converted into a water-closet, and, as mentioned above, have already availed themselves of this power in a fair number of instances. It is to be regretted that in other instances they have spent money in retaining privies of an unsatisfactory type.

In about 200 cases, since 1906, privy-middens have been replaced by pail-closets or water-closets, and dry ash-pits or galvanised iron dust-bins been provided for ashes and house refuse.

At the time of my visit I was informed that there were in the borough :—

Water-closets	...	...	1,835
Privy-middens	...	...	522
Pail-closets	...	...	192

For the reception of house refuse other than excreta there were :—

Dust-bins	...	...	396
Dry ash-pits	...	...	635

Removal of excrement and house refuse, which had formerly been carried out by contract, was taken over by the Corporation in February, 1908. Three carts are employed for this work during the day, and two during the night when the contents of ash-pits and privy-middens are generally emptied, closet-pails and ash-bins being emptied about once a week in the day-time. The cost of the system is about £15 weekly, equivalent to a rate of about $4\frac{1}{3}d$.

Some of the pail-closet and privy-midden refuse is deposited on tips outside the town, and removed thence by farmers. All the remainder of the refuse is burnt in the Corporation's destructor. The destructor (Meldrum's) was erected in 1907 at a cost of £3,500, on land belonging to the Corporation.

The Corporation have shown considerable activity during recent years, and especially since they have taken the scavenging into their own hands, in reforming the objectionable methods of excrement and refuse disposal that formerly obtained in the borough, but much yet remains to be done before the condition of the town can be regarded as satisfactory in this respect, and in particular the need for progressive reduction of the large and objectionable privy-middens, so many of which still exist in the older parts of the town, should be kept steadily in view.

The time of the inspector of nuisances has been chiefly occupied since the scavenging was taken over by the Corporation, in getting this system into good working order, and making up the arrears of work which had been previously neglected. At the time of my visit in February, 1909, good progress had been made, but a few of the large privy-middens had not yet been emptied of their long accumulated contents.

Common Lodging Houses.—There are five common lodging houses in the borough, having a total accommodation of 173 beds. I visited the three largest of these, and found them clean and well

kept. In one of them (Barber's) water-closets and sanitary bins had recently been installed in substitution for privy-middens.

A new code of by-laws in respect of common lodging houses, repealing former by-laws adopted in 1878, was sanctioned on February 12th, 1909, but had not come into force at the time of my visit. In some instances, beds for married couples were not screened off from one another, as is required by the new by-laws.

Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milkshops.—There are 32 registered cowkeepers, dairymen, and purveyors of milk in the borough. I visited nine of the largest farms and one or two milkshops. The majority of the cowsheds I saw were clean, adequate in respect of cubic accommodation, well paved, light, airy and well ventilated. A few of these have recently been remodelled by the Duchy of Lancaster. I found one cowshed in which the beasts were overcrowded, and in this instance the ceiling was in bad repair and leaky: another cowshed, which was very ill-ventilated, contained nine cows, of which one was ill and emaciated, its appearance suggesting general tuberculosis including udder disease.

On the whole, the condition of dairies, milkshops, and cowsheds in the borough appeared to be good, and I was informed that several of the worst cowsheds, on which Dr Kaye commented unfavourably in 1902, either were no longer in use or had been pulled down and re-constructed since that date.

Slaughter-houses.—There were 15 registered slaughter-houses in the borough at the time of my visit; two of these had, however, been closed, and one was in course of re-building. This latter had a midden privy and a large over-full manure heap in close proximity to it; I recommended that these should be required to be removed. I visited about half-a-dozen other slaughter-houses, and found them cleanly kept and, save that repairs were needed to the flooring or to the pavement of the curtilage in one or two instances, in satisfactory condition.

Under Section 59 of the Pontefract Corporation Act, 1906, the Corporation have acquired powers to establish a public slaughter-house and to secure the disuse of private slaughter-houses upon such terms and conditions as may be arranged between the parties, provision being made for arbitration in cases of dispute. So far they have not availed themselves of their power in this respect.

Provision for dealing with cases of infectious disease.—There is an isolation hospital, opened in 1902, which serves jointly the Borough of Pontefract, the Pontefract Rural District and the Knottingley Urban District, and is the property of a Joint Hospital Board composed of representatives of these districts: it stands at Chequers Field, a well-isolated site 2 acres 7 perches in area, about a mile from the centre of the borough. The hospital buildings, which are enclosed by a brick boundary wall 6 ft. 6 in. high, comprise:—

Administration block, containing 10 bed-rooms, 2 sitting-rooms, kitchen, scullery, and quarters for a married couple acting as porter and portress;

Pavilion block, containing two wards of 12 and 4 beds respectively, and a ward kitchen; a bath-room communicating on one

side with the lobby and on the other with the open air, serves for discharging patients ;

Isolation block, with accommodation for four patients in two wards.

Both the above blocks for patients have verandahs, cross-ventilated lobbies communicating with the lavatories and water-closets, and are ventilated by Tobin's tubes.

Laundry, with hand machines, not steam.

Mortuary, with hot and cold water laid on, concrete floor, glazed-brick walls, and porcelain slab.

Disinfector ("Climax"), with separate "foul" and "clean" entrances. This apparatus is of rectangular shape and is designed to yield a steam-pressure of 60 lbs., but it is leaky and in bad repair, and the boiler is old and of doubtful efficiency. It is intended shortly to establish a steam disinfector on the same site as and in connection with the destructor of which mention has been already made.

Coach-house for ambulance carriage.

The hospital drainage system is connected with the borough sewers, and is flushed by an automatic flushing tank. The hospital buildings are lit by gas, and the wards are in telephonic communication with the administration block and with the residence of the medical officer in Pontefract. The arrangements for warming the wards do not appear to be satisfactory.

The ambulance carriage is horsed by contract and is accompanied by a nurse when patients are conveyed in it. It is disinfected by means of formalin.

Dr. Moxon acts as medical officer to the above hospital at a salary of £85 per annum.

There is a small-pox hospital constructed of wood and corrugated iron at Sherburn, eight miles from the borough. The latter hospital serves, in addition to the districts above named, the Selby Urban and the Selby and Tadcaster Rural Districts, and is the property of the above-mentioned Joint Hospital Board, the Selby Hospital Board, the Tadcaster Rural District Council, and the Garforth Urban District Council.

Sanitary Administration.—*The Medical Officer of Health* for the Borough is Mr. Arthur Hillaby, M.R.C.S., Eng., L.R.C.P., London, who is also engaged in general medical practice. He was appointed to the office in 1895, and receives a salary of £60 per annum, of which half is repaid out of county funds. Mr. Hillaby carries out his duties as medical officer of health in a satisfactory manner and gives excellent advice to the Corporation.

The Inspector of Nuisances is Mr. Albert Jackson, who receives a salary of £100 per annum, half of which is repaid out of county funds. Mr. Jackson was appointed assistant inspector of nuisances and water inspector in 1900, and in 1903 became inspector of nuisances without an assistant, but continued to act as water inspector with a plumber as his assistant in the latter capacity. In September, 1907, the Corporation, in consequence of representations made by the Board, appointed him to devote the whole of his time to his duties as inspector of nuisances at his present salary.

Mr. Jackson holds no certificate in sanitary science, but has studied the subject in text-books and attended a course of lectures at Leeds. He is an energetic officer and is well acquainted with every part of the borough, of which he is a native; but his time was too much taken up prior to September, 1907, with his duties as water inspector, and since that date, as I have already mentioned, with the work of organizing the present scavenging system and dealing with outstanding arrears of refuse collection, to permit of his devoting sufficient time to the proper duties of an inspector of nuisances. The increased powers recently acquired by the Corporation and the improvements in sanitary organization which they have adopted should enable Mr. Jackson to play a useful part in carrying out the reforms which are still needed to render the condition of the borough satisfactory from the standpoint of the public health. He should now undertake a systematic house to house inspection of the whole borough which hitherto, for reasons above stated, he has been unable to carry out.

The *Surveyor* is Mr. Pickard, the duties of whose office comprise the upkeep of 30 miles of road including 6 miles of main road, the general control of the water supply, sewerage and sewage disposal, scavenging and the management of the destructor, and the superintendence of new buildings, all plans of which are submitted to him. Mr. Pickard is an able and energetic officer and appears to have a thorough grasp of all his duties.

The following adoptive Acts are in force in the Borough—

The Infectious Diseases Prevention Act, 1890.

The Public Health Acts Amendment Act, 1890.

The Private Street Works Act, 1892.

Extensive sanitary powers have recently been acquired by the Pontefract Corporation Act, 1906.

During 1908 and 1909 by-laws have been allowed with respect to :—

Nuisances.

New streets and buildings.

Drainage of existing buildings.

Slaughter-houses.

Common lodging-houses.

Preventing the waste, undue consumption, misuse or contamination of water.

Offensive trades.

Regulations under the Dairies, Cowsheds and Milkshops Order, 1885, were adopted in 1902.

It has been shown that Pontefract is an ancient borough encumbered with legacies from generations ignorant of modern sanitary ideals, in the shape of slum areas badly planned, dwellings badly built, and defective methods of excrement and refuse disposal. In these respects the borough has fully earned the strictures pronounced by Mr. Spear in 1886, by Dr. Kaye in 1902, and by its own medical officers of health from time to time.

The Corporation have, however, recently become possessed of powers and equipment which have already borne good fruit and which if rightly used should yield a good harvest of sanitary reform in the near future.

These recent improvements in sanitary organization or equipment may be thus summarized :—

The Pontefract Corporation Act, 1906, gives powers in respect of water-supply, sewerage, drainage, and refuse removal, street planning and building, the control of infectious diseases, the regulation of the milk supply, common lodging-houses, slaughter-houses, &c.

A complete code of up-to-date sanitary by-laws has been adopted during 1908 and 1909.

The removal of excrement and house refuse was taken over by the Corporation staff in February, 1908.

A destructor was installed in 1907.

The inspector of nuisances was appointed to devote his whole time to the duties of that office in September, 1907, but much of his time has been taken up by the superintendence of scavenging, which, save in respect of nuisances arising from defects in the system, is outside the scope of his official duties.

The sewage disposal works have been rendered efficient.

The administration of the Midwives Act, 1902, rests with the West Riding County Council who have not delegated any of their powers in this respect to the Corporation. There are in the borough 10 practising midwives who are systematically visited by the medical officer of the county and his assistant, and generally supervised by the public health department of the county council.

In conclusion I desire to thank Dr. James Kaye, medical officer of health for the West Riding County Council, Mr W. Haddock, the town clerk, Mr. Arthur Hillaby, the medical officer of health, Mr. J. E. Pickard, the surveyor, and Mr. A. B. Jackson, the inspector of nuisances, for assistance and information courteously rendered in the course of my inquiry.

REGINALD FARRAR.

Recommendations.

1. That the Corporation should make continued and increased efforts to replace the privy-middens still existing in the borough by more satisfactory arrangements for excrement disposal and wherever it is practicable by water-closets.
 2. That they should make continued and increased efforts to improve the condition of the unsatisfactory house property which still remains in the borough, should diligently apply their powers under the Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act, 1909, and that all new houses erected should be erected in conformity with the by-laws.
 3. That a public slaughter-house should be provided.
 4. That an efficient disinfecting apparatus should be provided.
 5. The Council should take measures to deal with the excessive infantile mortality. These measures should include the adoption of the Notification of Births Act, 1907, and the making of arrangements proper for the education of mothers and those who have charge of infants.
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