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Contributors

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Annual Report

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health

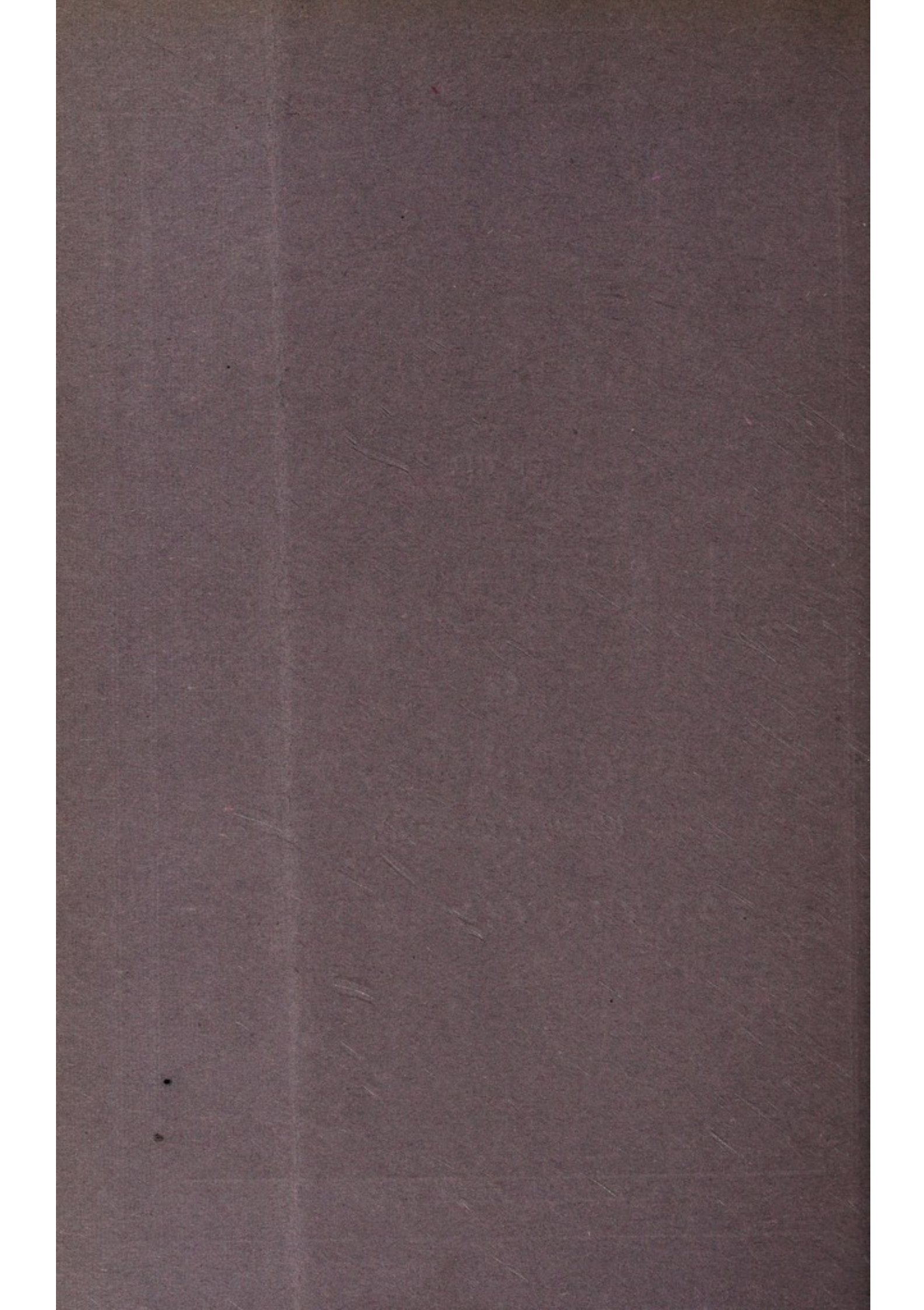
OF

COLEFORD,

(County of Gloucester),

FOR THE YEAR 1914.

A. T. Bright, Printer, Coleford.



Medical Officer's Report.

Coleford Urban District consists of the Town of Coleford, together with the surrounding Districts of the Scowles, Berry Hill, Milkwall, Whitecliff, and portions of the Lane End. All these, with the exception of Whitecliff, stand on ground elevated above that occupied by the Town, which lies in the centre. The highest point in the District is Berry Hill, the height above sea level being 751 feet, while Whitecliff, the lowest point, is 375 feet above sea level. The Town lies between these points, at an altitude of 558 feet above sea level.

The area of the District is 2,235 acres, and, according to the Census of 1911, the population was 2,604, inhabiting 566 separate dwellings. Estimated to the middle of 1914 the population is 2,624. This number is divided between the different Districts, approximately as follows:—The Scowles, 256; Lane End, 574; Berry Hill, 247; Poolway, 50; Whitecliff, 133; Coleford itself, 1,172; and Milkwall, 192.

The District is divided into two almost equal parts by the outcrop of the coal measures of the Dean Forest coalfield. This outcrop runs roughly in a North and South direction across the District, the eastern half of the District lying on the coal measures and having a clay soil, while the western half lies above the iron ore and limestone measures.

The natural drainage of the District is towards three small valleys, which radiate from the Town, one running almost due east, the second north-east, and the third north-west. The streams which flow from these valleys unite in the Town and form the brook, which leaves the District in Whitecliff and eventually finds its way into the Wye.

The industries which give occupation to the inhabitants of the District are, in order of importance, coal mining, quarrying, iron mining, and agriculture. There are printing works in the Town. No trades specially injurious to health are carried on.

WATER SUPPLY.

Coleford itself is supplied at present from a stream which, issuing from the coal measures, is passed through a sand bed, and is then collected in a receiver. From this it is passed by gravity to the lower levels of the Town. The head of the stream is so low that nowhere in Coleford itself does the water rise appreciably above the ground floor of any of the houses. Besides this, during dry seasons the supply is quite inadequate for the needs of the inhabitants. The augmentation of the water supply to Coleford is therefore a very serious question. Sufficient water has been found at the Mill Pond pit, from which the Council has been endeavouring to secure a further supply. Unfortunately, the two analyses taken are very discouraging, the water being condemned as unfit for drinking purposes, on both occasions. It is true that when the first sample was taken the pit had only partially been steened and cleaned out, but, unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the last occasion, when the pit had been cleaned out to a distance of 50 yards, far below where the stream comes in. It was resolved, however, by the Council, to write to the Local Government Board for a further extension of time, so as to determine if the solids and other deleterious constituents would clear off. I fear, however, that this result will not ensue because the deposit in the pit occurred many years ago, and ever since that time the stream has been washing this deposit. It therefore appears most probable that the deleterious matters are in the stream itself. To attempt to make use of this water when other and purer sources can be obtained does not therefore seem to be advisable. The inhabitants of the outlying portions of the District are dependent upon rain water reservoirs, springs and wells for their water supply. During a dry summer these sources are soon exhausted, and the need of a sufficient supply more independent of the immediate rainfall is keenly felt. During the year no new wells have been sunk, but the stand pipe which supplies the lower part of Whitecliff has been repaired. There are 229 reservoirs in the District, and 106 wells, both public and private. Many of the wells supply quite a large number of the houses in their vicinity. The supply of water for the Scowles is drawn from water which collects in the bays of an old mine cutting, and some of the inhabitants have to carry water for quite considerable distances. Berry Hill is supplied by a well in the vicinity; this well being a long distance from many of the houses. Lane End and Milkwall are dependent upon their own wells and reservoirs. Five samples of water have been taken for analysis. A loan of £200 was granted by the Local Government Board for the purpose of testing the supply at the Mill Pond pit.

SEWERAGE AND DRAINAGE.

The state of the drainage of Coleford is a matter which needs to be gone into carefully and systematically. For this reason I again urge upon the Council the advisability of calling in a Sanitary Engineer, so that a complete plan of a system of drainage for the whole town may be made out. That it would lead to considerable saving of money I have no doubt whatever. At the same time, it would assure the ratepayers that any expense to which they might be put for drainage work carried out now would not have to be repeated at some future date. The brook still performs the duties of a sewer, which it was made to do in past years. The enclosed portions have been ventilated as thoroughly as is possible by large air pipes, but for some considerable distance in several places the brook runs underneath the houses, making thorough ventilation practically impossible. Many of the drains leading into the brook are simply made of rough stones, which allow of percolation into the surrounding soil, and many of these drains have broken down.

In the houses in the town where the sewage is not passed into the brook the bucket system is used, the refuse being cleared away by the Councils scavenger twice weekly. Septic tanks are gradually superseding the privy middens, which are used in the outlying localities. House refuse is also removed twice weekly by the Scavenger.

Appended is a table of the closet accommodation:—

I. Privies with fixed receptacles	-	-	228.
Privies with movable receptacles	-	-	190.
Fresh water closets	-	-	93.
Waste-water and hand-flushed closets	-		56.

II. CONVERSIONS FROM ONE TYPE TO ANOTHER.

	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914
Privies with fixed receptacles to						
privies with movable receptacles	10	8	9	9	9	2
Privies with fixed receptacles to						
fresh water closets ...	1	2	1	2	0	0
Privies with fixed receptacles to						
waste water closets ...	0	0	0	0	0	0
Privies with movable receptacles						
to fresh water closets ...	1	0	0	1	0	2
Privies with movable receptacles						
to waste water closets ...	0	0	0	0	0	0

There are no fixed ash-pits either in combination with privies or alone. Refuse is either used on the gardens or collected in boxes and buckets, which are emptied by the Scavenger. Movable ash-bins, with proper coverings, are used in 24 cases, 13 new ones having been substituted for other receptacles during the year.

Two houses have been newly connected with the sewer and three new pail closets constructed. Four notices were served to empty privy vaults, and two privy vaults have been abolished.

No changes have been made in the arrangements for the collection or disposal of refuse during the year.

I have again to deplore that the Sanitary work of the Town has been much impeded by the resignation of the Inspector, who felt himself unequal to the work. My own illness, too, for the first three months of the year, prevented my satisfactorily completing the house to house inspection for the 1909 Act. The number of inspections made by myself under the 1909 Act were 65, and the Sanitary Inspector reports having inspected 229 houses generally. The number of houses for which notices were rendered necessary by defective conditions was 98. The number of houses for which notices were served under the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 was 70, all of which were remedied. The number of notices served under other sections of the Public Health Act was 28, and of the houses in respect of which the notices were given, 20 were remedied. Seven houses were found to be unfit for human habitation, and of these five were remedied without closing orders. Three representations were made to the Council. Two closing orders were made, and one of these houses was made habitable after the service of the orders. No demolition orders were made and no houses have been demolished. Three cases of overcrowding were reported, but on notice these were abated. Six houses have been cleansed on notice.

During inspections the following defects have been noted by the Inspector and myself:—

1.	Arrangements for preventing contamination of water supply	...	...	...	...	...	3
2.	Closet accommodation	...	...	...	...	...	8
3.	Drainage	...	...	...	...	...	15
4.	Condition of dwelling house with regard to light, free circulation of air, dampness and cleanliness	...	...	...	...	...	14

5.	Paving, drainage and sanitary conditions of any yard or outhouses belonging to or occupied with the dwelling house	...	...	...	9
6.	Arrangements for deposit of ashes and refuse	...	...	...	7
7.	The existence of any room which would, in pursuance of sub-section 7 of section 17 of the Act, 1909, be a dwelling house so dangerous or injurious to health as to be unfit for human habitation	...	...	...	1
8.	Any defects in other matters which may tend to render the dwelling house dangerous or injurious to the health of the inhabitants	...	...	...	13

The number of complaints received was 15, and 192 nuisances were reported to the Council. Of these all were abated, leaving none for further consideration. Forty-four preliminary notices were served and 15 Statutory notices, but no legal proceedings have been necessary.

The house in connection with the old lodging-house has now been partly converted into a second lodging-house, and these two common lodging-houses have been inspected weekly, 100 inspections having been made. The three slaughter-houses have been visited 36 times, and each of the nine bake-houses have been inspected several times, making 36 inspections in all. Forty-two inspections have been made of the 21 dairies and cow-sheds in the District. The workshops have also been inspected.

Of the four Public Elementary Schools in the District, neither has any water supply, the drinking water having to be fetched. With regard to infectious cases in schools, the head teachers are supplied with charts, giving information as to the chief symptoms of infectious diseases, and also instructions as to what action should be taken to prevent the spread of the disease. The names of children absent from school who are suffering from infectious diseases are sent to me each week by the head teachers. Either by inquiries by the Sanitary Inspector or by personal knowledge, I satisfy myself that the children are absent for the reason given, and after signing the forms, I forward them to the School Medical Officer, who acts under the County Council. The sanitary condition of the Schools is satisfactory.

FOODS.

MILK SUPPLY.—A portion of the milk sold within the District comes from farms outside, but on the whole the supply may be regarded as being quite wholesome. Inspections of the cow-sheds

show that the cows are kept under good conditions, but too great care with regard to cleanliness cannot be taken by those who have to handle the milk supply. Legal proceedings were taken in one case, after analysis had proved the milk to be below standard.

No seizures of unsound food have been made.

HOUSING.

The housing accommodation of the District is very inadequate, many of the older houses being deficient in modern hygienic requirements. A very few of the newer ones are of brick, but mostly they are of stone. The question of providing accommodation has received the attention of the Council, who have decided to build 12 houses on a site at Lord's Hill.

One new house has been built in accordance with plans submitted to, and approved by, the Council.

One water certificate has been granted under Section 6 of the Public Health (Water) Act of 1875.

The Scowles district lies high and is isolated from the other parts of the Urban District. The only approach to it for vehicles is by a very rough and rocky road. In fact, the road is so bad that carts are practically unable to travel to the cottages. In wet, and especially in frosty weather, the rocks which jut up in the pathway make walking very dangerous.

The roads in the Lane End District, viz., Campbell Road, Machen Road, and Howard Road, are for the most part of the year little better than quagmires, deep ruts and half-a-foot of mud alternating. The Milkwall District is no better off, as the Forest and Edenwall Roads are in a similar condition.

There have been no changes in, and no additions to, the Bye-laws in force in the District.

VITAL STATISTICS.

The number of births registered in the District during the year was 64. Of these 37 were boys and 27 girls, one boy and two girls being illegitimate. The birth rate per 1,000 head of population was 24.3, a decrease on last year, when the rate was 27.2, the number of births being 71. This birth rate is the lowest since 1908, when the number of births was 60, the rate (calculated on a population estimated at 2,594) being 23.1 per 1,000.

The total number of deaths registered of persons belonging to the District was 36, four of these deaths occurring outside the District. The death rate per 1,000 head of population was 13.7, a decrease on last year, when the rate was 16.1 per 1,000. This death rate is the lowest since 1907, when the rate was 13.1. The number of infants who died before reaching the age of one year was five, making an infantile death rate of 78.1 per 1,000 births as against 84.5 per 1,000 births last year. This infantile death rate is the lowest since 1907, when the rate was 59.7 per 1,000 births. Of these five infants died of pneumonia and one of meningitis, the other three deaths being caused by malformations and premature births. No deaths of illegitimate infants under one year of age occurred. There has been no death due to enteritis. Of the other 31 deaths 18 were of persons over 65 years of age, 13 of whom were over 70, and of these six were over 80. One death was caused by enteric fever, two by phthisis, four by pneumonia, five by heart disease, one was the result of an accident, one was caused by cirrhosis of the liver, and one by bronchitis.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

The number of cases of infectious diseases notified during the year was nineteen, a large increase on last year, when only six cases occurred. Of these nineteen cases, seven were cases of diphtheria, five of enteric fever, four of pulmonary tuberculosis, two of scarlet fever and one of ophthalmia neonatorum. The cases of diphtheria were scattered over the District, the largest number in one locality—two—occurring at Milkwall. There were no deaths from diphtheria. The cases of enteric fever were confined to two houses, one in Boxbush Road and one in Gloucester Road, two cases occurring in the first and three in the second. Of the former one proved fatal. Of the four cases of pulmonary tuberculosis, one in Sparrow Hill and one in Victoria Road ended fatally. No deaths were caused by scarlet fever, the two cases notified occurring in Newland Street and at the Scowles respectively. The case of ophthalmia neonatorum occurred in Newland Street.

Of non-notifiable diseases among school children, there were 11 cases of measles, two of whooping cough and four of ringworm.

The Scowles School was closed from December 7th and re opened after the Christmas holidays, owing to the case of scarlet fever which occurred in the headmaster's house.

Unfortunately, we have no isolation hospital. The need for this is becoming more urgent every year. As an instance, the Scowles School was closed because it was impossible to remove the patient suffering with scarlet fever from the School House. Had any epidemic of infectious disease broken out amongst the soldiers quartered with us, there would have been no means of isolating such cases. In another case where a person had come to nurse a sick woman, that person contracted scarlet fever, so that we had a condition in which there were two sick people occupying the only two bedrooms of the houses, and one an infectious case. The cases of enteric fever in Boxbush Road were practically certainly due to sewer gas escaping from the sewer to the scullery. The cases in Gloucester Road were imported from Southampton.

Disinfection of houses in which infectious cases have occurred is carried out by sulphur fumigation and formalin vapour.

Nineteen cases of infectious diseases were visited and reported on, and the 14 houses in which these cases occurred were afterwards disinfected.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES (NOTIFIABLE).

All cases of infectious diseases notified have been carefully investigated in order to discover the causes of such diseases and their distribution in the District. The houses in which infectious cases occurred are disinfected by the Sanitary Inspector. Disinfectants are supplied free of charge to persons who apply for them, and directions relating to isolation, etc., are given to householders.

There is no public disinfecter.

Bacteriological aids to diagnosis in cases of diphtheria, typhoid fever and tuberculosis are utilised by the medical practitioners in the District. Examinations are made at the Public Health Laboratory, Bristol University, but I cannot say how many such examinations were made for cases in the District.

Cases other than those of notifiable infectious diseases have not been investigated.

Ophthalmia neonatorum is now a notifiable disease.

No special steps have been taken in regard to prevention of infantile mortality.

The chief influences threatening the health of the District are in connection with drainage, the disposal of excretal refuse, the deficient water supply, and the inadequate housing accommodation.