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Mr. John Spear's Report to the Local Government Board on the Sanitary Condition of the Urban Sanitary District of Quickmere.

EDWARD C. SEATON, M.D.,
Medical Department,
September 26, 1879.

THE Urban Sanitary District of Quickmere, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, about three miles from Oldham, stands at the eastern border of the Lancashire coal field. The soil consists of loose shale and marl, beneath which is the sandstone of the coal formation. Site.
Geology.

The area of the district is 523 acres, the Lees Brook, a tributary of the Medlock, forming its boundary on the south and east. Area.

The enumerated population of 1871 was 3,358, and the estimate for the present year is 3,800. The cotton and woollen manufactures are the staple industries. Population.

In receiving instructions as to this inspection I was directed to "inquire into the circumstances under which fever had recently been prevalent at Quickmere, and into the general sanitary condition of that district;" but as regards the first-named subject of inquiry, matters were somewhat complicated by my finding that the Sanitary Authority, backed by the opinion of their Medical Officer of Health, denied the fact of there having been any recent prevalence of fever, and that the official death registers of the district, on the authority of which the assertion of such prevalence had been made, were so defective as to render their information on the subject little trustworthy. Thus it appeared that during the first quarter of the current year no less than 40 per cent. of the deaths were uncertified; and that of the five deaths registered as from fever (three from typhus and two from typhoid), which had particularly attracted the notice of the Board, the three former had been registered under the certificate of a person styling himself a "medical botanist," and were, at least two of them, cases not of typhus but of scarlet fever, whilst one of the cases of typhoid fever occurred beyond the boundary of the district. On the other hand, during the same three months, three deaths registered as from "pneumonia," and one ascribed to "acute gastritis," occurred in families in which fever (probably enteric) at the time prevailed; a discovery which tends to the conclusion that deaths properly attributable to fever probably often escape registration under that head. Object of inquiry.
Prevalence of fever.

The defects of registration referred to do not, however, vitiate the evidence deducible from the *general mortality* of the district, and this evidence it will be seen by reference to the subjoined table is particularly unfavourable to the sanitary reputation of Quickmere. The mortality from all causes, exclusive of deaths in the workhouse, reaches an annual average of 26·7 per 1,000; a death-rate above that of most of our largest and most crowded towns. It is evident, too, from these statistics, making every allowance for defective registration, that some form or other of zymotic disease is almost always prevalent in the district; that this indeed is so—that scarlet fever at short intervals becomes fatally prevalent, that diarrhoea is often most prevalent and fatal in the summer months, that small localized outbreaks of enteric fever are constantly recurring, especially in the outlying villages—is the conclusion at which I arrived from conversations with medical practitioners, and from personal inquiry amongst the general public.

MORTALITY STATISTICS of QUICKMERE for Recent Years.

Date.	Estimated Population.	Total Deaths.	Births.	Deaths under 1.	Death Rate per Annum from all Causes.	Deaths under 1 to Births per 1,000.	Seven principal Zymotic Diseases, Death Rate per 1,000.	Small-pox.	Measles.	Scarlatina.	Diphtheria.	Whooping Cough.	Fever.	Diarrhoea.	Other Zymotics.	Phthisis.	Bronchitis and Pneumonia.	Heart Disease.
1873	3,418	99	—	23	28·7	—	6·4	—	—	1	—	—	—	14	4	13	20	8
1874	3,500	93	—	37	26·2	—	5·5	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	1	14	15	—
1875	3,590	93	—	26	26·0	—	2·8	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	—	9	23	—
1876	3,650	88	154	23	24·1	150	5·7	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	5	4	16	—
1877	3,720	93	144	29	25·0	209	6·2	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	4	10	11	—
1878	3,770	92	137	29	24·3	146	4·2	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	5	15	13	—
1st quarter of 1879	3,800	29	39	5	30·5	105	8·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Annual mean of 6½ years.	3,600	95·4	—	—	26·7	—	5·5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

NOTE.—This return is subject to the addition of such deaths as occurred in the Saddleworth Union Workhouse, amongst persons belonging to Quickmere. The information necessary to distinguish between such deaths and the total number registered in that institution cannot, it is said, be obtained; but an examination of the books leads me to believe that about four deaths annually might be so apportioned. This would raise the death rate to an annual average rate of 27·8 per 1,000.—J. S.

Topography.

SANITARY CIRCUMSTANCES.—The area of the district may be stated roughly to be of triangular form, the ground rising steadily from the apex, from an elevation of 600 feet to an altitude of 1,000 feet above ordnance datum, and as divisible for the purpose of this inquiry into three portions: the township proper, with a population of 1,690, the most closely inhabited and the least elevated portion of the district, consisting of a main street, Springhead, and New Road, with subsidiary streets on either side, at the apex of the triangle; Austerlands, a village on elevated ground at the north-west angle, having a population, together with small hamlets on the Austerlands Road, leading to the village, of 1,226; and Scout Head, a village similarly situated at the north-east angle, with small hamlets scattered in its vicinity, and having a total population of 739.

Arrange-
ment of
buildings.

In the first-named division the population is urban rather than rural in character. The houses are more or less closely aggregated; there are to be found many back-to-back houses, "cul-de-sac" back lanes, and even the close courts of a town are represented. With these disadvantages of a town district, it has not the usual compensatory advantages. Streets and yards and courts are mostly unpaved, very often unchannelled, and owing to this circumstance, and to there being no efficient scavenging arrangements, filth of all descriptions fouls the surface. Of the sewers, with the single exception of the sewer in the New Road, which was constructed five years ago, partly at the expense of the rates and partly by owners of neighbouring property, and which until recently was unventilated, little is known. They consist of loose stone or rubble drains, originally intended to carry storm and surface water from the highways, but with which houses, as they have been built, have been connected. Their construction is such as to freely allow of the percolation of their contents into the surrounding soil; their origin, course, and destination appear to be little more than matters of conjecture, but it is believed they all eventually discharge themselves at one point or another into the Lees Brook which runs at the foot of the township. Into one of such drains the New Road sewer above referred to empties itself.

Paving of
surfaces.

Sewers.

In the villages and hamlets the means of drainage are the same. Old square rubble drains terminate sometimes in a field where the sewage soaks away as best it can into the porous ground, sometimes in the nearest brook; and in addition to the ordinary mischief that ensues, the brook waters, afterwards stored in factory reservoirs for boiler purposes, become there a nuisance. One such reservoir behind the New Road was obviously much polluted by sewage, and was stated to be in hot weather most offensive.

House drains.

The house drains until within the last two years were in direct communication with sewers such as I have described, but at that time the Board, on the representation of their Medical Officer of Health, ordered their disconnexion. This disconnexion has now been very generally carried out—a judicious change, although the manner in which it has mostly been effected (the house drains being made to open *directly* above an *untrapped* gully) is somewhat unfortunate.

Excrement
and refuse
disposal.

There are only some half dozen waterclosets, and about twice as many pail closets in the district. For the remaining houses excrement and house refuse are stored for lengthened periods in privy-middens of the worst description. The midden itself, or ashpit, is usually of vast size; is made of rough and porous material, sunk beneath the surface, uncovered, and often has as many as four privies communicating with it; and one such erection is supposed often to serve for considerable blocks of property. It is usually situated, too, in most improper places, sometimes in enclosed courts, at others opposite, or in closest proximity, to house doors and windows, the result being that the atmosphere of many dwellings is habitually contaminated by their unwholesome effluvia. Such middensteads are still being erected with the sanction of the Authority. Enormous, however, as many of these erections are, they do not appear to be equal to the storage capacity required by the scavenging arrangements. Many I saw with refuse piled to the topmost edge, with excrement reaching the privy seat, and with filth strewn for yards around. I saw in one case the privy midden of one man leaking in a foul stream almost into the dwelling of another; while cases were not infrequent where the refuse had been thrown from the ashpit on to the adjoining ground and left there, while the pit was again filled.

The out-door characteristics, in short, of much of the property of the district may be said to consist of privy middens of the largest and foulest type, standing upon surfaces unpaved and filthy.

An attempt has been made in certain properties to introduce the pail closet, retaining however the large ashpit for ordinary house refuse. The attempt has mostly failed through the latter circumstance, and by reason of neglect in the scavenging operations;

in two properties, however, where a fortnightly scavengage of the excrement pails was pretty regularly provided, a great improvement over the old system was manifest.

The general arrangement of the buildings I have remarked upon. The house accommodation, with a few exceptions, I found of a decent and substantial kind. There appears to be little destitution, and in point of cleanliness the interior of dwellings presented a marked contrast to the state of their exterior surroundings. Nor did I find much overcrowding. What little there was was caused by the smallness of back-to-back houses, and by the fact that down-stair rooms (there is always an up-stair room) were rarely used, owing probably to the coldness of their stone flooring, as sleeping apartments. On the other hand, a most vicious custom of providing houses with windows that will not open is extraordinarily developed. House after house I visited, some of them of quite recent construction, where the windows sometimes at the front, sometimes at the back, and sometimes in both places would not open. There are scores of back-to-back houses, a class of buildings whose ventilation by reason of their construction should always be a matter of special concern, where this defect is found. There is a house at Walker's, containing three large rooms, where the only window surface in the whole house that admits of being opened measures 27 square inches; and there are many others in this and in other neighbourhoods almost equally destitute of this most ordinary means of ventilation. In the hamlet last spoken of (Walkers') there are houses damp and dilapidated, so damp certain of them as to be unfit for habitation. The latter remark applies with added emphasis to the houses at Cook Croft close by. Fever has recently prevailed there, and more than one of the occupiers at the time of my visit were suffering from the effects of the extreme dampness of their dwellings. These houses should be at once closed. Again the same observation may be extended to certain houses at Knowsley, and to others in Whitehead Square, Den Lane. The excessive dampness and want of ventilation of these latter might possibly be remedied by certain structural works; meanwhile they are unfit for human habitation.

House accom-
modation.

It is in the matter of water supply that the great distinction between the district that has been designated in this report as the township proper and the outlying villages must be drawn. The former is supplied from the mains of the Oldham Corporation Waterworks, the supply being on the constant service principle, and on the whole, it is stated, satisfactory. The outlying villages, on the other hand, are situated at an altitude which, it is stated, is too great to admit of the water from the mains reaching them; and they are supplied by the surface drainage of adjacent land. A rubble drain or channel is laid from so-called "surface springs" on higher ground to a point below the hamlet to be supplied, and it there terminates, having run through the village with its leaking privies and loose rubble sewers, in a shallow open catch-pit, usually sunk beneath the level of the ground and roughly paved. Into this the people dip their buckets by hand. There is usually an overflow channel, and should there be, as is usually the case, houses on a lower level, this overflow runs to supply another catch-pit, or as it is locally termed another "well." The rubble channel is open from its origin to its termination to every source of pollution; and it is no uncommon thing for the inhabitants to discontinue for a time the use of particular "wells" from finding that sewage or slop-water is running into them. At the time of my inspection I saw "wells" not only that were liable to such contamination (they were all without exception so liable) but that were actually and admittedly while being used, for the people had no other source of water, polluted from the sources I have named. In saying this I refer to a "well" close to the toll-gate at Austerlands, one at the Pastures, and one at Shelderslaw. It is quite a usual arrangement, too, for privies of the sort I have described to be built within a few yards of the shallow "wells," and on higher ground, and as regards the source of the water, in two or three instances when I had the sites of "springs" pointed out to me, I found on visiting them that foul liquid from adjacent privies was running over the very spot. This I found in the case of the Knowsley well, which gives, it is said, *generally* good water, but the users of which suffered from an outbreak of enteric fever last year, and from one of diphtheria within the last three months.

Water
supply.

The supply of water to these villages is in point of quantity also, as might be expected, most insufficient. Many people have to go habitually quite long distances, as much as a quarter of a mile (going and returning), for their supply; and in the summer, with no means of storage, even these remote sources often fail.

I may briefly refer to the sanitary condition of the hamlet of Claytons, where an excessive mortality has recently been experienced; the more especially as these hamlets are, as regards their sanitary circumstances, a counterpart, so to say, of one another.

The hamlet
of Claytons.

Claytons stands on a bank by the high road, and consists of 12 inhabited houses (half of which are built on the back-to-back plan, and some of which are inadequately ventilated) and possesses 59 inhabitants. During the first quarter of the present year there were registered in this hamlet six deaths, one from enteric fever (certified) and two from pneumonia in one house, one from gastritis (in the house of a relative), one from diphtheria, and one from scarlet fever. At the *highest* part of the bank, immediately above the houses, stands the privy accommodation—a large privy midden re-constructed by order of the Authority some 18 months ago, and at the time of my visit, not only nearly full with the privies in a filthy state, but with a deposit, alongside, of refuse, which had been thrown out at some previous and not very recent time, to the amount of about three tons. Offensive liquid was oozing from this mass of refuse across a filthy and unpaved surface towards the houses. The “well” is situated across the high road on lower ground, and the stone channel which feeds it is said to come from the banks above on which the refuse is deposited, and to run in proximity to the middenstead and to the rubble sewers; there is, moreover, another refuse pit within 14 yards.

PROVISION FOR DEALING WITH THE SPREAD OF INFECTION.—Beyond that afforded by the registrar's returns of deaths, the Sanitary Authority receive no information as to the amount of infectious sickness in their district. The medical practitioners do not afford such information to the Medical Officer of Health, nor does the latter receive returns of pauper sickness; such returns it appears not being supplied even to the guardians. Houses that are found to be infected are on occasions fumigated with sulphurous acid, and chloride of lime is supplied gratuitously by the Authority, but the manner of its use is left far too much to the imperfect and often ridiculous notions of the public. No hospital for the isolation of cases of infectious disease has been provided, nor, so far as I could learn, has such provision ever been contemplated.

SANITARY ADMINISTRATION.—The district of Quickmere was constituted a local government district in 1864. No public works for sanitary purposes, with the exception of the contribution of 200*l.* out of the district rate to the cost of construction of a sewer previously spoken of, have been engaged in, and no private improvement works have been carried out. The Local Board have contracted no debt, and the rate for all purposes has been maintained for some years at 1*s.* in the pound yearly. The rateable value is 9,400*l.*, and the rate above mentioned produces a net average annual sum of 420*l.* Two-thirds of this is expended in the repairs of highways, and the lighting of streets; the remaining third, with the exception of an insignificant sum for disinfectants and payment for death returns, is required for establishment charges, amongst which the salary of the Medical Officer of Health figures at 15*l.*, and that of the officer who acts as collector, surveyor, and inspector of nuisances at 40*l.*, 10*l.* a year being the remuneration attached to each of the two last-mentioned offices. The Board meet monthly, and the Sanitary Committee only when specially convened. The Medical Officer of Health reports as to the mortality, and in general terms as to the sanitary state of the district, quarterly; and it would have been well for the district had certain recommendations contained in these reports been acted upon. The record of the Inspector's action is confined to the nuisance report book; and this has been kept only for the past eight months, and in it only 20 nuisances are reported. Nineteen of these, moreover, are complaints of overflowing ashpits and privies, a mere record of defective scavenging. There is no organised or systematic inspection of the district, and the official intercourse between the Medical Officer of Health and the Inspector of Nuisances is not sufficiently close or frequent (it takes place, I learned, at intervals sometimes of months) to allow a reasonable opportunity to either of those officers for the discharge of their respective duties with efficiency or success. As a result a large number of nuisances of the grossest character exist in the district, and have existed many of them for years, of which the Authority appear to have no adequate information.

But even in the cases brought before them, the action taken is not usually such as is calculated to secure good results. Beyond the facts that house drains have been disconnected from the common sewers, that in a few instances dilapidated privy middens have been re-constructed (a questionable improvement), and that in one case a polluted well was closed, the Authority appear to have been satisfied with the merest temporary abatement of nuisances, and to have taken no steps necessary to prevent recurrence. In one case only have proceedings been taken before justices, which was a case of meat unfit for food, while a large number of nuisances in the district, some of them nuisances of a grave character, have remained unabated for months, even after notices

for their removal have been served, and others, as I have said, have only been temporarily dealt with. The Authority do not provide for the removal of house refuse, that duty being left to owners of property. The latter, when any arrangements at all are made, employ farmers and others for the work, paying from 4s. to 5s. per year per tenement, a charge which as a rate would be equal to about 5d. in the pound on the gross rateable value. It would appear then that the operation, while performed in so deplorable a manner, is only carried out at a cost probably in excess of that for which the Authority could institute and carry out an efficient system of scavenging.

JOHN SPEAR.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. A system of main sewerage for the whole district should, under skilled advice, be provided without unnecessary delay. In doing so regard should be had to the disposal of the sewage at the outfall harmlessly, and for this latter object the question of effecting a combination with one or more of the neighbouring sanitary districts situated on the same drainage area may with advantage be considered.

2. A wholesome water supply should be provided for the villages. If it is found that they cannot be supplied from the waterworks of the Oldham Corporation, skilled advice should be taken as to the best means of obtaining water from a source protected from excremental or sewage contamination, and of conveying it so protected to dwellings; and such works should be pressed on without delay. Polluted supplies should be dealt with under section 70 of the Public Health Act, 1875.

3. The Authority should themselves undertake the removal of excrement and house refuse from premises and the cleansing of privies; and such removal and cleansing should take place at intervals not exceeding one week.

4. The privy middens of the district should be removed as nuisances injurious to health, and unless a watercloset system of excrement removal should be decided upon, some form of privy receptacle should be required which will be adapted to such frequent removal of refuse and cleansing of receptacle, as is spoken of in the preceding paragraph. Whether moveable or fixed these receptacles should be water-tight, above the level of the ground, protected from rain and slop water, no larger than will allow of the accumulation of refuse for one week (say of 8 cubic feet capacity), of smooth and impervious internal surface, and of substantial workmanship.

5. The provisions of section 150 of the Public Health Act should be carried into effect. Yards and courts should be paved, so as to secure their efficient surface drainage. Streets and lanes should be so levelled, paved, and channelled as to admit of their thorough scavenging.

6. Every effort should be made to obtain early information of the appearance in the district of infectious disease; and some provision should be afforded, either by the erection of a building, the renting of a suitable cottage, or by arrangement with a neighbouring Authority having the necessary accommodation, for the immediate isolation of those sufferers from an infectious disease who are without such proper lodging or accommodation as will admit of their being retained at their own homes without danger to others. Provision, likewise, should be made for the proper disinfection of clothing and bedding by the Authority. Where disinfectants are supplied to the public by the Authority the method and object of their use should be fully explained, and often their use personally superintended, by a competent person.

7. It is necessary that the provisions of the Public Health Act relating to the abatement of nuisances should receive the close and more deliberate attention of the Sanitary Authority. Especially should the provisions of the 92nd, 94th, and following sections of the Act be carried into effect. With this object systematic inspections of the district should be made at short intervals by the Inspector of Nuisances, acting under the directions and supervision of the Medical Officer of Health. Nuisances ascertained to exist should be reported in detail, and at intervals not exceeding one month, to the Authority, who should, when satisfied of the existence of a nuisance, take such action as is authorised by the statute for its abatement, and for the prevention of its recurrence. In addition to nuisances which especially require the attention of the Authority of this district and which have already been referred to in these Recommendations, there are nuisances arising from filthy and offensive cow-byres and stables, from defective ventila-

tion of rooms, and from the dampness and dilapidated condition of certain dwellings. Houses so unwholesome from these latter causes as to be unfit for human habitation should be closed until rendered fit for that purpose; and application under the 97th section should be made with this object to the justices.

8. In carrying the foregoing recommendations into effect the Authority will find it desirable to procure a revision of their present code of byelaws, and for this purpose the model byelaws lately issued by the Local Government Board should be consulted. Information that will be of value to the Authority may also be obtained from the Official Report to the Local Government Board on certain means of preventing excrement nuisances in towns and villages, and from the Official Memoranda on Hospital Accommodation, and on the Precautions to be taken against Epidemic Disease.

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