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## Oswestry Rural District Council.

## Report of the Medical Officer of Health

FOR THE YEAR 1925.

GENTLEMEN,

In presenting this, my last, Annual Report on the health of your District, I beg to thank you most heartily for the kindness and courtesy I have always received at your hands. In some cases you will find that the Medical Officer of Health has to constitute himself a spur in the side of his Council, if not get out and push behind, to make a less ignoble simile. From my first appointment, and for not a few years, I had to discharge my duties with the assistance of untrained officials. I am glad to say this has changed; my Inspectors now are highly trained, take a keen interest in their work, and have better means of getting over the country. One's own ideas, too, are improved. We do not think that most preventable diseases are produced by dirt and drains; microbes, often not visible to the naked eye, are distributors by methods of which we used to be ignorant. I will divide this Report into various sections—(1) Facts and Figures, Births and Deaths; (2) Notifications and Notes; (3) Dairies and Milk Supplies, and legislation concerning them; (4) Water Supplies. The last paragraph of the Report will give some idea of the work carried out during the year.

We will now proceed to statistics of the year, commencing with the enumeration of Birth and Death-rates. Taking the Registrar-General's figures, which are always to be relied upon, our population is 16,580, and, as our area extends over 72,407 acres, there is, or will be, very little overcrowding for a year or two. Coming back to our figures, we find that there were 310 children born in the year—Males 151, Females 159 (of this number 16 were illegitimate—Males 9, Females 7, not a high average in a country district, and a large diminution in this class of Births as against 37 last year) showing a Birth-rate of 18.7, a little above that of the country at large. A fairly high Birth-rate is supposed to show, not only the healthiness of a district, but also its material prosperity. It is a good sign, not only to have plenty of children, but to know how to keep them when born, in spite of adverse circumstances, for it will not do to trust too much to Providence.

We must now consider the Deaths, of which there were 173 registered during the year—94 Males and 79 Females. The cause of nearly every death you will find in Table No. 1. The Death-rate for your District was 10.4, the lowest Death-rate I remember ever recorded, and gives us reason to hope and think that it is due to your sustained efforts in sanitation, including Water Supplies, really efficient drainage, and the supervision of new buildings, and should do much to encourage the Council to persevere in all these good works. This, with the close supervision of food so well exercised by your Inspector, will help, I hope, in the future, to diminish the Death-rate equal to that of the country at large.

**DEATHS AND NOTIFICATIONS.**—During the year the deaths from Zymotic diseases were few in number. Many cases of Scarlet Fever were not recognised or recorded. This disease, once so formidable, has of late years become so mild in type that it is scarcely noticeable in its earlier stages. Long ago we had epidemics affecting crowds of children who nearly all remained immune against further attacks. Now, partly because we take so much care in tracing and isolating cases, and partly because it is so like the poor—"It is nearly always with us"—there are only a few cases here and there; these cases, though mild, are very contagious and resist disinfection (that is, personal). The public are of opinion that after a few weeks all fear of contagion is over; that is not so, as cases after hospital treatment come home to infect other members of the family. Luckily, this is the exception and not the rule. Another thing to be remembered is that the poison does not now spend itself on the skin, and therefore does not cause extensive peeling, a ready means of recognition. In the later stages of the disease a great deal of the poison used to be thrown out in this manner, avoiding its retention in the person to be evolved in other ways. The disease is sometimes not recognisable, children going about apparently well until a fresh case of illness leads to further enquiries. This increases the difficulties your officers have in dealing with and isolating these cases.

**ENTERIC FEVER.**—We had no case of Enteric notified in the District during the year.

**DIPHTHERIA.**—The cases of Diphtheria numbered 14. There were only 2 deaths, the majority of the cases being very mild sore throats, with always the possibility of developing into diphtheria. This disease is said partly to be produced by damp—such as damp walks, imperfect pavements; channels to and around inlets to drains keep up the chronic malarial damp, the cause of most preventable illnesses. Uncultivated soil around a house makes a breeding place for diphtheria germs, and every defective foot of troughing and down spout is often the unsuspected cause of illness.

**OPHTHALMIA NEONATORUM.**—There was only one case of this disease in your District. These cases, if seen to and taken care of at once, do well, but are often best sent to the Eye Hospital at Shrewsbury. We are indeed lucky to have such a splendid institution in our midst.

**TUBERCULAR DISEASES.**—These do not seem to be increasing, as every case now is notified. We know better than formerly how we stand. Strenuous efforts are being made everywhere to cope with this dreadful affliction. We are taking our share and not lagging behind. In addition to the splendid institutions already in existence, we have the Orthopaedic Hospital where many of the sufferers from Tubercular diseases of bone and joints are cured by surgical skill, nursing and open-air treatment. Food, plentiful and of good quality, is essential to the successful treatment of Tubercular diseases.



The following Table will serve to compare the Birth and Death Rates in the Oswestry Rural District, a very wide and extensive one, with similar statistics for the Oswestry Urban District and England and Wales :—

TOTAL BIRTHS.	Rate per 1,000 Births.	Deaths.	Rate per 1,000 Deaths	Deaths under 1 year.	Acres.	Population.
<b>Oswestry Rural.</b>						
310	18.7	192	10.4	61.9	72,407	16,589

The infectious cases notified during the year 1925 are as follows :—

Scarlet Fever .. ..	21
Scarlatina .. ..	1
Diphtheria .. ..	14
Op. Neonatorum .. ..	1
Erysipelas .. ..	3
Encephalitis Lethargica .. ..	1

The following were the causes of Death during the year 1925 :—

	M.	F.
Encephalitis Lethargica .. ..	1	0
Whooping Cough .. ..	2	1
Diphtheria .. ..	1	1
Influenza .. ..	2	0
Tuberculosis (Respiratory System) .. ..	5	4
Other Tubercular Diseases .. ..	1	1
Cancer (Malignant Diseases) .. ..	11	14
Appendicitis and Typhlitis .. ..	3	0
Diabetes .. ..	0	1
Cerebral .. ..	3	10
Heart Disease .. ..	17	18
Arterio Sclerosis .. ..	7	5
Bronchitis .. ..	5	3
Pneumonia .. ..	5	4
Other Respiratory Diseases .. ..	0	1
Acute and Chronic Nephritis .. ..	2	2
Congenital Debility .. ..	7	3
Accidents and Diseases of Pregnancy .. ..	0	1
Deaths from Violence .. ..	4	0
Other defined Diseases .. ..	17	10
Causes ill-defined or unknown .. ..	1	0
Deaths of Infants under 1 year .. ..	13	5
.. .. illegitimate .. ..	1	0

**MILK SUPPLY.**—During the last year we have taken a great deal of pains that the milk supply all through the District may attain a good average of quantity and quality. All milk-sellers have now to be registered, and this gives us the power to visit and examine the condition under which milk is stored for consumption. Your Rural District is fairly good, though in the towns, especially the smaller ones, the places selected for storing and selling milk are small and often inconvenient of access, and are liable to pollution from dust and objectionable smells. It must be remembered milk is specially apt to take up odours and even liable to pollution if these odours proceed from objectionable sources. The milk in the country is generally transferred from the vendor as soon as it is produced, so not much harm comes from this source. The storage of milk in an ill-ventilated press in close proximity to other food is not to be recommended. Often the worst ventilated press in the house is chosen for this purpose. We know from experience that milk carries many organisms, and too much care cannot be taken as to the storage of it for the reasons we have stated before.

**WATER SUPPLIES.**—To give a mere outline of the extensive schemes to provide water-supplies would furnish reports covering many pages, so I will content myself with naming a few of the principal ones. The first, that supplying the village of Weston-Rhyn, is a pure water, excellent for all domestic purposes; it is supplied from springs near the Mardy Farm. This supply has been lately supplemented by the water from the Bath Pool, a natural reservoir situated about a mile from Selattyn. These conjoint springs, with the assistance of a storage reservoir, give an ample supply to the villages of Weston-Rhyn and St. Martins and the immediate neighbourhood, not only of pure water for dietetic purposes, but a satisfactory supply works the nearly universal provision of W.C.'s. I am happy to think that this supply is nearly, if not quite, paid for. These villages, largely inhabited by colliers, are completely sewered with all the modern improvements, and last, but not least, have an efficient system of scavenging carried out by your motor lorry. This, however, entails a great addition to the duties of your inspector. I am not aware of any village of their size where all three of the principal sources of civilization—drainage, water supply and scavenging—are brought to work so efficiently. Your Council can be proud of them.

The Sweeney Supply also supplies or will supply the village of Llanymynech which lies partly in your area and partly in that controlled by the Llanfyllin Union, thus making a proper drainage scheme a matter of some difficulty.



The village of Knockin, situated on red sandstone, possesses a fair supply derived from pumps which furnish excellent water, portable and fit for most domestic purposes. The geological structure of your District is very varied, furnishing very hard, though organically pure water from the limestone rocks of the upper portion of your District, sandstone in and around Sweeney, limestone grit overlying the coal measures of Ifton Heath and St. Martins, and red sandstone underlying Knockin and West Felton. I made numerous analyses of the water in the District, being particularly careful, where public supplies were included, to see if the water was likely to be contaminated and unfit for drinking. I would like to remark that the water which we have obtained from Sweeney is derived from springs and is a very pure water—its appearance being equal to its quality. A small reservoir has been constructed, and I never saw water so clear and transparent.

Whittington has a plentiful supply. Quality in the case of a water supply is the first consideration, quantity is not everything. The public should be educated as to the value of pure water, of which a certain quantity ought to be consumed by drinking every day if the health of the population is to be considered. Your Council are lucky to have the Liverpool pipes running through your District so that you can avail yourselves of this excellent water.

**MARSBURY WATER SCHEME.**—Another district which must shortly claim your attention is that of Marsbury. This is a low-lying portion of your District rising from the sloping ground and descending towards the Shropshire Plain, one portion rising again as it meets the higher configuration of Knockin. The subsoil of this District is gravel, clay and, in portions, peat, but everywhere the soil is shallow and water rather close to the surface. Morda river, with its tributary streamlets, runs through this District, and water is to be found everywhere, but it is not in all cases fit for drinking owing to the subsoil. Though there are some good wells locally, sunk at a fair depth, it is hard to find water for drinking. I think your Council will have to endeavour to divert some of the excellent water from the Sweeney or the Pant or some such source, as building will be likely to spread in this District.

**GOBOWEN SEWERAGE SCHEME.**—This important village situated on the main G.W. line is the junction for Oswestry, which ancient Borough it will soon join and possibly absorb. Oswestry itself is perhaps preparing for the threatening eventuality, though I think it will be hardly pleased to lose its old name and be characterized as "Oswestry, a pleasantly situated suburb of Gobowen, celebrated for its grammar school and its ancient well." Stranger things than this have happened, but we may look forward to the amalgamation of the flourishing towns of Oswestry and Gobowen. This village of Gobowen lacks one of the principal sources of civilization. It has, strange to say, a very efficient system of collection and disposal of refuse, but this, though working efficiently, cannot in any case take the place of a proper drainage scheme. I cannot say much for the present system. Neither in levels, continuity, structure or ventilation, can it rank as a sewerage scheme as there is no system about it. Any system depending largely or entirely on cesspools is only a temporary substitute and is in time bound to give trouble. Some of the better class houses are well provided in this respect, and are waiting and hoping till the cesspools are cleaned out and filled up and the terminal pipes directed into a main drain.

**WHITTINGTON SEWERAGE.**—Another ancient village on the Holyhead Road, once the direct road between London and Holyhead, will be all the better for a sewerage scheme. I must congratulate your Council on their pluck in undertaking the drainage of this village as a part of their scheme for the drainage of the Orthopedic Hospital of the Park Hall Estate and the district of Babbins Wood. It is a big job to be taken as an entirety, but I have no doubt that it will do much to bring land into the market for building purposes.

**SCAVENGING.**—I think your Council deserves the greatest credit for having tackled the scavenging problem, and for having carried it out so thoroughly. Your heavily laden motor, traversing most parts of the district, is "The Officer of Health on Wheels." Heaps of ashes and garden refuse are no longer prominent objects of the landscape, waiting for high winds to distribute poisonous germs and foul gases; their prompt removal through your efficient scavenging scheme proved a real boon, and their absence will not be missed. No system of sewerage disposal can be called complete without provision being made for the removal of refuse.

Wonderful work is being carried out in the village of St. Martins, now increasing, and which will ultimately be classed as a large colliery village. It was formerly very badly scavenged, overcrowded, and contained many squalid dwellings, having more than its fair share of population. When I first took up my work here, my visits to this particular part of the district were not few and far between. I am glad to say that the work being carried out by your Council when completed, supplemented with new houses and the demolition of insanitary property, will, I think, effect wonders. This village is situated on a high slope looking towards the valleys of the Ceiriog and the Dee. The soil however is heavy. We have now drained the village; the draining and consequent loosening of the soil will in itself be a great factor towards its aeration, and in consequence dry the houses and their surroundings.

**MORDA SEWERAGE.**—Morda will be another place that will demand sewerage. It is now furnished with an excellent water supply from the Liverpool main. This prospective sewerage will then provide for the Council houses on Morda Bank. As to its ultimate site I cannot decide or recommend any particular place or system. The same remark applies to the Pant where there are many good houses along the line of the water coming from Sweeney to provide Pant and Llanymynech.

**KNACKER'S YARD.**—We have only one so-called Knacker's Yard in your District, situated close to the canal, and though there are a number of cottages in close proximity, the yard is so well kept by its present owner, Mr. Griffiths, that I see no objection to its continuance as a Knacker's Yard so long as he is the occupier.

Knacker's Yards are a boon if the work is carried out properly, and the situation is all that can be desired, but a constant supervision by your Inspector is absolutely necessary. Generally speaking, Knacker's Yards should be situated as far as possible from inhabited dwellings, on a suitable soil, with a plentiful supply of water not liable to pollution.



Yours sincerely,

D.P.H., F.C.S., F.R.I.P.H.  
etc., etc., etc.

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H. HASKAYNE, Sanitary Inspector.