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Contributors

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Carntyne, Hexham, Feb. 4th, 1897.
To William Pruddish, Esq., Clerk, Hexham Urban
District Council.

Dear Sir,—It is again my duty, through you, to bring to the notice of the Hexham Urban District Council the sanitary condition of Hexham for the year 1896, as measured by the death rate.

The climatic conditions of 1896 were not such as to affect adversely the public health. The winter was mild, the spring and early summer were dry, the early autumn rains prevented injury from scarcity of water, and undue heat affecting infant life. Labour was plentiful and food cheap, benefiting the condition of the working class.

We passed through a heavy outbreak of infectious disease, chiefly measles, followed by one of mumps, which has been more complicated than any previous outbreak in my knowledge. I find 104 deaths and 161 births have been registered during the year. 15 of the deaths occurred in the Union Workhouse, 8 of which were from beyond your district, leaving 96 as the actual number of deaths in the Hexham Urban District for the past year, which, on a population of 6,000, give a death rate of 16 per thousand per annum; of these deaths 45 were males and 59 females. 161 births give a birth-rate of 26·833 on a population of 6,000. Of the births 77 were females and 84 males.

A birth-rate of 26 is below the average, which is nearly 31. A death-rate of 16 is satisfactory for an urban population, but Hexham, with its many advantages, should be less.

Ages at Death.—25 were under 1 year, 9 were 1 and under 5, 11 were 5 and under 25, 27 were 25 and under 65, 23 were 65 and under 80, 9 were 80 and under 90. 25 deaths under 1 year, or practically one in every 4 of the deaths in your district, being under 1 year, is too heavy. No doubt this is partly due to the outbreak of measles and the complications arising from them.

Causes of Death.—17 were due to diseases of the respiratory organs, 16 to diseases of the nervous system, 11 to heart disease, 10 debility at birth, 10 natural decay, 4 inquest cases, 3 to infantile diarrhoea, 2 to whooping cough, and 2 to enteric fever. It is well for you to note that 10 of the deaths, viz.:—those from measles, whooping cough and enteric fever, are due to infectious or preventable disease, some might add to these, those from infantile diarrhoea, making 13 out of 104, or $\frac{1}{8}$ of your deaths due to causes which are held to be preventable. If preventable, gentlemen, why have they not been prevented? This as the Sanitary Authority, you must each answer for yourselves.

Cases Notified.—600 cases of infectious diseases have been notified during the year, against 173 in 1895, and 37 in 1894. 447 of the 600 are of measles, 82 of scarlet fever, 62 whooping cough, 4 erysipelas, 3 diphtheria and 2 enteric fever.

These figures show the severity of the epidemic we have passed through. The cost may be considered by some excessive, and I am not prepared to say that in the case of measles it could not or should not be amended. At the same time I am convinced that notification of all infectious disease conduces to the public benefit, and had you at your disposal an Isolation Hospital, to which first cases could be removed, where such first cases are so situated as to exclude the possibility of isolation at home, outbreaks of such disease would in many instances be prevented. If you even succeed in postponing such outbreaks you would reduce the deaths, as a greater number of those susceptible would be above the most fatal age, especially in measles, which is from one and a half to two and a half years of age. You do not want a large hospital, as it is impossible in an outbreak to provide for all, but you should have a well equipped hospital at the disposal alike of all non-pauper members of the community, to which they may be removed, or any member of their household, if they desire it, and to which as a Sanitary Authority you can remove any case so placed in your midst as to endanger the public health. I fail to understand by what process of reasoning you convince yourselves as a Sanitary Authority that you are doing your duty in this matter.

I am not insensible to the many difficulties of public authorities, but I had hoped ere this that some decisive steps would have been taken to erect public slaughter houses. I need not dilate upon this, as you are all perfectly aware that the existing ones classed as a whole are totally unfit for the

slaughtering and keeping of healthy meat. Why do you allow them to continue? I regret that it has been sanctioned by the Local Government Board to continue the Cattle Market in Priest-puddle, which is the natural interpretation of their having granted a loan for its improvement.

During the year the mode of sewage disposal has been altered and much improved; an extension of the same principle as is now adopted will enable you to produce an effluent which will satisfy the requirements of the Rivers' Pollution Act, and that at comparatively small cost. Your efforts in this have met the approval of the County Medical Officer, who made a careful inspection of the works, and gave valuable hints as to future improvements. It was a pleasure to meet one so conversant with all sanitary matters, and actuated by such an earnest desire to further all sanitary work. Such visits must tend to improve the hygienic condition of the district. I am unable to approve of the principle of the septic tank on Tyne Green; the more I have considered it, the more am I convinced that it is on a fallacious basis, which must fail in practice. The principle underlying it appears to me to be that destructive decomposition tends to produce something superior to the material being decomposed. No doubt when such material is exposed to the free action of the sun, light, and air, they are resolved into their essential or first elements, but we all know if brought in contact with this decomposition that it is harmful. If, then, this is the result when exposed to the natural health giving elements of sun, light, and air, what must it be when these are excluded as in the septic tank? Take, for example, a deep well: when carefully covered over, although pure water may be flowing in and pumped out every day, yet in a comparatively short time the air above the water becomes so deteriorated that a candle will not burn in it, and it will destroy animal life; or, again, a pit which may be in daily operation and carefully ventilated, yet how slight an atmospheric change will render the air unfit to breathe, and even become explosive. If this happens with pure air and pure water, what may you not expect by keeping hermetically sealed foul air and the foulest of sewage? Instead of any improvement, as the septic promoters expect, you can only have the foulness intensified, rendering it more deleterious to health. It is, however, the unexpected that often happens, and should the practical working of the septic tank prove effective, although thereby it will overthrow many cherished idols, all interested in sanitary work will gladly welcome it. In the meantime let me advise you to follow out and improve the system now in operation at the lower out let. Let every attention be paid to keep the scavenging staff in good and perfect order, so that cleanliness may become a special feature of the town.

During the annual inspection with Mr Surtees, the various nuisances were from time to time brought to your notice. I must ask you to order their removal.

I find from Mr Surtees that during the year 189 nuisances have been dealt with. Of these 63 have been privy middens, 21 of which have been abolished, 34 houses have had their drains and sanitary arrangements tested and overhauled, the plans, when necessary, being given. 20 water closets defective, 20 stable middens refuse, &c., 16 slaughter houses, 15 choked drains, 12 animals kept in an unsanitary state, and 9 arising from cesspools.

I may here mention that more attention in the future will have to be paid to the proper housing of animals, and the sanitary condition of dairies.

Plans have been submitted and approved of 193 houses, building plans for 94 houses, 24 additions to houses, and 9 shops, offices, stables, &c.

750 yards of new sewer have been laid, and 213 yards have been taken up and relaid; 750 yards of new water main have been laid; 740 lineal yards of private streets have been made up, comprising 1,047 square yards of cement footway, 1,770 square yards of whinchip paving, and 2,270 yards of macadam carriage way.

18 new houses have been occupied during the year.

I believe your district is at present free of infectious disease.—I am, sir, yours very faithfully.

DANIEL JACKSON.

