

[Report 1900] / Medical Officer of Health, Stevenage U.D.C.

Contributors

Stevenage (England). Urban District Council.

Publication/Creation

1900

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/w5bfjkz6>

License and attribution

You have permission to make copies of this work under a Creative Commons, Attribution license.

This licence permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See the Legal Code for further information.

Image source should be attributed as specified in the full catalogue record. If no source is given the image should be attributed to Wellcome Collection.



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

To the Members of the STEVENAGE URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Stevenage,
January 27, 1901.

Gentlemen,

"I am very pleased to be able to say that your district has maintained its reputation for health."

"During last year 54 deaths were registered, the same number as in 1899. After deducting three of these which belong by residence to other districts and adding one of ours which occurred in Hitchin we have a death-rate of 13.8 per thousand. This is taking our population at the low estimate of 3,850. I shall not be surprised to learn that at the coming census the population of Stevenage has reached 4,000; in a rapidly growing town of this size it is impossible to make any reliable estimate. It is satisfactory to notice that the deaths under 1 year fell to 19 as against 13 in the two preceding years. The less unfavourable weather during the early autumn with the consequently smaller incidence of diarrhoea may partly account for this result. The deaths, too, under 5 years of age show a decrease from 18 to 13; those between 5 and 15 an increase of 2, between 25 and 65 an increase of 4, whilst at ages 65 and upwards the number remains the same, namely, 18. Of these 9 were upwards of 70 years of age, and 4 upwards of 80. "The total number of births registered during 1900 was 111, an increase of 3 over those of the previous year, of which 61 were of males and 50 of females; this gives a birth-rate of 28.83, a slight decrease on last year, which was 29.1, but which by some error was given as 26.5.

"The demand for cottage property is still greatly in excess of the supply in spite of the fact that many new houses, more particularly adapted to the requirements of the artisan class, are rapidly being erected.

"The same difficult question, that of the housing of the working classes, is still exercising the minds of most of the sanitary authorities throughout the kingdom. If in Stevenage it is still thought inadvisable to erect model dwellings—and I am not yet convinced of the impracticability of this solution of the difficulty—I still think some improvement might be brought about by dividing our parish into an urban and rural district on much the same lines as it has now been divided for the purpose of removal of ashes and house refuse. By this means cottages for farm labourers might be more cheaply built and let at a more reasonable rental, who would thus have the extra advantage of living nearer to their work.

"At the present time the agricultural labourer is forced into occupying the old and often insanitary cottages because he cannot afford the newer ones: this often leads to overcrowding.

"One of the points raised against model dwellings is the assertion that tenants would not be found who would be willing to live under the same roof with other families; but I have recently found two rooms of a cottage suited to another family. This has been brought about by the high rentals, and if it continues will cause overcrowding to be far more common than at present.

"I am glad to say that one owner has closed three old thatched cottages as being unfit for habitation. I hope his example may be soon followed by others. Considering the present high price of building land it would seem as though this might be done with advantage both to the owner and also to the public health.

"I feel sorry that the Inspector's and my inquiries about the house connections have proved to have been of so little value. Only one meeting of the sub-committee to whom this question was remitted has yet been held, and no action has at present been taken.

"Perhaps, though it may appear rather a personal grievance, I might draw your attention to the similar fate that has befallen our report on dairies and milk-shops. I would, with respect, like to say that this apparent apathy on the part of the Council tends to cause its officers to lose that keenness and interest in their work which it is so important for them to have.

"During the past year the footpaths came under your notice, and a great improvement has taken place. Both sides of Julian's-road and the west side of the High-street from the corner of Hitchin-road to Brick-kiln-road have been asphalted, whilst several other paths have been made up and coated with fine slag, which, except for the transitory smell arising from it when first put down, seems quite to have answered expectations. I am very glad to see, too, that the pathway to the schools is being drained and re-laid, a much-needed improvement, as the health of the children attending the schools is of great importance. I must congratulate the Council on having carried out these works.

"On looking through the Inspector's journal I notice that he has made upwards of a hundred visits. As a result of these he brought to your notice some 28 pit or pail closets, only a few of which have been done away with; 7 cases in which house property was not connected with the sewer; in most of these cases the work has been done, but in two cases, both, I am sorry to say, the property of members of your Council, for a very long time our complaints were without avail, although the statutory notices were served. In one of these the work has not even yet been done. Let me point out the extremely bad effect this has in carrying out necessary improvements. Defaulters who are well aware of these and similar cases have more than once said to me 'If we were only on the Council we should not be compelled to do this.' Such a state of affairs brings your authority into contempt and acts as a grave obstacle to any reform. The nuisances reported were mainly blocking of drains and accumulations of ashes, and were easily remedied. Two cases of overcrowding were also reported; in both cases the nuisance was abated. One set of insanitary cottages which had given much trouble for the last three years have been put into a sanitary condition as soon as the new road and sewer were completed. It is now necessary to do the same to an adjoining road, the drains of which have been reported as being blocked on at least four occasions during the year.

"I should like to draw your attention to the fact that at many of the publichouses water is not laid on to the urinals, which consequently fail to get the requisite amount of flushing.

"In spite of all my previous protestations you still allow water closets to be erected without cisterns. I am told that after some controversy this much-needed reform has been carried out at Ware, owing to its being clearly proved that nearly all the blocked drains occurred in cottages which were not provided with cisterns.

"I would strongly urge you to have a systematic inspection of the district made at once with a view of trying to discover which house drains are still connected with the old sewer.

"There were two nuisances reported which I should like to say a few words about. Firstly, the smell from the manure as it is being unloaded at the railway station. Everyone agrees as to its existence, and to the intolerable nuisance which arises from it when the wind is westerly. It has been under your consideration on many previous occasions and more than once during the year, and a representation has been made to the railway company on the subject. The real difficulty is the agricultural interests involved. I cannot think that with two sidings one north and one south of Stevenage station and each within 1½ miles of it that a very great injustice would be done by stopping manure being brought here at all. After talking over the matter with a representative of the Company, I could not see any middle course open. I maintain that the extra cost to the few farmers whom this would effect would be small by comparison with the annoyance and even danger to health that a large number of ratepayers have now to suffer. Not only this, but the town is growing and yearly becoming more residential in character, and it is therefore only fair and right that the requirements of those who contribute so largely to the rates should be studied.

"The other nuisance is that arising from the keeping of pigs. Here again the fact of the rapid growth of the town has to be taken into consideration. Without perhaps going so far as to suggest that the keeping of pigs ought to be abolished, I do say that the way most of them are kept at present ought not to be allowed. If the pigsties were properly built and kept the complaints arising from them would be far less common. The Council should insist on all styes having a properly-constructed floor of brick or other impervious material laid with a fall to a drain connected with the sewer. The floors should be well washed down with water from time to time, and the sides lime-washed.

"I had occasion to draw your attention to a case in which I happened to observe ordinary soil being used for the purpose of making mortar. I regret that so little notice was taken of this important matter. This practice, I believe, is getting very common.

"The supply of water throughout the whole year has been abundant, and the quality of it is excellent. One or two wells have been closed and town water laid on. I hope to see all superficial wells gradually go out of use.

"I wish to congratulate the Council on having undertaken the removal of ashes and house refuse. Any accumulation of these can now be reasonably dealt with.

"With regard to the sewerage of the district we have again had several complaints of the smells arising from the manholes. The committee have, on my recommendation, sanctioned the purchase of more ventilating shafts. I think if there are a sufficient number of them erected that several of the manholes might with advantage be closed, but there will be a greater risk of sewer gas finding its way into those houses whose drains are not properly trapped and ventilated. This remark applies to many of the older houses in the town.

"Another question which has occupied much of your time has been the consideration of an isolation hospital. I must congratulate the Council on having arrived at the decision that it is better to join with Hitchin Urban, Baldock Urban and Hitchin Rural Districts for the purpose of erecting a combined hospital. I am sure this will prove to be by far the most economical and efficient solution to a difficult problem.

"The inquiry instituted by the Herts County Council has brought the various district councils into touch with one another, and has done much to smooth away difficulties. There seems to be little doubt now that the proposed course will very shortly be adopted.

"As a disinfecting apparatus will most probably be erected in connexion with this scheme Stevenage will have the advantage of getting at a small cost a much-needed improvement.

"I might here mention that the number of infectious cases notified to me were four during the past year: two of these were erysipelas, one was a case of puerperal fever and one was a case of diphtheria.

"The case of puerperal fever which terminated fatally seems to have arisen from the defective condition of the drains at the house as no other cause could be found. The further cases were notified, and the husband developed a septic inflammation of the throat at the same time. This occurred in a nearly new house, and it shows how important a matter careful inspection of all new drainage is, and the reason why I consider that the by-laws should be rigidly adhered to.

"With regard to the case of diphtheria, this happened in a low-lying damp house towards the end of December; there had previously been an outbreak in the neighbouring village of Graveley, and several cases of sore throat of rather doubtful character had previously come under my own observation. They were all developed during November and December, when the atmospheric conditions, namely, damp, closeness and fog, favour this disease.

"Whilst dealing with notifiable diseases, I should like to ask you to carefully consider the advisability of adding consumption of the lungs to the present list. As it is known now that this disease is certainly infectious, I think, were careful instructions given as to the best means of prevention and disinfection, the prevalence of this deadly disease might be lessened. This could only be brought about by having all the cases notified. There are various arguments against such a course, I know, but in my opinion these are outweighed by the corresponding advantages. I hardly think this report is the proper place to deal thoroughly with this large and important question.

"With regard to by-laws, the Council know the strong opinions which I hold as to the value of their adoption and thorough application. I trust now that the matter is under your consideration that you will soon come to hold the same views. As mentioned in my last report you would be well advised to make regulations dealing with cowbeds and dairies.

"You have at the present time a report on the condition of the various slaughterhouses in your district with my recommendations as to the same.

"The Inspector of Nuisances had occasion to seize a box of fish at our annual fair which was quite unfit for human consumption. A summons was taken out, and a conviction and £3 fine obtained."

"I enclose the usual statistics."

"I beg to remain, Gentlemen,

"Yours very truly,

"ROBERT ATTON DENN, M.D., D.Hy."

