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Alnwick Urban District.

Annual Report

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health.

1912.

1900-1901

1900-1901

1900-1901

Alnwick Urban District Council.

Medical Officer's Annual Report.

1912.

GENTLEMEN,

On looking over the reports of the last few years, I am pleased to note that many of my suggestions to the Council have assumed practical shape, and none of them gives me greater satisfaction than that which has led to the near approach of the completion of the Water Scheme.

I have previously briefly described the general physical features of the town and neighbourhood, and, to my mind, no useful purpose will be served by enlarging upon them now.

It is not too much to say that everybody is suffering more or less from the absence of heat and sunshine during the past summer.

Our rainfall for the year was 36.82 inches, with 219 days on which rain was measured, as compared with 30.35 inches for 1911, and 183 wet days.

This is an increase of nearly 7 inches on our average annual fall.

In the months of June, July, and August alone, more than half of this fall was recorded.

In the early part of the year, however, it was found necessary to pump $1\frac{1}{2}$ million gallons of water to augment the regular town supply.

VITAL STATISTICS.

During the year under review we have had 165 births and 105 deaths registered.

The births include 87 males and 78 females, which show a decrease of 4 on 1911.

The birth rate is 23.5 as against 24.1 for the previous year.

The death rate is 15 per 1000.

The number of deaths of non-residents registered in the district is 11, thus reducing the number 105 to 94. We must, however, add to the latter number, 10 deaths of residents which have occurred out of the district, giving a corrected total of 104 deaths of persons belonging to the Urban area. This reduces our annual death rate to 14.8.

In the foregoing I take the population of the district, as last year, at 7,000.

TABLE A.

Estimated Population	7000	Rate per thousand.
Births—Males 87, Females 78	165	23.5
Deaths—all causes	105	15
„ Phthisis	2	.28
„ Respiratory Diseases	7	1
„ *Zymotic	6	.85
Infectious Notifications	11	1.57

*Excluding one death returned as Enteritis, the Zymotic rate is reduced to .71.

TABLE B.

Detailed List of Deaths.

Measles	3	Other Respiratory Diseases	1
Whooping Cough	2	Diarrhoea and Enteritis	1
Phthisis Pulmonalis	2	Appendicitis	1
Tuberculous Meningitis	3	Cirrhosis of Liver	1
Other Tuberculous Diseases	2	Nephritis	1
Cancer	13	Accidents of Parturition	1
Heart Disease	10	Congenital Debility, etc.8
Bronchitis	4	Violent Deaths	6
Pneumonia	2	Suicide	1

Other defined diseases, 39.

In commenting on the above Tables, let us first consider the deaths due to Zymotic disease.

These are more numerous than in the past 3 years, and the contributory causes are Whooping Cough in the spring, which was responsible for 2 deaths, and Measles, which broke out in July and became epidemic.

There was in the beginning of September still a number of cases, and I suggested that the schools which at the time were in vacation should remain closed for an extra week when the outbreak had to a great extent died down.

Soon after the reopening, there was a recrudescence which developed so that it again became a question as to whether the schools should not be closed for a further period.

Happily, however, the trouble took a more favourable turn, and, although cases kept cropping up till the middle of December, a further closure was unnecessary.

The complication to be feared after Measles is Pneumonia, and this is not fully appreciated, at any rate, by the working classes. "The bairn has only got the measles; it is hardy worth while getting the doctor." As a consequence, the child, if it has ever been confined to bed, is allowed to get up and to go out, before the risk of taking pneumonia has passed.

Considering the inclemency of the weather, while and after the epidemic was at its height, it is a matter for congratulation that more deaths from Pneumonia following Measles have not been recorded.

To be candid, I anxiously perused the monthly returns of the registrar during the period, and was agreeably surprised to find so few deaths attributed to this cause.

As for the sixth death which is classed under the heading of Diarrhœa and Enteritis, and to be included in Zymotic Disease, we may discount it, as it took place in the month of February, and was not due in any way to epidemic Diarrhœa.

Of cases of this sort we have had none during the year.

There have been 12 cases of Pulmonary Tuberculosis notified, and two deaths. This is in striking contrast to our returns for several years, and, while it is not to be expected that such a favourable condition of affairs will be regularly maintained, let us hope that the present crusade against Consumption will show material results in the near future.

Cancer, however, is responsible for no fewer than 13 deaths, a larger number than we have had for some time.

The infant mortality rate shows a slight increase, being 17, as against 16 in 1911, but still compares very favourably with other parts of the county.

We have had 11 cases of notifiable infectious disease, excluding Measles and Whooping Cough.

They were: Diphtheria 7, Erysipelas 2, Scarlet Fever 2. Of these, 5 cases of Diphtheria and 1 of Scarlet Fever were removed to hospital. Wherever it has been practicable, in all these cases, the premises have been disinfected.

In the latter part of June a widespread outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease occurred in the county, but luckily our own Urban District escaped.

A case of Glanders was reported on September 12th in one of the stables in the town.

It may be well to point out the liability of the human subject to contract this disease and that special precautions, which in this instance were effective, are necessary.

A case of Anthrax occurred on Alnwick Moor within the Urban district. As in the Glanders case, it did not extend to the human subject. On the first of February this year the Public Health (Tuberculosis) regulations, 1912, came into force. This entails another register of notifications, four different forms which are to be separately entered, and an additional weekly return. The Medical Officer has also to send in quarterly the amounts due to the various practitioners for notifications received. As you can see, this entails a great deal of extra clerical work. It would appear that in a very short time the present part time Medical Officer will be a thing of the past, and that whole time men will have to be appointed. Pen and ink will replace the stethoscope and scalpel, and the office the consulting room. You may take my opinion for what it is worth, but I am convinced that the only practical way to deal with Tuberculosis in the human subject is for the Government to turn its attention to Tuberculosis in the cow.

DAIRIES AND COWSHEDS.

My previous remarks anent structural defects in several of the Dairies and Cowsheds still stand.

I do not think it advisable to press for alterations in view of possible legislation on the question, but it would, of course, be a great deal better if all the Cowsheds were on model lines.

On the other hand, two new Cowsheds have been erected according to the latest requirements. More of the milk supply for the town is now being obtained from the rural district, and, as far as we can judge, this will increase from year to year.

COMMON LODGING HOUSES.

The two common lodging houses have been under constant supervision, and, although their standard has not been up to that of previous years, probably owing to change of managers, yet nothing has taken place to call for special comment.

SLAUGHTER HOUSES.

The structural arrangements of the eight slaughter houses are satisfactory. They have been often visited, and we have had no cause for complaint against any of the tenants since our last report.

PUBLIC MORTUARY.

A most suitable site has at length been found for this on the Board premises. The present tool house with certain alterations, which can be carried out at a moderate cost, will make as good a mortuary as will ever be required for a town such as Alnwick is.

PUBLIC CONVENIENCES.

The Sanitary Committee have, I am informed, decided on a central position for an underground lavatory in front of the Fish Market, and are at present considering plans for the same. The urinal near the station is to be improved.

SEWERAGE AND DRAINAGE.

The sludge drying bed at the main works has been enlarged to facilitate more speedy removal and utilisation of the sludge manure.

The whole of this system has been maintained in excellent order, and no complaints have been received with regard to the effluent.

The pumping station in Staig's Garden, for the Canongate portion of the sewerage has been working satisfactorily since the middle of February. A run of clear water from the disused old Militia Hospital and also the surface water from the Dairy have been diverted into a separate drain.

AREA NO. 2.

In the early part of 1912, the Local Government Board held an enquiry regarding Area No. 2, as to the extent of the property which was to be demolished, &c. I remarked last year that this question was then by way of being settled, but I believe I am right in stating that only very recently has our Council received a definite order on the point at issue.

MINOR IMPROVEMENTS.

The middens are, as time goes on, being reduced in size, the floors cemented and drained, and, as far as possible, they are being removed from the near vicinity of human dwellings.

Certain street works have been executed in Hotspur Place, Correction House Lane, and a good long stretch in Bondgate Within. Several public footpaths have been laid with tarred whinstone paving, and others are receiving attention.

Fifteen new houses have been built and occupied, and three have been closed as unfit for habitation, two in Angel Inn Yard, and one in Cal's Yard.

Only two new houses are at present in course of erection.

Under this heading, I might refer to Mr. Milburn's report, which is appended.

From this it will be seen that a great number of minor improvements have been effected, all of which have been carried out without resource to compulsory measures.

I understand that new bye laws bearing on street construction and new buildings are under consideration.

HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING.

With regard to the Housing (Inspection of District) Regulations, 1910, the Inspector of Nuisances and I have made several visits to various premises in the town. The result has been the closing of three houses as unfit for habitation. An inspection of the South portion of the town has been made, and everything was found satisfactory and in good order. This work will be continued during the year. Personally, I approach the matter with fear and trembling. The loans for several large schemes, which the Town has been obliged to undertake in the last few years, will not be paid off yet awhile. Added to this there is the permanent burden on the rates due to pumping the Canongate sewage, and the additional town water.

Existing and prospective burdens will prevent any large scheme of demolition for some time to come. In the meantime we must be content to deal only with the very worst cases that are brought up.

It must be admitted that the Act is framed on lines calculated to be of great benefit as time goes on. "Festina lente" is, however, a motto that must not be forgotten by those who sit in high places. It would, no doubt, be good if we could, at one fell swoop, relieve Alnwick of all that was not ideal in it, but the fact remains that the town cannot stand any wholesale demolition scheme, at any rate, for some considerable time. We must cut the coat according to the cloth.

I am happy to say that, as in former years, I have had the hearty co-operation of the members of the Council and of all the officials connected therewith.

When the Medical Officer can reckon on the appreciation of his efforts and the belief in his honesty of purpose, it makes for added interest in the carrying out of his duties.

I remain, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

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

Medical Officer of Health.

COUNCIL OFFICES,

GREEN BAT,

ALNWICK,

February 18th, 1913.

TO THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

SIR,

I beg to submit to you the following particulars respecting my work as an Inspector of Nuisances during last year, as entered in my "Journal." The number of inspections recorded are 449; of these 69 refer more particularly to inspections of dwelling houses as distinct from the systematic inspection of premises.

Arising out of these inspections, 238 notices were given for the abatement of various nuisances found to be existing. Only 6 of these notices were Statutory, and were served in connection with the Closing Orders in respect of 3 dwellings, which were found to be unfit for habitation.

As a result of these notices and of suggestions made to owners of properties, the following improvements have been carried out:—19 drainage systems have been improved, in several cases by a complete overhaul being carried out; additional w.c. accommodation has been provided in 5 cases, 43 w.c.'s have been repaired, pedestal basins have been substituted in place of 11 defective and insanitary hopper basins, improved flushing cisterns have been fixed in 12 closets, 32 obstructed drains have been cleared of matters which were a hindrance to the efficient working of same, 9 drains lacking ventilation have been ventilated, and 4 which were directly connected to sewers have been disconnected by traps. Miscellaneous nuisances to the number of 170, have been abated, consisting of clearing obstructed gullies, cleansing of w.c.'s and insanitary conditions in tenemented yards, removal of manure from stables and cow-byres; and other matters.

Yours respectfully,

JOSEPH MILBURN,

Inspector of Nuisances.

