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ANNUAL REPORT

of the

Medical Officer of Health

and

Medical Officer for Maternity
and Child Welfare

of the

BOROUGH OF TAUNTON,

FOR THE YEAR 1944.

TAUNTON:
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Public Health Department,
St. Paul's House,
TAUNTON,

10th September, 1945.

The Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses,
THE BOROUGH OF TAUNTON.

Mr. Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to submit an abridged Annual Report for the year 1944. This is prepared to comply with the requirements of the Ministry of Health in Circular 49/45. It is now possible to give particulars of population and mention other matters such as the opening of an entirely new water treatment plant in 1941, which could not be made public during war-time.

The statistics for 1944 are generally satisfactory, the live birth rate rose to 18.7 but the illegitimate birth rate of 2.3 is the highest recorded. The infant mortality rate of 48.8 is slightly higher than that of 44 for corresponding towns. With the exception of Dysentery of which there were outbreaks, the incidence of communicable disease was astonishingly low. Overcrowding is rife and some distressing cases have been investigated and reported to the Housing Officer.

I have to express my thanks to Alderman A. J. West, J.P., Chairman of the Maternity and Child Welfare and Public Health Committees for his continued unfailing interest and support and to record my appreciation of the work of the staff.

I am,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN ALLEN.

BOROUGH OF TAUNTON.

Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the year 1944.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS.

Registrar General's estimate of resident population	30,470
Number of inhabited houses at the end of 1944 according to the Rate Books (approx.)	8,045
Rateable Value at the end of 1944	£237,008
Estimated product of a penny rate	£920
Births live and still, number:—	
Male 307. Female 265. Total 572.	18.7
Births, live:—	
Male 298. Female 255. Total 553.	18.1
Births, still:—	
Male 9. Female 10. Total 19.	0.61
Births, illegitimate, live and still:—	
Male 42. Female 29. Total 71.	2.3
Deaths:—	
Male 210. Female 188. Total 398.	12.4
Infant Mortality Rate per 1,000 live births	48.8
Infant Mortality Rate legitimate per 1,000 leg. live birth	43.1
Infant Mortality Rate illegitimate per 1,000 illeg. live birth	90.9
Neonatal mortality rate, deaths under one month per 1,000 live births	21.7
Death rate per 1,000 live births from Diarrhoea in infants under 2 years of age	7.2

GENERAL PROVISION OF HEALTH SERVICES.

Maternity and Child Welfare. This was similar to 1943 and included:—

Ante-natal Clinic.—In temporary premises at North Street Sunday School—on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. The number of mothers who attended for ante-natal examination was 479, while five came for post-natal examination.

Thirteen mothers who had booked a midwife for their confinement were referred by the midwife to a doctor for ante-natal examination.

Home Helps. It was not possible owing to the great demand for female labour and lack of suitable women to provide any assistance of this kind.

Obstetric Consultant. This service was provided at the request of the doctor attending for 14 cases, of which 11 were able to visit the consultant and 3 required his attendance at their homes.

Maternity Home. 10 beds. The number of women ad-

mitted was 207 including 3 for special ante-natal care, and with the co-operation of the Somerset County Council, two women who could not be admitted owing to lack of beds were sent one to Tetton and one to Bridgwater.

Complicated Maternity Cases. 49 cases with complications were admitted from the Borough to the Taunton and Somerset Hospital.

Infant Welfare Centre. There are two—one in temporary premises at North Street Sunday School open on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, and the other at Halcon Chapel on Wednesday afternoons. Total consultations numbered 5,994 with 558 new infants brought for the first time. Of these, 477 were under one year at their first visit so that 86 per cent. of the registered live births came to the centre.

Work of the Health Visitors. There are three Health Visitors who also act as Child Life Protection Visitors and School Nurses; about half their time being given to Maternity and Child Welfare. They made 238 visits to expectant mothers 2,315 to children under one year of age and 2,449 visits to children between one and five years of age.

Puerperal Pyrexia. The special unit for the treatment of cases at the Taunton and District Isolation Hospital has continued to be of the greatest benefit. Fifteen cases were notified. Nine of these were removed to the Isolation Hospital and six were treated in the Taunton & Somerset Hospital.

Fruit Juices and Cod Liver Oil. The distribution of these products at the Infant Welfare Centres has continued; a part-time helper being engaged for this purpose. As these were available for country as well as town people it is not possible to give any estimate of the quantities taken by the children in the town.

War-time Nursery. 45 places (0—2 years 14. 2—5 years 31.) The demand for accommodation has continued and exceeds the space available. No child is admitted unless the mother is working. Measles reduced the attendance in the spring—the majority of children being infected. Whooping-cough also appeared but prophylactic inoculation seemed to limit the spread. No child is admitted unless protection against Diphtheria is effected or agreed to.

The Care of Illegitimate Children. Circular No. 2866 of 1st October, 1943. In this the Minister asked that special consideration be given to the problem presented by war conditions, and that co-operation with voluntary agencies for moral welfare has shown that much can be done to help the mother and

safeguard the child. Other helpful measures are the provision of special hostels for mother and child and the provision of places in day or residential nurseries for the infants or suitable foster mothers.

A conference to discuss the matter was called by the County Medical Officer of Health on 26th July who described the provision available through the County Council—which included places in residential nurseries and a hostel for mothers and children.

Illegitimate births in 1944 numbered 71 (66 live and 5 still births) equal to an illegitimate birth rate of 2.3 per 1,000 population which is the highest so far recorded.

A scheme which included a grant of £104 a year to the Taunton and District Society for the Welfare of Women and Girls, who employ a whole time welfare worker, and participation in the provisions available through the County Council was approved. The welfare worker submits reports once every three months on her work in the Borough.

One illegitimate infant was admitted to a residential nursery on 20th November and maintained there until 30th Dec.

The Care of Premature Infants. Circular 20/44 issued on the 22nd March, 1944, contained the recommendations made by an Advisory Committee and approved by the Minister. Some of these involved increased staff and accommodation, which it is not possible to provide at present.

To obtain more accurate information as to the number of premature births, particulars of the weight of the child at birth (that is if 5½ lbs. or under) were required on the notification of birth forms from the 27th June, 1944, and it appeared from these that eleven infants were prematurely born. In the whole year six infants died from this cause.

Arrangements were also made for the retention for a suitable period of such infants in either the Taunton & Somerset Hospital or the Maternity Home, where circumstances rendered this desirable, and for information to be sent to this Department when the discharge home of the infant was decided.

A special cot with an electrically heated and thermostat controlled cover has been provided at the Maternity Home.

It has not been possible owing to the dearth of suitable women to provide home helps to any of the cases.

It is hoped that it may be possible to provide in the Maternity Home special accommodation such as a small ward with facilities for maintaining a higher temperature and humidity.

One premature infant was retained in the Maternity Home for six weeks until fit for discharge.

Supply of Sheets for Expectant Mothers. Circular 154/44 of 3rd November, 1944. At the suggestion of the Minister, arrangements were made with the midwives, so that expectant mothers who had booked a midwife and arranged to be confined at home, could have priority dockets to enable them to purchase two or at the most three sheets according to need on the certificate of the midwife. The scheme was put into operation on the 1st December. One application for three sheets had been dealt with by the end of December.

Promotion of Cleanliness and Elimination of Verminous Conditions. Circular 2831 of 2nd July, 1943. The three Health Visitors (who are also the School Nurses) continue to pay special attention to children under 5 years of age who are known to need this. They find that where a child in school has an unclean head that younger members of the same household who are not attending school are often in need of attention.

Instruction as to cleansing is given and metal combs are loaned, while special preparations which have a lethal effect on the louse, such as benzyl benzoate emulsion are provided free of cost. When it is known that the mother, for various sufficient reasons, is unable to cleanse the child, this is done by special arrangement at the Clinic.

Scabies was slightly less prevalent. The special clinic for the treatment of this at Belmont Sick Bay continued and was open for four afternoons and one evening each week. Contacts have been advised to attend for prophylactic treatment.

SANITARY CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE AREA.

Water Supply. This is derived from several sources on the Blackdown Hills. They are mainly surface in character and some contamination is inevitable although everything possible is done to reduce this. The water is stored in reservoirs having a total capacity of approximately 160 million gallons. From these it falls by gravity to Fulwood where it is passed through a completely new and most modern treatment plant, which was put into operation in November, 1941.

In this plant lime is first added to the raw water and then a solution of alumina, after which, it passes through conical upward flow tanks where the floc resulting from the addition of alumina traps coarser suspended matter. From these the water passes through rapid sand filters; ammonia and chlorine are then added to the filtered water which passes into service reservoirs with a capacity of approximately 1,250,000 gallons. From the service reservoirs the mains to the towns go through

a meter with an automatic residual chlorine recorded at Fulwood.

(i) The water supplied has been satisfactory in quality but an increased demand—particularly for military purposes—combined with a low rainfall, made it necessary to curtail the supply during the night from the 1st April to 31st October.

(ii) Fifty-three samples of main tap water were taken at approximately weekly intervals through the year, and sent to the County Bacteriologist for examination. Samples of the raw water entering the Filtration Plant at Fulwood and of the treated water passing through the Recorder House at Fulwood were taken at fortnightly intervals, to check the bacterial content of the raw water, the effect of the treatment on this and the amount of residual chlorine. The number taken was 26 of each.

The main tap samples shewed no excretal *B. coli* present in 50 c.c. on 49 occasions, and on 4 occasions excretal *B. coli* were present in 30 c.c. but not in 10 c.c. These results were examined by the late Dr. Suckling, who after a visit and examination, considered that they were probably due to contamination in the tap, it not having been possible to procure special sampling taps for this purpose as intended.

The Corporation also provide a supply from Leigh Reservoir for parts of the Taunton Rural District. This is subject to slow sand filtration at the reservoir, after which chlorine is added; eleven samples of this supply were taken from the service reservoir at Leigh and all shewed no excretal *B. coli* in 50 c.c.

The County Analyst, Mr. D. R. Wood, gave the following chemical analysis of a main tap sample taken on 4th Dec. :—

Physical Character	.....	Clean and bright.
Reaction	.....	Slightly alkaline.
		P.H. = 7.4
Alkalinity (as Ca CO ₃)	.....	5.5
Total hardness	.....	8.0
(a) permanent	.....	5.5
(b) temporary	.....	2.5
Chlorine (in terms of Na Cl)	.....	2.6
Nitrogen as Saline and free Ammonia	.....	0.0017
Nitrogen as Albuminoid	.....	0.004
Nitrogen as Nitrates	.....	0.05
Nitrogen as Nitrites	.....	—
Oxygen absorbed from		
Permanganate (4 hrs. at 80 deg. F.)	.....	0.1
Poisonous Metals	.....	—
Free Carbon Dioxide	.....	0.4
Silica (Si O ₂)	.....	1.0

(all results in parts per 100.000)

(iii) The water as supplied has a slight plumbo-solvent action—diminished since the opening of the new filter plant—

by the addition of lime in the form of calcium hydroxide to the raw water before it enters the settlement tanks. No special analysis has been made for plumbo-solvency.

(iv) There are approximately 8,045 inhabited houses in the town and of these all except 51 are supplied from public water mains direct to the house. Of the 51 not so supplied, 46 with 159 inhabitants are condemned houses in confirmed Clearance Orders, occupied either by evacuees or under licence. 4 with 10 inhabitants are supplied from 2 wells and 1 with 1 inhabitant from 1 spring.

Milk. A scheme for the rationalization of distribution of all milk was put into force on 1st December, 1942. The object of this was to effect economy in man power and petrol consumption, but it also restricted the purchaser's choice. Regulations imposing restriction on the sale of raw milk in certain areas had been made in 1943 but these have not yet been enforced. Pasteurized milk was produced from two premises; samples of these were taken at approximately weekly intervals and sent for examination of bacterial content and the phosphatase test for sufficient heat treatment, to the County Bacteriologist.

Of the samples taken from one producer 87.7 per cent. and of the other 83 per cent. complied with the test for sufficient heat treatment.

I believe that shortage of trained staff contributed largely to these results not being more satisfactory.

Notifiable Infectious Disease. There was no undue prevalence of any infectious disease except Dysentery during the year. The number of cases of certain infectious diseases notified, the rates per 1,000 population, and comparable rates for similar sized towns in England and Wales were:—

Disease				No.	Taunton Rates per 1,000 population	Smaller towns Rates per 1,000 population
Notifications of—						
Typhoid Fever	.....	.....	.....	—	—	0.01
Paratyphoid Fever	.....	.....	.....	—	—	0.01
Cerebro Spinal Fever	.....	.....	.....	3	0.09	0.04
Scarlet Fever	.....	.....	.....	67	2.19	2.67
Whooping Cough	.....	.....	.....	48	1.57	2.29
Diphtheria	.....	.....	.....	13	0.42	0.69
Erysipelas	.....	.....	.....	9	0.29	0.28
Measles	.....	.....	.....	45	1.47	3.94
Acute and Influenzal Pneumonia	.....	.....	.....	6	0.19	0.82
					rates per 1,000 live & still births.	
Puerperal Pyrexia	.....	.....	.....	15	26.2	9.25

Diphtheria. There was one death from this cause, the case an unofficial evacuee, aged 4 years, had not been immunised against this disease.

Sustained effort continues by all members of this department to increase the number of children protected. A clinic for this purpose was open each Saturday morning at the temporary centre in North Street. A scheme devised by the Liverpool Health Department to ensure a careful estimate of the numbers at each age who have been protected, has been adopted. It appeared that at the end of the year at least 44.7 per cent. of the children under 5 years of age and 62.0 per cent. of those between 5 and 15 years of age had been immunized.

Dysentery and Diarrhoea were unduly prevalent. 54 cases of dysentery were notified and deaths from Diarrhoea or allied conditions in children under 2 years of age numbered eleven, of which eight occurred in the Taunton and Somerset Hospital.

A series of cases of Dysentery in February, March and April appeared to be connected with a supply of pasteurized milk. All the staff were examined with negative results, but a roundsman of another firm was found to be a carrier and was treated for this condition in the Isolation Hospital.

There was also an outbreak in the Public Assistance Institution in April and May when 22 cases were notified with one death.

Refuse Collection and Disposal. It has been found necessary owing to shortage of man power and vehicles to reduce the frequency of collection of household refuse to once a fortnight. The lack of paper and other combustible material collected for salvage has made it impossible to continue destruction by fire at the Sewage Works. Some nuisance had arisen from uncontrolled dumping by allied forces in a place just outside the area; on indicating this to the appropriate authority immediate steps were taken to deal with the dump and control it.



