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Health Conditions in the Borough

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THE district has long had a reputation for good health. In the seventeenth century considerable claims were made for the curative powers of the water obtained from a well on the Common and for a time Epsom became a fashionable health resort. Though its importance as a spa has not endured, its desirability as a place of residence has continued. The water from the spring in Ewell village did not obtain the same amount of publicity as that from the Epsom well, but it had its legendary medicinal value and within the period of incorporation a request has been received that a bottle of its water should be sent to a distant address, where the applicant proposed to use it as a soothing lotion for the eyes.

The present environmental conditions of the Borough continue to be in favour of good health. Those which are dependent upon the Council's services give some indication of the progressive attitude which has been adopted during the period of its development. There are good water supplies; the district is extensively sewered; there is an absence of offensive trades; aerial pollution is relatively light at most times, and when it occurs in serious degree, it is due to the proximity of the Metropolis associated with suitable atmospheric conditions. Housing conditions are good in that the majority of residences are either modern or are old buildings which have been re-developed. Property approaching the end of its useful life receives careful attention from the Public Health Department with a view to its closure or demolition. In common with all districts in Surrey, there is a great demand for accommodation.

The area is particularly fortunate in its open spaces and its numerous recreation grounds. It is fitting that in this year, which marks the twenty-first anniversary of incorporation, the amenities of the Hogsmill Open Space have been greatly improved by the beneficial results which have followed the completion of the Hogsmill Valley Joint Sewerage Scheme.

Although not the administrative responsibility of the Corporation, mention must be made of the services which deal with personal health and welfare. On these the individual citizen and his family rely for assistance in the preservation of good health or in the mitigation of disease should it become established. The National Health Service Act of 1946 brought about great changes to these services. Comprehensive medical and dental services were established, the hospital and specialist services were brought under a unified control, and an efficient laboratory service was set up. The health and welfare services of 1ocal health and welfare authorities were strengthened and expanded in relation to the care of mothers and children and expectant mothers, to the health of schoolchildren, to the provision of home nursing and help of the sick, and to the care of the elderly and handicapped person. Similar improvements took place in the treatment and care for those suffering from mental il1ness.

The domiciliary health and welfare services are the concern of the Surrey County Council, which has established divisional health and welfare sub-committees to deal with their day-to-day administration. Representatives of the Corporation have played an important part in the

efficient working of the divisional sub-committees in this area. During the period under review, remarkable advances have been made in the production of new drugs and therapeutic substances. The introduction of sulphonamides in 1935, of penicillin in 1944 and of other antibiotics subsequently, has greatly improved the outlook in several types of infection. Other drugs with specific action against the bacillus of tuberculosis have helped in improving the results of treatment in this disease. Progress has also been made in the prevention of disease by inoculation of substances which produce artificial immunity. With regard to infectious diseases, diphtheria has been absent from the Borough for several years : the illnesses associated with scarlet fever, measles and whooping cough have become less severe : infantile diarrhoea has been much less common. The campaign against tuberculosis has had obvious results as shown by the fall in the number of deaths from the disease. An exception to this satisfactory trend has been the increased incidence, on a nation-wide scale, of poliomyelitis, and the Borough has had its share of cases. A vaccine has now been produced against this virus, and a start has been made in its administration. The progress of the scheme depends upon the rate of manufacture of the vaccine.

The general effect of these progressive changes has been beneficial and has assisted in maintaining the health of the community at a high level. Proof of this is evident in the falls which have taken place in the infant mortality rates, and in the incidence and mortality rates from several infectious diseases. The health and condition of the majority of children attending schools in the district is good. 12% of the population is aged 65 years or more, compared with 11% for England and Wales as a whole.

An increasing amount of attention has been paid to the storage, preparation and distribution of food by the Public Health Department of the Corporation in recent years. On the one hand, food has to be studied as a source of energy and growth and as a vital factor in the maintenance of good health and there is ample evidence of an increased appreciation by mothers and other people responsible for catering for the young, of the elements in a diet necessary to supply needs. On the other hand, it has to be considered as a possible medium for the growth of the organisms of disease and a subsequent vehicle for their distribution. Some foods are potentially more dangerous than others, and particular attention has been paid to milk, meat and articles consisting of or containing cooked meats, ice cream and confectionery containing cream. The standard set by most traders in this district is high and, as a rule, and, faults in methods are speedily rectified when attention is drawn to them.

Voluntary work for good causes, whether undertaken by the individual or by associations, has long been a feature of the life of the Borough. Many citizens devote much time and energy in supplementing the work of the official services, and it would not be possible to close this short note on health without paying them a tribute.