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The 1913 Dispensary for the care of people with tuberculosis

By Kate Taylor

The first steps by a British Government to ensure the care of people suffering from tuberculosis of the lungs came under Herbert Asquith's hugely progressive Liberal regime with the great Insurance Act of 1911, which came into force on 15 July 1912 and provided sickness benefit for people who went into sanatoria for treatment.

At the same time, the Government provided some £150,000 to encourage local authorities to set up dispensaries, hospitals, and sanatoria.

It was only in 1908 that it had become compulsory to notify a 'proper officer' of the local authority of cases of TB (or Phthisis as it was often called at the time) and the regulation applied then only to cases dealt with under the Poor Law, usually in workhouses. By 1912, however, under the Public Health Tuberculosis Regulations, notification of all cases was required. Within the boundaries of Wakefield City, 110 cases were recorded, 50 of them male.

1913 saw the first development in Wakefield with the opening on 3 February of a dispensary at 5 Almshouse Lane where sufferers from TB could see a doctor and receive care from a nurse.

Wakefield's Medical Officer of Health, Dr Thomas Gibson, had urged the Council to open a dispensary in his annual report for 1910 but progress was delayed when a Government committee, under Lord Aston, recommended that the responsibility for providing both hospitals and dispensaries should rest with the county councils or with county borough councils. Although Wakefield had applied to become a county borough council, giving it full autonomy, the status had not as yet been granted. Thus the West Riding County Council had responsibility technically for tuberculosis facilities within Wakefield.

Dr Gibson was appointed by the County Council as its Assistant Medical Officer for Wakefield and the surrounding area, at the same time continuing to serve Wakefield as its Medical Officer.

But Wakefield's elevation to County Borough status seemed close and, indeed, was granted later in 1913, taking effect from 1 April 1914. Thus after some

negotiation with the County Council, the Almshouse Lane dispensary was shared, with the City Council opening it on two days a week for people living within its boundaries and the County Council opening it on two further days a week for people from the outlying areas.

Wakefield's lady Health Visitors served as the City's tuberculosis nurses.

The County Council leased the Cardigan Hospital at Carr Gate in 1913 as a tuberculosis sanatorium. The hospital had been financed jointly by Wakefield City Council, Wakefield Rural District Council, Ardsley Urban District Council, and Stanley Urban District Council, as an isolation hospital for cases of small-pox but the outbreak had subsided. It continued in its new role until the formation of the National Health Service in 1948.

(The principal source for the above notes are the Minutes of the Wakefield Corporation Sanitary Committee, held at the Wakefield Local Studies Library.)

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