

Dr. S.W. Wheaton's report to the Local Government Board on the sanitary condition of Swanage, and on administration by Swanage urban district council / [S.W. Wheaton].

Contributors

Wheaton, S. W.
Great Britain. Local Government Board.

Publication/Creation

London : Printed for H.M.S.O. by Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1897.

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/v49st3pw>

License and attribution

This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



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

OFFICIAL COPY.

Dr. S. W. Wheaton's Report to the Local Government Board on the Sanitary Condition of Swanage, and on Administration by the Swanage Urban District Council.

RICHD. THORNE THORNE,
Medical Officer,
July 12th, 1897.

THE district under the control of the Swanage Urban District Council includes the town of Swanage, together with the village of Heston and a few small hamlets. The district has an area of 2,850 acres; the population of the district in 1891 consisted of 2,600 persons, living in 564 houses; at the present time the population is estimated at 3,300 persons, living in 702 houses. Of late Swanage has become a popular seaside resort, and during the summer months the population is increased by influx of visitors to the number of 1,500 to 2,000 persons. For several years the Board have received complaints of inefficient administration by the Local Sanitary Authority, especially complaint as to nuisance from the discharge of sewage on the foreshore of Swanage Bay, and as to pollution of streams by sewage.

In 1886 a very serious outbreak of enteric fever occurred at Swanage, which was the subject of a report to the Local Government Board by Mr. W. Harvey, formerly one of their Medical Inspectors. Mr. Harvey's report showed that there were many unwholesome conditions existing in the district calculated to foster the spread of any infectious illness that might occur there, and certain recommendations were made to the Swanage Local Board by the Local Government Board for the sanitary improvement of their district, as a consequence of Mr. Harvey's report.

In August 1893 Swanage was visited by Dr. Bulstrode, one of the Board's Inspectors, in the course of the general cholera survey, and he in due course made certain recommendations to the Swanage Local Board for the sanitary improvement of their district.

Although the before-mentioned recommendations have, from time to time, been pressed upon the Swanage Local Board, and upon the Urban District Council which succeeded them, information in the possession of the Board tended to show that very little had been done in remedying the sanitary shortcomings of Swanage. Under these circumstances, I was instructed to visit the district, and to report upon its sanitary condition and upon the sanitary administration of the District Council.

The greater number of the houses in the town of Swanage are situated upon the southern side of a valley which runs west and east, and opens out to Swanage Bay. The valley is bounded on the south by a range of high hills, formed by the Purbeck beds, from which the well-known Purbeck stone

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE,
BY EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

And to be purchased, either directly or through any Bookseller, from
EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, EAST HARDING STREET, FLEET STREET, E.C.; or
JOHN MENZIES & Co., 12, HANOVER STREET, EDINBURGH, and
90, WEST NILE STREET, GLASGOW; or
HODGES, FIGGIS, & Co., LIMITED, 104, GRAFTON STREET, DUBLIN.

1897.

No. 117.

Price Twopence.

WELLCOME
LIBRARY

General Collection

+P

199

was formerly obtained; on the north it is bounded by a high range of chalk downs. The valley is about one mile in width, and is traversed by two small streams, which are about half a mile distant from one another, and which fall into Swanage Bay. The houses in the older portion of the town are chiefly situated along one street—the High Street—which is on the south side of, and nearly parallel to, the southernmost of the two streams before mentioned. In addition, there are three situations in which building operations are in progress, *i.e.*, on the southern slope on the Durlstone Estate; between the two streams in the valley, on the De Moulham Estate; and on each side of the smaller and northernmost stream, known as the Ulwell Stream. The subsoil on the southern slope of the valley consists of decomposed rock, upon which the greater number of the houses in the district have been erected. That of the valley itself is composed of sand and clay of the Wealden formation and of alluvium.

The inhabitants of Swanage were formerly chiefly employed in the quarrying of the well-known Purbeck stone, but of late trade in this stone has greatly diminished, and at the present time the inhabitants are chiefly engaged in supplying the wants of visitors, who are attracted to the district by its picturesque characters.

I.—GENERAL SANITARY CIRCUMSTANCES.

Condition of Dwellings.—Most of the dwellings in the district are well built of stone or of brick. In the older parts of the town, and at Heston, there are dwellings which are much dilapidated; some, too, are damp, owing to the absence of eave-spouting, or from the fact that they have been built into a bank or have a bank close behind them. There is very little crowding together of dwellings. Most of the houses have yards or gardens attached. No instances of overcrowding of persons in dwellings came to my knowledge.

Water Supply.—This is chiefly obtained from a private company—the Swanage Gas and Water Company. This company obtains water from two sources; in the first place, from a spring issuing from the chalk down to the north of the town, in the second place, from a well situated nearly in the centre of the town. Other sources of water supply are, from a well near the pier, from a few private wells, and from springs in the case of some outlying houses.

With regard to the sources of the water supplied by the company, the first source, that which is obtained from the spring, appears to be of good quality and free from risk of pollution. This water is delivered to a certain low-lying part of the town by gravitation; the remaining portion of the town, which is situated at a higher level, is supplied through the medium of a reservoir situated on the hill-side to the south of the town, to which water from the spring is pumped by means of a gas engine. The company's second source, that from the well in the town, is, I am informed, rarely utilised now. Usually this well water is only pumped into the mains twice monthly, for the purpose of keeping the well clear, and for ensuring a fresh flow of water into it. There is an abundant supply from the first source, which is sufficient for the needs of the district, and the company would do well to entirely discontinue the use of the water from the well in the town, the surroundings of which are not altogether satisfactory. The well is 113 feet in depth, the first 60 feet being a shaft, and the remainder a boring; it is sunk upon a site which has been occupied by dwellings for many years, and is surrounded by dwellings at the present time. Since Swanage is an ancient town, in which vault privies and cesspools, so-called, have long been in use, allowing soakage of their contents into the subsoil, which at this part is composed of loose rock with many fissures, it is probable that organic filth has penetrated the rock to a great depth; and since the well is sunk in this fissured rock, there is risk that organic filth may get access to and contaminate the water furnished by it. The well in question appears to intercept water flowing from higher ground towards the sea. Thus I am informed that when the water is pumped from this well the level of the water in private wells in its neighbourhood is much lowered, and notably so in the case of a particular well situated at a lower level nearer the sea-shore.



It is evident that there are several underground streams making their way from the higher ground towards the sea in this part of the town.

The company's water is supplied to the larger dwellings by way of storage cisterns; the occupants of the smaller class of dwellings obtain water from stand-pipes in the streets. All waterclosets supplied with water by the company are required to be furnished with separate waste-preventing flush-out cisterns.

Sewerage.—Up to the year 1893 the district was without any system of sewerage. In that year the Swanage Local Board decided to provide sewers for the town; plans were prepared, and the consent of the Local Government Board obtained to the borrowing of 6,000*l.* for that purpose. In the plans submitted to the Board all the sewers were shown converging to an outfall sewer, by which the sewage would be discharged into the sea below low-water mark, at a place a little north of the southern headland bounding Swanage Bay. No outfall sewer has, however, been constructed, the Urban District Council having failed to carry out in its entirety the scheme of sewerage works which obtained the Board's approval. In the absence of the outfall sewer, the newly-constructed sewers have been connected to an old culvert discharging on the foreshore of the bay. There are also other shortcomings in connexion with the new sewerage system, in that the old sewers have not been removed, and the Urban District Council have not made general use of their powers for enforcing the connexion of house drains to the newly-constructed sewers. As a result, very many dwellings have not been connected to the new sewers, and, in some instances, an old sewer remains side by side with a new sewer, receiving the sewage from dwellings, whilst the new sewer has no sewage falling into it. Owing to these circumstances, the 4,500*l.* spent have so far been of very doubtful benefit to the district. There is, indeed, now, discharge of a greater quantity of sewage through the old culvert, with consequent increase of the nuisance which had existed before on the foreshore abreast of the town, and which the new scheme was intended to remedy. In consequence of the failure to enforce the connexion of house drains and branch drains to the new sewers, a considerable quantity of sewage is discharged at various points into the stream which enters the south side of the bay. At Heston, the sewage from a population of about 500 persons also enters this stream. At various points below Heston other sewers or drains discharge into this stream, which falls into the sea a few yards away from the old culvert before mentioned as discharging sewage on the foreshore. Latterly a sewer has been constructed under the direction of the District Council, which conveys the sewage, excluding that from waterclosets, of the houses which have been built on the northern side of the valley, into the Ulwell stream, just as it flows beneath the promenade. There are thus, on the foreshore of Swanage Bay, three points at which sewage is discharged, and in addition there are several private sewers from dwellings near the sea which discharge on the same foreshore. Of the three main points of discharge for sewage, two are situated at the southern end of the promenade and one at its northern end. The promenade is in the centre of the bay, and is nearly half a mile in length; the part of the foreshore below the promenade is sandy, and convenient for bathing, and here the District Council have marked off two bathing places, one for each sex. The bathing places and sands below the promenade are thus situated between two points of discharge for sewage. Many complaints have reached the Board from inhabitants of Swanage, and from visitors, respecting the nuisance arising from the deposit of sewage on the foreshore of the bay. With a rising tide the sewage from the main point of discharge at the southern end of the promenade can be seen to be carried directly towards the bathing grounds, whereas if the original sewage scheme had been carried out the sewage would have been carried out by the outfall sewer to a headland, with a view to being swept by the tide out of the bay.

The newly constructed sewers are ventilated by means of ventilating shafts, and there are proper inspection chambers; there are also two flushing chambers in connexion with the new sewers. The old sewers in the town are of imperfect construction, and without means of inspection, ventilation, or flushing.

House Drainage.—In the case of newly built dwellings the house drains are usually properly constructed, and fitted with proper traps; but in the case of older dwellings the drains are often of defective construction, and fitted with the old-fashioned Bell traps. At Heston a number of houses are unprovided with drains, and slopwater is thrown, or flows, on the roadside.

Excrement and Refuse Disposal.—Excrement disposal is effected by vault privies, by waterclosets, and by pail privies. Waterclosets are usually provided in the newly-built villa residences, and are fitted with separate flush-out cisterns. Not unfrequently the soil pipe of the watercloset passes down inside the house, and is not ventilated, or only imperfectly so; and waterclosets inside houses have been built without proper means of ventilation. A few closets are without a separate supply of water for flushing.

The vault privies of the place have receptacles situated below the ground level, lined with stone, and not cemented; so that there is always more or less escape of their contents into the surrounding soil. These privies are a source of great nuisance, and the vaults belonging to them were frequently found to be overflowing. The pail privies are a great improvement upon the vault privies, but sufficient attention is not given to cleansing the pails or tubs after their emptying.

Refuse is collected in pails, or in ashpits; and in the case of dwellings provided with gardens, the occupiers frequently collect refuse in a hole in the ground, and use it as manure. Scavenging of pails containing refuse, and of pail privies, is performed three times weekly by the District Council in the winter months; by a contractor in the summer months, when, owing to the influx of visitors, there is more refuse to remove than can be dealt with by the Council's staff. The scavenging of privy vaults is left to occupiers, as is that of ashpits; the Council will, however, undertake this work when requested to do so by occupiers, but make a charge for so doing. Refuse is removed to a field some distance from the town, and sold to farmers for use upon land.

There are no common lodging-houses in the district, and no offensive trades.

Slaughter-houses.—The two slaughter-houses in the district are not registered. They are in a most unsatisfactory condition; one of them, situated in a farmyard, is unprovided with a drain, and is surrounded by sources of nuisance, such as pigsties; the other, situated in the town, is surrounded by houses, has very defective flooring, and requires whitewashing and cleansing.

Cowsheds, Dairies, and Milkshops.—There is no register kept of these. The milkshops are suitable for the purpose, but the condition of the dairies and cowsheds is in many instances most unsatisfactory. There are no regulations for dairies, cowsheds, and milkshops, and there does not appear to be any systematic inspection of them. Although the serious outbreak of enteric fever which occurred in 1886 was attributed by Mr. Harvey, who investigated the circumstances, to the use of contaminated milk from a dairy in the district, and although the Local Board were then strongly recommended to draw up regulations for the management of cowsheds, dairies, and milkshops, this has not been done. A few cowsheds are in good condition, but the condition of the majority is filthy; often there is no drainage, they are dark and imperfectly ventilated, there is no proper flooring, and the ground of the shed is saturated with filth. The condition of the dairies is in some instances good, in others extremely bad; for instance, one dairy had no through ventilation, it was situated in a farmyard, surrounded by sources of nuisance, and adjoining a dilapidated slaughter-house; an open drain or gutter, causing nuisance, owing to the filth which it contained, led directly into this dairy. The water supply to some of the dairies is of a very doubtful nature; it can, in view of local circumstances, hardly be free from pollution.

Bakehouses.—There is no register of bakehouses; the number of bakehouses is not known, but I visited a great many in the district. For the most part their condition is good, but some of them are in a very unwholesome condition, and there is evidently no supervision of them by the District

Council. As an instance of the unwholesome surroundings of some bake-houses, I may mention that one which I visited adjoined a cowshed, was distant only 11 feet from a sty containing pigs, and about the same distance from two offensive vault privies; its interior also was in a dirty condition.

II.—ADMINISTRATION.

The Medical Officer of Health is Dr. A. S. McCausland, M.D. Brux., L.R.C.P. Lond., M.R.C.S. Eng., of Swanage; he receives as salary 21*l.* per annum, half of which is repaid from county funds.

The Inspector of Nuisances is Mr. J. S. Senior; he is also surveyor, and receives a salary as Inspector of Nuisances of 80*l.* per annum, half of which is repaid from county funds. Mr. Senior holds the certificate of the Sanitary Institute; he is responsible for the cleansing and repair of the roads and for the scavenging of pail privies and removal of refuse during the winter time; he also examines plans of new buildings which are submitted to the District Council.

Action of the District Council with regard to Nuisances.—There is no register kept of nuisances, nor of the steps which have been taken for their abatement; and it is stated that no legal proceedings have been required for the abatement of nuisances. It is evident that very little action has been taken for the abatement of nuisances which were of such a nature as to recur from time to time; such, for instance, as leaking vault privies, defective house drains, absence of house drains, and pollution of water-courses by sewage.

Action with regard to Infectious Diseases.—The Urban District Council have not adopted the Infectious Disease (Notification) Act, 1889. Inaction in this sense does not appear to be due to conviction on the part of the District Council that the outbreak of any infectious disease in their district is not to be feared. At the time of the late epidemic of small-pox in the city of Gloucester, they caused public notices to be printed and issued, warning the inhabitants of Swanage against receiving visitors from Gloucester lest the infection of small-pox should be brought into their district. They have not provided any isolation hospital, nor have they any disinfecting apparatus. Disinfection is performed by burning sulphur in rooms which have been occupied by persons suffering from infectious illness. This is done usually under the superintendence of the Inspector of Nuisances.

The Council have adopted the Public Health Acts Amendment Act, 1890, in its entirety. They have not adopted the Infectious Disease (Prevention) Act, 1890. The Council possess byelaws for the prevention of nuisances, for the construction of new streets and buildings, and for the regulation of slaughter-houses; which were allowed by the Local Government Board in 1880. These byelaws are in need of revision, especially those relating to new buildings.

S. W. WHEATON.

April 1897.
