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ALNWICK
URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

REPORT
OF THE
MEDICAL OFFICER

FOR THE YEAR ENDING
DECEMBER 31st, 1895.

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ALNWICK, 15th January 1896.

TO THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE URBAN
DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Gentlemen,

You will probably remember that at the close of 1894 I was able to announce as part of that year's experience a very gratifying reduction of the death rate, which, when added to others in the years immediately preceding it, might be construed into evidence of a substantial and steadily advancing improvement in the sanitary condition of the district.

That view of the situation had, with apparent correctness, much in its favour at the time; but we are now forcibly reminded that we are still unable to deal effectually with certain forms of disease and contingencies whose irregular visits and developments may at any time disturb our calculations of the ordinary mortality.

I may mention moreover (yet as a matter of no great practical value) that, although there was still much room for improvement in the death rate, and we cannot always for our guidance accurately determine when it has reached a limit below which any attempt to reduce it in the immediate future must necessarily fail, yet, a numerical progress that amounts annually and without interruption to the average attainment of the four years terminating in 1894, is on the high road to its early extinction, which, however desirable, is manifestly beyond what we can hope for under existing circumstances and by the means employed.

But while it is much to be regretted that the loss of life in 1895 sums up so heavily to our disadvantage, and is at first sight far from encouraging, it admits partly, we must allow, of a qualifying explanation which may be briefly stated as follows:—

Four principal and not very controllable causes, whose consecutive operations were continuous over the former half of the year, and from whose more remote effects recovery is scarcely yet complete, may be chiefly credited in the following order with what, in the meantime, we may call this temporary return to a higher rate.

Weather which for nine weeks or more had little else to characterize it than frost and snow, with a temperature often below zero, could be helpful or agreeable only to those who, in at least moderately favourable circumstances, were youthful or vigorous enough to surmount its hardships, and resist its hurtful accompaniments.

But for many who endured with difficulty these earlier trials, others were in store; and after influenza, as a sequel to its tedious illness, had exerted a depressing effect upon the older ones, measles and whooping-cough turned their weapons upon the young, and their frequently combined attacks upon delicate children and others of very tender age, derived help from being directed against a weak position.

Among the other causes which, in smaller proportions or a less noticeable way, contributed to our misfortune, may be included the growing necessity or disposition felt by persons

in less than robust health, to shut themselves up for months in unventilated rooms; an increased dampness of dwellings due to a protracted melting of snow, more especially over unprotected ground in courts and lanes not easily accessible; to a greater prevalence of moisture in the atmosphere, and to a more frequent flooding of cellars and underground kitchens from which permanent relief seems only possible after the new works of drainage have been brought into proper order for its accomplishment.

The following details of our experience supply some further information—

During the past year there have been registered within the District of this Council 195 deaths, of which 96 were males, and 99 were females. 23 of them occurred at the Workhouse, and 2 at the Infirmary, which is an increase of 13 over those of the previous year. 60 were under 5 years of age, and of these 33 were infants who died within the first year of life, 60 attained the age of 65, and of those who exceeded it, 24 at the time of death were above 70, and 23 above 80. By comparing the ages and causes of death in the last two years, a rough estimate may be obtained of the points in which they differ. The increase in 1895 to be accounted for is 87. It can be made up as respects age by 34 additional deaths under 5 years, 30 between that age and 65 years, and 23 at the ages above it. And as respects disease, the chief increase has been in deaths from measles, whooping-cough, affections of the respiratory organs (including phthisis,) and what are classified under the column assigned to other diseases. There have also been 4 more deaths from injuries. The death rate per 1000 of the population, according as we include those at the public institutions or leave them out of the calculation, is 29·14 in the one case, and 25·40 in the other.

The births during the year have been 214, of which 111 were males and 103 were females. The number is 12 above that of 1894, making the birth rate per 1000 of the population, 31·98.

Notice must next be taken of the year's sanitary work as contemplated or accomplished. I have nothing to report respecting an increased storage of water,

which had been acknowledged to be necessary in the drier seasons of former years; but it has been occasionally noticed at meetings of the Board by the Water Committee, in whose hands it remains. Though no drought has been experienced, numerous fires in the town have shown the inconvenience of a scanty allowance, if the demand for it suddenly increased; but the recent purchase of a new fire engine, and a reorganization of the fire brigade, seem to be token a desire to allow no want of foresight or adequate effort to impair the efficiency of either, consistently with the plentiful reserve of water required at all times by the town for ordinary use.

Some attempts have been made, though but little accomplished, towards improving the recreation ground. Physical exercise, if moderately indulged in, is undoubtedly conducive to health, and need not seriously divert attention from more profitable employment or duties of prior obligation; and to this extent should be encouraged.

More success has attended the efforts made to provide suitable places of rest for the weak and weary, whose wanderings in the open air must otherwise be confined within too restricted limits. For this purpose seats have been fixed at convenient distances from the town, points of ground selected to please and benefit those who are to use them.

But especially are good results to be expected from the attention which is springing up with regard to the relief of the congested parts of the town. A recent inspection of them has resulted in the discovery that there is still a large number of the population residing in single rooms, unsuitable and disproportioned to the requirements of their respective families. Much useful work has been done by the Inspector, whose account of it I append. Infants and little children suffering from such diseases as have this year been prevalent, will, with few exceptions, be treated at home, where unfavourable conditions of life by the accumulation of infectious poison impede or prevent recovery and endanger the health of others. You will readily perceive that the course on which you have entered derives support from these considerations.

Perhaps the largest piece of work of a structural character accomplished during the year has been an addition to the slaughterhouse accommodation of three new houses including one for scalding—making in all eight for killing purposes, and two for the subsequent cleansing.

The question of a more adequate and less faulty system of sewerage for the town, raised many years ago, and never since lost sight of, had, we thought, when I addressed you on a similar occasion, been discussed in all its bearings by the Board and in the local papers up to the full measure of advantage, and was on the point of settlement, but it continued to be a subject of interest and discussion throughout the year. My instructions direct me to limit this report to the proceedings and occurrences of the year recently concluded; but a tender has since been accepted for an immediate execution of the larger section of the work as previously sanctioned by the Local Government Board. The congratulations this evoked followed so closely on the dawning of the New Year that they mingled pleasantly with some of its earliest greetings, and perhaps a reference to a matter so important should not be omitted. I have no reliable information that workmen in search of employment will, with this intention, visit Alnwick in numbers sufficiently large to be any serious inconvenience to the town, in providing for their accommodation; but it may be well to bear in mind that a Common Lodging House, which would be an improvement on those at present in use, and provide for emergencies, might in this connection, be appropriately considered.

Without attempting to remove all the disappointment naturally felt at so large an increase of a death rate whose improvement during several successive years had steadily and even surprisingly advanced, I may say that the rare combination of untoward and somewhat exceptional causes which led to it, and the very tender ages of the children whom they so calamitously affected, may, I think, be fairly allowed to moderate what appears gloomy in the situation. But if we admit this and moreover that there are elements in it which make us hopeful that this departure may not extend very perceptibly into other years, it is only right to

add that there is still a practical side of the question which merits attention. Infectious disease, often implicating the respiratory organs, such as in many instances proved fatal during the past year, was necessarily treated at the houses of the very young children, who doubtless received from their parents and others to whom the care of them was entrusted, all the kindly consideration which was possible under the circumstances. But when the illness assumes a character of more than ordinary severity, a wise regulation of the temperature and ventilation of the sick room becomes eminently useful, or, as some would say, indispensable to the safety of its progress. Must not, in short, a favourable issue become a matter of increasing difficulty in proportion as the choice lies between a poisoned atmosphere and an exposure equally unsuitable to the patient's requirements?

These remarks are made by way of contributing out of the year's experience some little explanation of the advantage derivable from improved accommodation in those overpopulated parts of the town where disease of this kind is more apt to obtain a full and fatal development.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

GEO. F. EASTON, M.D.,

Medical Officer of Health.

Report of Inspector of Nuisances.

URBAN COUNCIL OFFICE,

GREEN BAT, ALNWICK,

15th *January* 1896.

TO THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

SIR,

I beg to submit a summary of work done in the way of Sanitation during the year 1895.

Number of Notices issued both formal and informal for the abatement of Nuisances, 188.

Total number of Nuisances abated, 279.

Number remaining on the books in progress and under notice, 9.

No. of Water Closets repaired	..	..	..	62
„ „ cleansed from obstruction	..			25
„ increased Water Closet accommodation	..			1
„ Drains requiring opening and cleansing from obstruction	..	..	..	33
„ Drains requiring repairs, relaying, or otherwise improved	..	..	..	35
„ Drains not efficiently trapped	..	..	..	17
„ Back yards cemented out, repaired, or improved				14
„ Premises new spouted, repaired, or cleansed out				36
„ Cases where Animals were improperly kept	..			4
„ Cases of overcrowding abated	..	..	..	5
„ Rooms closed unfit for human habitation	..			2

No. of Rooms disinfected after cases of infectious disease	15
„ Miscellaneous Nuisances arising from various causes	27

In addition to the above a large number of drains have been smoke tested, and urgent nuisances such as filthy and obstructed water closets and obstructed drains, &c, have been abated by the Council's own men.

DAIRIES, COWSHEDS, and MILKSHOPS ORDER, 1885.

The number of persons registered as Cowkeepers and Purveyors of Milk is 42, the regulations have been fairly well carried out during the year.

FACTORY and WORKSHOPS ACT, 1891.

There are 34 workshops or workrooms at present on the list, most of them have been inspected during the year.

COMMON LODGING HOUSES.

These, three in number, giving accommodation for 32 lodgers, have been frequently inspected and the regulations fairly well carried out.

PUBLIC BAKEHOUSES.

These, nine in number, have been periodically inspected and found clean and in good condition.

MAGISTERIAL PROCEEDINGS.

Proceedings were taken in 6 cases, for a breach of the Council's Bye-Laws, in not removing snow from opposite their premises, four were fined one shilling each and costs, and two cases were dismissed.

DANIEL WATERS,

Inspector of Nuisances.



