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Alnwick Urban District

Annual Report

of the

Medical Officer of Health.

- - 1909. - -



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ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

For the Year 1909.

TO THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE ALNWICK
URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

GENTLEMEN,

VITAL STATISTICS.

In an annual report, statistics are a necessity. When preparing these I divide the area into two main parts, town and country, the former as usual embracing all the sewered portion of the district.

TABLE A.

	Town	C'ntry	Total	Rate per 1000		
				Town	C'ntry	Total
Estimated Population.	6300	500	6800			
Births	171	14	185	27·1	7	27·2
Deaths— all causes ...	118	6	124	18·7	12	18·2
„ Zymotic Disease	3		3	·47		·47
„ Phthisis	14		14	2·2		2·2
„ Under one year ...	14		14	2·2		2·2

Infectious Notifications, 42.

(Rate per 1000, 6·1).

TABLE B.

A detailed list of the deaths enumerated above is given.

Measles	3	Senility,... ..	13
Diphtheria, ..	1	Premature Birth,...	3
Enteritis, ..	1	Childbirth,	1
Gastritis,	2	Heart Disease, ...	13
Phthisis,	14	Accidents,	3
Other tubercular		Suicides,	1
Diseases,	9	Alimentary Diseases	8
Cancer,	7	Nervous ,,	18
Bronchitis,	5	Urinary, ,,	6
Pneumonia	2	Uncertified	4
Alcoholism,	5	All other causes, ...	5

While the birth rate for the year is with one exception the largest for the last decade, the death rate is practically an average of that for a similar period.

The births include 84 males and 101 females.

I am glad to say the infant mortality is the lowest since 1899, viz. 14, which corresponds to a rate of 75.67 per 1000 births registered. This is a striking contrast to the last ten year's average, which is 22.6, a rate of 129.14, and amply bears out the statements which I have advanced in former years while dealing with this part of my subject.

I attribute the low death rate to the weather conditions which prevailed during the summer months. The common house fly was hardly in evidence; dust was much reduced in quantity; food stuffs, especially among that class whose facilities for the hygienic storing of victuals are practically non-existent, were liable in a less degree to contamination.

As a consequence Diarrhœa was practically unknown.

On the other hand we must congratulate ourselves on the fact, that although the climatic conditions have been to all intents and purposes favourable to the development of Bronchial Diseases, we have only had one fatal case of Pneumonia under the age of one year. It must not be forgotten, too, that we had to contend with a widespread epidemic of Measles in the early part of the year. Now Measles renders the patient specially susceptible to inflammation of the lungs.

This outbreak will be more fully discussed under the heading of Infectious Diseases.

Deaths over one year of age numbered 110. Almost 40 per cent of these were over 65 years, and the patients succumbed for the most part to those ailments to which persons of an advanced age are liable.

When we bring into review the deaths as a whole, it is worthy of notice that the fatal cases of respiratory diseases total 7.

In dealing with the infantile mortality, I mentioned the absence of genial summer weather, and for this reason the small number of 7 deaths is all the more remarkable.

Last year our district gained the unenviable distinction of having the highest death rate for Phthisis in the County. This year, I regret to say, it bids fair to uphold its record in this respect.

The deaths attributable to this cause are 14, as against 15 last year. The question naturally arises "Why should Alnwick head the list in this respect?"

On going over the Registrar's returns, I find the conditions under which quite half of these people lived were inimical to the development of such a disease.

If a reason must be given, I think it may be found on the one hand in some hereditary tendency, accelerated possibly by inter-marriage; and on the other, by what appears to be the innate repugnance on the part of certain classes to opening doors and windows, and so depriving themselves of such fresh air as these simple means of ventilation afford.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

The number of notifications is this year greater than it has been for ten years at least. We have had 20 cases of Diphtheria, 21 of Scarlet Fever and 1 of Typhoid—an aggregate of 42.

Scarlatina and Diphtheria have been met with consistently throughout the year, until the month of December, when 11 cases of the latter were reported.

The Scarlet Fever has been of a very mild type, which produced little tendency to infection. This causes one to ask whether any of the cases may not have been connected with that mysterious so called "Fourth Disease" whose existence is still a matter of discussion among medical men.

Although the cases of Diphtheria have occurred mostly in children, adults have not escaped. I cannot find any direct cause, either in contact at school, in sanitary conditions, or in milk supply; but, as I mentioned last year, I am forced to the conclusion that there are certain "carriers" who, unknowingly, spread the disease.

By that, I mean that many mild, yet infectious cases, pass unrecognised.

Can there be any relationship between the two diseases? Can this modified form of Scarlet Fever and the mild Diphtheria have any clinical connection?

It is well that the cases of Scarlatina have shown so little tendency to general infection, as during the month of November our hospital was closed by the unfortunate occurrence of double infection on the part of two of the inmates. After being admitted for Diphtheria they developed symptoms of Scarlet Fever, thereby necessitating their isolation in one ward, while the ordinary Diphtheria patients occupied the other.

This closed the hospital for all practical purposes to any other cases. Owing to this state of affairs, all the Scarlet Fever patients had to be isolated at home, and I am glad to embrace the opportunity of complimenting and thanking the parents for their care in so doing, as in only two instances could I trace the spread of the disease to direct contact.

Do these two instances help to drive home my theory as to the connection of the two diseases? Is it Scarlatina with a tendency to Diphtheria, or is it Diphtheria with a tendency to Scarlet Fever?

For the first time since 1899, Enteric Fever has occurred. This was directly traceable to drains which were found defective and remedied as speedily as possible.

As I have already stated, we had an epidemic of Measles, and we have been fortunate in recording only 3 fatal cases as the result.

It was at its height in the month of February, when a special meeting of the Council was called to consider the advisability of closing the schools. I pointed out that such a course just then would have little or no effect in arresting its progress, and consequently no steps were taken.

Before leaving this part of my report, I would mention that Gas has been laid into the Isolation Hospital and a slow combustion stove, suitably protected by fire guards, has been put in each ward. 13 patients in all have received treatment.

WATER SUPPLY.

The average rainfall for the district, measured in inches, is roughly 30. This year it has been 34, an excess of 10 over 1908, although the number of days on which rain fell was practically the same as for the year immediately preceding, viz. 182 against 184. It is unnecessary to mention that 1909 was cold and cheerless, and remarkable for the absence of sunshine.

As you can easily imagine the extra 10 inches mentioned above have materially augmented our supply. Only 1,000,000 gallons of water have been pumped from Rugley Culvert Springs which contrasts very favourably with the quantity necessary to be raised for some years past.

Explorations, boring and well sinking in the neighbourhood of Old Rugley have been carried on by the Castle authorities, supplemented by syphon tests on the part of the Urban District Council, but all to no purpose.

The several schemes of Mr. Fowler, of Manchester, whose report was presented to you early in the year, have had to be abandoned, either on account of the terms being too exacting, or the estimated and contingent costs being prohibitive.

These schemes were briefly:—

- (1) Gravitation from the catchment area of Newton Burn.
- (2) (a)—Gravitation from the Senna Wells.
(b)—Pumping by two alternative routes from the same source.

I understand that your Committee is now considering the Town Surveyor's scheme of:—

- (1) New Filter Beds.
- (2) New Service Reservoir for 3 days supply of filtered water.
- (3) An Open Storage Reservoir for the catchment area near the Red Road on Alnwick Moor.

It is evidently generally agreed that the various places already considered, although offering a pure supply of water, are unpracticable. Therefore another source of supply must be sought for. This I think is in sight. The proposals put forward by your Surveyor offer, under the circumstances, what I consider to be a supply of water suitable for the needs of the town, if negotiations can be successfully carried out.

SEWERAGE.

What I hope will make for considerable improvement has been carried out at the Sewerage Works this year.

All the filter beds have been cleared of willows and an improved system of under-drainage installed. In consequence, the effluent from the tanks is now percolating instead of overflowing, and the filter beds themselves have or are given a chance of recovery after use. The system has hardly had sufficient time to establish itself, and I trust it will be my privilege to speak of its efficiency in a subsequent report.

As regards the Canongate Sewerage the alternative suggestions of Mr. Murphy have been rejected.

A competition was held and adjudicated upon by Mr. J. C. Mellis as assessor, who gave his award to Messrs Spinks, Pilling and Rodwell of Leeds, whose estimate for carrying out the alterations was roughly £1,600. These, I am informed, will be carried out during the ensuing summer.

The whole question of Urinals and Public Conveniences is having the attention of the Sanitary Committee.

I hope that their deliberations will shortly bear fruit, and that the opposite sex will not be overlooked.

DAIRIES, ETC.

Under this heading I include Lodging, Slaughter and Bake Houses. These have from time to time been inspected during the year and found satisfactory.

In view of prospective legislation regarding Dairies, certain alterations have for the present been left in abeyance.

The practice of depositing, adjacent to the Slaughter Houses, manure awaiting removal to the Allotments, has been commented on by me in a previous report, and I quite agree with certain members of the Council that this nuisance should be abated.

TOWN IMPROVEMENT.

Correspondence has passed between the Local Government Board and the Urban District Council respecting the above, deferring action until the new houses in Lisburn Street have been completed and occupied.

These consist of 8 double flats—16 dwellings, and ought to be ready in May, 1910.

The next question which the Council will in all probability have to face will be that of dealing with area No. 2.

To those who know the inner workings of the Local Government Board and an Urban District Council, it is a fact that no authority in a place like Alnwick can erect houses of a type suitable for the needs of the working classes.

The powers that be will not sanction a loan to a public body for such buildings, as they insist on plans for houses which are beyond the means of the occupiers we have in view.

The whole crux of the matter lies in the fact that the speculative builder cannot obtain land at a price which will enable him to erect dwellings at a moderate rental.

Is it too much to hope, that in the near future some solution of the difficulty will be found?

In this way, and in this way only, can I combat the general state of the slum property, and condemn those houses which otherwise would have been condemned long ago.

To be candid, if some remedy is not speedily found, it will be my duty to close certain properties which I have had under consideration for some time, and whose structural defects are too glaring to allow them to remain occupied any longer.

I have before pointed out, that, if these houses are pronounced unfit for habitation, it means either turning the people into the street, or causing overcrowding in a district where that evil does not at present exist.

As a possible solution of the difficulty, would it be wise to condemn them and give the tenants notice to quit at the end of a certain time to be fixed by the Sanitary Committee? This will, at any rate, give them an opportunity of seeking "fresh fields and pastures new."

The Housing and Town Planning Act etc., 1909, has come into force. Its object is "to provide for the making of Town Planning Schemes and to amend the law relating to the Housing of the Working Classes".

I do not know enough about the measure at present to give an opinion as to whether its adoption by the Council will be beneficial to the town of Alnwick.

REQUIREMENTS.

As far as these go, they are practically the same as those I enumerated in former years—

- (a) The water supply is now receiving active attention.
- (b) The housing of the purely working classes is for reasons stated above at a standstill.
- (c) A disinfecting apparatus would be a boon.
- (d) A public mortuary in which the disinfecting apparatus might possibly find a home is in my opinion necessary.

At the risk of repeating myself, I again bring this forward. If my reasons were cogent five years ago, they are no less sound at the present time.

Many minor improvements have been effected during the year, and it is noteworthy in Mr. Miburn's report to observe that a certain class of the people are gradually becoming alive to the advantage of healthier and cleaner surroundings.

It is only by constant supervision and reiteration that such folk can be made to grasp the first principles of sanitation.

I cannot close this annual report without saying how much I appreciate the help that is always so willingly given by the several officials, and the courteous treatment I ever receive from the members of the board.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,

your obedient servant,

R. B. ROBSON.

M.B. (Dur.), M.R.C.S. (Eng).

REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR OF NUISANCES.

COUNCIL OFFICES, GREEN BATT, ALNWICK,

JANUARY 27TH, 1910.

TO THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

SIR,

I beg briefly to report to you on the work done in the Sanitary Department during the past year.

The part of my work as an Inspector of Nuisances which calls for closest attention is the periodic inspection of tenemented properties, as it is here where persons are most careless of their surroundings, and in the case of some of these people, the simplest rules of sanitation are either unlearned or the effort to put them into practice is beyond their easy going habits.

While we still have in our midst those who demand constant attention to keep them up to a standard which does not outrage the feelings of their more particular neighbours. I can at the end of another year say that the occupiers of this class of property in the town are generally more wishful to live up to a higher standard, as evidence of which there is less persuasion necessary now to get the needful cleansing done in the yards and conveniences used by them.

Where improvements have been required in the structure or apparatus of the outside conveniences at these properties I have endeavoured to get owners to substitute appliances of the best and simplest form, and in all cases I believe the improvement is appreciated by the users, and more care is taken to keep them in working order.

SANITARY STRUCTURAL IMPROVEMENTS.

At other properties in the town where the sanitary arrangements are more complicated, and when defective more liable to give rise to ill-health, a considerable amount of improvement has been carried out.

This is a feature of the work in the Sanitary Department to which I have referred in former reports to you ; this year's work is equal to any previous year, either in number of new drain installations carried out, or in the many improvements which always follow the overhaul of out of date systems of drainage.

When any complaint is received which would place suspicion on the drains not being right, the application of test, an interview with or letter to parties responsible for conditions, is usually followed by carrying out of the needful work.

DAIRIES AND COWSHEDS.

These have been inspected from time to time, and on the whole have been found in good order, some of the older structures could be greatly improved if provided with impervious floors and better lighting arrangements.

COMMON LODGING HOUSES.

The common lodging houses have been inspected periodically during the year, and although a certain number of the persons frequenting those places have not been such as would bring much good to the town, the keepers have maintained the houses under their charge in fairly good order.

JOSEPH MILLBURN,

Assoc. Royal San. Inst.,

Inspector of Nuisances.



