

The Inspector of Nuisance

The forerunner to the environmental health department was the inspector of nuisance, whose job it was to attend to all manner of 'nuisances' on a day-to-day basis and report his findings back to the local authority, and the Medical Officer of Health

His role was to maintain the peace amongst villagers by arbitrating 'nuisances' and to avert public health dangers by monitoring living conditions, trying to raise standards of health and hygiene to acceptable levels and to lessen the workload of the Medical Officer of Health. Below can be seen part of a typical yearly report on the state of health and social standards of Wheatley.

August 4th 1890

Dr Wood Medical Officer of Health

Annual report of the sanitary conditions of the district for the year 1889.

'There were 16 deaths in the year against 14 deaths in the previous year, and against 15 for the year 1887. There was not a single death from any infectious diseases., there were 49 nuisances abated consisting of blocked drains, foul closets, dirty pigsties, cesspits and other accommodations. One house was lime-washed and repaired, the public culvert was subsequently flushed during the dry weather and the public pumps were repaired as required'.

(As can be seen from the above report, living conditions were far from ideal, probably the norm for their time, where eking out an existence took precedence)

(Wheatley being a typical rural Oxfordshire village, formerly based upon an agrarian economy, had its fair share of social deprivation amongst the less well-off members of its society, many of which feature in the minutes of Urban District Council minute books, within the reports of Mr Turner, Inspector of Nuisance. The Munts appear with regularity as can be seen from the following passages taken from the UDC minute books, held at Oxfordshire County Record office.)

August 1882

Mr Turner submitted his report 'cottages at the back of Railway Tavern in a dilapidated condition, also proper urinal at the Red Lion new public house, notice in each case given to the owner. Mr Gardiner was seeking to remedy his water supply'

September 4th 1882

Mr Turner submitted his report, 'A case of scarlatina in the house of William Munt at the back of The Railway Tavern another case in the house of Charles Messenger and another in the house of Thomas Shorter, West Field Road. 'Mr Gardiner reported property crowded, privy accommodation bad and the water still discoloured and not fit to drink.'

Feb 4th 1884

The Inspector of Nuisance report was laid before the board. Nuisances were reported on the premises of Messrs, J Munt, Gooding, W King, H Messenger, E Tombs, J Shorter, E Edwards, notice in each case to be given to abate nuisance'.

April 7th 1884

Munt Stephen H, Munt George, to be exempt of rates in case of poverty as usual'

(This simple entry tells the family historian much about the habitual lack of finances amongst the Munts, who obviously led rather a hand to mouth existence. }

March 2nd 1885

Mr Turner submitted his report 'nuisances, J Clements (Blenheim), J Shepherd, A Gould, J Munt, J Shepherd (High Street), H Gomm, High Street dilapidated roof. Notice to be given to the owner in each case.

April 5th 1886

Mr Turners report was laid before the board and nuisances reported last meeting, E Tombs abated. Nuisances now on the premises of J Munt, E Shepherd, A Gould, W Fisher, M Pratt, A Smith, Roger Miles, etc.

May 1st 1886

Mr Turner submitted his report; the nuisances repeated last meeting were abated. A case of fever in the house of Richard Miles, the house in Farm Close Lane occupied by Ellen Munt, still dilapidated.

June 6th 1887

A complaint has been made that James Munt has obstructed the pathway in High Street by putting wood there. The surveyor served him notice to remove the wood at once and call his attention to the notice there.

October 3rd 1887

Inspector Turner's report on 'The hovel in Church Street repaired satisfactorily, other nuisances reported in the last meeting abated. Typhoid fever in the house of Mrs G Putt, Kiln Lane. Two cases that of Emily Putt and James Munt, disinfectant to be supplied and every caution given. William Ring, J Clements's house in Blenheim to be disinfected,

November 1st 1887

Inspector Turner's report Typhoid fever in the house of Isaac Munt, Blenheim, two cases both doing well, no spread. Foul Privy Thomas Putt Blenheim, Foul drain W Munt, High Street

January 2nd 1888

Inspector Turner's report 'The nuisances reported last meeting were abated, except that of Thomas Putt and I.

Munt at Blenheim'.

April 2nd 1888

Nuisances at the premises of Gould, Harding, Munt, Messenger. Gould, Coates, Wm Ring, Ellen Munt, Shorter, Smith, and Davis.

(The area of Wheatley, known as Blenheim, was about as unsanitary as one can possibly imagine a small area of back-to-back cottages to be, tightly packed with little more than enough room for a small front yard. Many cottage yards contained a pig sty. Little or no proper sanitation existed. Most people made do with outside privies, which invariably leaked into the local water supply, with foul water being drawn from a communal pump. Little wonder that disease such as typhoid fever frequently took hold and came to the attention of the authorities.

November 9th 1891

A letter read from Mr Chillingworth of a nuisance and obstruction of the public footpath in High Street by James Munt depositing wood, poles, chisels and other implements there and damaging the wall of his property occupied by Henry Allen. Resolved that the clerk acknowledge the receipt of Mr Chillingworth's letter by the board and to inform him formally shall receive the board's attention.

Resolved that (the surveyor call upon James Munt to clear away everything belonging to him from off the footpath against his dwelling house and against the garden wall of the property occupied by Henry Allen, within seven days from the date of order. Or in default of compliance, legal proceedings to be taken. Also the surveyor is requested to forbid any other person to deposit anything obstructable on the roads.

The clerk to invite Mr Munt and inform him of this and to take steps to abate the nuisance, also the foot bridge in Farm Close Lane.

December 7th 1891

The nuisances reported at a former meeting were abated'.

(Clearly the Inspector of nuisances wasn't a man to be trifled with as the threat of legal action was enough to keep the Wheatley inhabitants in order, as there are no cases as yet of any legal proceedings being taken.)

(Existence for the poor cottage dwellers in 1880s and 1890s Wheatley, would have been much the same as for their like, the length and breadth of Great Britain. Employment was generally of a casual nature, and not very well paid, very often described on the census form as 'ag lab', which in reality meant picking up any seasonal or manual work that was offered. To supplement their low wages the cottage dwellers worked hard to improve their lot by means of tending their own vegetable plots and keeping a pig or two. This keeping of pigs seems to have incurred the wrath of the inspector as the minute books report.)

Match 7th 1892

Inspector Turner's report read;

'R Price foul privy, Gardiner dilapidated cottage, W Rogers foul privy, James Munt heap manure, A Hodgkins heap of manure. Chillingworth Cottages, Bell Lane foul privies, I Shepherd heap of manure, Clements,

Harding, Munt H foul privies, T Putt heap of manure’.

May 7th 1894

Inspector Turner’s nuisance report,

‘J Coppock's cottages Crown Road, well out of repair. Wm Munt High Street, heap of refuse, work done. Mortimer s heap of manure, not done. Wm Munt pig sty foul, Wm Munt, Chapmans Yard, asked permission to erect a pig sty in his garden, permission not granted’.

My 19th 1897

The inspector of nuisance reports that he had received a complaint from J Barnes as to the keeping of pigs at Blenheim, by Charles Shorter, Thomas Goodwin, .Goodlake, Edwin Tombs, James Munt, Edward Coppock and John Lakerman, and that he had had none of the pigs removed and the pig sties cleaned and he was instructed to keep the matter under close observation.

August 10th 1897

Inspector of nuisances report 'that the pig sties at Blenheim were being kept clean and that James Munt was moving to Littleworth.

August 20th 1897

The chairman reported that Mr Sturgess (Inspector of Nuisances) has been away from Wheatley, but that on inspection of the premises he found the pigs all gone and the pig sties removed.

(The inspector after a long drawn out battle with the inhabitants of the area of Wheatley known as Blenheim, won the day, albeit a protracted affair. The cottages mentioned are mostly still there to this day, a very respectable neat, well-kept part of the village with all the modern 21st century conveniences. It is not difficult to imagine them a little over hundred years ago, no drainage, no tap water, and no mains sewerage, more heavily populated than today and supporting a pig or pigs at each household. Little wonder that this area featured so prominently in the inspector’s reports.)