

**Dr. J.R. Hutchinson's report to the Local Government Board on the sanitary circumstances and administration of the Urban District of Oakengates (Shropshire).**

**Contributors**

Hutchinson, J. R.  
Great Britain. Local Government Board.

**Publication/Creation**

London : H.M.S.O., 1912 ([London] : Darling and Son)

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/srxqks88>

**License and attribution**

The copyright of this item has not been evaluated. Please refer to the original publisher/creator of this item for more information. You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use.  
See [rightsstatements.org](https://rightsstatements.org) for more information.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

FOR OFFICIAL USE.

# REPORTS

TO THE

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD

ON

## PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICAL SUBJECTS.

(NEW SERIES No. 70.)

---

Dr. J. R. Hutchinson's Report to the Local  
Government Board on the Sanitary Cir-  
cumstances and Administration of the  
Urban District of Oakengates (Shropshire).

---



LONDON:

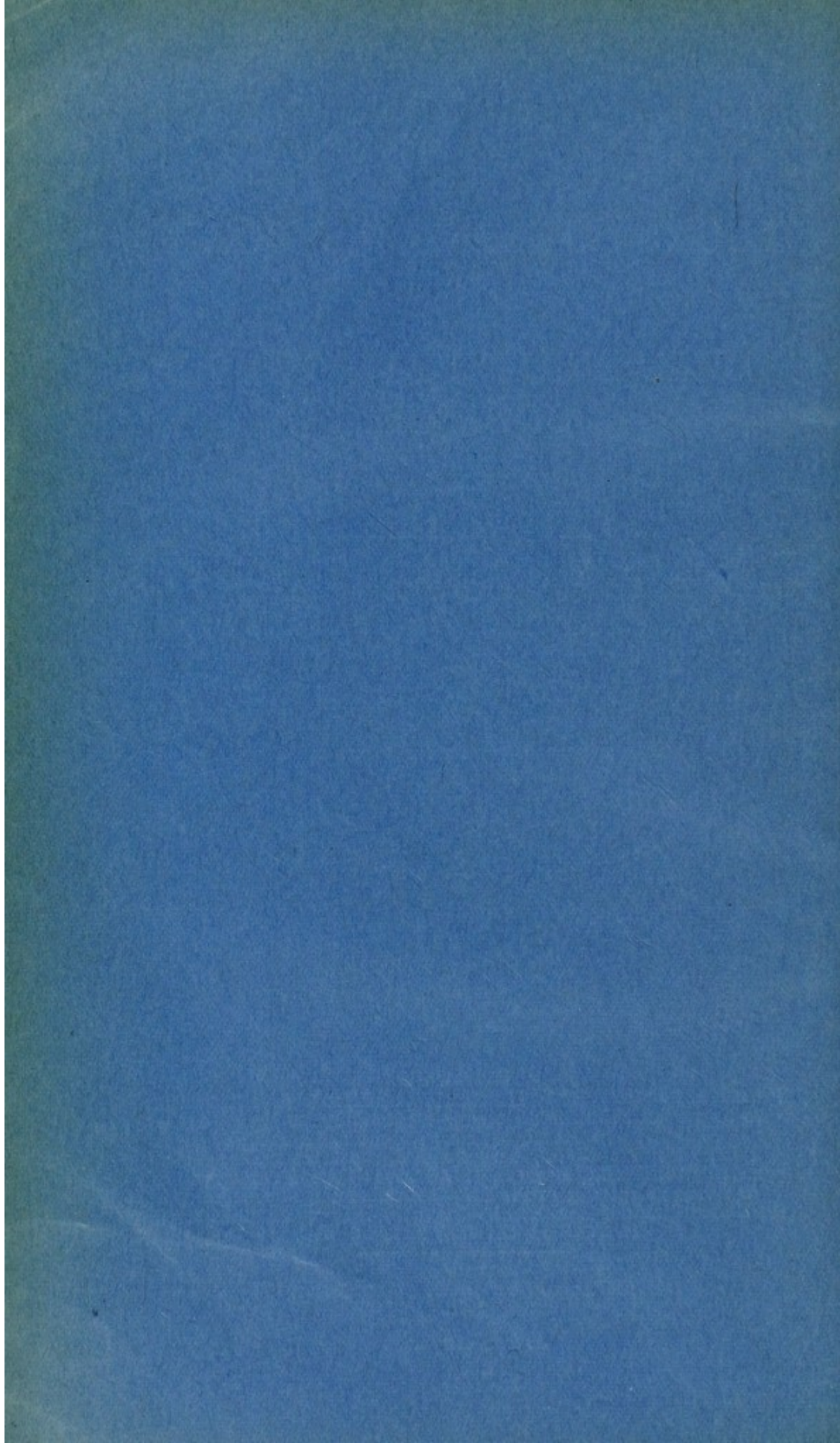
PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

To be purchased, either directly or through any Bookseller, from  
WYMAN AND SONS, LIMITED, FETTER LANE, E.C.; or  
OLIVER AND BOYD, TWEEDDALE COURT, EDINBURGH; or  
E. PONSONBY, LIMITED, 116, GRAFTON STREET, DUBLIN;  
or from the Agencies in the British Colonies and Dependencies,  
the United States of America, the Continent of Europe and Abroad of  
T. FISHER UNWIN, LONDON, W.C.

PRINTED BY  
DARLING AND SON, LTD., BACON STREET, E.  
1912.

*Price Fourpence.*







# Dr. J. R. Hutchinson's Report to the Local Government Board on the Sanitary Circumstances and Administration of the Urban District of Oakengates (Shropshire).

---

ARTHUR NEWSHOLME,  
Medical Officer,  
7th August, 1912.

---

This enquiry was ordered by the Board as a result of certain representations relating to housing and to the home isolation of infectious diseases made by the ex-medical officer of health prior to his relinquishing office in December, 1911.

*Population and Rateable Value of the District.*—The Urban District of Oakengates, formed in 1898 from parts of the Rural Districts of Wellington, Newport and Shifnal in the County of Shropshire, comprises an area of 3,600 acres, and is divided into four parishes, Wombridge, Wrockwardine Wood, St. George's and Priorslee. For municipal purposes the first two parishes constitute the wards so named; the two latter together form the Priorslee Ward.

The population was 10,906 in 1901 and 11,744 in 1911. The number of inhabited houses in these years was, respectively, 2,187 and 2,525.

The bulk of the male adult population is employed by the Lilleshall Company Limited, in coal mining, iron working and allied industries. There is no industrial employment of women.

In 1910, the rateable value of the district was £33,059 12s. 3d., and the assessable £25,144 0s. 3d., the district and poor rates were respectively 3s. 6d. and 1s. 10d. in the £. A penny rate yields £104.

An abatement of 50 per cent. on the district rate is granted on all house property of a rateable value of £8 and under. At the time of enquiry this abatement was operative in respect of 1,868 houses or 74 per cent. of the total number.

There is an outstanding debt on sewerage and water schemes amounting to £23,010 4s. 7d.

*Physical and Geological Characteristics.*—Oakengates is situated on the coal measures; its northern boundary being practically co-terminous with that of the coal area. Beyond this lies the Shropshire plain which consists of the Bunter beds of new red sandstone covered with drift.

The altitude of the district varies considerably and ranges from 200 + O.D. in the north to 550 + O.D. in the south and south-east. The naturally hilly character of the district is exaggerated by huge coal "mounts" in the neighbourhood of old pit shafts. With one exception all the coal pits in the area ceased to be worked many years ago.



In all parts of the district "mine-broken" houses are to be seen, this is particularly noticeable in Snedshill where the Lilleshall Company are at present engaged in mining fire clay.

*Housing of the Working Classes.*—Of the 2,525 houses in the urban district, 662 have more than four rooms, 1,160 have four rooms, 471 have three rooms and 148 are two-roomed. In addition there are 84 "barrack" or one-storied houses, usually of three rooms.

Almost without exception the houses are of brick with "quarry" (tiled) floors; many of them are very old.

All available houses are occupied, including some whose condition might possibly be held to render them unfit for human habitation. These include houses in Mumpton Hill, Stationfields and Church Street, Oakengates. There is too, a much larger number which are unsatisfactory by reason of their dampness, darkness and lack of ventilation. Amongst the main factors contributing to this condition are the absence of damp-proof courses, ceilings, eaves gutters ("trowing" as this is locally called), and of fireplaces, the want of pointing, and the back to earth condition of a not inconsiderable number.

No part of the district appears to be unduly crowded with houses. Off West Street, St. George's, there is a number of cottages which, partly by reason of the obstruction to light caused by an adjacent shop, are open to serious objection. The "barrack" houses are very unsatisfactory; they are commonly damp, dark and inconvenient. A house of this type usually consists of a central living room with a bedroom on either side; the larder may open out of the living room or out of a bedroom. The larders are usually provided with a salting slab for the curing of bacon, and the destructive effects of nitrogenous compounds derived from the "salt" on the brickwork of the wall against which the salting slab is placed was very marked in the older houses. As a rule one bedroom in a "barrack" house is provided with a fireplace, but this is not uncommonly bricked up. The windows are generally inadequate and, as in a very large number of cases the backs of the houses abut on a road or public footpath; and as the height to the eaves is only about seven feet, it is impossible to put proper windows in the rear.

A very common type of house is one of three rooms and a larder; the usual arrangement is two bedrooms (one of which is little more than a landing on to which the stairs open) and under these a fairly large kitchen and larder. The larder is commonly some 18 inches lower than the kitchen and is approached by steps; in practically all cases it is ill-lighted and badly ventilated. Some larders are built out from the living room and are back to earth, many are very damp. Houses of this type are built in rows of eight or more and are approached from behind by an entry in the middle of the row running under a bedroom. The rear wall of such a row presents a plain surface broken at regular intervals in its lower portion by small larder windows, and in the upper storey by quite inadequate bedroom windows at the rate of one for each alternate house.



There are no cellar dwellings, underground rooms or common lodging houses in the district: there are a few back to back houses. There is one block of tenement dwellings constructed out of two old blast furnaces and the intervening engine house; the character of the accommodation furnished by these dwellings, eleven in number, is, in point of lightness and dryness of rooms and of general convenience, superior to that afforded by many of the ordinary dwelling-houses.

The majority of the houses, with the exception of those situated in the more populous parts of Oakengates and fronting a main road, have gardens, many of which are quite extensive, and here fowls, pigs and poultry are kept. As a rule the gardens are situated in front of the houses, the roadway being in some places between the fronts of the houses and the gardens, and in other places in the rear. With the exception of a strip of paving opposite the house doors the roadways or common passages in front of the houses are unpaved.

A brewhouse—which is also the washhouse—is usually situated in the garden at the near end, whilst the closet accommodation is down the garden and well away from the house. A brewhouse usually contains a brick oven and two washing coppers and will do duty for several houses.

Water, if not obtained from a standpipe in the common passage, is usually laid on in the brewhouse; the tap may or may not be placed over a trapped gulley. In a number of instances the brewhouses had been allowed to fall into disrepair.

Reported cases of the overcrowding of persons have been few, and I met with no indication that such overcrowding occurs on a considerable scale. Since 1901, 301 houses have been built and there has been an increase in population of 838 persons. Very few houses have ceased to be inhabited in this period.

In regard to unsatisfactory housing no action was ever taken by the council under the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890, and since the passing of the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909, and the issue of the Board's Housing (Inspection of District) Regulations, their policy seems also to have been one of inaction. This no doubt is to some extent due to the fact that no representations strictly in accordance with the later Act (except so far as they related to four houses off Station Road) have been made to them. A large number of houses were inspected by the late medical officer of health in April, 1911, but his subsequent proceedings as a result of this inspection were not such as to enable any formal action to be taken by the council. There are many houses to which the provisions of Section 15 and probably Section 17 of the Act of 1909 would apply, although, owing to the dearth of house accommodation, changes of tenancy since the passing of the Act, essential to action under the former section, have been comparatively infrequent.

A serious attempt to deal with the housing question requires to be made. For this purpose the co-operation of owners should be invited, as has been done with good results in the adjoining Newport Rural District, where by dint of personal application the medical officer of health has been responsible for many great improvements.



The Lilleshall Company own approximately 900 houses of a rateable value of £8 or less: 600 of these are in the urban district, the remainder in the Newport and Shifnal Rural Districts. So far as I was able to ascertain the houses were occupied by their own employees, apparently on a modified rent free system. The deduction from wages made in lieu of rent, was, in all cases where the information was forthcoming, much less than the rents charged by private owners for similar houses.

The agent of the Lilleshall Company is fully alive to the defects which are to be met with in the houses under his control, and he informed me that it is now the company's policy as the houses fall vacant to overhaul them before they are re-let. Speaking of the Housing and Town Planning Act, he says there have been "no notices to hand from any authority up to the present."

It would appear therefore that although much adverse comment has been made by the ex-medical officer of health on the housing question as it affects this company's property no serious attempt to deal with it has been made. It is reasonable to suppose that had proper detailed reports been made to the council pointing out the structural and sanitary defects to be found in many of the houses, they would not have so neglected their duties in this matter.

*Water Supply.*—The water supply is obtained by an agreement dated 27th December, 1905, from waterworks owned by the Duke of Sutherland. Distributing mains were laid down by the council, who at the time omitted to apply to the Board for the necessary sanction to raise a loan for this purpose, and it was not until November, 1911, about three-and-a-half years after the completion of the work, that sanction was obtained.

The water, which is of excellent quality, is obtained from two wells at Hilton Bank, three miles to the east of Oakengates; the supply is constant. One well is 537 feet deep, and its borehole varies in diameter from 4 feet 6 inches to something under 15 inches; the second, sunk alongside the first, is shallower and communicates with the first by means of an adit at a depth of 217 feet. Both wells pass through the Bunter pebble beds into the Permian sandstone; they are situated in open country and the possibility of local fouling would appear to be negligible. The pumping machinery consists of a well pump capable of delivering 10,500 gallons per hour. This pump, driven by a 35 h.p. gas engine, delivers to a tank beneath the engine house floor. From here the water is driven by a main pump through 5,170 yards of 8-inch cast iron piping to the service reservoir at Redhill (615 + O.D.), whence it gravitates to all parts of the district. The highest point the reservoir is called upon to supply is 575 + O.D. and the lowest 246 + O.D., there is said usually to be no lack of pressure at the extremes of the service, but this was certainly not the case in the summer of 1911.

Sunk into the earth to a depth of 12 feet, the reservoir is constructed entirely of concrete and is completely covered in by means of a galvanized iron roof and sides. Four ventilating



shafts are placed in the roof and four grids at each end; no light is admitted except through these latter.

The capacity of the reservoir is 673,000 gallons or about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  day's supply; when full the depth of water is 16 feet. The surface soil in the neighbourhood of the reservoir is composed of gravel and soft sandstone to a depth of about 40 feet; below this is the sandstone rock.

The Duke of Sutherland has provided the wells, the pumps, the rising main and the reservoir, and they remain his property. The Duke undertakes to supply the council with water for a period of 40 years, from the surplus obtained from his wells, after his own requirements and those of his tenants and the Lilleshall Company have been met, at a cost of sixpence per 1,000 gallons; the council undertaking to pay for a minimum amount of 50,000 gallons daily. Should the supply at any time be insufficient to meet all demands—a contingency regarded as very remote—the Duke and his tenants are in the first place entitled to all the water that can be supplied up to 20,000 gallons per day; the surplus water, if any, is then to be divided between the council and the Lilleshall Company in the proportion which the quantity of water which the council and the Lilleshall Company respectively shall have taken for the preceding six calendar months, shall bear to such water. Pumping goes on continuously from the well into the reservoir, and as there is nothing at the pumping station to indicate when the latter is full, it occasionally overflows. The Lilleshall Company have their own water mains, service pipes, fittings, &c., and supply their own houses and works. From the Redhill reservoir to a point in St. George's district runs an 8-inch cast iron main on which a meter is situated; this main is the conjoint property of the council and the company, but since the water consumption of the latter is approximately two-thirds the total they defrayed two-thirds of the cost of this pipe. At St. George's the conjoint main divides into two and thence forward the council's and the company's supplies are separate. Meters are situated on both these mains just below their point of origin. By agreement, whatever water passes through the meter on the conjoint main and does not pass through that on the Lilleshall Company's main, is paid for by the council.

From the conjoint main 18 houses at Limekiln Bank are supplied. Comparison of the meter readings over a period of seven months indicates that, allowing five persons per house, the water consumption per head per day here reaches to 90 gallons. The corresponding figure for the rest of the district is nine gallons.

In all 1,655 houses are supplied with water by the council and 644 by the Lilleshall Company, and as the latter's houses are scattered throughout the district there is much unnecessary duplication of mains. Both the council and the company charge the same water rate.

Two hundred and twenty six houses are still unsupplied with water and they depend on rainwater and unprotected shallow wells. Some of these houses are in isolated groups in districts not served by the existing system, but in many cases the council's main passes the door.



The majority of the houses are supplied by standpipes situated in the yards or brewhouses; one pipe often serves several houses. There seems to be considerable reluctance on the part of tenants to having water laid on in the houses, and in some houses where this has been done there are no slopstones.

The total weekly water consumption in houses and manufactories served by the public supply is approximately 1,500,000 gallons. It is estimated that nine gallons per head per day are used for domestic purposes.

*Sewerage and Sewage Disposal.*—Under a loan sanctioned by the Board in July, 1903, a comprehensive sewerage scheme was begun and, so far as relates to two-thirds of the district, was completed in 1907.

Prior to this date, the Furnace Lane brook afforded a natural outlet for the sewage of the eastern portion of the district, and into it two brick culverts opened. A culvert in Quabb Lane, Oakengates, served the needs of the western side, and an attempt to treat the sewage of this portion of the district was made by allowing it to flow into three settling tanks constructed in the bed of an old canal on the Lower Wombridge Farm. The effluent from the tanks was permitted to escape into the Wombridge Pool, thence into the Middle, and finally into the Trench Pool from which the Shropshire Iron Works obtains its water for manufacturing purposes and the Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company its canal compensation water.

The Quabb Lane culvert was incorporated in the new sewerage scheme, and now by way of it the bulk of the sewage from Ketley Bank and Oakengates is carried to a point on the Lower Wombridge farm, from which the western main intercepting sewer runs practically due north to the outfall works.

Owing to the arrangement of culverts and storm overflows, sewage has overflowed on to the pastures of the Lower Wombridge farm and claims for damages against the district council have been made and met. Further, in July 1911, an injunction was obtained against the council and £150 damages were awarded to the farmer. At the action certain terms were agreed upon and were made an order of the Court. This order directs *inter alia* that the sewers should be rearranged in such a way as to prevent any further flow of sewage or storm water on to the farm land, and that plans of works for this purpose be presented to the Board within nine months. I understand that it is the intention of the council to prepare a scheme providing for the exclusion of all storm water from the western sewer. At the action in July, 1911, evidence was given to show that the tanks into which the storm water ought to have run were so full of earth, &c., as to be unrecognisable as such, and this obtained also at the time of my visit. The fact that the storm overflows on this sewer come into operation too soon, has frequently been represented to the council in past years, notably by the Board after an enquiry by one of their engineering inspectors in 1907, and by Dr. Wheatley, the county medical officer of health, in a report to the county council in the same year.



The eastern main intercepting sewer runs from the St. George's district in close proximity to the Furnace Lane brook, and roughly parallel to the western. At a point about half a mile above the outfall it is joined by a sewer which serves the Stafford Road.

Both the eastern and western sewers are 15 inches in diameter, and are of stoneware socket and spigot pipes with cement joints. The sewers contributory to the eastern are said to be too shallow in places to serve all the houses along their course, and as a result the sewage from some 24 houses in Church, New, and Duke Streets, St. George's, still continues to pollute the Furnace Lane brook.

The sewers are laid throughout with self-cleansing velocities, and are ventilated at frequent intervals by means of perforated man-hole covers and by shafts; man holes are placed at all changes of direction. I understand that they are regularly inspected during the summer months and the sewers flushed by means of a watering-cart if necessary.

As the sewerage scheme at present exists it provides for a population of 7,000 persons scattered over approximately two-thirds of the entire district. It is the intention of the council to complete the system by sewerage the Snedshill and Racecourse districts, as soon as the necessary funds are available.

At the outfall works a screen and detritus chamber and two septic tanks are provided for each outfall sewer. The capacity of the tanks is, on the eastern sewer 42,187 and on the western 78,156 gallons. The sewage is entirely domestic and 65 acres of land are available for the treatment of tank effluent, but only about one-third of this is used. The land appears to be suitable for the purpose, it is not subject to floods and the level of the subsoil water is low. The effluent from the western tanks has been treated on the same land ever since the works were completed. The need for equal distribution of the sewage over the land was represented to the council by the Board in 1908, but no action has been taken. Apparently this cannot be done without considerable alteration of the existing arrangements, as the tanks do not appear to occupy such a position of vantage as will permit of the sewage being carried to all parts of the farm by gravitation.

The portions of land under treatment are under-drained at a depth of 4 to 6 feet; no figures are available to show the quantity of sewage treated. The effluent finds its way into the Strine brook, into which the Furnace Lane brook also runs, the Strine joins the river Tern, which is a tributary of the Severn. No public water supply is drawn from the Strine or the Tern. At the time of my visit the effluent could not be described as well purified. Its unsatisfactory character has been reported upon by Dr. Wheatley, who also clearly indicates the remedy when he says (June, 1910), "More of the land should be brought under irrigation, better means should be provided for distributing the sewage, and the portion of land under treatment should be changed more frequently."

*House Drainage.*—The number of houses connected to the sewers is not known, although it is said that all house drains are submitted to the smoke test before they are covered in. The only



reliable figures available are those relating to the Lilleshall Company's houses, 252 of which are connected up, whilst 413 are said to be "awaiting the new sewer."

Kitchen sinks, except in the better houses, are not commonly met with, probably owing to the fact that taps in houses are also uncommon; such drains as there are take only the surface water and slop water which is discharged from the brew houses and poured down the gullies or (as is not uncommon) thrown into the roadway.

I am informed that in old drains tapering, unsocketed, unglazed, earthenware pipes are met with, in others socketed pipes with clay or open joints are found; open drains are still common.

Unpaved or partially paved common passages in front of houses are the rule; they may or may not be drained. Some have an open channel and into it slop water is thrown from the house doors; others are drained and have old iron lip traps and flat gullies. The worn, uneven surface of the road, in many instances renders the gullies useless so far as surface washings are concerned.

Absence of eaves gutters is a very common defect in the district, and in times of rain the common passages, being unpaved and frequently undrained, become cut up and little better than quagmires.

*Excrement Disposal and Removal.*—There are in the district 180 closets on the water-carriage system and these are connected to the sewers where such are available; elsewhere they run into cesspools, which are emptied from time to time by the council. Of the other 1,564 closets, 1,252 are pit privies and 312 pail privies. The council make themselves responsible for the emptying of the pits and pails. To this end there is an understanding by which an occupier notifies the inspector of nuisances when his privy-pit is full; systematic emptying at stated periods is considered impossible as the size of the pits and the number of houses per privy vary considerably.

Six men, with horses and carts, are engaged in this work from 6 p.m. to midnight; in the early hours of the morning they remove house refuse. The emptying of four to six privy-pits represents an average night's work, pail-closets are emptied at least once a week. It is difficult to see, therefore, how the privy-pits can be emptied more frequently than, on the average, once a year.

As a rule the privies are situated in gardens well away from the houses. Access to them for the purpose of emptying is frequently difficult, and it is not uncommon for the contents to have to be conveyed considerable distances in buckets. In the more recent pit-privies care is taken, by lining the pits with 9-inch brickwork set in cement, to prevent filth absorption, and well-fitting lipped cast-iron covers are provided; the bulk of them, however, are old and very unsatisfactory. Moreover, the construction of pit-privies is contrary to the council's byelaws, which require the filth receptacle to be above the level of the surrounding ground.



In pail closets the receptacles are provided by the owner, and he is responsible for keeping them in repair. In many cases there is no riser to the closets and the pail is in full view when the door is opened, whilst in some cases an ordinary bucket does duty for a pail. The standard of cleanliness in closets in which there was no riser was greatly superior to that observed in closets where the pail was concealed. In the Granville Buildings the distance from the back door of the house to the pail-closet door is approximately four feet.

The emptying of these receptacles is done *in situ*, their contents are simply tipped into a cart and the pail then replaced beneath the seat.

The excrement is finally deposited on one of four tips rented for the purpose, and conveniently situated in different parts of the district so as to economise in time and expense; they are well away from dwelling-houses, and complaints of them are infrequent.

Fifty-eight conversions of pit-privies to water-closets have been carried out since water was available for the purpose. Some of these were done voluntarily, others as a result of the council's action under the nuisance sections of the Public Health Act, 1875. There appears to be no reason why this work should not be accelerated. No action has been taken by the council in the matter under the Public Health Acts (Amendment) Act, 1907.

*Refuse Disposal and Removal.*—The collection and disposal of house refuse is undertaken by the council. In new property the provision of galvanized-iron bins for the storage of dry refuse is advocated, and their use is on the increase in the case of old houses also.

In the majority of cases however, large, open, common ash-pits are met with even in property built within the last few years. This would appear to be in contravention of the byelaws which require these structures to be covered in. In many places boxes, barrels and other receptacles are in use; not infrequently no provision at all is made and the refuse is thrown down in the yard or garden. There are a few privy middens in which ashes and excreta are placed in a common receptacle.

An attempt is made to collect house refuse in a systematic manner, but its efficiency is open to question. Many of the ash-pits at the time of my visit had apparently not been emptied for a very long time. The final disposal of the collected refuse is by tipping in some convenient place sufficiently far away from dwelling-houses as to create no nuisance. The provision of a refuse destructor has been advocated, but so long as tips which give rise to no serious nuisance can be used and their use is regulated by the council's officers, the provision of a costly destructor does not seem to be a pressing need in this district.

*Milk Supply.*—Regulations made under the Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milkshops Order came into force in 1899, and under them certain improvements have been effected.

There are 22 cowsheds on the register; there are no milk shops. In the cowsheds I visited a somewhat low standard of cleanliness was observed, and the floors of the byres were badly paved and drained.



One of the farms visited had a very inadequate water supply which failed altogether last summer. The farmer had pressed the council to supply water from the town's mains, but this has not been done.

No veterinary inspection of the cattle has been made either for the district council or for any outside authority. Recently the inspector of nuisances has been instructed to prepare a report on the condition of the cowsheds in the district.

*Slaughter-houses.*—There are 14 slaughter-houses in the district; they are generally satisfactory and conform with the provisions of the byelaws adopted by the council in 1900. They are visited by the inspector of nuisances whenever he happens to be in their vicinity.

On Saturday afternoons and evenings a market is held in the main street of Oakengates, and here large quantities of meat are retailed; much of this is frozen or chilled. In October, 1906, the late medical officer of health represented to the Board that diseased meat was disposed of in the market by outside butchers, who brought in carcasses "dressed, stripped and cut-up in small sections," and he asked if the council had power to make byelaws which would have the effect of controlling this practice. The Board replied that beyond the existing powers as to the seizure of meat they were not aware of any enactment which would assist the council in dealing with the matter.

Except in the market no routine meat inspection appears to be carried out, and it would in any case be difficult owing to the irregular times of slaughtering.

The inspector depends on reports from butchers for his knowledge of suspicious carcasses; only one such case has been reported in the last five years. I am informed that no seizures of meat exposed for sale in the market have ever been made.

*Bakehouses.*—The bakehouses on the register number 18, all of which are above ground. Little exception can be taken to the inside condition of most of them but this does not apply to their surroundings, which in many cases are very dirty. At some premises water-closets have recently been installed for the bakers, but for the most part the accommodation is that provided by pit-privies. More attention ought to be paid to the provision of hand-washing accommodation and the storage and removal of house refuse at these establishments.

The administration of the Sale of Food and Drugs Act is in the hands of the Shropshire County Council, and is not supplemented as regards the adulteration of milk or other foods by the district council.

#### SANITARY ADMINISTRATION.

Oakengates is governed by a council of 13 members: the whole council sits as a health committee and holds monthly meetings. The late medical officer of health, who, prior to his appointment in September, 1906, was a member of this body, attended the committee meetings regularly until March, 1911, when he disposed of his practice and went to live at Wolverhampton, 16 miles away; he relinquished office at the end of December,



1911. The last nine months of his tenure of office appears to have been a period of comparative inactivity; for a portion of the time he was out of the country.

No written reports, with the exception of the annual ones, were ever presented to the committee by the late medical officer of health. Speaking generally, the work of this officer appears to have been left considerably in arrear, and much new work must be inaugurated by his successor if the various duties of the office, as laid down in the Board's order, are to be efficiently performed.

About the time of my inspection the district council appointed Dr. A. E. White, of Wellington. Dr. White is not engaged in private practice, but is medical officer of health of the Borough of Ludlow, Wellington Urban and the Shifnal, Ludlow, Burford, Cleobury Mortimer, Rock, and Tenbury Rural Districts.

The inspector of nuisances, Mr. William Marston, holds the certificate of the Royal Sanitary Institute and is a capable and energetic officer with a good knowledge of the district and of the people. He did very good work in connection with a scarlet fever outbreak in the autumn of 1911. Mr. Marston's books and records are well kept, he appears to need assistance with clerical work, which would enable him to give more time to his outdoor duties.

The surveyor, Mr. Victor Wilson, is scavenging superintendent and manager of the sewage farm; he has been in office about five years.

Both these officers attend the committee meetings, and are accustomed to receive verbal instructions from the committee during the course of the proceedings. On a few occasions copies of the committee's resolutions have been forwarded by the clerk to the surveyor, but this is quite exceptional.

There is sufficient work in this district to engage the attention of a separate health committee, and any instruction they might require to give to their officers should ordinarily be in the form of a resolution, a copy of which should be delivered to the particular officer concerned.

Regulations under the Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milk Shops Order were made and approved in 1899. Byelaws with respect to slaughter-houses and new streets and buildings were adopted in 1900 and 1901 respectively. As already mentioned there is evidence to show that compliance with the byelaws has not been universally secured; a matter requiring the attention of the council and their surveyor.

Regulations for the supply of water were made in 1907.

The following Acts are in force:—The Public Health Acts (Amendment) Acts, 1890 and 1907 (Part II., III., portions of Part IV. and Part V.), and the Private Street Works Act of 1892.

#### INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

No provision has been made for the adequate isolation of cases of the common infectious diseases occurring in the district. The need for hospital provision has on more than one occasion been brought to the notice of the council by the Board, and was also represented to them by the late medical officer of health. There



is a considerable body of evidence to show that personal contact was the chief factor in the spread of an outbreak of scarlet fever in the autumn of 1911 and that the home isolation of the patients was inadequate. In one instance one primary and one subsequent case occurred in a "barrack" house with a kitchen and two bedrooms; the bedrooms were without fireplaces and there were in the house in addition to the patients, two adults and five other children. In a second instance one primary and two subsequent cases occurred in a three-roomed house in which were three adults and six other children; there was no fireplace in the only bedroom and the patients were therefore nursed in the sitting room opening out of the kitchen. Three cases occurred in a two-roomed house, the mother sleeping with each of the sick children in turn as he fell ill. In this instance the father worked during the night, in the daytime he slept in an infected room.

It has hitherto been the practice for each case of infectious disease as it is notified to be visited by the inspector of nuisances who makes certain enquiries which are subsequently submitted to the medical officer of health and then filed. At the inspector's visit verbal and printed instructions are given to the head of the household and a leaflet explaining the law as to infectious diseases is also left. From time to time infected houses are re-visited to see if isolation is being maintained.

At the end of the isolation period the inspector disinfects the infected rooms, clothing, bedding, &c., with a formalin hand spray; about one ounce of formalin is used for an average room and its contents. After disinfection the householder is advised to boil the bed linen, &c., and when this has been done the owner of the house is served with a notice to strip and re-paper the disinfected rooms. No other provision whatever is made for disinfection. An analysis of the returns of houses invaded by scarlet fever and diphtheria in the five years ending December 31st, 1910, shows that more than one case occurred in no fewer than 30 per cent. of the total.

One of the complaints made to the Board by the late medical officer of health on his resignation was that "bad housing accommodation and the impossibility of proper isolation" were responsible for the repeated occurrence of secondary cases of infectious disease: this allegation appears to have substantial proof.

In reply to an enquiry by the Board in June, 1910, the clerk to the council wrote "nothing further has been done but it is not anticipated, in case of an epidemic, that there will be any difficulty in obtaining the use of a neighbouring hospital."

There are only four hospitals for scarlet fever and diphtheria in the county, viz., at Market Drayton, Bridgnorth, Newport and Shrewsbury. That at Newport, 5½ miles away, is the only one which can be considered "neighbouring"; the others are all more than double this distance away. Of the Newport Hospital Dr. Wheatley in his report to the Shropshire County Council on the "Isolation hospital accommodation and the need for further provision" (Sept. 30th, 1911), says it "cannot be considered suitable in its present condition," and he goes on to formulate a



scheme for the whole county which ignores this hospital altogether. It is difficult to see, therefore, what the district council had in mind in June, 1910. The scheme drawn up by Dr. Wheatley suggests a combination under the Isolation Hospitals Acts and provides for a hospital in the vicinity of Oakengates to serve the needs of the Newport Urban and Rural Districts, the Wellington Urban and Rural Districts, Oakengates, Dawley, Shifnal and a portion of the Borough of Wenlock. The total population of these districts is 64,504 and an analysis of the figures for the last 10 years shows an average scarlet fever incidence over the whole area of 203 cases per annum. As an alternative to procedure under the Isolation Hospitals Acts, the districts might be formed into a united district for the purpose of providing a hospital, under the provisions of Section 279 of the Public Health Act, 1875.

The grouping of the area (two others are suggested for the portion of the country as yet unprovided for) appears practical and convenient for all the districts concerned, and it is manifest that only by some such scheme can the present defective arrangements for controlling infectious diseases in the Oakengates Urban District, be put an end to.

Free provision of antitoxin for the treatment of diphtheria is made; bacteriological examinations for purposes of diagnosis are made by the County Health Department. Notified cases of pulmonary tuberculosis have, I understand, been visited by the medical officer of health and personally instructed by him in the necessary precautions to be observed.

Credit is due to the district council for the provision within 13 years of a good water supply and of a sewerage scheme. As a sequence of this the abolition of the conservancy system of excrement disposal should follow.

Better provision is required for the disposal of house refuse, and greater cleanliness in the neighbourhood of dwelling-houses should be enforced. The whole question of housing requires attention and sustained action, and better provision for the isolation of patients suffering from the common infectious diseases and for the disinfection of infected houses should be made.

In conclusion, I desire to acknowledge my indebtedness to the county medical officer of health and the officials of the district council for the assistance rendered to me in the course of my inquiry.

J. R. HUTCHINSON.

---







