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Contributors

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W. H. M. B.

HEXHAM URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT.

Carntyne, Hexham, Feb. 7th, 1898.

Dear Sir,—I beg to call the attention of your council to the health statistics of the Hexham Urban District for the past year. Although the year has been a remarkable one in the annals of the country, it has not been marked in Hexham by the maturing of any well-devised sanitary scheme for the public welfare, such as the providing of an isolation hospital for infectious disease, a public slaughterhouse, model lodging-houses, public wash-houses, or artisans' dwellings. I had hoped that the council might have carried out some such much needed scheme, as a tangible memorial of its existence during the unique jubilee. No doubt much time has been spent in investigating the various schemes of sewage disposal, in order to abate a long standing nuisance on Tyne Green, and to meet the requirements of the Rivers Pollution Act in the disposal of the whole of the town's sewage.

A great improvement has taken place in recent years in the management of sewage. Many varied schemes are before the public, and the subject being one of such vast importance, one cannot help thinking that it will be solved, more or less satisfactorily, within a reasonable time. Amongst the various schemes examined by your council lately, that at Ex-ter and Sutton appear to me the most likely to meet the requirements of Hexham, and the preference of the former over the latter is more due to structural requirements than intrinsic excellence. Had you had sufficient fall on Tyne Green for the Sutton scheme, it might have been less costly (having no patent or royalty right-), and equally effective. The Ex-ter scheme can be carried out with a less gradient, consequently may be more applicable for flat land, such as Tyne Green. Both schemes get rid of the sludge, which has hitherto been a stumbling block, and require little looking after, therefore not costly in working. The Ex-ter or septic tank scheme is evolved out of the old cesspool, which appears to have been a farther advance in sanitation than was generally recognised. It, however, failed to reach the goal, being only part of a scheme, and illustrates the adage that "a miss is as good as a mile."

The septic tank is practically a cesspool, with this addition: that arrangements are made by which the gas, which is generated, is burnt instead of making its way back to the house, where it had evil effects, and the effluent or overflow, instead of going direct into a stream, goes on to properly constructed filter beds, where it is aerated and rendered harmless before going into any stream. The absence of smell and of any unsightly appearance are recommendations to both schemes.

During the year 127 deaths and 175 births have been registered in your district. 127 deaths gave a death rate of 21.166 on a population of 6,000. 18, however, of these deaths occurred in the work-house, nine of which were from beyond your district, leaving 118 as the number of deaths in the Hexham Urban District for the year 1897, which is equal to a death rate of 19.666 per thousand per annum on a population of 6,000. Of these deaths 58 were females and 69 males. Ninety-two of the 175 births were females and 83 males. 175 births gave a birth rate of 29.166 on a population of 6,000.

Ages at Death.—25 were under 1 year, 11 were 1 and under 5, 11 were 5 and under 25, 34 were 25 and under 65, 35 were 65 and under 80, 10 were 80 and under 90, and 1 was over 90.

Causes of Death.—17 were due to senile decay, 26 to diseases of the respiratory organs, 10 of which were from consumption, 8 to pneumonia or inflammation of the lungs, 8 to bronchitis, 16 to diseases of the nervous system, 8 to heart disease, there were 7 inquests, 8 to diarrhoea, 7 to scarlet fever, 1 to diphtheria, 1 enteric fever, 1 rheumatic fever, and 1 to croup.

Cases Notified.—171 cases of scarlet fever have been notified, 11 of measles, 8 of whooping cough, 5 of erysipelas, 4 of diphtheria, and 2 of enteric fever—201 cases against 600 in 1896.

Work done.—During the past year the Surveyor's statistics show that estate plans for 243 houses have been approved of, building plans for 123 houses, 10 shops, warehouses, stables, &c., and 10 additions to buildings. 61 new houses have been occupied. 2,133 yards of new sewers have been laid, 120 yards of sewers re-laid, 4,317 yards of water mains laid, and 41 houses have had their drains and sanitary arrangements tested and reported upon. All new sewers and private drains have been tested by your Surveyor before being covered up. 17 privy middens have been abolished and W.C.'s substituted. 133 nuisances have been dealt with; of these 32 arose from privy and other middens, 21 from choked drains, 15 from defective W.C.'s, 12 from animals kept as a nuisance, 7 from damp houses, 7 from slaughter houses, and 39 from rubbish heaps and other causes. Two lots of diseased fish have been destroyed. Four houses have been reported unfit for human habitation; one of these has been closed so far as being occupied as a dwelling house by order of your council, but still occupied as business premises, although unsafe and unsanitary. This is a fair record of work satisfactorily done, shewing a rapid growth of the town, calling for increased exertion on the part of the council and its officials. The work of the council has much increased of late years, and no one should seek to enter it who has not a considerable amount of time at his disposal. It would be well for the electorate to take this fact into consideration at the coming election. Local self-government is a great and serious trust placed in the people's hands, to which careful thought should be given by them. I regret that the present council is about to expire. I think it would be in the best interests of the town if the governing body retired in rotation—so many in each year instead of in a body as at present—the former being more favourable to continuity of action.

I should have been pleased had I been able to report that midden privies were a thing of the past, but by some inexplicable inconsistency of action you retain a few, and these of the worst possible type, in an objectionable position, considered by the county medical officer, your surveyor, and myself injurious to the public health.

One house partially closed by you out of four reported to you for three years cannot be considered hasty action.

The death rate, you will observe, is higher than when you took office. This may be due to increased population. The average for the three years 1892, 1893, and 1894 is 16.6; that for the past three years 1895-96-97 being 17.8.

Particular attention is now being paid to the proper housing of animals. This is a matter of greater concern in large towns and cities; even here we must be on our guard, and it is well for all owners and occupiers of dairies and cowsheds to know that the requirements of the law as to air space and cleanliness is greater than formerly. I am pleased to say on our recent inspection our suggestions to this end were favourably received. It is gratifying to notice the increased interest taken by the public in all sanitary matters, as shown by the frequency with which my advice is asked and the absence of all hostile spirit on my public visits.

I am, sir,
Your obedient servant,
DANIEL JACKSON, M.D.,
Medical Officer of Health.

To W. Pruddab, Esq., Hexham Urban District Council.

NEWTON LITERARY DISTRICT COUNCIL

A MEMORIAL OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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