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Contributors

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Kingsbridge Urban District Council.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1903.

Gentlemen,—I have the honour to submit to you my tenth annual report, dealing with the health matters of your district for the year ending December 31st, 1903.

Following the suggestions contained in the memorandum issued by the Local Government Board for the guidance of Medical Officers of Health in the compilation of their annual reports, I will commence by referring firstly to the Physical Features and General Characteristics of this district regarded from a health point of view.

The district consists essentially of two different areas—one a low-lying part stretching from the Estuary, and the other consisting of several small hills rising to a height of over 100 feet above sea level. The lower area comprises most of the older buildings in the town; and notably in Kingston-street and Market-place the dwellings on the east side labour under the disadvantage of being built against the hillside, and as a consequence their gardens and back courts are in many instances at a higher level than the ground floors of the houses. This condition curtails the supply of sunlight and fresh air, which are the most needed in that many of the cottages have their ground floors paved with stone, all these conditions having a tendency to generate damp. The public thoroughfares in the district are fairly wide, and are well drained and maintained. There are practically no back-to-back dwellings; but in some of the courts, notably those off Fore-street, the approaches are narrow, and there is a marked deficiency of light in the lower rooms.

HOUSE ACCOMMODATION: ADEQUACY AND FITNESS.

The accommodation in the various houses is generally adequate for the number of their inhabitants, and the dwellings have as a rule sufficient air space surrounding them.

SUPERVISION OVER THE ERECTION OF NEW HOUSES.

All new buildings in the district are erected under conditions complying with the bye-laws of your Authority, which have been duly approved and sanctioned by the Local Government Board.

SEWAGE AND DRAINAGE.

The district has a system of water-borne sewage, discharging into the Estuary some mile below the town. The various sewers are constantly under supervision, and an efficient method of flushing is in operation. House drains are subjected to periodic inspection, and, where defects are discovered, means for remedying the same are adopted. One of the chief of these defects is the want of flushing-cisterns in the closets; and, with the present somewhat precarious water supply, it has not always been possible to insist on these being provided; but I trust that your Authority will, as soon as it possesses the augmented supply, compel owners to make this provision.

REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL OF HOUSE REFUSE.

All house refuse is removed by the public scavengers thrice weekly, and is carted away and deposited in various localities within the district. These accumulations do, however, sooner or later constitute a nuisance in their neighbourhood by the harbouring of rats, and by the litter of light material being blown about in their vicinity. In my opinion, some more satisfactory way could and should be found of disposing of the refuse, either by burning it in a suitable situation or utilising it for filling in low-lying waste spaces. In either case the situation selected should be one where it is not likely to become a nuisance to neighbouring property.

WATER SUPPLY.

The public water supply of the district at present is derived from three sources, viz. 1st, a series of springs in Combe Royal valley, about half a mile north of the town; 2nd, springs at Croft, in the parish of Dolebrooke; 3rd, a spring situated in the grounds of the Lord of the Manor of Kingsbridge. The water from the various supplies has been periodically analysed and pronounced to be wholesome.

Some of the outlying houses of the district are dependent for their water on wells, or water rammed from running streams. As a rule, for about three months of the year the public supply becomes insufficient to admit of a constant delivery, and consequently during this period the water is cut off for several hours during each day. During the last few years new dwellings have been erected in parts of the district which are above the level attainable by the existing water supply; these houses obtain their water by pumping it up privately from the town source.

The periodic scarcity of water and the absence of an automatic delivery to these higher sites have induced the Council to try to provide a supplementary scheme in order to furnish the whole district with a continuous supply. During several years past, various sources have been found and investigated; three of them have been so far approved that a Local Government Board inquiry into their merits was held under one of their inspectors. The first and second, known as the Borough and Moreleigh schemes, were, after all the formalities had been complied with, abandoned: the first by reason of its excessive cost, and the second because the conditions which were expected to be complied with in order to meet the rights of the various owners were considered prohibitive.

The third, that known as the West Alvington scheme, has finally been adopted, and the work has been begun and is expected to be completed within a few months. It is to be hoped that this scheme will prove a satisfactory supplementary supply to the district, for it is only after very careful consideration and all investigation it was possible for your Authority to make, and a detailed inquiry by the Local Government Board, that it has been decided to adopt this plan for augmenting the present supply of water.

Various objections, many frivolous and some apparently reasonable, have been advanced against this supply. I may take cognisance of two of these:—

Firstly, it has been objected to that this scheme entails a yearly expenditure in pumping, but when it is remembered that any of the alternate gravitation schemes would have entailed probably four times the initial expenditure it will be seen that this scheme on its own merits is actually a cheaper one.

Secondly, many have thought and said that as West Alvington village lies just above the new supply, the water is not only liable but likely to be contaminated by the sewage of the village. The experts consulted on this point went very fully into the matter, and came to the conclusion that the danger was one in theory only, as, owing to the formation of the rocks in the locality, the watershed of West Alvington village and that of the area of the new supply are practically on different sides of the ridge. Moreover, the Local Government Inspector also satisfied himself on this point, and further safeguarded the supply by ensuring the efficient sewerage of the adjacent part of West Alvington village; by prohibiting the erection of houses or the manuring of the soil, which might lead to pollution of the catchment area; and by ordering that all cesspits should be removed from the neighbourhood.

In considering the risk of pollution of the water, it should also be borne in mind that the numerous analyses of the water, which have proved satisfactory, were of samples taken under the existing conditions, and the possibility of contamination will, when the work is completed, be less and not greater than before.

SUPERVISION OF LODGING-HOUSES, WORKSHOPS, ETC.

As your Council is aware, there are at present no common lodging-houses in the district.



The only "offensive trade" (Public Health Act, 1875) carried on in the district is that of a fellmonger and tanner, the premises of which have been frequently inspected and found satisfactory.

The slaughter-houses, dairies, cowsheds, milk shops, bakehouses, factories, and workshops have been periodically inspected by me, and have with few exceptions been found satisfactory. I would however mention that though the cowsheds are clean they in many instances lack the prescribed cubic air space for each animal; this defect, however, I consider is less serious in this district, where the cattle seldom remain stalled for any length of time.

The owners of the three slaughter-houses in the district have applied for, and have been granted by your Authority, the usual licences. With regard to the bakehouses, most of them are modern and well constructed, one of them being fitted with machinery for the making of bread, which in my opinion, obviating as it does the necessity of hand kneading of the dough, is a meritorious advance towards hygienic cleanliness.

NUISANCES.

The number of nuisances discovered and reported on during the year have been very few, and with the exception of one case, in which a large number of pigs were kept in an insanitary condition, they were of a trivial nature, and have all under your authority's orders been abated.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

Our means, as your authority is aware, of dealing with infectious disease consists of compulsory notification, consequent investigation of the same, and disinfection of the premises occupied. We have no isolation hospital at present, and there has not fortunately during the last twelve months been any occasion for such an institution.

Measures are taken as much as possible for the segregation of contacts, and, when considered advisable, closing of public schools. I am however happy to state that for some considerable time I have not had occasion to advise the closing of the public schools, and indeed I may say that the district is singularly fortunate in freedom from epidemic diseases.

During the year I have received 19 notifications of the existence of infectious disease, viz., five of diphtheria, six of erysipelas, five of scarlet fever, and three of enteric, none of which cases have proved fatal.

DIPHTHERIA.

These cases all occurred in isolated places, and were due to local insanitary causes: they were duly reported to your authority as they occurred, and all necessary precautions were successfully taken to prevent the disease spreading.

ERYSIPELAS.

The six cases of erysipelas had in my opinion no bearing on local insanitation.

SCARLET FEVER.

The five cases of scarlet fever were also mild, and scattered through the town, only one of them being traceable to a previous case.

ENTERIC FEVER.

The three cases all occurred in children, and it was impossible to assign any origin to them.

The district, as far as I am aware, has been free from whooping cough and measles; but there has been an epidemic of mild chicken-pox, whilst there has been no case of smallpox, cholera, or typhus fever notified.

INSPECTION.

I have during the year made many systematic inspections of the district, irrespective of those called for by any particular outbreak of disease.

VITAL STATISTICS.

During the year there have been registered 64 births, giving a birth-rate of 21.3 per thousand of population; and 53 deaths have been registered for the like period, giving a general death-rate from all causes of 14.3 per thousand of the population.

There have been no deaths registered from the principal zymotic diseases.

There have been seven deaths of children under one year of age, giving a percentage of total deaths of 13.2.

The percentage of deaths of children under one year of age of registered births is 11.

The percentage of deaths of children under five years of age of total deaths is 13.2.

Twenty-six deaths have occurred at or over the age of 65, equivalent to 50 per cent. of the total deaths; 17 of them occurred in persons over the age of 70, and six over 80 years of age.

A comparison of these figures for the previous 10 years appears in the first of the Local Government Board tables herewith appended.

Five deaths have been returned as due to consumption, giving a mortality of 1.6 per thousand of population. This may be termed a permissible rate.

Four deaths have for the fifth year in succession been returned as due to cancer.

No death has been caused by influenza, and only four deaths have been known to occur from this disease during the last seven years.

There has been no death from accident, but one was attributable to suicide.

The general death-rate of 14.3 per thousand of population, though higher than last year, is only slightly greater than the average of the last 10 years, and it should be observed that a very large percentage, in fact a third, of the total deaths occurred beyond the ordinary expectation of life.

The birth-rate of 21.3 per thousand shows a decided increase on that of previous years, and is the highest in the last decade with the exception of 1894 and 1897, when it reached 21.7 and 22 respectively. The mortality of children under one year of age is high, but slightly lower than that of last year. The deaths were as follows: three from convulsions, three from debility from birth, and one from premature birth.

To conclude, I may say that the death-rate is a satisfactory one, whilst the birth-rate is encouraging.

OPERATION OF THE FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS ACT, 1901.

Under section 122 of the Factory and Workshops Act, 1901, it is my duty as medical officer to your Council to report as follows:—A register of workshops is kept by your authority, and I have personally together with your inspector from time to time inspected the workshops and work places in the district, and as regards (a) general cleanliness, (b) air space, (c) ventilation, and (d) provision of suitable sanitary arrangements, have found them satisfactory; (e) I have already referred to trades involving wet processes. I have failed to find that any home work is carried on.

UNION WORKHOUSE.

Five children have been born in the workhouse during the year, giving a general birth-rate of 61.9 per thousand of its population.

There have been three deaths under one year of age, all of them being registered as due to debility from birth.

There have been 23 deaths in all, giving an annual mortality of 204 per thousand of its population. The zymotic death-rate is nil.

The death-rate of children under one year of age is 12 per cent. of the general death-rate, and 60 per cent. of the registered births.

Of the total 23 deaths, 15, or 65 per cent., occurred at or beyond the age of 70, and four, or 17 per cent., at the age of 80 or upwards, the oldest being 84.

I have again received no notification of infectious disease occurring in this institution. There have been two deaths from phthisis and one from cancer.

The general sanitary arrangements of the institution are satisfactory.

Appended are the tabular statements required by the Local Government Board, the contents of which I have furnished to the extent of the information in my possession.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM HY. WEBB,

Medical Officer of Health.

The Kingsbridge Urban District Council.

