

# Dr Mivart's Report on the Public Health & Housing in Dartmouth 1914

## INTRODUCTION

In April 1914, Dartmouth was the subject of an official report of the Local Government Board, the Whitehall department then entrusted with the supervision of England's local authorities. The report, written by the Board's investigator Dr. F. St. George Mivart, criticised extensively the administration of housing and public health in Dartmouth. Fault was found with the conduct of both council and its officers with respect to the introduction of new housing legislation, administration of sanitary laws and regulations, provision of a water supply, arrangements for isolating victims of infectious diseases and supervision of trades such as butchers, dairies and bakeries.

The episode took place in the living memory of many present inhabitants of Dartmouth. Yet no apology is needed for reproducing the report for it reminds us of some useful facts. The work of local councils is too often taken for granted. But, here, only sixty years ago, persisted conditions so insanitary that none of us would now accept them. Only by virtue of hard work by councils and, especially, their officers, did they improve. Mivart's report illustrates what may happen when such labour is haphazard or desultory. It also indicates the disadvantages of a small community governing itself. Outside pressure, from the Admiralty and Whitehall, had to be exerted to galvanise it into action. To combat this tendency, local government reformers have advocated larger authorities, such as have now been instituted. Distant government can be, sometimes, fairer government; the officers both more skilled and less beholden to their councillors; the decisions of the council less coloured by self-interest, venal or otherwise. The comments of this report have relevance, even today.

While Mivart's description of sanitary administration may be taken as a reflection of the dilatoriness of the local authority, the position with regard to working-class housing resulted more from economic and geographical factors militating against the satisfactory growth of Dartmouth. This growth, in terms of population, had been considerable. In 1801, the number living in the parishes of St. Petrox, St. Saviour and Townstal was 3,412. This virtually doubled to 6,579 in 1901, with a further increase to 7,005 in 1911. The increase does not seem to have been a gradual one but concentrated into the first and last quarters of the 19th century. The long term effects of this were two-fold. The period saw a further cycle of land reclamation along

the river front and of the old mill pool. This had its parallel during an earlier time of growth at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries. The second effect was the expansion of the built-up area into the parish of Townstal.

The timetable of central reclamation may be simply rehearsed. The mill pool, stretching from Duke Street to Ford, was drained in 1825 and Market Square, Victoria Road, Lake Street and Roseville Street laid out on its site. The pool at Mayor's Avenue was reclaimed in 1876-7; the North and South Embankments completed in 1882. On this new land, and on the revitalised and reworked Higher Street and South Town after the construction of Newcomen Road in 1864, many of the public buildings that were expected of a late Victorian town were erected. These number amongst them the Primitive Methodist (1878), Congregationalist (1895), Wesleyan Methodist (1816, rebuilt 1874 and 1936) and United Methodist (1886) chapels; the Catholic church (1869); St. Barnabas's church (1831, rebuilt 1866); the market building (1828); the British school (1849, later the Guildhall and Subscription Rooms); the elementary schools on Newcomen Road (1872); the Post Office on the ground floor of the Raleigh Hotel (1889) and in its later home a few doors down South Embankment (1908); the Cottage Hospital (1894); and the Liberal and Constitutional Clubs on Victoria Road.

Building on the scale listed above reflects something of the sense of prosperity and expansion that must have been present in Dartmouth during the later 19th century, after a period of relative decline and stagnation. The increase in the numbers of public buildings may be paralleled by activity in the private sector. The new shops along Fairfax Place, South Embankment, Spithead, Lower Street and part of Victoria Road are signs of this.

While the population of the parishes of St. Saviour and St. Petrox grew by 17% in the years 1841-1901, that of the parish of Townstal more than doubled. In numerical terms, the increase in the town was 579 and in Townstal 1405. Townstal parish included the hamlets of Ford, Norton, Warfleet and Sandquay. Any development above Ford, therefore, was in the outer parish. New houses were certainly built on much of the available land in the last half of the 19th century. The perimeter of the town: South Ford Road, Ridge Hill, Combe and Above Town, date mainly from this time. Because of the difficulties of terrain, there was no space for large estates. The scale of building was therefore quite different from that found in Totnes, Torquay or Brixham, even though Dartmouth was suffering from pressure of numbers quite as severely as some of these towns. On one hand, the hills above Victoria Road were steep; on another, the plateau beyond Townstal church was too far from the centre for convenience; and on another, the most suitable area for expansion - the tract

from Mount Boone to Sandquay - was mostly kept out of the market first by the Mount Boone estate and then by the Royal Naval College. It is interesting to speculate on the form of Dartmouth today had the purchaser of the College grounds in 1896 been not the Admiralty but a private developer. (The site was, in fact, bought not on the open market but by compulsory purchase.)

The extent to which the town was overcrowded at this time may be gauged from the fact that although the population has barely increased since 1911, we have built a large council estate at Townstal, private development has taken place on the Churchfields side of the Townstal road, and much infilling has occurred, for example in Mount Boone, Fairview, Broad Park, Above Town and Warfleet.

Another cause of bad housing conditions was the reliance of the poorest classes on the harbour for their living. The labour was casual and ill paid, inhibiting both house ownership and the payment of the higher rents that would be demanded for new properties. There was, therefore, a strong demand from the tenants themselves for cheap tenements such as were unlikely to meet the standards of modern public health. Added to this was the need for many of the port workers to live close to the river. A 'lumper' could not afford to travel a long way before joining his workmates at the coal hulks. If he did, they would lose the race with the other teams to obtain the bunkering contract.

The expansion of Dartmouth, therefore, particularly the moving of the working population from the town centre to the estate at Townstal, had to wait until the harbour had ceased to be the chief employer; until the working centres had moved more emphatically towards B.R.N.C., Noss and Townstal itself; and until motor transport had made the precise location of housing a matter of less importance.

The report was also critical of the council and its personnel, especially the surveyor, F.J.Voisey, whose appointment in the teeth of better qualified competition had been contributory to the commissioning of Mivart's investigation\* There is little doubt that laxity had prevailed for some years, although there had been moves in 1913 to make a start on the housing problem. In anticipation of Mivart's comments, house to house inspections had been initiated by the public health inspector, and a scheme to buy land at Combe and build a small estate there had been mooted. Loan sanction for the purchase was in fact refused by Whitehall during the months that Mivart was making his investigations. The rebuttals of the report by the local press and the borough council were inadequate and poorly argued and many of its recommendations were to be acted upon in the next twelve months. In

succeeding years, further decisions made such comments superfluous as slum clearance, especially in the Higher Street and Collaford Steps areas, had its own impact on the problem.

It is not possible to state confidently the reasons for Dartmouth's failure to enforce the public health acts. A factor that should not be ignored, however, was the desire to keep the rates to a minimum. Such improvements as might be set in train by vigorous local government could have expensive consequences and those classes that could afford it may have felt that they had spent sufficient on their undeniable achievements in land reclamation, commercial development and the construction of new; public buildings.

The report is here reproduced largely as it was printed in 1914. The omissions relate to water supplies, particularly J.B.Hill's detailed reports, and certain comments made by Dr. Mivart regarding the unsatisfactory nature of Voisey's paperwork.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

The report is number 90 of the Local Government Board's Reports on Public Health and Medical Subjects. Its full title is Dr. F. St. George Mivart's Report to the Local Government Board on the General Sanitary Circumstances and Administration of the Borough of Dartmouth; together with a Report by Mr. J. B. Hill on an Examination of the Sources of the Dartmouth Water Supply. (H.M.S.O., 1914)

There is a certain amount of correspondence about Dartmouth and its relations with central government in the Ministry of Health files of correspondence Series I (MH 48/514) and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government 'O' Files (HLG 1/339) in the Public Record Office, Chancery Lane, London.

The Dartmouth and South Hams Chronicle for the relevant period may be read at the British Library Newspaper Library at Colindale. It is the chief source for information about local reaction to and council discussions of the report.

The minutes of the borough council and sanitary authority are available at the Devon Record Office (East Devon Area), Castle Street, Exeter.

In January, 1912, a communication was addressed to the Local Government Board by the Admiralty, stating that the Lords Commissioners had received information of an outbreak of scarlet fever at Dartmouth among poor children in a crowded part of the town. As married servants of the cadets at the Royal Naval College reside in the town danger was apprehended of infection being conveyed to the college. Seeing that there was no hospital for infectious diseases in the borough, their Lordships desired to have information as to the

extent of the outbreak, and to know whether steps could be taken to secure the provision of suitable accommodation for fever patients by the local authority.

Subsequent letters addressed by the Local Government Board to the town council on the subject of the provision of hospital accommodation elicited unsatisfactory replies. It had already been noted that the annual reports of the medical officer of health did not give the Board sufficient information as to the sanitary condition of Dartmouth; also it appeared that inspections required by the Board's Regulations under the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1909, were not being adequately carried out; while the local press had reported the appointment by the town council of one of their own members to be inspector of nuisances. In these circumstances I was instructed to inquire into the general sanitary circumstances and administration of the borough. I visited Dartmouth on several occasions during the summer of 1913, being accompanied at my last visit by my colleague, Mr. J. B. Hill, the Board's geological adviser, who was instructed to examine and report on the public water supplies and sources thereof.

The ancient borough of Dartmouth, or, to give its full designation, Clifton Dartmouth Hardness, occupies a singularly beautiful situation on the west bank of the estuary of the River Dart which at this point forms a land-locked harbour remarkable for the depth and stillness of the water, and is visited by a large number of foreign and coastwise vessels.

The busiest part of the town stands in contiguity to the harbour and landing stage; but a large portion of it lies in a deep valley at right angles to the river and rising gradually in a westerly direction.

Houses are built to a considerable extent in rows, rising tier above tier on the slopes of the almost precipitous hills, access from street to street being frequently by means of flights of steps. This, together with the fact that many of the houses are of considerable antiquity, gives the place largely the appearance of a foreign town. The exceeding mildness of the climate - as shown by the free growth of sub-tropical shrubs and trees - is accompanied by considerable humidity, but is said to be remarkably favourable to longevity.

The area of the borough is 1,925 acres, and its population at the census of 1911 was 7,005, a marked increase since 1891, when it was 6,025; it was 6,579 in 1901.

The number of inhabited houses was 1,152 at the 1911 Census, of which as many as 905 are said to be let at under £16 rental. The principal industries of the borough are, naturally, in connection with shipping; also with yacht and boat building, engineering, &c. There is an important brewery and a paint factory; besides which many of the inhabitants are engaged in the various trades of a busy market town. The Royal Naval College, however, is directly, as well as indirectly, the borough's most important asset. Also the town has every year an increasing number of summer visitors.

The rateable value of the borough is £32,559, and its assessable value £30,994. The total rates levied in 1912 amounted to 6s.6d., being 2s.11d. for poor rate. There is no borough rate; the town clerk informs me that the income from borough property suffices to obviate the need for such rate.

The public debt at present outstanding amounts to £18,961.

#### GENERAL SANITARY CIRCUMSTANCES

##### Housing accommodation

The older houses are for the most part built of pieces of some sort of

stone set in plaster; of timber framing faced with stucco or plaster? or of some other mixed construction. As a rule only the more modern houses are built of brick. In the older houses eave spouting and down pipes were constantly found to be in one way or another defective.

A feature of Dartmouth housing is the tenement houses. Nearly all of these are old houses that have formerly been the residences of a more prosperous class. The buildings are huddled together at the feet of steeply rising hillsides in such a manner that lower rooms get little ventilation and, frequently, little light. In the more central parts of the town such houses abut upon narrow courts and yards shut in by high walls excluding sunlight and dominated by other houses upon higher levels.

Not a few tenement houses are back to earth as regards the lowest storey, or storeys, in such wise that the actual block of building has frontage to two different streets at different levels, the ground floor of the upper tenement entered from the higher level standing over a ground floor or even a ground floor and a first floor of a tenement on the lower level.

Many tenement houses present an appearance deceptive to persons unaccustomed to local peculiarities. At first glance houses may seem externally to be of a substantial character, but closer inspection does not confirm the first impression.

Access to these houses is by an entrance leading to a common passage, often long, rambling and dark, upon which the ground floor rooms directly open. Occasionally part of such passage is below the level of the ground at the back or side, and from the surface of this ground, in times of rains, water me-; flew into the passage -as I saw near Higher Street. The staircases are unventilated, tortuous, steep and often dangerously dark. Where staircase windows exist, I commonly found them fixed shut.

On stone stairways, the steps are often irregular and much worn; wooden staircases are often dangerously out of repair, the difficulty of surmounting then being increased by the unusually high 'risers'.

Rooms in tenements are not unfrequently of good size, but if they possess windows in the rear, the back ventilation is only from courts or narrow passages, and lighting in lower rooms is commonly very bad. Even on bright sunny days the gloom of many of these places was oppressive; in the winter it must often be impossible for inmates to carry on any sort of work, even in the morning, without artificial light. I often found inner rooms formed by boarding off part of a larger room. Commonly such inner rooms are used as sleeping apartments and have only the borrowed light and ventilation obtainable from a small window in the partition, and generally only part of such window can be opened. I found two boys sleeping in one such room measuring 6'9'<sup>1</sup> x 8'6" x 7' high, and having no ventilation at all except by an opening 3' x 2' in the partition wall of the adjoining room, which was occupied by father, mother, and younger children. Floors generally are in bad condition; often they seemed so decayed as to be likely to give way at any time. Windows and their frames are ill-fitting, broken and rotting from want of paint - not a few being found wholly or partly fixed shut.

A feature of the courts, alleys and backyards, is that the gutter spouting is often defective, and down pipes (especially from small sections of roof) are cut short and do not deliver over gulleys. Even in dry weather the walls and the soil about them seemed damp. Internally, walls were found frequently in bad condition, with plaster broken away and showing the laths beneath; the walls of many of the passages and rooms - especially of the back dark rooms -were to the last degree filthy. The walls of most of the rooms are papered, the paper sometimes hanging in rags; successive wallpapers have been hung without previous wall-stripping, thus providing cover for the vermin often swarming in these places. Ceilings were often seen broken, and often bulging down to a fall. They were generally filthy and frequently

festooned with cobwebs. I did not find many houses standing back to back, but in the central parts of the town the backs of a number of houses abut partly on the backs, or wholly on the sides of other similar structures. In many cases, as on the south side of Higher Street, only three to four feet of space intervene between the backs of houses.

A few instances of tenement conditions may be cited.

Tenement houses in Colaforde Lane;

An ancient house of four stories, said to have been condemned as unfit for habitation, but apparently no order has been issued. The house seems falling to pieces. It is still inhabited on the second floor by a woman and her two children, who have the free run of the rest of the house, which has been abandoned by its other tenants. The ground floor is open through from the street to the filthy and unpaved backyard, shut in by the backs of other houses; this yard is a quagmire littered with all sorts of decomposing refuse thrown there by the inmates of adjacent houses. In a corner of the yard is the 6-inch glazed soil pipe of an adjoining house - the pipe broken and plugged with rags. Until recently faecal matter was freely exuding from this pipe. The whole structure of the house seems to rest upon a single upright. Staircase dilapidated and broken. Floors of upper rooms stinking, decayed and so broken in places as to be dangerous. Whole building pervaded by a strong urinous smell. There is no closet, but inmates have the use of a w.c. under an adjoining house and entered from the street. This w.c. has no light or proper ventilation, and is in fact a public convenience in a filthy condition. House and yard said to be infested with rats. Rental of second floor 3s. per week. No water supply; water has to be carried up from a public tap or 'conduit' at some distance.

Other houses in Colaforde Lane, fully inhabited, are little better but seem to command good rents, e.g., one contains four separate tenements let as follows:-A, three rooms, 3s.; B, one room and slip, 2s.; C, one room (almost dark), 1s.6d.; D, three rooms, 3s.6d.; giving a total weekly rental of 10s. per week. The walls at the top of this house showed evidence of the free entry of wet. Floors at the top broken and dangerous.

In another tenement house adjoining an occupier, E, was paying 2s.9d. per week for three rooms, and another, F, was paying 4s. per week for a 'living room' and five rooms above, two of the latter being converted by means of partitions into four rooms. Three male adults sleep in a room measuring 11' x 7' x 6'6"; the window seemed to be fixed shut and there is no fire-place; other rooms have but little light. There are two w.c.'s on the attic floor in a passage formed by boarding off part of the attic space, and these are reached by a narrow; and extremely steep flight of wooden steps.

St Saviour's Court, opening from Colaforde Lane, comprises seven houses of timber framing stuccoed. These houses have no back outlet and face an unpaved and filthy yard.

In a narrow; passage leading to this place is the entrance to the tenement of an old man who pays £7.15s. per annum for the use of two rooms on ground floor and two rooms above. The ground floor rooms were almost dark and in a state of extraordinary filth.

The condition of the tenement houses in Silver Street and in the courts off Higher Street is apparently known to everyone in the borough except the town council.

It is difficult to understand how any sanitary authority can tolerate the existence of such dens as some of those visited. In Silver Street in one tenement I found an enormous collection of foul rags in a central room having no light or ventilation. A portion of the living room in this place was boarded off to contain a hopper w.c. with flushing apparatus broken; the pan broken and plugged with rags.

Another tenement close by was found inhabited by an aged bedridden woman, with whom dwelt her son, also apparently an invalid, whose sleeping room was extremely filthy. The whole of these premises are much out of repair and wanting in light and air. Similar defects and want of lighting and air were found at other tenement houses such as D ammerell's Tenements, Portobello, &c. The condition of two tenement houses in Oxford Slip was seen to be especially bad-

Many tenement dwellers are dirty and careless in habits; on the other hand it is difficult to see how they could be otherwise amid such surroundings. I agree with the medical officer of health in his observations that a large number of men cling to these wretched dwellings in order to be near their work on the coal hulks. Many 'lumpers' told me that a house at a distance from the river would be useless to them as they must live within easy earshot of the steamers' sirens which notify them that a steamer has arrived and needs coal at once.

The number of houses, whether erected 'back to earth'<sup>1</sup> in greater or less degree, or without back outlet is very large, and must form a large percentage of the total number of houses in the borough. Particularly bad examples of houses of this kind were met on the west side of Lake Street, where houses have been built on the site of an old rope walk at the bottom of a very steep slope.

Lake Street, Mansard Cottages; four of these are built completely in to the back up to the eaves. Three of them have flat roofs of zinc sheeting. One visited, comprised a room on ground floor, with scullery (containing hopper w.c.), three small bedrooms (one with fireplace). Rent £11 per annum -I- 8s.8d. per annum for water.

A number of other houses in Lake street are built back to earth up to the first floor. In the steeply sloping ground behind are cesspools for the slop drainage of other houses at a higher level. These cesspools frequently overflow; two of them were seen overflowing.

Eleven other houses in Lake Street are built with only about 4' space excavated behind. Into these narrow curtilages down pipes discharge rainwater; in a few instances there are gullies, but in the majority the down pipe is cut short to discharge on the ground, which is badly paved or unpaved. In all the houses there is evidence of dampness at the back.

At another house, in Woodbine Terrace, in the same road, I found, opening from the scullery, a sort of tunnel or cave into the bank; in this cave is a tank supplied with water from a spring somewhere in the bank above. Another house near corner of South Ford Road (rent, £9 per annum + rates), stands only 7' 6" from the steep cliff at the back. In this yard and close against the back door is a 6<sup>t</sup> glazed pipe bringing down slop drainage from the next house to discharge into the yard here. The occupant of the house complained of the nauseating stench pervading these premises. She asserted that she had complained in vain to a former inspector of nuisances.

Not a few houses were seen standing wholly or in part in such hopeless decay that even the poorest class do not apply for them. These houses ought to be demolished as they are infested with rats. I was satisfied that overcrowding exists, but apparently no search has been made for it by the officers.

It is obvious that many of the unsatisfactory conditions of, and about dwellings - of which illustrations have been given - are remediable by the ordinary administration of the Public Health- Acts, such as is carried out in any well regulated urban district. The neglect of such administration is emphasized by the fact that S.17 (1) of the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1909, and the Housing (Inspection of District) Regulations, 1910, made it obligatory on all local authorities to have a systematic survey of housing conditions for the purposes of the Act. Such a survey had only to be begun in Dartmouth by a competent officer to bring before the town council a large number of cases in which action under the Public Health or Housing Acts is urgently called for. I could not find, however, that thus far the town council had designated anyone under Article II of the Regulations to make the inspections.

Considering the state of the tenement houses above described, it is not surprising that the better class of working people will, as several observed to me, put up with almost any inconvenience in order to obtain a "single house" of some sort to themselves.

Undoubtedly hardship arises from the lack of suitable and wholesome dwellings for the poorer working class in Dartmouth, and I find it difficult to understand how the town council could on the 10th September last write to the Board that ". . . the council do not concur in the observations of the medical officer of health that the housing conditions in certain areas are insanitary".

#### Water supply

It is impossible to regard the water supplies of Dartmouth as satisfactory or free from risk in present circumstances/ owing to the fact that certain of the sources of supply are liable to pollution; while in other cases the filtering adopted does not appear efficient. The nature of the defects existing, and the measures which should be considered by the town council for the rectification of such defects are sufficiently indicated in the appended report by my colleague/ Mr.J.B.Hill, in which the sources of the supply are described in relation to the geological conditions involved.

At a large number of houses of the poorer class, and at all the tenements visited by me, no public water supply is laid into the house at all; the inmates, even those residing upon upper floors, have to obtain water from public cisterns - locally known as conduits - which are furnished with taps. For a large number of closets, water for flushing has to be similarly carried by hand. Much inconvenience is ' in many cases entailed by this arrangement. In some localities/ as near Higher Street, conduits with defective covers were noticed.

#### Roads

Under the borough surveyor's control are 4\*5 miles of main road, and 5 miles of other roads. At the time of my visits the roads were not in a very satisfactory condition.

#### Sewerage

It is stated that with the exception of a few outlying localities, the whole town is provided with efficient sewerage of glazed and socketed pipes, and that since about 1895 the whole of these have been re-laid. The natural gradients are of such steepness that no flushing is required. For ventilation purposes a number of 6" shafts have been provided.

The sewage is carried without treatment into the River Dart by some four or five separate sewers, the outfalls of which are below low water mark.

In a part of Victoria Road, the main thoroughfare of the town, there have occasionally been floods after heavy rains. This will now, it is hoped, be prevented by the installation, at a cost of E300 charged to revenue, of an electric motor and centrifugal pump by means of which storm-water rapidly descending from higher levels can be discharged quickly into the harbour.

No complaint of nuisance in connection with the sewers of the borough came to my notice.

#### House drainage

The medical officer of health assures me that he considers the house drainage of newer houses to be good, and that of the older houses to be in the main fairly satisfactory, but it has been a constant subject of complaint by successive surveyors of the town council that, owing to the absence of byelaws, persons are allowed to alter the drainage of their houses without notifying the sanitary officers. In this manner various drainage nuisances have been created and are from time to time the subject of complaint.

The drainage of back yards in many instances needs careful attention. Reference has already been made to cesspools, mostly containing slops, in the rear of houses upon steep slopes, and the recurring dangerous nuisance caused by the overflow of these receptacles. I was told that it would be difficult to abolish these since they are below the level of the road upon which the houses to which they belong abut. But it should be possible for the council to devise some scheme of back drainage with easement to a sewer in a road at a lower level. Had a systematic survey of housing conditions been made under the Housing (Inspection of District) Regulations valuable information as to the condition of house drains would have been obtained and steps taken to rectify defects such as the above.

#### Excrement disposal

In this respect undoubtedly there has been considerable advance of late years. No complete records of the work done by the sanitary officers were available, but the medical officer of health assured me that in the populous parts of the town no closet other than a water closet is now known to exist. The visits paid by me confirmed this. It is indeed remarkable that in some of the worst localities of the borough considerable sums have been expended in fitting water closets in connection with properties that will probably before long be condemned. On the other hand a very large number of water closets have no flushing apparatus, and in many others this was found to be out of order. Closets kept in a filthy condition were met with in many cases. The shortage of closet accommodation, especially in connection with tenement houses, is one of the few points about which I found householders anxious to make complaint. In many places only one closet is provided for the inmates of five or six tenements - such closet being found at some distance and in an inconvenient position.

#### Refuse disposal

In all parts of the town refuse if placed in readiness in receptacles is collected and removed daily by the town council's carts. There has been difficulty in obtaining a 'tip' within the borough area. At present the refuse is 'tipped' on agricultural land some three miles from the centre of the town. To reach this spot a long and steep ascent must be surmounted. To avoid the delay which would occur if each cart when full had to be driven to the 'tip', the earliest cartloads of refuse collected each day (comprising chiefly paper and light refuse from shops) are in first instance deposited in the surveyor's yard, adjoining the public gardens upon the quay. The daily collection begins about 7.45 a.m. In the afterpart of the day the refuse deposited in the stone yard is said to be carted away to the 'tip'. But in point of fact, I found that on each occasion that I visited this yard refuse

in some quantity was still lying there, the ground being in a foul condition, attracting swarms of flies. The arrangement described is a very unsuitable one; it is the cause of justifiable local complaint.

Occasionally house occupiers who desire to get rid quickly of their refuse carry it direct to the stone yard and deposit it there. It is very desirable that no refuse should be deposited even temporarily at this spot. Owing to the situation of the town at the foot of steep hills the question of refuse disposal presents considerable difficulty. Probably a small 'destructor' will ultimately be necessary.

There are no common lodging-houses. I made inquiry concerning public-houses or other places in which persons might be received in common lodging-house fashion. But at only one public-house I found this class of business carried on upon any scale. The lodgers seem to be mostly sailors come ashore. The cubic space per head, and the general sanitary conditions in these places, should be the subject of supervision by the sanitary officers. In one room measuring 17' x 10' x 7' 5" (fireplace blocked up; the single window opening only at the top), I found accommodation provided for seven persons in three double and one single beds at a cost of 6d. per head per night. There are a number of other rooms in this same house offering a similar accommodation in double beds. The house was cleanly kept.

There are four private slaughter-houses which I am assured are registered though the register had at the time of my visit been mislaid; there is also a public abattoir. All these places are far removed from houses and have been placed near a locality known as 'Jawbone' on the hill to the south-west of the town at an altitude of about 500<sup>1</sup> above O.D. The condition of these places calls for no special comment save that an enormous accumulation of blood and offal was found at one slaughter-house and at another the overflow of blood and filth soaking down the hill is, as Mr. Hill's report indicates, dangerous to a source of public water supply.

The public slaughter-house erected is a brick building constructed in three sections so that it can be used by three butchers, but at present only one section is in use. For some reason the place is not popular; two owners of private slaughter-houses allow the use of their premises by other butchers. The floors of the killing rooms are apparently porous rough brick forming a bad surface for cleansing. The abattoir is only about 90 yards from the isolation hospital building. At the time of my visit there was a large accumulation of blood, filth, and slaughter-house refuse on the ground only about 60 yards from the well giving a supply of drinking water to this hospital. While it is desirable that the slaughter-house should be well removed from dwellings, it is perhaps, not advantageous that it should be in a situation so remote that the inspector of nuisances cannot exercise a practical supervision of the animals killed here without undertaking a long and fatiguing journey.

There are 20 registered milk dealers, of whom 12 are said to keep cows, and most, of their premises were visited. At my first visit to Dartmouth I found that no alteration had been made in the milk dealers' register since 1898, but the book has since been brought up-to-date. Some of the milk, vendors' premises in the town are mere general shops - even drapery goods being sold there. I found pans of milk standing without any protection from dust or flies. Some of the shops were dirty and the means of scalding milk vessels seemed insufficient.

The cow-keepers' premises, of which I visited nearly all, were found extremely defective. Cow-houses almost without exception were filthy; some were in a disgusting condition and seemed not to have been whitewashed for an indefinite period. Low-pitched, dark, and wanting in ventilation, some of them smelt offensively. Floors, everywhere of rough and uneven surface, were dirty and often thickly coated with dung. At nearly every farm there was a large manure heap close to the doors and windows of cow-houses, and at one

farm the accumulation was so great as almost to block the entrance. At another farm the hands of a milker just about to commence work were found dirty. With dairies there was much less fault to find. The majority of them were cleanly though too often used as a store for miscellaneous articles of food and household effects; some dairies communicate directly with dwelling-house rooms.

There was an old register of bakehouses, but it had not been kept up for many years. The inspector of nuisances was not in a position to say how many bakehouses there are in town, but there seem to be a considerable number, while a few of those visited were clean, the majority were very dirty and ill-kept; some, indeed, were in a disgraceful condition. Many of the premises are in no way suited for this trade. The buildings are not only old and dilapidated, but also wanting in light and ventilation; in some instances the ceilings, walls, and floors are so broken and defective that cleanliness is almost impossible. In some bakehouses there are large rambling lofts overhead and running back into the rock. Some of these were found full of miscellaneous effects and rubbish, the ceilings festooned with cobwebs and in some cases harbouring bats. In two of the lofts I found household linen drying, and in one of them, in addition to household linen, was a store of flour, insufficiently protected from dirt. In three instances I found hand-flushed hopper closets in filthy condition close to the bakehouse door; one of these closets had to serve for three families.

I found in a dark room adjoining one bakehouse in open sacks and boxes a quantity of flour which was covered with dirt. A large collection of rat traps were hanging conspicuously in the bakehouse. The manager admitted that the place is "overrun with rats", as are also, I believe, most of the old bakehouses in Dartmouth.

In his annual Report for 1912, the medical officer of health states that he has inspected "all the bakehouses during the year and found them in good order and up to the requirements of the byelaws". What these requirements may be I cannot say, for I was shown no byelaws respecting bakehouses, nor am I aware that the local authority can make such byelaws. For my part I consider the state of some of the bakehouses to be such as to constitute a scandal.

I heard of no offensive trades nor did I meet with any nuisance arising in connection with the keeping of animals.

#### Sanitary administration

The town council and urban district council consist of 17 members who meet monthly, and there are three separate committees, each of which comprises the whole council. The town clerk informs me that though there is no 'health' or 'sanitary' committee, the 'works committee' is empowered to deal with sanitary matters. At each meeting of the urban district council a report from the medical officer of health is read by the clerk. Mr. Voisey, the surveyor, presents a monthly report, at the close of which he introduces any reference that, as inspector of nuisances, he may have to make to sanitary matters. I examined all the reports presented by Mr. Voisey since his appointment. In only two of them is there any reference to his work as inspector of nuisances, and then only with respect to visits to "several properties" where nuisance was "suspected". No particulars are given, but he reports that in some cases nuisance has been abated, while, as to others, he says that matters "are being seen to by the owners". I learn from him that he intended to refer to certain visits to slaughterhouses and cowsheds.

The town clerk is Mr. Sydney J. Pope, who is also clerk to the urban district council and to the cemetery committee. In respect of these appointments he receives a salary of £140. He is also clerk to the port sanitary authority at an annual salary of £15. He has to provide his own office. He is not a whole-time officer.

The medical officer of health, Dr. John Henry Harris, was appointed in May, 1900, at an annual salary of £30, half repayable from county funds. He is also medical officer of health to the Dartmouth and Totnes Port Sanitary Authority at a salary of £30, and district medical officer and public vaccinator for the first and second districts of the Kingsbridge Union and holds certain other official appointments. He is engaged in private practice in the borough.

On the whole Dr. Harris has a good knowledge of his district, but circumstances do not allow him scope for the efficient work he is unquestionably well able to do, and his annual reports are perfunctory and wanting in detail. He needs the service of an active trained inspector to carry out his instructions and work in close touch with him. Even so it would, in my view, be easier for the necessary independence to be exercised by an officer not engaged in local private practice. An officer so engaged must find himself constantly in a position of antagonism to patients, actual or prospective.

It is greatly to be desired that the borough of Dartmouth should form part of a scheme of combination which would obtain the services of a medical officer of health independent of private practice.

The inspector of nuisances, Mr. Fredk. John Voisey, formerly for some years in business as a builder, possesses no sanitary certificate and has had no previous experience as to his present duties. Some years ago he was a town councillor, but gave up office and remained 'off the council. In October, 1912, however, he was again elected a town councillor, resigning office three months later in order to become candidate for the combined office of surveyor, water engineer, and sanitary inspector", applications for which were invited by advertisement dated 24 January, 1913. The advertisement states that "Canvassing of members of the corporation either directly or indirectly will absolutely disqualify an applicant. Applicants must state salary required".

Mr. Voisey was appointed in preference to some 108 other applicants, many of whom are stated to have had experience of the duties or to have possessed certificates of sanitary knowledge obtained, after examination, from the Royal Sanitary Institute or other similar bodies. At the time this appointment was made it seems to have been understood that Mr. Voisey himself would study sanitary work with a view to obtaining such certificate, but I did not gather that he had taken, or was about to take, any active steps in this direction. He accompanied me (after reference to the town council) in my inspection. It appeared to me that he had little knowledge of the duties of his office.

As surveyor a salary of £100 per annum was allotted to Mr. Voisey, and as inspector of nuisances a salary of £50 was assigned to him on the understanding that his appointment was sanctioned by the Local Government Board within a reasonable time, failing which the salary as inspector of nuisances was to be reduced from £50 to £25. As such sanction has been withheld, Mr. Voisey's salary as inspector of nuisances stands at £25, the whole of which sum must be debited on the rates since no portion of it can be recovered, under the circumstances, from county funds.

In addition to the appointment of surveyor and inspector of nuisances, Mr. Voisey seems to have received that of water engineer. I question seriously Mr. Voisey's ability to give efficient advice to his councillors regarding the engineering aspects of their water undertaking. Indeed his duties in that direction would seem likely to overlap those of the water inspector, Mr. J. H. Wallis. This officer, who is a registered plumber, was appointed in 1896, at an annual salary of £91. It is his duty to look after the pumping station, filter beds, reservoirs, pipes, &c., &c., and to supervise generally the arrangements of the water supply.

Isolation of cases of infectious diseases

For infectious cases, until the present year, the borough possessed no hospital accommodation. Owing to this circumstance and to the prevalence of scarlatina the town of Dartmouth had been placed "out of bounds" by the Captain of the Royal Naval College. The local trades people having made strong complaint of the loss entailed on them by this measure, the borough council, early in the present year, caused to be erected at 'Jawbone', the top of the hill, about 500' above O.D., to the south-west of the town, a temporary structure of corrugated iron, match-boarded internally. It contains a four-bed ward and a two-bed ward respectively, on either side of the entrance lobby and duty room. From the duty room access is obtained to a passage leading to a pantry, scullery, and nurses' bedroom. The wards being in direct communication, the hospital can only be used for one disease at a time. By means of a wind pump a supply of water is obtained from a well said to be sunk about 30'. There is no bath; there is a single w.c. for patients and staff, and drainage to a cesspool.

The wards are warmed by radiators and pipes supplied from a separate boiler. The site of the hospital is surrounded by an open fence. Up to the time of my last visit, in September, no patient had been admitted to the hospital.

The institution seems of little value in its present fragmentary condition. The hospital is not kept ready for the reception of cases, and much time would be lost in preparing it for this purpose. No doubt the town is of insufficient size to provide a really efficient isolation hospital for its own exclusive use. Dartmouth might with great advantage form part of a combination comprising the urban and rural districts of Kingsbridge and Totnes, and the urban district of Salcombe, By these united districts one or even two small but efficient hospitals might be provided and kept always ready for the reception of cases. The difficulty of carrying out isolation of infectious cases at home is clear from the description already given of the housing conditions at present existing in Dartmouth. The medical officer of health informed me that in some cases it was impossible to isolate as the whole family had to remain in the same two rooms.

Disinfection of premises after infectious disease is carried out by the inspector of nuisances under instructions from the medical officer of health. For disinfection of clothing, &c., the borough council possess a current steam disinfector which is kept in a two-chambered brick building at the stone-yard adjoining the public garden on the quay. The place is apparently accessible to anyone during daytime. I could gather nothing as to the work done in the way of disinfection in this apparatus, as the inspector of nuisances keeps no record on the subject.

The borough council recently purchased at Plymouth at a cost of about £20 a rubber tyred reclining ambulance of somewhat antiquated type. This vehicle it is intended to keep in the market in a stall previously occupied by the fire engine.

#### Small-pox hospital accommodation

There is no special accommodation for small-pox cases. Some years ago an arrangement was entered into with the Dartmouth and Totnes Port Sanitary Authority that, accommodation being available, cases of small-pox may be received at their hospital ship at a cost of £1.15s. per week inclusive of medical attendance.

This hospital ship, "The Mayfly", is an old Mersey passenger steamer purchased in 1893 at a cost of £1,000. She is now condemned as unseaworthy and the port sanitary authority are negotiating with the Admiralty for the purchase of another vessel. As the hospital ship has had to be cemented under the bottom up to 18" above the water line she must be kept in shallow water and now lies off the shore at the entrance to Old Mill Creek. She can only be reached by water and that from half-flow to half-ebb. At other states of the

tide she lies on the mud and can only be approached from the shore by a gangway, to reach which involves a considerable detour. To reach her thus would be difficult in the case of a patient acutely ill. Thus far no patient has been received on the ship during the present year. The worst point about the ship is the deck, which is far from water-tight and admits water freely during heavy rain.

The ship has three wards - a large ward forward and a large ward and small ward towards the stern. These with the caretaker's quarters are all below the main deck. There are two beds in each large ward. On the upper deck is a convalescent room. Water has to be carried on board and stored in tanks; water closets are provided and discharge into the Dart which here is tidal. There is a mortuary shed on the old bridge. I found the ship being kept clean by the caretaker and his wife; but it is desirable that new hospital provision should be made by the port authority.

#### CONCLUSIONS

From the above statement it will be seen that a number of weighty questions, gravely affecting the good government and health of the borough, are awaiting consideration by the town council whose supineness for many years past has permitted the gradual growth of a large number of insanitary conditions, many of them now difficult of abatement. The following points seem to me to demand in more special manner early attention by the town council:-

I. To facilitate dealing with public health questions the town council should proceed as soon as practicable to form a small efficient committee as their 'sanitary<sup>1</sup> or 'health<sup>1</sup> committee.

II. The statutory obligations as to house inspection laid on the council by the Housing, Town Planning, &C., Act, 1909, and the Board's regulations there under should at once be realised and complied with. Data of the inspections should, as required by the Regulations, be recorded in permanent form so as to be readily accessible for reference.

Nuisances, overcrowding and other unwholesome conditions incidentally brought to light in the course of these inspections should be promptly dealt with.

III. The question of the sufficiency of housing accommodation \* for the working classes should be taken into serious consideration.

IV. Systematic attention should be given to curtilages and passages at present unpaved, in order to secure that these places shall be properly paved and drained.

V. The council should take steps to safeguard the purity of the public water supply.

VI. Under Section 23 of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act, 1890, the borough council should make byelaws with respect to the drainage of existing buildings. The adoption for this purpose of a series based on the Board's model code should be considered.

VII. More efficient arrangements for the collection and disposal of house refuse should be devised.

VIII. The regulations made under the Dairies, Cowsheds and Milkshops Order should be much more strictly enforced.

I.. The council should make use of the powers they possess to secure cleanliness and wholesome conditions in bakehouses; and generally much more attention than heretofore should be given to inspecting food prepared and sold in the district.

Inspection of meat and other foods should be carried out systematically.

.. As the existing temporary hospital for infectious diseases is not likely to be of much service without considerable further expenditure, the utility of which is more than doubtful, the town council should take into consideration the question of providing an efficient hospital in conjunction with other districts, viz., as already mentioned, the urban and rural districts of Kingsbridge and of Totnes and the urban district of Salcombe. As part of this scheme the existing temporary hospital might perhaps be adapted either in its present situation or some other for the reception of small-pox cases.

A special committee might, with advantage be formed to deal with this question.

.I. The council should obtain the services of a trained and certificated inspector of nuisances who should devote his whole time to the business of that office, including inspection under the Housing Regulations.

In conclusion, I have to thank Dr.J.H.Harris, the medical officer of health, for his assistance in this inquiry, also Mr.J.H.Wallis, the water inspector, for accompanying my colleague, Mr.J.B.Hill and myself in our visits to the sources of the water supply.

In a special manner I have to thank Dr.G.Adkins, county medical officer of Devon, for the time he has devoted to assisting me in eliciting facts in this case.

F. ST. GEORGE MIVART.