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EDITOR

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WATFORD LOCAL BOARD OF HEALTH.

TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

BY

ALFRED THOS. BRETT, M.D.,

*Medical Officer of Health.*

WATFORD :

M. PEACOCK, QUEEN STREET.

1894.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEDICAL  
OFFICER OF HEALTH.

“ Watford House, January 1st, 1894.

“ To the Watford Board of Health.

“ Gentlemen,—I beg to submit to you my twenty-first annual report. It is for the year 1893.

“ *Vital Statistics.*

“ In my last annual report I calculated the population at 19,400 in your district. The number of houses now rated is 4,231. Number of houses empty 130. I now estimate the number of inhabitants at 20,500.

“ *Births.*

“ The births were 580. Watford 526, New Bushey 54, excluding seven which did not belong to us. Birth rate is 27·95. Illegitimate births 22, four of which do not belong to Watford.

“ *Deaths.*

“ The deaths were 284 ; that is 22 less than last year. In the Workhouse 40 deaths ; 13 less than last year ; 19 did not belong to Watford. Leaving out those who died in hospitals and did not belong to our district, the death-rate is 12·82 per 1000. In 1892 the death-rate was 13·93. Nine died above 80. One ratepayer lived to be 100 years.

“ *Zymotic Diseases (that is Epidemic or infectious Diseases).*

“ The death-rate is ·87, not one of a 1000 of the population. In 1892 it was 1·9. The causes of some of the deaths were as follows :—Scarlet fever, 3 ; diphtheria, 2 ; membranous croup, 2 ; small-pox, 1 ; measles, 2 ; whooping cough, 6 ; erysipelas, 1 ; child bed fever, 1.

“ *Inquests.*

“ There were 12 inquests, as against 14 last year, and 15 the year before. Four were accidents. No deaths from hydrophobia. Last year lock-jaw caused two deaths.

“ *Health of the Poor.*

“ In the Guardians' Infirmary 60 beds at least, and about to be enlarged. There were medical, 274 cases ; surgical, 84 cases. Last year there were 278 medical and 68 surgical.

“The Guardians’ Isolation Hospital 16 beds, which is intended for infectious cases only, was for 12 weeks set apart for small-pox cases, and no other cases were admitted. We had in all 53 cases, such as six small-pox, influenza, scarlet fever, ring-worm ; in all 23 cases requiring isolation.

“Out-door poor.—Cases treated in the year, medical, 608 ; surgical, 170. Total, 778.

“ *Public Health.*

“The general health has been good, and the death-rate has been low, and even the zymotic death-rate has been less than usual. Our chief trouble has been caused by an extensive epidemic of scarlet fever of a mild type. I have sent you many reports of this and a very detailed one lately, therefore I need not repeat the facts. No disease varies so much in character as does scarlet fever. I have seen it so malignant as to destroy life in a few hours. I have known it destroy five out of six in one family. At other times the disease is so slight as to escape notice, even medical advice is not obtained, and the child is allowed to mix with others in an infectious condition. I am opinion that it is all one disease, and that the milder form may give rise to the most malignant. 364 cases have been reported to me ; of these 268 have been sent to our three isolation hospitals, and 96 at home.

“The death-rate per 1000 of scarlet fever was—treated in the hospitals, 14.92 ; treated at home, 31.35. So that the death-rate at home is twice as much as those in hospital.

“ *Smallpox.*

“I said in my last report, and I cannot too often repeat it, ‘That of the unvaccinated who get smallpox 1 in 4 die.’ I might have said 1 in 3. We had 13 cases, one fatal. This woman died before a doctor saw her. We could not find any evidence of vaccination. The verdict of the jury was ‘died from malignant smallpox.’ Some of the other cases were confluent and most severe ; and I remarked again that those who had fewest marks of vaccination had the disease in the most severe form. Of course all nurses and attendants were re-vaccinated except one woman, who refused. She was the only one who caught the disease.

“Much credit is due to the Board of Guardians for acting with such forethought and energy. It is found that contagious diseases are often brought by vagrants. We entertained 4,305 tramps last year.

The Board appointed a special tramp inspector, who called the doctors' attention to any special case. I had one suspicious case removed to the Small-pox Hospital, and in two days it proved to be small-pox, and I procured a London nurse the same day. This man came from London. He slept at Harrow last. We are indebted to London for most of our infectious cases at the beginning. We afterwards had 6 men and 6 women. At my request the Guardians kindly allowed the women to be treated at their hospital, the men being left at the old Lower Infirmary or Pest House.

"Every precaution was taken, and I think that it was owing to the pains that the late Mr. Williams and others took that we were able to prevent an epidemic of smallpox. It should never be forgotten that this disease is quite unnecessary.

"Vaccination is as great a preventative, as one attack of small-pox prevents a second attack.

*"Diphtheria.*

"We had eight cases, and two fatal, all treated at home.

*"Membranous Croup.*

Five cases, two fatal. This disease is a relation to diphtheria, and perhaps can cause that complaint in others.

*"Influenza.*

"This was very prevalent at the beginning and the end of the year. It caused 4 deaths.

*"Remarks from my Journal and Book of Application.*

"These books are placed before you at each meeting, and I am at 14, High-street, daily at 10 a.m., Sunday excepted. I have had 281 notices sent me under the Notification Act, and I have issued 281 orders to disinfect, &c. I have paid about 105 visits to slaughter-houses, bake-houses, dairies, cow-sheds, lodging-houses, courts, and alleys, of which we have about 30 in the High-street alone, the Board Schools and others. I have attended your Board often and the Board of Guardians often on sanitary matters. I have received and written numerous letters, often to other M.O.H.

"I have made 39 reports to you on various sanitary matters requiring your attention, such as precautions against cholera, small-pox, scarlet fever, and others. The condition of the Market-place is still most unsatisfactory.

*“ Closing Schools.*

“ The dispersion of a school on account of an outbreak of zymotic disease is always a serious step to take, and should very rarely be carried into effect; except in one case when the mischief is kept up by some local sanitary defect which can only be remedied when the children are away. In 1892 I advised the schools to be closed, 1,000 children being away. The schools were often closed in an adjoining district, and twice here because of scarlet fever. I could not find it had a marked effect in restraining the disease. Each case must be judged on its own merits, and on the Medical Officer of Health must rest the responsibility, as he alone knows all the facts. I should use the closure more freely in case of an epidemic of diphtheria. I advise all managers of schools to insist on a very free ventilation when the children are sent into the playground for some minutes.

*“ Hospital Accommodation for Watford and District.*

“ I need not detain you on this subject as you and the public are well informed. Owing to the generosity of the Earl of Essex, who has given to the Watford Union some land, I hope we shall soon have an isolation hospital worthy of us, and that it will be so well managed, and be made so attractive, that all ratepayers can go there without any loss of self-respect. Even in our present five temporary buildings we have had representatives of the following professions:—Clerical, artistic, scholastic, tradesmen, and others. There are 12 infectious diseases mentioned in the Notification Act; most of these we must provide for, and not only scarlet fever.

*“ Public Lighting.*

“ This leaves something to be desired. Up to the death of your late gas inspector, Mr. Lovejoy, the gas was above the legal standard as regards pressure, purity, and power. The public do not get the full benefit of this, because of your defective burners and faulty fittings, which it is your business to keep in order, and the good gas gets the blame for your fault. We might with a little thought get much better light, and perhaps with less expense; much is now burnt needlessly.

*“ Allotments.*

“ We have these north, south, east, and west of our district. The Hon. Reg. Capel was the first to provide some for us at Harwoods Farm, there 209

tenants, and there are more applicants. You have applicants at Bushey, some at the London Orphan Asylum, some at Callow Land, and some 12 acres obtained this year. Allotments should be encouraged. Gardening is the most healthy and pleasing occupation. "God Almighty planted the first (allotment) garden, and indeed it is the purest of human pleasures. It is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man.

*" Public Recreation Grounds and Open Spaces.*

"The Watford Fields Recreation Ground is getting more appreciated. It is greatly indebted for its attractions to the late Mr. H. Williams.

"The Ebury Recreation Ground will soon require your attention. A band should play in each every week.

"The West Herts Cricket and Football Ground does not belong to you at present, yet it is of great value to health as an open space. I think you should get one more site while you can.

"The Callow Land Estate or (Merton Town as it might be called after Merton College) is being rapidly built upon. I suggest you should buy some land there for a recreation ground.

"The road by the Parish Church has been greatly improved. Although some regret the pulling down the house in which Cromwell is reported to have slept, yet it is an improvement. There are some other houses hardly fit for human habitation.

*" Bathing Place on the River.*

"We had 22,570 in the year from April to October. The greatest number was in August, 8,680, and August 20 we had 620. Our remarkably fine warm summer no doubt increased the number of bathers. Now that your Ebury Recreation Ground extends to the river it may be possible to make this river still more attractive. There is a demand for a tepid swimming bath to use in the winter months when the river is too cold. The late Mr. C. F. Humbert had a plan made for this. Baths and wash-houses would be useful. It is but right to state that hot baths can be obtained twice a week at the Clarendon Hall; 4505 bathers went there last year. The last ten years, 36,830.

*"The Colne Bridge at Watford.*

This bridge has been much improved by the County Council; it is not quite finished. On hearing that the Vice-Chairman of the County Council, Sir John Evans, was going to look at the bridge with others, I went also. We saw that three out of four of the riparian owners had much encroached on the road and river. Also that one arch of the river had been bricked up. Afterwards I saw the former bed of the river under this arch and washed sand and gravel. To allow the arch of a county bridge to be bricked up must show negligence on the part of someone—the vestry or churchwardens. Seeing this obstruction to the river and the changing of its bed, I thought it my duty to report to you November 2nd, on

*"Floods.*

"These are a nuisance injurious to health. They can be prevented, in a great measure, and should be. It cannot be lawful to brick up one arch of a county bridge. The condition of our rivers and waterways is not satisfactory. In my humble opinion this important matter should be taken in hand by some central authority such as the County Council. They once appointed a committee to overlook and protect the salmon fisheries of our county. Why should we not have a committee to look after our trout streams, which might be as good as any in England. Complaints are frequently made to me of destruction of fish. Five trout were brought to me; they weighed 7lb. 8oz.; one weighed 3lb. 8oz. We should have a highway committee for our roads, and we have a waterway committee to look after our streams. I respectfully suggest that you petition the County Council to appoint such a committee, to prevent floods by removing obstructions such as bricked up arches to county bridges and to keep the rivers clean. And then if we do our duty we need not fear any meddling with our county by the Thames Conservancy Bill, said to be one of the most harsh and arbitrary ever brought into Parliament.

"I enclose the report of Mr. D. Waterhouse, your engineer, to show a little of the work done.

"With regard to the report of the Sanitary Inspector, I withhold it for the present, as Mr. Williams died in October, and Mr. Baker, his successor, only began his duties on December 14th, 1893. During the time we were without an Inspector of Nuisances all officers gave willing help, and much extra work devolved on Mr. Camp.

"I remain, gentlemen, yours obediently,  
"ALFRED T. BRETT, M.D."



## SURVEYOR'S REPORT.

" January, 1894.

*" New Roads and Buildings.*

" Plans have been submitted and approved by the Board for the following works during the year within the district of Watford:—" Three new roads, viz., Liverpool, Clifton, and Westberry roads, with a total length of 700 yards.

*" New Buildings.*

" 264 new houses, 20 additions to houses, 8 new shops, 23 new shop fronts, 4 new workshops, 13 store sheds, 3 mission rooms, 1 factory, 4 stables, 1 warehouse, 12 additions to business premises, 4 studios, 1 addition to school, 1 soup kitchen, 1 cow house.

*" Street Works.*

" Improvement works have been carried out as follows:—Widening of Aldenham-road, and erection of concrete wall surmounted with substantial iron railing around Board School in this and London-road. The paving, channelling, and making the roadway in Market-street, widening of Church-street, and erection of iron railings. The kerbing and channelling of Upton-road, Loates-lane, and part of St. Albans-road. A new urinal has been erected in Church-street.

*" Water Supply.*

" The 12in. and 4in. water mains have been re-laid over the new bridge over Colne, 4in. diam. water mains have been laid in Wiggshall and St. James's roads. The 6in. diam water main has been extended along St. Alban's-road. Progress has been made in diminishing the waste of water in the older parts of the town by the removal of defective services where detected.

*" Sewerage.*

" The low level sewer has been laid from High-street across the new Recreation-ground to take the sewage from Shaftesbury and Ebury roads. A crossing under the river which has been effected, which will take the sewage from the property in New-street into this sewer. The storm water drain for taking water from St. Andrew's district and the relief of Queen's-road has been executed.

" D. WATERHOUSE,

" Surveyor."