

Report of the Metropolitan Poor Law Inspectors' Advisory Committee on the Homeless Poor, to the Right Hon. Herbert Samuel ... president of the Local Government Board, 1914.

Contributors

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REPORT

OF THE

METROPOLITAN POOR LAW INSPECTORS'
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE
HOMELESS POOR

TO

THE RIGHT HON. HERBERT SAMUEL, M.P.,
PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD,

1914.

Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty.



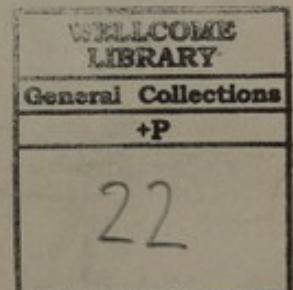
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Mr. JOHN STARK	City of London Police.	
Sir SHIRLEY F. MURPHY, F.R.C.S.	London County Council.	
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Mr. WALTER EICKHOFF	Vice-Chairman of the Casual Wards Committee of the Metropolitan Asylums Board.	
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REPORT OF THE METROPOLITAN POOR LAW INSPECTORS'
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE HOMELESS POOR.

TO THE RIGHT HON. HERBERT SAMUEL, M.P., PRESIDENT OF THE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD.

SIR,

The circumstances which led to the appointment of the Committee, the steps which had been taken prior to their appointment (in March, 1912) to deal with the problem of the homeless poor, and the measures which the Committee had brought into operation up to 31st December, 1913, were described in a report submitted early last year and issued as a Command Paper [Cd. 7307].

2. *Changes in membership.*—Since that report was made, the Commissioner of the City of London Police has nominated Mr. John Stark to represent him on the Committee, and Mr. Percival Harter has joined the Committee, in place of Mr. Fitzgerald Arbuthnot, as representative of the London Mendicity Society.

3. *Meetings.*—The Committee have held their meetings in the office of the Local Government Board. They have met once a month, except during the Summer Recess. The meetings have continued to be particularly well attended, and it may be remarked that singular unanimity has characterized the Committee's deliberations; every effort, often at considerable sacrifice to themselves, has been made by the bodies represented to fall in with the plans that the Committee had decided upon.

4. *Work of the Committee.*—During the early part of the year and in the summer, the Committee, in addition to carrying out and perfecting schemes already in operation, were engaged in considering other arrangements to deal with the problem before them, especially the extension to other parts of the Metropolis of the scheme for providing shelter for homeless persons found at night on the Embankment and in Central London, and in connexion with an attempt to assist homeless persons found in the London parks. When the European War broke out, these arrangements were on the point of being brought into operation, but it was felt that it would not be expedient that new schemes of this nature should be started at a time when the conditions were so abnormal, and it was accordingly decided that a more favourable opportunity should be awaited for their initiation, especially as it was intended that they should in the first instance be merely experimental. It is considered that an account of the measures contemplated should be deferred until the Committee have been able to test them by actual experience of their working. This report must, therefore, necessarily be confined to indicating the progress and results of schemes, the inception of which has already formed the subject of previous report.

5. *Scheme for providing with shelter homeless persons found at night on the Embankment and in Central London.*—The details of this scheme were fully described in the last report. Briefly, it may be said that specially deputed constables of the A, E, C and D Divisions of the Metropolitan Police, and of the City Police, carry tickets which they hand to any homeless persons who come to their notice, and direct them to apply at an office on the Waterloo Pier, which is staffed by the Metropolitan Asylums Board. Here the recipients of the tickets are interviewed by the officer in charge, who gives them an order for admission either to one of the Charitable Agencies

or to a Casual Ward, as seems most suitable. If it appears possible that the applicant may be helped to make a fresh start in life, after some assistance, or has some definite chance of obtaining work in the morning, he is referred to a Charitable Agency; if he seems to be an habitual vagrant he is sent to a Casual Ward. The officer is in telephonic or other communication with the Voluntary Agencies and Casual Wards and knows where there is available accommodation. The Agencies and Casual Wards always admit the applicant on presentation of the order, and the Police therefore are certain that the recipient of a ticket will receive the offer of shelter, if he cares to avail himself of it. The scheme is at present in operation in the area between the Thames and the Marylebone Road, and between Vauxhall Bridge Road and the City; it also includes the Albert Embankment.

6. In the first instance the tickets were distributed between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m., but in January, 1914, it was decided that during the winter months the hour at which the distribution of tickets should cease should be extended to 3 a.m. At the end of March it was found unnecessary to give out tickets after 2 a.m.

7. During the past twelve months, cases have been received by the Church Army, Houseless Poor Society, "Morning Post" Embankment Home, Salvation Army, and the Willow Street Mission, in addition to those sent to Casual Wards. Certain cases have been helped by the Shaftesbury Institute and Dr. Barnardo's Homes, and other agencies have agreed to assist when their help is required, as will be the case when the scheme is extended.

8. The table printed in Appendix B indicates the number of tickets distributed by the Police in each month since the scheme started (November, 1912), the number of admission orders given at the Waterloo Pier for (a) Charitable Agencies, and (b) Casual Wards, and the extent to which they were used.

9. A striking feature is the rapid but merely temporary increase manifest in the figures for August. This appears to have been due to the fact that a large number of men came to London in that month to join the Colours, and had no money for a bed until they were actually enlisted. Further, a certain number of men rejected by the military authorities as medically unfit found themselves stranded. Owing largely to the generous help given by the Voluntary Agencies at this time of special difficulty, suitable accommodation was temporarily made for such men, until they were able to enlist or otherwise provide for themselves.

10. It will be observed that since August a very marked decrease in the number of persons dealt with has taken place. The average number of tickets issued by the Police each month up to the end of December, 1913, was 1,441. The average for each month in 1914 was 971. The figures for 1914 in respect of each month up to July are lower on the whole than those for the corresponding month in 1913, but nevertheless no very marked variation is evident until August. The war broke out on 4th August, and the figures rose rapidly from 993 in July to 1,773 in August (as against 1,368 in August, 1913); this is a higher figure than that reached in any preceding month except November, 1912, in which month the scheme was started. An equally rapid decline is observable in the numbers for September, which are about normal, while in October there was a decrease of about 30 per cent. below normal, and in December the figures had fallen to 282, or about 70 per cent. below the average.

11. The proportion of tickets issued by the Police and not used for the year 1914 was 31 per cent. as against 33 per cent. for the period from the initiation of the scheme up to the end of December, 1913. The percentage of Casual Ward tickets given in 1914 was 45 per cent. as against 53 per cent. for the period from the commencement of the scheme (November, 1912) up to the end of December, 1913.

12. The number of persons sleeping out within the area, who had presumably declined to avail themselves of the offer of shelter, is not above the normal. On 6th November, 1914, an inspection of the area was made by an officer of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, who reported that he found 36 persons sleeping out; on 8th November, 40 persons, and on 8th December, 36 persons. The nightly average of persons sleeping in Casual Wards in 1914 was about 240 as against 290 in 1913. It is clear, therefore, that the decrease in the number of persons dealt with on the Pier cannot be accounted for by any increase in the number of those sleeping out or in Casual Wards.

13. The reasons for the abnormal decline manifest since September appear to be mainly as follows :—

- (i.) Prior to the war, there were numerous Army reservists amongst the unemployed and homeless. These have now rejoined the Colours.
- (ii.) In addition, many reservists and territorials in the employment of large firms are now on service, and an opening has thus been made for employing men who would otherwise be out of work.
- (iii.) A large number of men are employed by the War Office in preparing camps and shelters for the troops all over the country, and the very large increase in the number of men employed by armament firms has assisted in augmenting the demand for labour.
- (iv.) Money is said to be circulating freely and many poor persons have an opportunity which was not available during past winters of earning a trifle. The payment of separation allowances to the wives and dependants of soldiers and sailors is said to have assisted in causing the freer circulation of money.

14. Nevertheless, in spite of these favourable conditions (if we may judge by past experience in times of crises when special funds were started), it is probable that, but for the present system of sifting the cases at the Waterloo Pier, a far greater number of persons of the "workshy" and cadging class would have been attracted to London in the hope of sharing in the charitable funds which are usually forthcoming when exceptional distress may be expected; the scheme also lessens the temptation—particularly great at such a time—to a certain class of poor London residents to betake themselves to a vagrant life.

15. *Co-operation between Casual Wards and Voluntary Agencies.*—The arrangements by which suitable applicants at a Casual Ward, if they do not appear to have become habituated to a vagrant life, are passed on to one of the Voluntary Agencies, have continued to give satisfactory results. A smaller number of such persons are now applying at the Casual Wards, but this is probably due to the general reduction in the number of vagrants. The Voluntary Agencies report that they are in many cases able to assist those sent to them to make a fresh start in life with every hope of success attending their efforts. During 1914, about 600 persons were referred to, and dealt with, by Voluntary Agencies.

16. *Central registration of homeless persons.*—The system of registration described in the last report has been somewhat extended, and early in the year arrangements were made for facilitating the notification of records to the Voluntary Agencies. The register which is kept at the Office of the Metropolitan Asylums Board now contains about 4,500 records. A copy of the form used for registration purposes is printed on page 10 (Appendix A).

17. *Census of homeless persons taken by the London County Council.*—In recent years a census of homeless persons has been taken periodically by the London County Council. The following table briefly summarises the results of the census for the past five years :—

Date on which census was taken.	In shelters, but not provided with beds.	In the streets.	In free lodging houses.	In Casual Wards.	Total.
18th February, 1910 ...	1,778	969	2,790	1,107	6,644
17th February, 1911 ...	759	1,026	2,540	1,091	5,416
9th February, 1912 ...	220	983	2,374	1,033	4,610
14th February, 1913 ...	158	491	2,045	546	3,240
13th February, 1914 ...	106	434	2,006	335	2,881

18. It will be observed that since 1910 there has been a steady decline in the numbers obtained at the censuses. A marked diminution is evident in the number of persons found in the streets and in Casual Wards in February, 1913. In that year the administration of the Casual Wards was unified by being placed in the hands of the

Metropolitan Asylums Board, and at the time the census was taken the scheme for providing shelter for homeless persons in Central London, described above, had been in operation for about four months. The figures for 1914 in both these cases as well as in the case of those found in shelters but not provided with beds, shows a still further decline, and the total number of homeless persons is lower by about 350 than that recorded in the previous February. It may be remarked that this decrease of homeless persons in London has not been accompanied by any increase in the number of persons applying at Casual Wards in the Unions adjoining London.

19. *Conclusion.*—As stated in the last report, it is not claimed that this satisfactory reduction has been due only to improved administration; of course other factors have had considerable influence, notably the Old Age Pensions Acts, the National Health Insurance Act, and the institution of the Labour Exchanges. That the state of the labour market causes great variations in the condition of vagrancy, is indicated by the comparatively small number of persons recorded since August as having received tickets from the Police for the Waterloo Pier (*see* paragraph 10). Nevertheless, unless the agencies, whether statutory or voluntary, engaged in assisting the homeless, work in close accord and with knowledge of each other's activities, a large number of habitual vagrants, who refuse to make any effort to support themselves, and of whose reclamation there can be no hope, are able to pass from one agency to another, and so live upon assistance which was intended for others; while many of those who with temporary assistance might once again become self-supporting may never reach the agency who could best help them. Experience in the past, before the formation of this Committee, appears to show that in such circumstances the number of homeless persons remains high even under favourable conditions, and that any reduction is not proportionate to the improvement in trade and the state of the labour market. The reason appears to be that, when there was a lack of cohesion between the various agencies concerned, a life of habitual vagrancy was rendered easy, and the temptation to those who are just able to support themselves to resort to a nomad life was greater. But since the bodies dealing with the homeless poor, especially the Police, Casual Ward Authorities and Voluntary Agencies have worked together, the homeless person has at the earliest possible moment been brought to the notice of those who can best help him, and every effort has been made to set him on his feet again, where possible. The effect of the Committee's work is, therefore, twofold: the habitual vagrant is prevented from exploiting the charities while the person who has become homeless, but will again become self-supporting with help, is at once given assistance before he sinks too low and loses all desire for anything better than a tramp's life (and it must be remembered that the vagrant habit is easily acquired).

20. As pointed out above, good administration alone will not result in low numbers if the conditions are abnormally unfavourable. At present, the labour market is brisk, but it may be expected that when the war is drawing to a close and the armies are being disbanded, there may be a large increase in unemployment, as many men will then be thrown on the labour market; it must be anticipated that the number of homeless persons may then rise, at any rate, for a time. The present low figures should therefore be regarded as temporary only, and every effort will be needed to make provision to meet the distress that will occur in the future.

21. The principle which is now followed is to distribute amongst the co-operating Voluntary Agencies those homeless persons that seem likely to respond to remedial treatment, leaving the habitual vagrant to be dealt with in the Casual Wards. Some description of the co-operating Voluntary Agencies and the classes of persons they assist may be found in Appendix A to our last report. Gratifying results have attended the efforts of the societies, and many cases have been reported where the applicants have been permanently restored to a self-supporting life. Hitherto, the Voluntary Agencies have been able to receive all who have been sent to them: indeed, it has not yet been found necessary to utilize all the accommodation available, and the Committee feel justified in concluding that no homeless person really capable of being helped need now remain in the streets of Central London for any length of time without receiving the offer of adequate assistance. But as larger demands are made on the societies (whose funds have already been seriously depleted as a result of the war), they will need far greater support from the public if they are to continue to be in a position to render the invaluable services they have done in the past. The opportunity may,

therefore, be taken to urge once again that the charitable public should liberally support the well-established charities at this time of special difficulty, instead of bestowing without investigation small gifts of money on those who beg from them in the streets; such persons in the vast majority of cases are not proper recipients of charity, and even if they were, they are far more likely to be injured than benefited by being encouraged to rely on indiscriminate alms.

Signed on behalf of the Committee,

J. S. OXLEY,
Chairman.

19th February, 1915.

APPENDIX A.

Central Office No.
(to be left blank).

FORM FOR REGISTRATION OF THE HOMELESS.

Institution.	Surname.	Christian Name.

Institutional No.

Date.

Hour of admission.

Age and Sex.

Place of Birth.

Name of Wife or Husband (if any).

Family.

Height (approximate).

General Description, including in particular any physical defect.

Calling or Occupation.

Last or longest Employers, or other references (with dates).

(1) Name

Address

(2) Name

Address

Cause of distress.

Where slept last.

Signature of Applicant.

Signature of person making the return.

APPENDIX B.

TABLES showing number of tickets distributed by the Police to necessitous persons in the streets, during 1912, 1913 and 1914, where shelter was provided for such persons and the extent to which the shelter offered was made use of.

	1912.					1913.					Total.	Monthly Average.				
	November.	December.	January.	February.	March.	April.	May.	June.	July.	August.			September.	October.	November.	December.
Tickets issued by Police	2,966	1,600	1,675	1,246	1,347	969	1,168	1,201	1,243	1,368	1,379	1,567	1,342	1,108	20,179	1,441
Tickets presented at Central Office:—																
Men	2,514	1,396	1,488	1,142	1,226	919	1,059	1,002	1,071	1,202	1,130	1,458	1,196	1,017	17,820	1,273
Women	96	32	36	27	27	18	26	33	32	35	34	28	29	26	479	34
Tickets for Charitable Agencies which were used:—																
Men	542	302	499	561	606	504	549	561	533	603	716	818	637	561	7,992	571
Women	9	6	14	16	14	2	8	16	11	14	9	10	15	11	155	11
Not used:—																
Men	32	18	21	28	21	29	14	29	22	34	29	33	42	20	372	27
Women	12	2	3	2	4	2	6	7	1	6	7	2	2	4	60	4
Tickets for Casual Wards which were used:—																
Men	967	628	625	331	350	216	288	248	259	289	225	327	265	243	5,261	376
Women	31	8	8	3	2	10	6	6	10	8	8	4	7	4	115	8
Not used:—																
Men	973	448	343	222	249	170	208	164	257	276	160	280	252	193	4,195	300
Women	44	16	11	6	7	4	6	4	10	7	10	12	5	7	149	10
Total number of tickets not used	2,015	1,100	987	562	608	400	508	422	536	580	403	623	529	447	9,720	694
Proportion of tickets issued by Police and not used	44%	41%	31%	26%	27%	24%	27%	30%	34%	33%	30%	26%	31%	26%	33%	33%
Percentage of Casual Ward tickets given...	77%	77%	64%	48%	48%	42%	46%	40%	48%	46%	34%	41%	43%	42%	53%	53%

TABLES showing number of tickets distributed by the Police, &c.—*continued.*

		1914.												Monthly Average for 1914.		
		Dec. 1913.	January.	February.	March.	April.	May.	June.	July.	August.	September.	October.	November.		December.	Total.
Tickets issued by Police		1,441	1,179	1,121	1,031	1,176	1,044	961	993	1,773	1,025	685	893	282	11,663	971
Tickets presented at Central Office :—																
Men		1,273	1,115	1,034	947	1,040	935	801	891	1,656	794	555	309	222	10,299	858
Women		34	20	23	13	22	32	36	38	49	61	43	14	7	358	30
Tickets for Charitable Agencies which were used :—		1,307	1,135	1,057	960	1,062	967	837	929	1,705	855	598	823	229	10,657	888
Men		571	582	551	539	582	429	416	507	816	383	260	145	111	5,321	443
Women		11	17	10	7	8	13	16	14	16	19	9	5	1	135	11
Not used :—																
Men		27	26	37	20	32	30	38	37	46	37	20	8	3	334	28
Women		4	—	2	1	4	6	5	7	4	11	5	—	3	48	4
Tickets for Casual Wards which were used :—		613	625	600	567	626	478	475	565	882	460	294	158	118	5,838	486
Men		376	288	218	200	240	227	152	178	388	224	154	88	62	2,419	202
Women		8	—	5	4	4	7	5	12	11	17	12	7	—	84	7
Not used :—																
Men		300	219	228	188	186	249	195	169	406	150	121	68	46	2,225	185
Women		10	3	6	1	6	6	10	5	18	14	17	2	3	91	8
Total number of tickets not used		475	292	337	281	342	368	372	282	542	382	230	148	108	3,704	309
Proportion of tickets issued by Police and not used		33%	24%	30%	27%	29%	35%	38%	28%	30%	37%	36%	37%	38%	31%	31%
Percentage of Casual Ward tickets given		53%	44%	43%	40%	41%	50%	43%	39%	48%	47%	50%	51%	48%	45%	45%