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Nelson 1885

Borough of Cowbridge — Urban Sanitary Authority
Annual Report of Medical Officer of Health.

Gentlemen

I beg to present my Report as to the Health and Sanitary condition of the Borough during the 9 months of the past year during which I have held Office.

Mortality
Births.

During the year ending December 31st 1888 the deaths of 17 persons — 12 males and 5 females — and the births of 30 children — 15 males and 15 female — have been registered in the Borough.

Death Rate

The Death rate has therefore been 13.83 and the Birth

Birth Rate

Rate 24.41 per 1000 per annum.

Deaths from
Zymotic diseases
Zymotic death rate

Five deaths have occurred from zymotic diseases, namely 3 from diphtheria and 2 from scarlet fever giving a zymotic death rate of 4.06 as against 2.40 — the average rate for the United Kingdom — and 3.52 — the average rate for the Borough during the last 3 years.

Other causes of
death.

The deaths have included 3 from consumption, 2 from diseases of the nervous system, 1 from old age, and 1 from heart disease.

Deaths of Children
under 1 year.

Five children have died under the age of 1 year representing an infantile mortality of 166 per 1000 compared with 138 for the United Kingdom. Two deaths only are those of persons over 50 years of age.

It will thus be seen that whilst the general death rate is somewhat below the average death rate of rural districts the death rate from zymotic diseases — which forms a valuable guide as to the sanitary condition of a District — has been almost double the average rate during the past year. The number of deaths of children under 1 year is also considerably

Sickness.

Infectious Diseases

Speaking generally there has been a great deal of sickness within the Borough during the past year.

Infectious diseases have been more than usually prevalent during the earlier and later months of the year, cases having occurred of typhoid fever, scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, chicken pox and mumps.

Diphtheria.

Isolated cases of diphtheria occurred at intervals from February to the end of the summer - one case proving fatal

Causes.

In almost every instance the disease was associated with insanitary surroundings.

This disease appears to be epidemic in the Town.

At all events there has been a succession of cases occurring each year since my residence here, which now extends over a period of more than 4 years. As a rule the same houses, or groups of houses, are attacked, and upon enquiry I have almost always found them damp and badly drained with nuisances existing upon or around the premises.

Diphtheria

In October the Borough was visited by an epidemic of diphtheria. The first case came under my notice on October 21st, and was followed within a few days by other cases. There were in all some 13 cases, I believe.

With some 4 or 5 exceptions where there appeared to be other causes such as the infection being carried from house to house, all the cases occurred in houses which were in a bad sanitary condition. Two children died from the disease.

Scarlet fever

Scarlet fever broke out in the West Village in February but did not spread.

Scarlet fever epidemic of

A second outbreak of scarlet fever occurred in October. The first cases were in a house situated in the East Village and 4 of the family were attacked, one of whom died; other cases followed; About 10 cases in all came under my notice.

Measles.

A few cases of measles occurred in October one of which

Typhoid fever.

There was a fatal case of Typhoid fever in the East Village in December; and another case also occurred in the central portion of the Town, I believe; but the disease did not spread in either case.

Cause of the above epidemics.

The epidemics of diphtheria, scarlet fever, and measles were caused by aerial diffusion - these diseases being at the time widely prevalent throughout the country - and developed by atmospheric influence and the insanitary condition of some of the houses attacked.

Epidemic started before -

Every precaution was taken as to isolation and disinfection to prevent the epidemic from spreading; disinfectants were freely used and as far as possible communication was shut off between the persons affected and their neighbors and friends.

Precautions taken.

The Master of the Board School was written to advise him as to the precautions he must take against spreading the epidemic by the admission of children from infected houses or of those convalescent from infectious disease and asking him to see that the school premises were at once disinfected.

The two largest private schools in the Town were closed, but I did not deem it advisable to recommend the closing of the Board Schools. Intimation of the outbreak was at once communicated to the Local Government Board and Town Council and full written instructions and advice were given to the Sanitary Committee and Sanitary Inspector.

The result, I venture to say, proved most successful and the Borough was spared an extensive and fatal epidemic which is usually associated with these diseases.

Water Supply.

I have examined samples of water from four public wells in the Town from time to time. Whilst those of the West Village and Gutter Market wells were somewhat impure, the samples from the East Village and Town Hall wells were good. In summer, however, I believe the water derived from both the East and West Village wells is impure and unfit for use. In

24 drains

There being large cess pits and stables in the immediate vicinity locality, and the stop water from Taff Street also has ready access to it. The owners of the houses in the latter Street can hardly be expected to take the stop water away by pipes or drains as the Authority has not provided a proper sewer into which they could be connected. Such nuisance however must either be done away with altogether or proper precautions taken to prevent any seepage taking place into the well. The substitution of a pail or water system of Closets, and proper scavenging would lessen to a very great extent those dangers of well pollution. The private supply by wells is, generally speaking, unsatisfactory. I consider a proper public supply necessary.

Habitations.

There are many houses occupied by the poor in the Town which are, in my opinion, in very urgent need of improvement. Many are built below the level of the adjoining street or garden. The walls and floors are damp; they are badly lighted and badly ventilated, and are in a dilapidated condition. In some instances the privy accommodation is insufficient; in others there is over-crowding. In one case there are upon some occasions no fewer than 4 married couples occupying one small room, devoid of any screen or partition, a condition of things which should be prevented, not only because it is illegal but also in the interests of decency and morality and upon the score of health.

And here I should like to take an opportunity of again drawing the attention of the Authority to the condition of Lewellyn's Row in the West Village. For years the families occupying these houses have been constantly suffering from sickness caused by their insanitary condition and in some cases with fatal results. The request of the Authority that the Sanitary defects should be remedied by their owner has for some months been ignored and nothing

Proceedings
of the
Authority

During the past year the health of the Town has received far greater attention from the Sanitary Authority and its Officers than it has received for some years past at least. The nuisance Inspector has shown much energy in the conscientious discharge of his duties. A large number of nuisances have been abated. There has been a marked improvement in the condition of the Channel on either side of the road in the East Village. Houses in which there have been infectious diseases have been carefully disinfected. Lodging houses and bake houses have been registered and inspected.

Market

The construction of the New Cattle Market has removed a very serious nuisance which used to exist by the cattle being located on the public pathways on Market and Fair days.

The condition of the public streets as regards their repair and cleansing has been excellent and quite devoid of nuisance.

Drainage
and
Sewerage

I need hardly point out the unsatisfactory condition of the drainage and sewerage of the town. Where drains exist they are frequently found in a most defective state from want of repair, leakage and absence of proper ventilation and flushing. The sewers are not only insufficiently ventilated and flushed but they empty themselves into the river at a point in the immediate vicinity of the town.

Here the water is dammed up by the Town Mill, situated about 400 yards below the entry of the sewers forming a perfectly stagnant pool which some times during the summer months awaits for several weeks sufficient accumulation to permit of the working of the mill, and the escape of its polluted contents down the river into the sea some miles away, causing a nuisance to the adjoining village of Flaublethian.

Privies
and
Cesspools

In the majority of cases the privies and cesspools of the town are a nuisance. They are badly constructed, with no proper ventilation and permit, in some instances, of adjoining

They are very seldom emptied and then the contents is merely transferred from the cesspit into a hole dug in the garden within a few feet of the house.

Ashpits
and
Refuse.

Ashpits and rubbish heaps also form a nuisance, many of the poorer inhabitants being unable to provide for their proper disposal.

Disposal of
their contents.

To deal satisfactorily with these matters, it is, in my opinion absolutely imperative that the Corporation itself should undertake the duties of sewerage and refuse removal by means of public scavenging, for upon the proper performance of those duties depend, to a very large extent, the sanitary condition and health of the Town.

Disposal of
Sewerage & Refuse

As regards the best means of sewerage disposal the only two methods that commend themselves to my judgment are the water and pail systems; the former system I fear is not well adapted to the requirements of the Town.

There is no adequate water supply and there is but little fall for the efficient working of sewers; besides which the sewerage itself could ultimately be disposed of either by irrigation, filtration, or chemical process, each method involving great expense. In addition to which the construction of water closets, drains, and sewers would also be attended by an enormous outlay. The latter system has much to recommend it; by its use accumulation would be prevented. Two pails or boxes could be supplied to each householder, one for ashes and refuse and a second for excreta. Both could be regularly disposed of by such householders who possessed a large garden and who would be willing to undertake the duty and in the case of others by the Corporation; in addition to which the present privies could be adapted to this system and their accompanying cesspits and cesspools done away with at a comparatively small cost or they could be adapted to a modified ashpit system.

Stop Water
cont^d.

arises from stop water in the Town I fear it will be necessary to construct drains. I can myself see no objection to such drains emptying themselves into the River provided the outfall be at such a distance below the Town as to prevent a nuisance. In case of there being such an objection filtration or irrigation might be substituted or carried out before the contents of the drains are allowed to flow into the River.

Infectious
diseases.

Although I do not consider it necessary that any provision should be made by the Sanitary Authority for the isolation of infectious diseases and the public disinfection of infected clothing I consider it most desirable that prompt information should be given and an early discovery be made of the outbreak of any infectious disease in the Town. It is sometimes a week or two after the occurrence of a case of fever before I have any information as to its existence and upon enquiry I find that not the slightest precaution in any way has been taken to prevent the disease from spreading.

Bye-laws:

Another important matter I would strongly urge upon the Authority is the necessity of their framing Bye-laws relating to the construction of new houses, the removal and prevention of nuisances and the inspection and regulation of slaughter houses, bake houses &c. &c.

Requirements
of the
Borough.

The requirements of the Borough which I should be glad to once more briefly enumerate are— an improved public water supply; a system of sewerage, refuse and stop water disposal, including public scavenging; the framing of Bye Laws as above mentioned; the early removal of all existing nuisances arising from cesspits, pigstyes &c. and the necessary steps taken to compel the owners of dilapidated, insanitary dwellings to put them in proper repair and in a proper sanitary condition.

Enclosed you will find tables relative to new

Borough during the past year.

I am, Gentleman.

Your obedient servant

(signed) Charles Booth Mellor.

Medical Officer of Health.

Received by Clerk
2nd May 1889

EXTRACTS FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH 1888.WATER SUPPLY:

I have examined samples of water from four public wells in the Town from time to time. Whilst those of the West Village and Cattle Market wells were somewhat impure, the samples from the East Village and Town Hall wells were good. In summer, however, I believe the water derived from both the East and West Village wells is impure and unfit for use. In the case of the former well the risks of pollution are very great, there being large cesspits and stables in the immediate locality and the slop water from Taff Street also has ready access to it. The owners of the houses in the latter Street can hardly be expected to take the slop water away by pipes or drains as the Authority has not provided a proper sewer with which they could be connected. Such nuisances, however, must either be done away with altogether or proper precautions taken to prevent any soakage taking place into the well. The substitution of a pail or water system of Closets, and proper scavenging would lessen to a very great extent those dangers of well pollution. The private supply by wells, is generally speaking, unsatisfactory. I consider a proper public supply necessary.

HABITATIONS:

There are many houses occupied by the poor in the Town which are, in my opinion, in very urgent need of improvement. Many are built below the level of the adjoining street or garden. The walls and floors are damp; they are badly lighted and badly ventilated; and are in dilapidated condition. In some instances the privy accommodation is insufficient; in others there is overcrowding. In one case there are upon some occasions no fewer than 4 married couples occupying one small room, devoid of any screen or partition, a condition of things which should be prevented, not only because it is illegal but also in the interests of decency and morality and upon the score of health. And here I should like to take an opportunity of again drawing the attention of the Authority to the condition of Llewellyn's Row in the West Village. For years the families occupying these houses have been constantly suffering from sickness caused by their insanitary condition and in some cases with fatal results. The request of the Authority that the sanitary defects should be remedied by their owner has for some months been ignored and nothing has been done in the matter.

PROCEEDINGS OF
THE AUTHORITY:

During the past year the health of the Town has received far greater attention from the Sanitary Authority and its Officers than it has received for some years past at least. The Nuisances Inspector has shown much energy in the conscientious discharge of his duties. A large number of nuisances have been abated. There has been a marked improvement in the condition of the Channel on either side of the road in the East Village. Houses in which there have been infectious diseases have been carefully disinfected. Lodging houses and bakehouses have been registered and inspected.

EXTRACTS FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH 1888.

NEW CATTLE MARKET: The construction of the New Cattle Market has removed a very serious nuisance which used to exist by the cattle being located on the public highways on Market and Fair days.
The condition of the public streets as regards their repair and cleansing has been excellent and quite devoid of nuisances.

DRAINAGE AND SEWERAGE:

I need hardly point out the unsatisfactory condition of the drainage and sewerage of the Town. Where drains exist they are frequently found in a most defective state from want of repair, leakage and absence of proper ventilation and flushing. The sewers are not only insufficiently ventilated and flushed but they empty themselves into the river at a point in the immediate vicinity of the Town, Here the water is dammed up by the Town Mill, situated about 400 yards below the entry of the sewers forming a perfectly stagnant pool which sometimes during the summer months awaits for several weeks sufficient accumulation to permit of the working of the mill, and the escape of its polluted contents down the river into the sea some miles away, causing a nuisance to the adjoining village of Llanblethian.

PRIVIES AND CESSPOOLS:

In the majority of cases the privies and cesspools of the Town are a nuisance. They are badly constructed, with no proper ventilation and permit, in some instances, of soakage into the foundations of the adjoining houses. They are very seldom emptied and then the contents is merely transferred from the cesspit into a hole dug in the garden within a few feet of the house.

ASHPITS AND REFUSE: Ashpits and rubbish heaps also form a nuisance, many of the poorer inhabitants being unable to provide for their proper disposal.

DISPOSAL OF THEIR CONTENTS:

To deal satisfactorily with these matters it is, in my opinion, absolutely imperative that the Corporation itself should undertake the duties of sewerage and refuse removal by means of public scavenging, for upon the proper performance of those duties depend, to a very large extent, the Sanitary condition and health of the Town.

SLOP WATER:

To prevent the nuisance and danger which now arises from slop water in the Town I fear it will be necessary to construct drains. I can myself see no objection to such drains emptying themselves into the river provided the outfall be at such a distance below the Town as to prevent a nuisance. In case of there being such an objection, filtration or irrigation might be substituted or carried out before the contents of the drains are allowed to flow into the River. (to be continued)

EXTRACTS FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH 1888.

DISPOSAL OF
SEWERAGE AND
REFUSE:

As regards the best means of sewerage disposal the only two methods that commend themselves to my judgement are the water and pail systems; the former system I fear is not well adapted to the requirements of the Town. There is no adequate water supply and there but little fall for the efficient working of sewers, besides which the sewerage itself could ultimately be disposed of either by irrigation, filtration or chemical process, each method involving great expense. In addition, to which the construction of water closets, drains and sewers would also be attended by an enormous outlay. The latter system has much to recommend it, by its accumulation would be prevented. Two pails or boxes could be supplied to each householder, one for ashes and refuse and a second for excreta. Both could be regularly disposed of by such householders who possessed a large garden and who would be willing to undertake the duty and in the case of others by the Corporation; in addition to which the present privies could be adapted to this system and their accompanying cesspits and cesspools done away with at a comparatively small cost or they would be adapted to a modified ashpit system.

INFECTIOUS
DISEASES:

Although I do not consider it necessary that any provision should be made by the Sanitary Authority for the isolation of infectious diseases and the public disinfection of infected clothing I consider it most desirable that prompt information should be given and an early discovery be made of the outbreak of any infectious disease in the Town. It is sometimes a week or two after the occurrence of a case of fever before I have any information as to its existence and upon enquiry I find that not the slightest precaution in any way has been taken to prevent the disease from spreading.

BYE-LAWS:

Another important matter I would strongly urge upon the Authority is the necessity of their framing Bye-laws relating to the construction of new houses, the removal and prevention of nuisances and the inspection and regulation of slaughter-houses, bakehouses etc., etc.

REQUIREMENTS OF
THE BOROUGH:

The requirements of the Borough which I should be glad to once more briefly enumerate are - an improved public water supply, a system of sewerage, refuse and slop water disposal, including public scavenging; the framing of Bye-laws as above mentioned; the early removal of all existing nuisances arising from cesspits, pigstys etc., and the necessary steps taken to compel the owners of dilapidated, insanitary dwellings to put them in proper repair and in a proper sanitary condition.

(Signed) Charles Booth Mellor.

Medical Officer of Health.

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17 deaths, 30 births during this year – all registered in the Borough. Three deaths from diphtheria, 2 from scarlet fever, three from consumption, two diseases of the nervous system, one old age and one of heart disease.

Five children died under one year of age (considerably above the average). There were only two deaths of people over 50.

During earlier and later months of the year, there were many cases of infectious diseases (typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, chicken pox and mumps). In about every instance the disease of diphtheria was associated with insanitary surroundings. This disease seems to be epidemic in the town. As a rule, the same houses or group of houses are attacked and always found to be damp and badly drained etc.

Scarlet fever broke out in West Village in February, but did not spread.

In October, there was an epidemic of diphtheria – the first case was October 21st, followed within a few days by others (13 in all). With some four or five exceptions, where there appeared to be other causes, such as the infant being carried from house to house, all the cases occurred in houses with bad sanitary conditions. Two children died.

There was a fatal case of typhoid fever in East Village in December and another case in the central portion of the town, but the disease did not spread in either case. There were a few cases of measles in October, one of which was complicated with diphtheria and ended fatally. There was a second outbreak of scarlet fever in October. The first case was in a house in East Village and four of the family were attacked, one of whom died (10 cases in all).

Every precaution has been taken. Disinfectants freely used etc. The Master of the Board school has been advised as to the precautions to be taken. The two largest private schools were closed.