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ANNUAL REPORT

ON THE

HEALTH

OF THE

Halwhistle . . .

. . . Rural District

BY THE

Medical Officer of Health

1905.

HALTWHISTLE :

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**To the Chairman and Members of the
HALTWHISTLE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.**

GENTLEMEN,

As your Medical Officer of Health I have pleasure in submitting my Annual Report for the year just ended. The arrangement adopted four years ago as regards the division of your district into five sub-areas will remain unchanged. The total area of the whole district, comprising 17 townships, is 96,333 acres, and the population, which at the last census in 1901 was 8,500, may now be computed to be 8,900. The increase of the estimate is based on the rate of annual increase found to exist between the census of 1891 and that of 1901. This is also verified to some extent by the increase which has occurred in the number of inhabited houses in the district. A population of 8,900 gives a density of .09 persons per acre. Subjoined is a table showing the division into sub-districts, with area, population, inhabited houses, births, deaths, and infectious diseases notified in each :—

TABLE A,

Sub-Districts.	Area.	Population.	Inhabited Houses.	Births.		Deaths.		Deaths under one year.		Infectious Diseases notified.	
				Number.	Rate per 1000 living.	Number.	Rate per 1000 living.	Number.	Rate per 1000 living.	Number.	Rate per 1000 living.
1. Haltwhistle	Acres. 3134	3317	720	114	34.4	51	15.3	13	114	51	15.3
2. Melkridge and Henshaw ..	17630	1120	230	33	29.4	16	14.2	4	121	6	5.3
3. Blenkinsopp and Thirlwall ..	10508	1556	286	36	23.1	19	12.2	7	195	9	5.7
4. Lambley and Hartleyburn ..	6595	911	175	21	23.	8	8.7	1	47	—	—
5. Remaining Townships ..	58466	1996	429	38	19.	12	6.	2	52	23	11.5
Whole District	96333	8900	1840	242	27.2	106	11.9	27	111	89	10.

VITAL STATISTICS.

BIRTH RATE.—The number of births registered during the year, according to the above Table, will be seen to be 242. Of that number 117 were males, and 125 females, the proportion of illegitimates being 15, as compared with 17, 14 and 16 in 1904, 1903 and 1902 respectively. The annual Birth Rate is equal to 27·2, a slight increase on that of last year, and exactly equal to the average of the last ten years. There has been a steady declension in the Birth Rate of England and Wales from 36·3 per thousand of the population in 1876 to 27·9 in 1904.

In the following Table will be found a comparison between the Vital Statistics of England and Wales and that of your own district:—

TABLE B.

<i>For the Year 1904.</i>	<i>Annual Rates per 1000 living,</i>		<i>Infant Mortality. Annual Death Rate of Infants under 1 year per 1000 births.</i>
	<i>Births.</i>	<i>Deaths from aer Causes.</i>	
Haltwhistle	26 87	14 23	93 22
England and Wales ..	27 9	16 2	146 00
Northumberland ..	29 42	17 12	168 89
Rothbury	23 02	12 44	90 99
Bellingham	24 45	13 72	122 58

DEATH RATE.—The gross Death Rate for the year was only 11·9 per thousand of the population. This shows a decided fall from last year when the rate was 14·23, and

deducting two deaths of persons not belonging to the district, and also one suicide, the rate would be still further reduced to 11.6.

This is a matter for congratulation, and, as will be seen from the above Table, compares favourably with the rate in other rural districts of the county. The actual number of deaths registered was 106, as compared with 125 in 1904, and an average of 115 for the preceding ten years. As regards sex, 60 were males and 46 females; and in reference to age, 27 were under 1 year and 41 attained the ages of 65 years and over.

INFANT MORTALITY.—The expression, “Infantile Mortality,” is understood in this country to mean the proportion of deaths under one year in a thousand births. As has already been noted in the preceding Table the number of such deaths was 27, an increase of five over the year 1904, and also five above the average for the last decennial period. The following are the principal causes of this mortality:—premature birth, congenital defects and injury received during birth. These are generally considered to be unavoidable causes. The preventible causes are insanitary domestic surroundings, bad habits and mode of life of parents, but especially improper feeding. This latter must always be regarded as a special factor in infant mortality, and the fact that diarrhoeal diseases are particularly fatal in hand-fed children is well known. The importance of cleanliness not only of the dwelling, but also of the person and clothing of the child, and especially of the feeding-bottles, is often entirely overlooked. In these days of district nursing, much good ought to be done in inculcating lessons of cleanliness if the mothers in question were amenable to advice. It is true that from year to year there is a considerable variation on the proportion of deaths of infants

under one year, but that variation may generally be explained by climatic conditions, and does not indicate any material decline in infant mortality.

ZYMOTIC DISEASES were this year responsible for 7 deaths, as compared with 17 in 1904. Of these one was due to diarrhoea, two to scarlet fever, and three to diphtheria, and one to puerperal fever. The rate per thousand under this heading is $\cdot 78$ as compared with $1\cdot 92$ last year.

PHTHISIS caused 8 deaths as compared with 11 last year, and the rate is equal to $\cdot 88$ per thousand.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.—A reference to Table A shows that 89 cases of infectious disease were notified during the year.

SCARLET FEVER represented 56 of these notification, and was the prolongation of an epidemic which prevailed all over the district in 1904. Fifty per cent. of the cases occurred in No. 1 Sub-district, and about 30 per cent. in No. 5, the remainder in Nos. 2 and 3: No. 4 escaped entirely. The disease was remarkably mild in type, only two deaths resulting, and one of them being complicated with the puerperal state. Isolation under present conditions in this district is almost an impossibility. The greatest difficulty is met with in convincing parents of the absolute necessity of keeping infected individuals not only apart from others of the family but of preventing them from exposing themselves amongst the general public. In many cases, no doubt, it is a matter of impossibility to practice thorough isolation, but I fear carelessness and want of thought for others has much to do with the spread of this as of other infectious diseases.

DIPHTHERIA, in point of numbers, stands second on the list, 22 notifications having been received during the year—17 of the cases occurred in No. 1 Sub-district, 4 in No. 5 and 1 in No. 3, the other districts being quite free. As will be seen from Table C, the first case occurred in a low-lying part of No. 1 Sub-district, early in the year, and proved fatal from heart failure during convalescence. Of other two fatal cases which occurred, one resulted from the same cause, and the other was due to asphyxia, the disease having spread into the wind-pipe. In many outbreaks the spread of the disease can be traced to Elementary Schools, where children suffering from sore throat have been in attendance, which in all probability was of a diphtheritic nature. It would be well when cases of diphtheria are prevalent if all children suspected by the teachers to be suffering from any throat affection whatever were excluded until the nature of the illness was ascertained. I have already notified the teachers to this effect, and I think it is better in this way to weed out all suspicious cases, and keep them under observation rather than close the school, and by this means scatter infectious children all over the district. Bacteriological examination of swabs from the throat of any suspected case is now undertaken by the County Council for all medical practitioners in their administrative area free of charge, so that there should be no difficulty in making a correct and early diagnosis. If the same authority, or your Council, would further agree to supply antitoxin serum for the treatment of all cases where the patient or their friends were unable to bear the cost, a public benefit would certainly result. The employment of this method of treatment is now well recognised as of the greatest importance, and the best results are found to follow its early application.

TABLE C.

Date.	Scarlet Fever.	Diphtheria.	Enteric Fever.	Erysipelas.	Puerperal Fever.	Influenza.
Jan.	{ 7 in No. III. 9 in No. V. 3 in I.	2 in No. I	.....	.....	.....	Prevalent.
Feb.	4 in No. I., 2 in V.	.....	1 in No. I.	.....	3 in No. II.	Do.
Mar.	2 in No. I., 3 in 5	2 in No. II.	.....	.....	.....	Do.
April	3 in No. I., 3 in V.	2 in No. I.	.....	.....	.....	.....
May	3 in No. I., 1 in II.	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
June	3 in No. I.	2 in No. I., 2 in V.	.....	1 in No. I.	.....	.....
July	.....	1 in No. V.	.....	.....	.....	Prevalent.
Aug.	.....	2 in No. I.	.....	1 in No. I.	.....	Do.
Sept.	.....	.....	.....	1 in No. II.	.....	.....
Oct.	4 in No. I., 1 in V.	4 in No. I.	.....	1 in No. III.	.....	Prevalent.
Nov.	6 in No. I., 1 in V.	1 in No. I.	.....	1 in No. I.	.....	Do.
Dec.	1 in No. I.	5 in No. I.	.....	1 in No. I., 1 in III.	.....	Do.

ERYSIPELAS.—Seven cases were notified during the last six months of the year, 4 in No. I. Sub-district, 1 in No. II, and 2 in No. III.

ENTERIC FEVER.—Only one case occurred early in the year in No. I. Sub-district.

PUERPERAL FEVER.—Three cases, all in No. II. Sub-district, and all under the care of the same physician, two of the cases being in the same house, were reported in February, one of which proved fatal. A special nurse was retained for the three cases, and every precaution taken to prevent any spread of infection.

WATER SUPPLY.

In No. I. SUB-DISTRICT this is abundant in quantity and of excellent quality. It is derived from springs in No. V. Sub-district, and conveyed to the town by gravitation, a distance of four miles. Unfortunately, a few months ago, in consequence of mining operations, a subsidence of the surface in Coanwood Moss, over which the line of pipes is carried, occurred, and the supply was interrupted by the breaking of the earthenware pipes. This was temporarily repaired by the substitution of wooden boxes supported on timbers. The Council, however, have decided to relay this portion with cast-iron pipes, which will be a decided improvement, and prevent the admission, which is taking place at present, of surface water into the mains. It is just possible, however, as the process of withdrawing the supports in the mine proceeds, a further subsidence of the surface may occur, a contingency which must be borne in mind. An extension of the water mains up the burn was carried out during the summer, and several outlying houses which previously had

an inadequate supply were provided for. There are still some thirty or more houses, mostly outlying cottages and farms on the north side which it is impossible to reach with the town mains, at all events, "at a reasonable cost." A sub-committee of the Council has devoted much time and attention to this matter, and incurred considerable expense also in obtaining reports from an engineering expert, but so far no definite result has been attained. An alternative scheme to supply this portion of the district from springs situated on the north side is still under consideration.

No. II. SUB-DISTRICT.—At Melkridge a public supply derived from a spring on the hillside is delivered to a stand-pipe and trough convenient to most of the householders. In March, 1905, one of the Local Government Board inspectors held an inquiry in connection with a proposed sewerage scheme for Melkridge. He advised the supplementing of the present water supply by taking a portion of the water from another spring known as Well Bullers. The owner of the land in which this spring is situated has raised the question as to the right of the Council to take any portion of this supply, and negotiations are at present taking place between the parties concerned. At Henshaw, also in this Sub-district, there is a public supply delivered to a trough conveniently situated.

No. III. SUB DISTRICT. — At Bankfoot the colliery owners maintain a supply pumped up from the mine to a small reservoir at a height sufficient to deliver by gravitation to all the colliery houses.

LONGBYRE.—A scheme for supplying the houses here, some thirty in number, has long been under consideration,

but the Committee have had difficulty in getting the owner of the spring to state what he is willing to do in the matter. Plans and estimates have been prepared by the Inspector, and the Council is now in correspondence for a definite arrangement with the owner, and it is to be hoped that what has been a long felt want in the district will shortly be remedied.

In Nos. IV. and V. SUB-DISTRICTS, which include several townships in almost purely agricultural areas, the supply is derived chiefly from private wells. At Thorngraston, in No. V. Sub-district, there is a storage tank in connection with a semi-public supply which should have certain alterations and improvements carried out to improve the purity of the water.

SEWERAGE.

In No. I. SUB-DISTRICT a very complete system of water-borne sewerage has been in existence for many years. The flushing and general supervision of the system is superintended by an employee of the Council, and has been working satisfactorily. With regard to the irrigation ground, I have only to repeat the remark I made in last year's report: "it is not utilised to the extent that it might be." The settling tanks require to be cleaned out more frequently, and there is often a large amount of sludge in the overflow drain where it discharges into the river.

In No. II. SUB-DISTRICT.—At MELKRIDGE plans for an elaborate scheme had been prepared by the late Inspector, but at an inquiry into the question held by a Local Government Board official in March, it was decided that a much less costly undertaking might be substituted. Plans and estimates

for this were prepared by the present Inspector, and submitted to the Local Government Board, but were returned by them. The matter is in abeyance at present pending a settlement of the water question.

In No. III. SUB-DISTRICT.—At LONGBYRE a sewer would be a decided advantage from a sanitary point of view. At present the drains from the various houses discharge into a small stream running under the main roadway, and in dry weather a nuisance often arises therefrom.

At GREENHEAD a similar arrangement is needed, as the drainage from the whole of the village at present is discharged into the Tippald in an unpurified state.

At GILSLAND.—Plans and estimates for a sewerage scheme were prepared by Mr. Parker, C.E., and submitted to the Council in November. They were referred to the Thirlwall Parish Council for discussion and approval, and have now been forwarded to the owner of the land on which the outfall was to take place for his inspection.

NUISANCES.

The Inspector has tabulated and arranged his work under this heading in a Table which is copied below. It shows a total of 100 cases dealt with. Defective privies, and ashpit and drains represent the great bulk of the cases. Legal proceedings were taken by the Council in the case of a nuisance caused by a burning heap in No. I. Sub-district. An abatement order was obtained and the nuisance was subsequently got rid of.

TABLE D.

NUISANCES DEALT WITH IN 1905.

<i>Sub-District.</i>	<i>Defective Ashpits and Privies.</i>	<i>Defective and Choked Drains.</i>	<i>Various Nuisances.</i>	<i>Notices given Verbal and Statutory.</i>
No. I.	29	17	18	46
„ II.	3	1	1	3
„ III.	8	6	1	13
„ IV.	2	2	1	5
„ V.	2	7	2	8
Total	44	33	23	75

In addition to the above Mr. Howitt also reports the following inspections of—

New Buildings in course of erection	...	48
Testing New Water Connections	...	14
Inspecting and Testing New Drains	...	18
Disinfection of Houses after infectious disease ... ..	...	25
Visits to Dairies and Cowsheds	...	25
Visits to Factories and Workshops	...	33
Total	...	<u>163</u>

TABLE E.

PLANS PASSED, NEW HOUSES OCCUPIED IN 1905.

<i>Sub-district.</i>	<i>Plans Approved.</i>	<i>Certificate of Occupancy.</i>
No. I.	26	10
„ II.	4	4
„ III.	0	—
„ IV.	1	—
„ V.	2	2
Totals	33	16

SCAVENGING by the public authority is carried out only in Sub-district No. 1. This is accomplished by the employment of a man with horse and cart, and has been done in a fairly satisfactory manner. There is one fault which, however, ought not to be allowed to continue, and that is the incomplete emptying of large ashpits. A few cart loads are removed, but a considerable residue is left, which is again covered over with fresh deposits. A complete removal of all refuse should be carried out when the contents are disturbed, and during the prevalence of any infectious disease it would be well to limewash the walls and floor of all such receptacles after emptying. The tip situated on the irrigation ground is full to overflowing, and should be extended. A tip at the west end of the town, which was used for some time and then abandoned, has again been opened out. The tip near the Saw Mill is not quite satisfactory, as contents of ashpits and

privies are deposited very close to a low embankment of the River Tyne, and, as occurred in a very recent storm of rain, a large portion of the accumulation was swept away in the flooded river.

In No. III. SUB-DISTRICT the colliery owner undertakes the removal of ashes and house refuse, and this has been satisfactorily carried out at Bankfoot, in this Sub-district.

DAIRIES AND COWSHEDS.

The number on the register is at present 20, a decided increase since the advertisement was inserted in the local papers, calling the attention of milksellers to the fact that registration was compulsory. The last inspection made by Mr. Howitt and myself was in August, and as a result of our visits to the various byres and cowsheds, we did not find much to complain of, so far as air space, ventilation, drainage and cleanliness were concerned. In six instances the half-yearly whitewashing and cleansing of the walls had been delayed on account of operations in the hay field. There are no milk-shops in the district, and it is not the custom to set up milk in tins or vessels in a milk-house, as after straining and cooling it is at once delivered by cart or in cans to the different customers. A small leaflet inculcating every cleanliness, not only of the premises and milk vessels, but also of the cows, their udders, and also the hands and clothing of the milkers, might be useful if distributed amongst the various cow-keepers in the district.

FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS.

A register of the various factories and workshops in the district has now been provided, but in addition to this

it will be necessary that all occupiers of such premises should provide twice a year a list of any home workers employed by them doing certain kinds of work at their own homes, and this list must be preserved both by the Council and by the employers of labour. I am not aware of any instances of this, unless it may occasionally occur in busy seasons amongst those who sell or make up wearing apparel.

The number of inspections made has been 33, and only in 7 instances was it found necessary to draw attention to any defects or violations of the regulations. In one case no abstract of the Act was affixed to the walls of the workroom. Ignorance was pleaded as an excuse, and this has now been attended to. The other defects found, and which have also been rectified, were: insufficient air space, 1; want of sanitary accommodation, 1; defective drainage, 2; workroom improperly used as a bedroom, 1; and want of cleanliness on the premises, 1. The number of buildings that come within this Act are factories 3, and workshops 28—total, 31.

IMPROVEMENTS.—The channelling and kerbing, and in many places relaying of the pavement undertaken by the County Council, and carried out in sections year by year, is now almost completed, so far as the town of Haltwhistle is concerned, and a most decided improvement in the side paths is the result. In some of the new streets which are not yet finished, a similar procedure will no doubt take place. I must again draw the attention of the Council to the practice which prevails more or less all over of carrying the water from the down spout of the houses in shallow open channels across, instead of in a pipe under the pavement. The Council should at least insist on this being done in the case of new pavement, as in wet weather the present method is a decided nuisance, and in frost may become positively dangerous.

REQUIREMENTS.—The list has little new to be added to that of last year. The most pressing items in the order of urgency are:—

- (1) Longbyre Water Scheme.
- (2) Water Supply and Sewerage for Gilsland.
- (3) Do. do Melkridge,
- (4) Further utilisation of the Irrigation Ground, and a new Refuse Tip there, or an extension of the present one.
- (5) The making up of several new Streets.

I am aware that powers for this purpose have been obtained by the Council for the following:—Lorne Street, Dale Street, Tynedale Terrace, back East View Terrace, Wydon Terrace, Scotsfield Street, and back River Terrace. But, in addition, the undermentioned are equally in need of the Council's attention:—

- (1) Crossfield Street, with 15 new houses built, or in process of construction, of which 9 are occupied. No roadway or side path whatever; the field a quagmire in wet weather.
- (2) The approach to houses in Pant Housefield not at all satisfactory.
- (3) The back street behind the Council Offices.
- (4) The back street which is also the main approach to five villas in Edens Lawn.

W. R. SPEIRS, M.B.,
Medical Officer of Health.

