

Buckfastleigh in the 1920's

Health and Welfare in a small industrial town

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1. Introduction

Buckfastleigh is situated on the South East edge of Dartmoor. Its history has been linked with the wool trade. Buckfast Abbey's monks provided a trade route with Europe via the river Dart and the river Mardle and the Dean Burn provided the water needed for processing of the weaving of cloth, tanning and fellmongery, and later for water power. Many Devon towns and villages developed cottage woollen industries, Buckfastleigh was unusual in retaining theirs in the mid 19th Century when other Devon towns lost out to factories up north. This was thanks to enlightened manufacturers, especially the Hamlyn family who had provided work, housing and social amenities within the town, including a Town Hall, a park and a swimming pool. Buckfastleigh Urban District Council was the local housing planning authority and responsible for public health.

The most obvious factors in considering health and welfare in any community are income, housing, sanitation and availability of medical care. But quality of life surely also takes into account amenities, culture and community so I have looked at these factors as well.

2. Historical Resources

The 1920's are a time just out of mind. As yet I have not come across any personal memories or recorded oral histories other than those recorded in Sandra Coleman's *The Book of Buckfastleigh*, which deals with the 1930s onwards (a few of the contributors were born in the 20's). The newspapers, mostly the Devon produced ones, are the best source, major events are reported and so are some of the discussions at local council meetings which include reports by the local Medical Officer of Health. The local health centre also loaned me the original reports. There are occasional reports from the local hospital and sometimes cases brought to court bring an incident in someone's life to light. Accidents and disasters hit the news. Sporting events, some church services and fundraising events get reported, I could write more about people winning prizes at whist drives than their visits to doctors. School log books tell of general issues concerning children, including epidemics. There are records at the Devon heritage centre on vaccination programmes and on local hospitals which I have not yet accessed..

3. The UK in 1920

In spite of the fact that this country was still reeling from the aftermath of the First World War and the Spanish Influenza pandemic, there was a degree of optimism in Britain in 1920. There was a brief economic boom. Welfare reforms were in place. In 1911 Lloyd George's government had brought in the National Insurance Act. Lower paid workers, their employers and the government contributed to a scheme which provided the workers with sick pay, treatment for tuberculosis and treatment from a 'Panel' doctor. It did not extend to their families. In 1920 Parliament passed two major programmes that permanently expanded the welfare provisions. The low level of unemployment in 1920 facilitated the passing of the Unemployment Insurance Act 1920 which set up a dole system providing 39 weeks of unemployment benefits to practically the entire civilian working population except domestic service, farm workers, and civil servants, with weekly

payments of 15 shillings for unemployed men and 12 shillings for unemployed women. The second programme was an attempt to provide 'Homes fit for heroes'. The Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act 1919 required local authorities to survey their housing needs and start building houses to replace slums. There would be government subsidies and the plan would come under the Ministry of Health.

4. Buckfastleigh in 1920.

The population in the 1921 census was 2,265.

1. The end of the war. There are 49 WW1 casualties listed on the war memorial in Buckfastleigh. It took many months for all the servicemen to return home, some came back seriously wounded, including local school teacher Mr R Tarrant who spent many months in hospital and was permanently lame.¹

At a public meeting in April 1919 it had been decided to erect a memorial to the fallen in the churchyard. There was also a plan to enlarge the Town Hall as a peace memorial. The local paper reported:

"The scheme is to hand over the present billiard room, reading and other rooms on the south side of the building to the ladies, and to secure the land adjoining on the west side, building thereon a new billiard room, reading and other rooms, bath, etc, and install a central heating system"²

There had been a number of other celebrations in 1919, a Peace day celebration in June, unfortunately blighted by heavy rain, an 18 pounder gun on display and a dinner laid on in the Town Hall for 200 servicemen.³

2. Spanish influenza. The 'Spanish' flu had hit Buckfastleigh in the autumn of 1919. Buckfastleigh boys school closed on October 18th. When it reopened a month later so many staff and children were still off sick that it combined with the girls' school.⁴ Many servicemen were suffering from the flu as well. Sadly a local R.A.F. pilot, Captain Fernly Hosking, who had been very active in the last two years of the war, died of it whilst on board a hospital ship in December.⁵ A Death Certificate of a Feoffees trustee, John Bovey, shows he died of flu in 1919.⁶

3. Employment

Buckfastleigh is surrounded by farmland and the newspapers of the time report on cattle and sheep sales just like other Devon towns. Five farmers are listed in the 1919 Kelly's gazetteer and there were others nearby so farming provided some employment, some of it seasonal.

¹ Buckfastleigh School Log Book.

² Western Times April 1 1919

³ World War 1 exhibition information in the Valiant Soldier

⁴ Buckfastleigh School logbook

⁵ Western Morning News 20 Dec 1919

⁶ Feoffees records, held at the Valiant Soldier.

But the biggest employer in the town was the Hamlyns/Furneaux business. It consisted of a weaving mill, a tan yard, a fellmongery and a woollen warehouse in Buckfastleigh, a carding and spinning factory in Buckfast, and 94 workers cottages. There were two other wool mills in the area, at Buckfast and Harbertonford.

There was also a paper mill, an iron foundry, limestone quarries, a gas works and an electric supply company. The council and the shops also employed workers.

The most significant event in 1920 in Buckfastleigh was the sale of the Hamlyn and Furneaux Mill. Neither Joseph and William Hamlyn, nor John Furneaux, who ran the business, had family members who wanted to take it on so they looked for a new buyer. As well as being the biggest employer the Hamlyns were strong Methodists and philanthropists (see below).

4. Shops and services.

Buckfastleigh was more or less self sufficient. By 1920 the local retail co-op, the Buckfastleigh Co-operative society, was 50 years old. It ran a grocery store, a drapery, a bakery and a butchery. there were also three other butchers, two bakers, two dairies, a greengrocer, a confectioner, three grocers, three general stores, two stationers, three drapers, two tailors, two milliners, a boot and shoe seller, a chemist, a coal and corn merchant, a seed merchant, two ironmongers, a furniture shop, a hairdresser, two watch makers, a car salesman and a photographer. There was a post office, with a sub post office in Buckfast, two banks, a tax collector, several registrars (who had other jobs as well), a police constable, a town crier/bill poster and a volunteer fire brigade. There were two builders, a thatcher, two painters, a wheelwright and timber supplier and a carpenter.⁷

5. The Council

Buckfastleigh Urban District Council (BUDC) had considerably more powers than the Town Council has today. The village of Buckfast, where monks were rebuilding the Abbey, came within its remit. It was the planning authority and had responsibility for public health. It employed a surveyor and a medical officer of health, confusingly they were both named Williams.

6. Housing

In 1919 Dr Williams, the Medical Officer for Health ⁸stated that there was a shortage of 50 homes in Buckfast and Buckfastleigh. 936 working class homes existed, of which only 60 had more than two bedrooms. The medieval pattern of housing still exists in Fore Street (lower town) and Market Street (upper town), terraced cottages with entrances to courts behind. The quality of the housing, however, he reported, was quite good, the main problems being overcrowding and, in some cases, poor ventilation, mostly in some of the courts. He was an advocate of public housing, supporting the Council's proposals for building and the plans that had been drawn up for the Abbey Meadow site in Buckfast. There was discussion about whether the houses should be 'parlour' or 'non-parlour' houses, the former had two living rooms downstairs, one of the arguments for the former was that they could be bedrooms for wounded servicemen.

⁷ 1919 Kelly's Guide

⁸ Report of local MOH to BUDC 1919

In September 1917 BUCD had received a circular from the Local Government Board about plans to build working class accommodation after the war, 'homes fit for heroes'. The Council replied that they were prepared to build some provided the Board would 'make a substantial free grant towards the same'. In October 1918 the clerk to BUDC Mr Wendeatt, reported back from a housing conference in Exeter. The Government was going to pay 75% of the cost of building council houses, the rest to be found from local rates.⁹ A year later the government changed this to a refund on any deficit from house building that was above the level of the income from a local rate of a penny in the pound of rateable value. In January 1920 a number of houses in the town were damaged by flooding and declared to be unfit for human habitation, putting pressure on the existing housing stock. .¹⁰

7. Sanitation

Thanks to the Hamlyns' efforts in the late 19th century the town had good sewage and water supply. There had been battles over costs, water sources and pollution from the Mills.¹¹ BUDC took its responsibilities seriously, in February 1920 it decided to ask the Ministry of Health to sanction a loan to extend water and sewage pipes in the Plymouth Road.

8. Health Services

There were three doctors in Buckfastleigh in 1920. The practice was the partnership of Dr Sydney Rice Williams and Dr Samuel Marle. The practice also included Dr Eva Ironside who had joined the practice during the war to cover for doctors who were serving in the armed forces. Dr Williams was also the local medical Officer of Health, employed by and reporting to Buckfastleigh Urban District Council and the local certifying factory surgeon. Dr Marle was the public vaccinator for the Buckfastleigh area. They charged their patients for their services.

Under the 1911 Insurance Act workers had to join an 'approved society' to get access to benefits. These included local friendly societies. They collected the contributions, paid out for treatment, and provided day-to-day administration including contracting GPs to provide medical care for their panel patients. Patients chose their doctor from a list given them by their 'approved society' .

There was a chemist, Alexander Cousins with a shop in Fore Street.

In 1876 the Ashburton and Buckfastleigh Cottage hospital had been established. The local doctors from Ashburton and Buckfastleigh attended patients and carried out surgery. The hospital was well supported by subscriptions, donations, bequests and fundraising but patients had to make contributions towards their care. To start with a working class subscriber paid 1 penny a week and those who were admitted paid 1s 6d a week towards their keep.¹² There were private rooms, as well as wards.

⁹ Western Times 11 October 1918

¹⁰ Western Time 28 January 1920.

¹¹ Mill records held at the Valiant Soldier

¹² Sandra Coleman *the Book of Buckfastleigh* 2003

Isolation hospital provision was deemed important at this time but there was no provision for Buckfastleigh. It was suggested by the Devon County Council medical officer that the Newton Abbot Hospital should extend this coverage to Ashburton and Buckfastleigh.¹³

There were no ambulances here at the beginning of the decade, accident victims were transported there by whatever vehicle was available

9. Amenities.

Buckfastleigh already had a town hall whose amenities included a hall, with a stage, reading room and a billiard hall as well as other public rooms, a swimming pool, a park and a number of playing fields, much of which had been provided by the Hamlyns. In 1920 the Hamlyns and John Furneaux gifted another £10,000 to the town which was to pay for the proposed doubling of the capacity of the town hall buildings described above. There would be a new recreation ground for bowls, cricket nets, tennis and hockey, and gifts to other organisations. In thanking the Hamlyns for these gifts the chairman of BUDC said 'Buckfastleigh was one of the most up to date little towns in the west of England, and that was largely due to the energetic manner in which the firm of Hamlyn bros had taken part in its public affairs'.¹⁴

The town had Anglican churches, the ancient Holy Trinity on the hill and a Chapel of Ease, St Luke's, in the town centre. There was a Wesleyan (Methodist) church and chapel in the grounds of the Abbey, a Congregational church and the Catholic church at Buckfast Abbey. There were Friendly Societies, sports clubs, a YMCA, a Masonic Lodge and other men's 'lodges', pubs and women's groups and a 'kinema'. It had bus and train transport links.

5.The UK in the twenties

The decade started with the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles, the post war settlement, and ended with the Wall Street Crash. Globally it was a time of comparative global prosperity, starting with a post war boom. But in the UK this boom was over by 1921. Britain was an ageing industrial power and its factories faced increasing competition from abroad, especially from the US and Japan, made worse by an overvalued pound. This led to cuts in wages in industrial areas as employers strove to remain competitive. A growing north – south divide led to industrial unrest culminating in the General Strike of 1926. It also led to strong political disagreements, of protectionists versus free traders, the rise of the Labour Movement and the emergence of the more radical responses of Communism and Fascism. The vote had been extended to all men and women of 30 and over in 1918.

Culturally there were changes too, more informal clothing, the 'Jazz age', art deco, the development of the cinema, with 'talkies' by the end of the decade, more cars and motor bikes,

¹³ Western Times 30 January 1920.

¹⁴ Devon and Exeter Gazette 30 April 1920

more radios in the home. These changes started in the big towns and suburbs but spread everywhere by the end of the decade. There were continued attempts to build social housing and to help the unemployed. Women had more freedom, the vote was extended to young women in 1928, , they could smoke and drink in public and drive cars.

Nationally the 1920s did not see any of the sweeping health and welfare reforms such as those brought in by Lloyd George's government or the post World War II Attlee government. There were a number of local government, charitable and independent initiatives. Local Medical Officers of Health often played an important role.¹⁵

6. Buckfastleigh in the 20's

1. The CWS

Wishing to ensure the future of the mill in the town and the good relationship between owners and workers the Hamlyns accepted an offer from the Co-operative Wholesale Society for their Mill. The CWS was wholly owned by the smaller retail co-operatives who traded with it.¹⁶ It already owned other woollen mills as well as factories producing food and household goods. A CWS representative optimistically said that they only produced '5 or 6 % of what we can sell, so we have a big leeway to make up. We can take all the stuff these mills can produce and we will shall not be satisfied until all the land we have here is covered in buildings and machinery'.¹⁷

The deal covered the weaving mill, the tan yard and the woollen warehouse in Buckfastleigh and a carding and spinning factory in Buckfast, plus the 94 workers cottages. Douglas Hamlyn, a son of one of the previous owners and Arthur Ridgeway, both of whom had been trained at the mills, were kept on as managers.¹⁸

The products of the mills included rough serges and worsted coatings, but also finer materials, tennis flannels, check and striped suitings and costume cloth. Members of the Buckfastleigh Co-operative Society were shareholders. William Hamlyn insisted during the negotiations that "our work people are to trusted exactly as before". He also said that "some people have grumbled at us for selling to such a body as the Co-operative Wholesale Society but there you are". The mills employed 330 men and women. Its continuation under a socially responsive ownership was a great asset for the town's workers.

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¹⁵ <https://peopleshistorynhs.org/encyclopaedia/pre-nhs-healthcare-reforms/> accessed 28 03 2021

¹⁶ Torquay Times 6 April 1923

¹⁷ Western Morning News 25 march 1920

¹⁸ The Book of Buckfastleigh by Sandra Coleman.

During an argument over water supply for a sprinkler system for the Mills during the December 1920 council meeting one councillor, J R Dyer, said 'the CWS factory is the mainstay of the town'.¹⁹

But the economic downturn affected the demand for its products. By April 1921 the Mills were only working half time. The Co-operative movement urged its retail societies to purchase from the CWS factories but these goods were not always the cheapest options and these societies had also to consider the needs of their customer members, who, concerned about their dividends as well as prices, wanted the shops to source their products as cheaply as possible. At the 1924 annual meeting of the Devon Co-operative Association at Newton Abbot Mr Pengelly from Buckfastleigh complained that the societies did not support the CWS woollen cloth mills.²⁰ At the same time wool prices were rising. At a large sale of fleeces up at Wallingford prices were up by 25%. On this occasion the Buckfastleigh CWS was one of the largest buyers along with a number of Yorkshire companies. Things got better, the following January it was reported by the National president of the CWS that trade in their factories had improved by three and a half million pounds, with a 'better outlook' at the Buckfastleigh textile mill.²¹ And in 1925 at a BUDC meeting discussing housing (see below) the mill manager referred to his wish to bring more workers into the town

The CWS promoted its products, there are a number of adverts in the national press.

By the end of the decade the mill had found a new outlet. A gentleman from Watford, who had visited Soviet Russia on a Co-operative fact finding mission, had a letter published in the Cornish Guardian describing life in Russia where there were shortages of cloth. He stated that in Russia

"Clothing is certainly in a backward condition; but our CWS mills at Buckfastleigh are working at full speed to help in altering this".²²

At the end of 1929 an appeal by the CWS against the rating assessment of the woollen mill and the fellmongery was reported in some detail in the local press, providing a description of the situation of the business at the end of the decade. The wool trade had been affected by the economic slump, though there had been 'a mitigation' in 1924. The appeal was based on the age and condition of the buildings and the machinery, which compared unfavourably with mills up north. The buildings were old and some processes were carried on at another site, in Buckfast. The machinery was also old, some of it was still powered by steam, requiring the use of coal which was expensive to source so far from the coalfields. However the water supply was cheaper and proximity to sheep farming was an advantage.

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Rug Sizes
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 4ft. 6in. x 2ft. 11in.
 4ft. 6in. x 2ft. 12in.
 5ft. 6in. x 2ft. 6in.
 5ft. 6in. x 2ft. 7in.
 5ft. 6in. x 2ft. 8in.
 5ft. 6in. x 2ft. 9in.
 5ft. 6in. x 2ft. 10in.
 5ft. 6in. x 2ft. 11in.
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Mat Sizes
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 27 inches x 12 inches.
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LOW PRICES

Sold by Co-operative Societies Only

If there is any difficulty in finding a Store or obtaining Rugs locally, send a Postcard to C.W.S. Rugmaking Department, Buckfastleigh, for full information.

¹⁹ Western Times 23 December 1920

²⁰ Western Morning news 17 March 1924

²¹ Sheffield daily telegraph 12 January 1925

²² Guardian 19 September 1929

Labour costs were cheaper. One solicitor suggested the workers were 'cheaper but inferior.' This was disputed by the CWS manager who described the workforce as 'cheap and efficient'. It was also said that "the mill had been established for many generations and as families had been brought up in the woollen trade there was practically hereditary labour". There were fewer disputes than in the north. Figures for the employment at the time were given, 128 men, 125 women, 32 boys and 18 girls, 27 fewer people than in 1920.^{23 24}

2. Buckfastleigh Co-operative Society

The local co-operative society ran its own local shops. Prices were not normally cheaper than other shops but profits were invested in the CWS and shared between members, who were often also its customers, as 'the divi'. It was a part of the wider regional and national movement. A rep (M. Hoare) was elected to Devon Co-operative Association executive in 1923²⁵.

3. Employment and wages, poverty, unemployment

In June 1920 the Council agreed to the pay rise for its workmen agreed by the Union of General Workers and the Joint Industrial Council for local authorities, giving them 52 shillings a week (£2.60)²⁶. One worker lost his job in order to pay for it. In July they had their annual leave increased to 6 days, plus bank holidays, provided they did as much work as before²⁷. The fact that there was enough employment to go round is demonstrated by a problem the local school had in finding a cleaner and a caretaker.²⁸

But things soon got worse. National unemployment was between 6 -10 % throughout the decade. The CWS mills went on half time working for a time.

In 1921 the Western Morning News set up an unemployment relief fund 'not to find a permanent solution for unemployment but how best we may face the coming months of winter which promise to be the most distressing in the history of the West of England'²⁹

In November 1921 a new Buckfastleigh councillor Mr J Willcocks called attention that the local unemployed were having to walk to the Labour Exchange at Ashburton 3 times a week, and most of them were women or old men. The council supported a demand from the local MP, Colonel Mildmay, and the local trades union for an office in Buckfastleigh, a local clergyman had offered accommodation and to pay travel costs for the clerk.³⁰ In January 1922 BUDC received a letter from the Ministry of Labour agreeing to have a representative in Buckfastleigh two days a week because of the 'abnormal amount of unemployment in the district'. In the same year Devon County

²³ Western Times 13 December 1929

²⁴ Western Times 20 December 1929

²⁵ Western morning news 19 March 1923

²⁶ Devon and Exeter Gazette 30 June 1920

²⁷ Western Times 30 July 1920

²⁸ Buckfastleigh School records.

²⁹ Western Morning News 4 October 1921.

³⁰ WT 30 November 1921

Council applied for 'certificate of 'serious unemployment' funding for road building schemes. Only five certificates were given and they did not include one for a Buckfastleigh bypass. BUDC complained.³¹

Unemployment and the slump put pressure on wages. In 1922 BUDC pressed the Ministry of Labour for permission to lower council house rents, they were too high for workers to be able to afford them. At the same meeting the council voted to reduce the salaries and wages of all its staff, from the Clerk and the medical Officer of health to the workmen.³² In 1923 the workmen's wages were reduced by a further 2 shillings.³³ They now earned 40 shillings a week, compared with 52s in 1920.

However prices also fell during the 1920's – by about 25% between 1920 and 1923,³⁴ a similar rate to wages. The cost of a 4lb loaf in Buckfastleigh was reduced from 10d to 9d.³⁵

Farmers suffered from falling prices – one Buckfastleigh farmer went bankrupt, the causes given were a drop in cattle values.³⁶

But in 1925 the manager of the CWS mills was talking about a lack of housing limiting recruitment. And there is no record of other businesses failing. In 1929 the manager of the paper works retired after 42 years with the company, he referred to the success of the firm and the loyalty of the workers.³⁷

In 1923 there was a national strike of Co-op factory workers. But many places did not join in, including Buckfastleigh.³⁸ I could find no reports of any worker in Buckfastleigh participating in the General Strike of 1926 though trains were not running west of Exeter for a time and coal stocks were affected by the continuing miner's strike.

4. Housing In July 1920 the council received from the Public Works Loan commissioners a loan of £400 which allowed them to go ahead with the purchase of the Abbey Meadows site in Buckfast with an initial draft mortgage of £3000,³⁹. These 'government houses' would be made from concrete. The illustration is a plan for a type B non parlour house, there were 4 of these and 7 type A, a similar size. They had gardens.⁴⁰ By October the purchase was complete, the architect was completing plans for eleven houses and they were about to consider the future rents.⁴¹ At the same

³¹ Western Morning news 18 November 1922

³² Western Times 2 June 1922

³³ Devon and Exeter Gazette 6 March 1923

³⁴ <https://www.icalculator.info/inflation/historical-inflation-rates.html>

³⁵ Devon and Exeter gazette 8 October 1925

³⁶ Western Times 25 August 1922

³⁷ Western Times 12 July 1929

³⁸ Daily herald 12 June 1923.

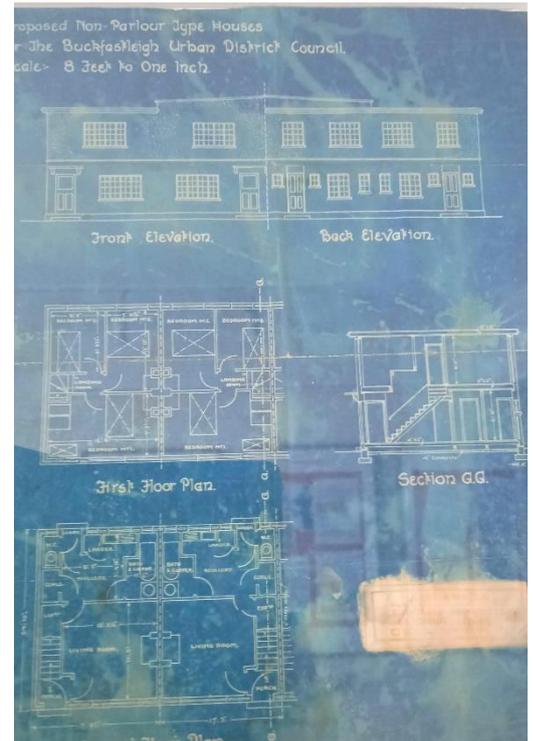
³⁹ Western Times 30 July 1920

⁴⁰ Valiant Soldier Collection.

⁴¹ Western Morning news 27 October 1920

meeting the Council decided to purchase land called Glover's Park, which was next to the Town Hall, and would be used for the extension and for more housing.

A serious problem soon emerged. If the rents charged for the new houses were economic ones the workers, who by 1921 were suffering reduced hours and reduced wages, would not be able to afford to live in them. A battle over the amount the rents should be subsidised commenced. An Inspector, representing the Bristol housing commission, attended a meeting of the BUDC. He stated that rents should be fixed at 8 or 10 shillings per week, the council had suggested 7 or 8. The clerk to the council pointed out that the mills were on half time working, the rents the council were proposing were high for local people. The Inspector said the Ministry policy was that 'the new houses would be occupied, not by the average working man, but by the highest grade of workers, so that the second grade could move into the homes they had vacated. The council pointed out that there were a number of houses almost as good as the new ones available for 6s 6d. The Inspector said that when rent restrictions were relaxed these rents would shoot up.⁴² So much for 'homes for heroes'.



A few weeks later a compromise had been reached, they split the difference and agreed rents of between 7s6d and 9s 6d and it was agreed to look for tenants. This was a sad meeting, the chairman who had presided at the previous meeting, Mr A. J. Stone had died suddenly, he was described as a 'man of peace' who had worked his way up. There was more discussion about housing. A ratepayers representative, Mr J Willcocks, who owned the local iron foundry, had written to the council suggesting that before the council proceeded with building more houses on the Glover's Park site they needed to see if they could let the Abbey Meadows ones at an economic rent. Mr J. R Dyer said the working class were waiting for the houses. Mr Chaffe said it would be worth waiting a few months to take advantage of falling prices, they agreed the tenders they had already received were too high.⁴³

An article in the Western Morning News by the previous Housing Commissioner for the west of England in October 1921 describes the progress made in Devon in building new homes. Devon and Cornwall are doing slightly better than the UK average but progress has been disappointing, reaching only 15% of total needs, or 40% of needs relating to overcrowding and not the state of the buildings. Progress had been held up by a shortage of skilled labour in the larger towns but principally by concerns about costs. It lists the numbers of houses started and completed in various towns and areas. Buckfastleigh was about average per capita of population compared with other places with housing programmes, except for the big towns, slightly better on completed houses. The Commissioner berates those places which have made no attempt to build houses. "Why" he said, do "these councils prefer to pay through their taxes for houses in other parts of England while

⁴² Western Morning News 8 April 1921

⁴³ Western Times 27 April 1921

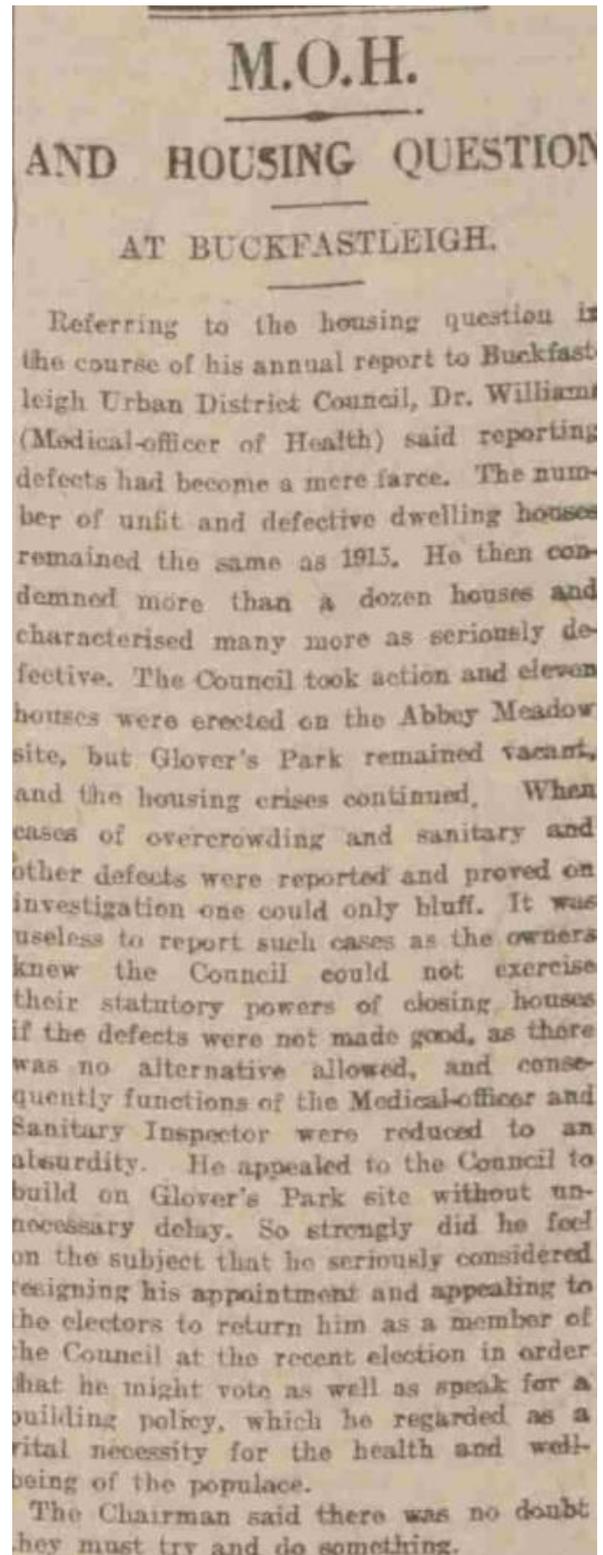
proving none for their own ratepayers (and) allowing a unique opportunity of improving the life of the working classes in their districts slip by “ Ashburton was one of the disappointing Urban District Councils.⁴⁴

Tenants had now moved into some of the houses at Abbey meadow but unfortunately things were not going smoothly. The stoves, or their chimneys, were causing a smoke problem. Some of the tenants were refusing to pay their rent in protest. The council decreed that the architect must sort out the chimneys at once.⁴⁵

And then Lloyd George’s coalition government abandoned all subsidies for house building not approved by July 1921, which put a stop to new schemes for a time.⁴⁶

In March 1922 the council requested a reduction in rent, now becoming unaffordable because wages were coming down. In April 1922 there were still problems with the new houses, and one councillor, Mr Bowerman, said the houses were ‘made of rubbish’.⁴⁷ Nevertheless later that year it was decided to go ahead with housing on the Glover’s park site.⁴⁸

In 1923, with the economic outlook better, the government re-introduced subsidies. This time the subsidy would be a fixed amount per house, per year. starting a programme of social housing building that continued into the 1930s. The scheme was aimed at private builders but local authorities could apply for the subsidies although they would have to raise the capital themselves. The basis of the scheme was simple; the State would pay the developer £6 per house per annum for 20 years for a 2 bedroom house, and £8 for a 3 bedroom house.⁴⁶ The grants and the pay back time were increased the following year. In 1924 BUDC, now chaired by Mr Willcox, obtained approval for the



⁴⁴ WMN 26 October 1921

⁴⁵ WT 30 November 1921

⁴⁶ <http://www.socialhousinghistory.uk/wp/post-ww1-funding/> accessed 4 May 2021

⁴⁷ WT 26 April 1922

⁴⁸ WT 10 November 1922

new scheme 'subject to the houses being suitable for the working class'.⁴⁹ There was also more flooding at this time and again, more seriously, the following winter, in Church Street, Hunt's Court and Abbey Meadow.⁵⁰

Two years after the new government funding programme had been launched progress on the new housing was slow. At a council meeting in April 1925 the Medical Officer of Health berated BUDC for its lack of action. (see cutting) ⁵¹

The arguments about the cost of housing being too great to let them to the working class were restated. Mr Willcocks, no longer chairman after elections, said that nothing had been done because the costs were too high, rates would have to go up by 6d in the pound to subsidise affordable rents, it was only a penny at the moment. It was reported that Ashburton was now going ahead with Council house building and the council decided they would go and have a look at the Ashburton scheme before they made any decision.

A month later the council had a serious discussion about the problem. The Council was now chaired by Mr E Coulton, a local farmer. A scheme at Tiverton was referred to, where they were building houses for £450, where the rents would be about 5 or 6 shillings a week plus rates, and Kingsteignton, where the council subsidy would be £100 and the rents not more than 8/6, similar to the proposed Buckfastleigh scheme. Mr Ridgeway, the CWS mill manager, said 'the problem was a great handicap to the business of the town. As employers of labour they wanted to bring people into the town for new industries but could not do so because there were no houses for them. A lot of people were prepared to move into better houses if they could get them.' He proposed they should build houses if they could do so for not more than £450, (the clerk pointed out this had been agreed two years ago but at present had not been acted on) and proposed a special meeting to look in detail at the Glover's Park scheme. This resolution was carried. ⁵² In July they decided to proceed if the cost could be kept to £500. It was also reported that a private builder, Mr Jackson, was building 4 houses with the government subsidy.⁵³ In October the council announced that it had drawn up plans for 20 houses to be built on the Glover's Park site and that they would put these plans on public display. They also proposed to invite a Ministry of Health Inspector to advise on whether the Jackson houses met government regulations.⁵⁴

By June 1926 a mixture of parlour and non-parlour houses were built and allocated to tenants.⁵⁵ By the autumn all but 3 of them were occupied and the council was looking for an opportunity to build some more. (They were also investigating the rules on pig keeping)⁵⁶.

The council wanted to build another 20 houses to meet the target set by Dr Williams but had difficulty finding a site and the government scheme appeared to be coming to an end. Dr Williams said all the new tenants at Glover's Road had come out of the courts and the improvement in their

⁴⁹ D&E G 4 June 1924

⁵⁰ D&E G 7 January 1925.

⁵¹ D&E G 29 April 1925

⁵² D&E G 29 May 1925

⁵³ WT 10 July 1925

⁵⁴ WMN 6 October 1925.

⁵⁵ WT 11 June 1926

⁵⁶ 12 November 1926

health was simply outstanding. It was also reported that whenever a decent house became available there were about a dozen applications.⁵⁷ Six months later the brother of Mr E Coulton, Mr W.E. Coulton, one of the leading farmers in Devon, who farmed at Dean Prior, had agreed to sell land known as Chaffe's Ground, on the Plymouth Road, to the council. They planned to build 2 parlour and 24 non parlour houses on the site.⁵⁸ They insisted on having them built with British bricks. By August that year the Council had agreed mortgage loans of about £11.000 with the Public Works Board and they were about to start interviewing prospective tenants for the first 6 houses.⁵⁹

The non parlour houses were not large and it seems strange today to have the bath more or less in the kitchen. But most of the Buckfastleigh cottages didn't have inside toilets and still had tin baths, and continued to do so until well after the next war. These new houses also had 3 bedrooms. The provision of 57 local authority houses within the decade has to be seen as an important achievement which improved the health and welfare of Buckfastleigh residents.

It should not be forgotten that the bulk of the housing was privately rented and that one of the biggest landlords was the CWS, who took on all 94 workers cottages built by the Hamlyns. I think they may have increased this number, because the house I live in, once a tannery owners house, came onto their ownership when it was converted into three rentable properties. The MOH Dr Williams made it his business to inspect private houses. In the early part of the decade he stated there was no point in condemning such cottages as the tenants had nowhere else to go but by 1928 with the increase in council properties the situation had changes. In 1928 he found 10 which 'were not in all respects reasonably fit for human habitation'. All of them were then 'rendered fit' as a result of 'informal action' by the local authority.

5. Public Health -Water supply, sewage and food.

BUDC employed Mr Lionel Williams as Surveyor and Sanitary Inspector.⁶⁰

The water supply in Buckfastleigh to its industries and homes came from its own reservoir in Wallaford Road. It was the responsibility of BUDC, managed through a Water Committee. The state of the reservoir was frequently reported on during council meetings, the levels rose and fell with the weather. In 1929 the committee had to deal with a problem with the collecting chambers up at Lambsdown due to a change in rabbits burrowing habits during snowfall.⁶¹

The council was also responsible for sewage. Most, but not all of the town was on mains drainage. In 1920 the council needed to get sanction from the Ministry of health for a loan to extend water supply and sanitation along the Plymouth road.⁶² Grange Road in Buckfast still relied on cesspits, which the MOH reported as becoming a nuisance, he asked the council to extend the sewers to this road,⁶³

⁵⁷ WT 8 July 1927

⁵⁸ WMN 5 January 1928

⁵⁹ WT 3 August 1928.

⁶⁰ 1919 Devonshire Directory

⁶¹ D& E G 6 march 1929

⁶² WT 27 February 1920

⁶³ WMN 6 October 1925.

Unfortunately throughout the decade there were problems with the outflow from the Buckfastleigh sewage works into the Dart. The Dart board of Conservators monitored the number of salmon being caught (their main interest seems to be fishing) and the quality of the water and found pollution from the sewage works and tar in the water. They made frequent complaints to BUDC. Part of the problem was fine wool from the mills clogging up gratings. This was attributed to the Buckfast Berry Mill in 1923⁶⁴ and to the CWS mills in 1925⁶⁵. This was improved but in 1929 the Dart Conservators again threatened BUDC with legal action over contamination.⁶⁶

The council was also responsible for food safety. Mr L Williams took on the additional role as meat inspector in 1925.⁶⁷ In 1925 it was found that some cowsheds had hygiene problems and there had been an improvement in clean milk supply. Butchers and slaughter houses were OK.

There was an ongoing discussion about building public toilets which Mr Hamlyn was going fund, but at the end of the decade they had not agreed on a site.⁶⁸

Unlike the council houses most of the cottages had outside toilets, sometimes, particularly in the courts, shared or in a row. However in 1928 all were on the main sewage system⁶⁹

People washed in the kitchen sink, had a weekly bath in a tin bath. Most people coped but the school records show about 5% of parents were sent warning letters about their children's hygiene and a few were excluded by the school nurse. It seemed to happen more to girls than boys but in 1922 the parents of one boy were summoned by the NSPCC for neglect of their son, the nurse reported he had been found wearing rags and infested with lice.⁷⁰ In 1925 the council requested that the school give the pupils a talk on personal hygiene during 'Health Week'⁷¹ (see children's health, below)

6. Doctors, Nurses and Hospitals

Doctors

Dr Marle left the town early in the decade, leaving Dr Sidney Williams (at Toll marsh) and Dr Eva Ironside (at Redmount) to serve the town. Workers who paid into national Insurance were entitled to free medical insurance, everybody else had to pay. The doctors also treated patients at the local hospital.

Laboratory tests were carried out through the Devon County scheme for pathological examination which also provided a diphtheria Antitoxin.

Nurses

Buckfastleigh had a Nursing Association, affiliated to the Devon County Association, which was responsible for employing a District Nurse. For 30 years this position was held by Nurse Eliza Cook.

⁶⁴ D&E G 17 April 1923

⁶⁵ D&E G 3 February 1925

⁶⁶ D&E G 31 May 1929.

⁶⁷ WT 11 December 1925

⁶⁸ D&E G 6 March 1929

⁶⁹ MOH report 1928

⁷⁰ WT 14 March 1922

⁷¹ D&E G 9 September 1925

In 1924 at the Annual meeting of the Association 'eulogistic references were made to the valuable work of Nurse Cook who had paid more than 2000 visits during the year'.⁷² She retired in 1927. A retirement reception was held for her, she was given a cheque for 100 guineas, raised by grateful townspeople. Glowing tributes were paid to her, including from Dr Williams who 'had been assisted by her in a number of cases'.⁷³ The Association may have run an insurance scheme, or it may have only charged those who could afford to pay. She was also a trained midwife and it is recorded in the MOH's Annual reports I have seen (1924 -1929) that no woman died in childbirth..

Hospitals

In February 1920 the annual meeting of the Ashburton and Buckfastleigh Hospital, chaired by Josiah Hamlyn, subscribers were told by the committee that the hospital was in a flourishing condition. 51 cases had been treated the previous years (10 from Buckfastleigh) and the average length of stay was 24 days, The Buckfastleigh Co-operative Society had donated £50 as had the Buckfastleigh Friendly Societies (compared with £35 from the Ashburton ones) There had been a legacy of £100 and gifts of 'vegetables, rabbits, eggs, papers and magazines'⁷⁴ Then in May it was announced that the Hamlyns were going to donate £1,000 to pay for a new wing which would include an up to date operating theatre.⁷⁵

The extent to which hospitals had to rely on local support is shown up in an article about government and local authority grants⁷⁶ The Devon Voluntary Hospitals Committee convened in Exeter to discuss the offer of a grant of £500 from the Ministry of Health provided the DVHC would match fund it. A previous grant of about £1340 had been shared out between 5 hospitals, the main recipient being the Royal Devon and Exeter. Ashburton and Buckfastleigh had received £25 and was unlikely to get anything this time round as hospitals with deficits would be prioritised. The committee seemed to be unsure about the financial states of the Devon hospitals though they had received a letter from the Dartmouth hospital saying its financial position was so weak they would have to close down.

Ashburton and Buckfastleigh Hospital did have financial problems early in the decade. In 1924 its expenditure exceeded its income by £123, due to a drop in receipts. Expenditure was £774, a normal level. By 1928 expenditure had risen to £969 and receipts to £1039. The biggest source of funding was from patients.⁷⁷ The receipts from the 18 private patients exceeded those from the 86 ordinary patients by £76 in 1926.⁷⁸ There are many reports of fetes, held in parks, the gardens of wealthier families or in the vicarage . An example is the 'Fancy fair and fete' held in Buckfastleigh's Victoria Park in 1922. The town band paraded the town, there were plain and fancy work stalls, flowers, greengrocery, jumble, 'Spinning Jenny', sweets, iced wafers and refreshments. There was a

⁷² WT 17 April 1924

⁷³ WT 28 January 1927

⁷⁴ Devon and Exeter Gazette 13 February 1920

⁷⁵ Western Times 14 May 1920

⁷⁶ P&E G 7 April 1923.

⁷⁷ WMN 11 February 1925

⁷⁸ WT 18 February 1927

sports programme organised by a teacher, and promenade concerts in the afternoon and evening, featuring piano music, a violin, various singers and dancers. At night 'the park was brilliantly lit by the electric light provided by the Buckfastleigh Electric Supply Co. for dancing to the strains of the Town Band.' They raised about £150.⁷⁹ There were also donations from various organisations and private individuals.

There was a discussion early in 1923 initiated by one of the doctors about adopting a contributory funding basis.⁸⁰ Mr Chudleigh, who was the representative of the Buckfastleigh Friendly Societies said he would undertake it for Buckfastleigh, however the Buckfastleigh supporters did enjoy their fetes. Eventually in 1928 a successful scheme was set up in Buckfastleigh enrolling 900 members.⁸¹ The following year one was set up in Ashburton. In this year income was £1,066 and expenditure was £1,024.⁸²

At the end of the decade the hospital was still lit by gas light, although Mr Hamlyn had volunteered to chip in with the cost of installing electric light. Mrs Hamlyn had arranged for the installation of 'wireless', to which all patients had access. In 1929 Josiah Hamlyn gifted a modern operating table and a bequest provided money to buy other new equipment.

It was needed, quite difficult operations were carried out, not always successfully. In 1925 a CWS lorry driver came back from a trip to Plymouth saying 'he had ricked his side'. Sadly he died. Dr Williams carried out a post mortem and found his small intestines were enflamed and distorted. An inquest concluded that a previous operation for appendicitis was a contributory cause.⁸³

The number of patients admitted and treated rose steadily through the decade. In 1924 there were 70, 2 died, 9 were 'relieved' and 59 were cured. There were 55 operations. Bed occupancy averaged about 6. By 1926 that had risen to 104 individuals treated, in 1929 to 157 patients⁸¹ Why? Was this because there more illness? There was a rise in nurses off sick in 1929. However it seems more likely that the improvement in treatments available resulted in doctors referring a greater number of patients and the insurance scheme must surely have made a difference. Had the catchment area grown?

The hospital did not handle people suffering from infectious diseases, BUDC had the duty of organising this provision. After dithering about the costs of linking to the Newton Abbot isolation hospital in the early 20's (the MOH reported in 1924 'there are no Hospitals provided or subsidises by the local authority for Tuberculosos, Marenity, Children, fever, smallpox or other cases) in 1925 it entered into an agreement with Paignton District Council to send cases who could not isolate at home there⁸⁴. In 1928 it terminated this agreement and entered into a new agreement with

⁷⁹ WT 20 June 1922

⁸⁰ WT 15 February 1924

⁸¹ WT February 15 1929.

⁸² WT February 14 1930

⁸³ WT 12 June 1925

⁸⁴ D&E G 6 March 1925

Newton Abbot Isolation Hospital.⁸⁵ This hospital, opened in 1902, provided wards for Scarlet Fever and Typhoid and Diphtheria.⁸⁶

7. A & E and first aid.

One role of the hospital was to be the local accident and emergency centre. In 1924 there were 10 accident victims, in 1928 that had risen to 35. Some of these incidents were reported in the press. A butcher's employee was kicked by a horse and taken to the hospital, he died. The post mortem was carried out by Dr Ironside.⁸⁷ In 1923 a boy was knocked down by a motorist in Ashburton, the motorist picked him up and took him to the hospital but sadly he died too.⁸⁸ This illustrates the lack of paramedics and ambulances at the time, though the 1924 MOH report refers to 'an excellent private ambulance'. In 1926 Mr Ridgway, the CWS manager and councillor, wanted to set up a branch of the St John's Ambulance Brigade in the mills. He wrote to the local doctors offering to pay them, to pay his staff whilst they took the classes and to provide the materials needed. Initially he got no response.⁸⁹ A month later he was able to report to the council that the classes would start after Easter and anybody could join.⁹⁰ Eighteen months later 20 men of the Buckfastleigh St John's Ambulance Brigade were inspected by the District Officer on 'stretcher drill', formation of various hand seats and other practical work. They were complemented on their efficiency and 9 men were awarded first aid certificates that year. Dr Williams was now Honorary Surgeon. A week later at their AGM it was reported there were 23 men enrolled and a new Ladies section had 13. They had dealt with 20 cases during the year. As yet they couldn't afford any uniforms.⁹¹ Leonard Elmhirst organised a competition at Dartington Hall for local teams, Dr Williams was the team work examiner, other subjects were individual theory and individual practice. Buckfastleigh came third out of three, but it was close!⁹² Accident reports in 1928 and 1929 show that the brigades were being used, though victims were still being bundled into cars. Around the same time the railway station also started training its staff in first aid. They sent a team to the G.W.R.'s Ambulance workers' competition at Plymouth in 1929 where they came 5th out of 9. It was said that the 'standard of work was exceptionally high for beginners and much better than last year'. The enacted cases they were tested on were mainly railway related such as a shunter being knocked down by an engine. Enacted injuries were broken bones, wounds and a head injury.⁹³

8. Epidemics

The school records provide a source of information about the spread of infectious diseases. The most serious out breaks were scarlet fever in the winter of 1920, which led to the school being closed for 5 weeks, influenza in January 1922 followed by measles, scarlet fever again in 1924 and 1925, closing the school for two weeks in the latter year and that year four children under the age

⁸⁵ WT 10 February 1928

⁸⁶ <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/acarchae2-247718/>

⁸⁷ WT 19 May 1922

⁸⁸ WMN 23 March 1923

⁸⁹ P&E G 5 January 1926.

⁹⁰ WMN 2 February 1926

⁹¹ WMN 2 November 1927

⁹² D&E G 1 October 1928.

⁹³ WMN1 March 1929

of 4 died of whooping cough⁹⁴. There was more whooping cough and mumps in the spring of 1926. The most serious worry was an outbreak of diphtheria in the autumn of 1927, which started in Scoriton. Dr Williams came into the school and took swabs from two Scoriton boys which were positive. He then swabbed the whole of their class and found more cases, they were all excluded from the school. That year there was a total of 6 cases notified, two hospitalised in the Paignton hospital where one died. This was followed by an outbreak of measles, at its height 42% of the pupils were absent and there were still suspected cases of diphtheria around. In July 1928 there was chicken pox amongst the younger children. Although these diseases mainly affected children adults were infected, the school cleaner caught scarlet fever in 1925 and was off sick for some time, and teachers too were vulnerable to outbreaks of colds and flu.

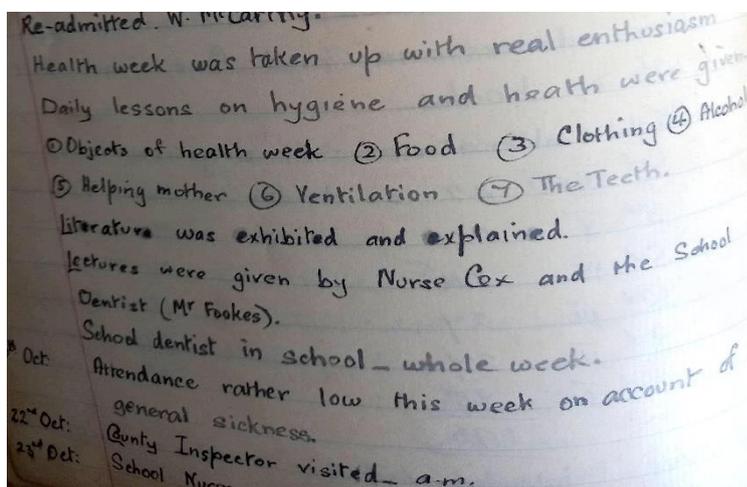
Between 1924 and 1928 there were 4 deaths from TB and one or two new cases. Some patients were sent to special hospitals at Torquay and Bovey tracey.

At this time the only vaccination was against smallpox.

9. Children's Health

In 1924 Dr Williams reported 'This is the first year that I have been able to record an infantile mortality rate of 0'. There were 28 births in Buckfastleigh that year. The national infant mortality rate was about 1 in 13. Over the next four years there were three infant deaths, one because of 'congenital abnormalities', well below the national average. Children were vulnerable to epidemics, as described above.

The school was proactive in promoting good health in its pupils. There were yearly dental inspections – resented by some parents who refused to let their children be treated - 13 in 1923. In 1924 the dentist fell off a chair opening a window and cut his head. 'We do not expect to see him any more this week' said the headmaster. But the refusals fell to 5 by 1928. There were visits from an oculist. And there were what were called 'medical' or 'hygiene inspections'. In 1922 the boys school amalgamated with the girls' school and these inspections seemed to become more frequent and to be carried out by the school nurse. 'Notices' were sent to parents when the child's hygiene was poor (for example . seven times in 1922), in extreme cases the child was excluded. Most of the cases were girls. The school participated in Devon County Council's Health Weeks 'with enthusiasm' as this extract from the School log book from October 1925 shows. As well as the epidemics described above there were also cases of ringworm, scabies and impetigo amongst the children.



There were some accidents involving children, mostly as a result of a dangerous surface in the school playground. Several occurred in 1926, one involved a girl falling on an iron railing, she had to have many

⁹⁴ MOH report for 1925

stitches. The Headmaster put in several requests to the County Council for repairs to be done. The following January contractors came in to work on it. A child was knocked down when he ran out in front of Dr Williams. The boy had a head wound and bruises and scratches but recovered at home after being treated by the doctor. His class had recently had a talk from their teacher about the dangers of running into the road without looking.⁹⁵

Dr Williams reported that there was 'no institutional provision for un married mothers, illegitimate infants, or homeless children in the area because nine has hitherto been found necessary'⁹⁶

10. Accidents and Hazards

Traffic accidents

As the number of motor vehicles road so did the number of traffic accidents. As the report on the G.W.R. ambulance tests in 1929 (see above) said 'in view of the increasing number of road accidents in which a knowledge of first aid is invaluable it was not surprising to find that the team test consisted of a pedestrian receiving severe injuries to the head and arm as a result of being knocked down by a person under the influence of drink'.

A number of accident reports , including court cases, tell the story. Some involved pedestrians. Whit Monday 1922, the day of the Buckfastleigh Races. Kate and her husband were walking home after a day at the races. They had stopped off in a local pub on the way back. At 8 pm they were walking in single file up Chapel Street where two cars were stationary outside the Waterman's Arms. The second one pulled out and knocked the couple down. Kate's husband was not badly injured and carried her home. Later she brought an action for damages against the car driver, at the court case the driver claimed the couple were drunk. ⁹⁷ A local CWS lorry driver, driving slowly in Exeter, hit a boy in Exeter who had been stealing a ride on the back of a horse drawn van and fallen off. This is an example of the lack of emergency services, the lorry driver picked the boy up and took him to hospital but in spite of a tourniquet having been applied he lost a lot of blood and later died⁹⁸ The Buckfastleigh lorry driver was exonerated at the inquest. This and similar cases shows the seriousness of the lack of ambulances and swift first aid. Two pedestrians had a near miss in Buckfastleigh when a car overtook a charabanc and mounted the pavement. The driver did not stop but a number of people saw him driving recklessly between Buckfastleigh and Dean and he was taken to court and fines £10. He was unrepentant, 'I was in a hurry' he said, 'if the driver of the charabanc had pulled in closer to the wall and if there had been no one on the pavement I would have got through all right'.⁹⁹

There were a number of incidents on the Ashburton to Buckfastleigh Road, which, as well as being a major route to Plymouth was used by local people on foot. A man from Buckfastleigh was knocked

⁹⁵ School log book

⁹⁶ MOH report 1926

⁹⁷ WT 21 march 1922

⁹⁸ WT 28 December 1923

⁹⁹ WT 17 September 1926

town on this road by an eighteen year old driving his father's car, without permission, and very fast.¹⁰⁰

In 1926 there was a programme of road improvements in Devon, including the route from Bristol to Plymouth

"to make the highway suitable for the demands of modern traffic. To the many thousands of people who annually visit Buckfast Abbey the tortuous streets of the village of Buckfastleigh are something of a nightmare, and all motorists will welcome the steps which are now being taken to avoid a bypass road avoiding the village, and giving an almost straight run through. This road, like all the new ones is wide and straight, entering and leaving the highway with a sweeping gentle curve. Here again the County Council have their own stone quarry right on the spot, and by arrangement are providing the contractors with stone and material."¹⁰¹

In 1928 there was another accident involving a CWS lorry loaded with skins, this time at Dean Prior, just outside Buckfastleigh. A 'motor proprietor' from Ashburton, who was driving the landlord of the Golden Lion in Ashburton to Plymouth, overtook the lorry as it was approaching a bridge over the Dean Burn. The car struck the front of the lorry, knocking the steering wheel out of the driver's hands, causing the lorry to crash through the bridge wall and fall into the stream. The car drove on but was stopped by a man driving a cow along the road. The lorry driver climbed out and challenged the car driver who replied 'get out, I never touched your lorry'. But he was prosecuted for dangerous driving at Totnes County Court, found guilty and fined £5.¹⁰² Later that year a man was killed after being struck by a Devon general bus just after it left the Buckfastleigh terminus. The victim had jumped out in front of the bus waving his arms. The local constable told the court he had warned the victim earlier after seeing him step out in front of cars up at Dean Bridge, and the man was undoubtedly drunk. As this occurred on Whit Monday it may have been another Buckfastleigh races incident.¹⁰³ And there was another one following the races the following year when a car almost ran down a police constable in heavy traffic. This driver was fined £3.¹⁰⁴

Fires

Buckfastleigh had its own volunteer fire brigade. BUDC was the responsible authority, it was also funded through insurance claims. In 1921 pulp outside the papermill caught fire. The employees fought it with water and extinguishers, preventing it spreading to the main building, then 'the local brigade, with their steam engine, were soon on the scene and the Co operative Wholesale Society's hand pump also did valuable work.' A Newton Abbot motor engine soon arrived and the fire was put out, before the Totnes one got there 'having first to find horses'¹⁰⁵

In January 1926 a serious fire destroyed a row of houses called Baker's cottages. It started in the roof of a thatched cottage occupied by a couple and their nine children. The family got out but the lack of quick communication impeded attempts to put it out. A neighbour cycled to Buckfastleigh to

¹⁰⁰ D&E G 29 March 1924

¹⁰¹ WMN 6 September 1926

¹⁰² P&E G 14 February 1928.

¹⁰³ WT 8 June 1928

¹⁰⁴ WMN 11 June 1929

¹⁰⁵ WMN 21 July 1921

call out the brigade who soon arrived. Edward Coulton, the BUDC chairman lived nearby, he sent his son to Buckfastleigh to phone the Newton Brigade. But it was too late, all the cottages were gutted. No lives were lost and except for the first cottage the families were able to save most of their possessions. Five families were made homeless. Edward Coulton found them temporary accommodation at Dean Court. Fortunately the cottages were insured, though not the contents.¹⁰⁶ Dean seems to have been a particularly unlucky place, at the end of the same year a barn at Skerraton Farm, Dean Prior, caught fire, almost killing the farmer, who was dragged free by his wife. Another Coulton, W.E. junior, a neighbouring farmer, helped fight the fire and the Buckfastleigh brigade arrived and prevented it spreading to adjoining buildings.¹⁰⁷

In 1929 the roof of the Methodist Minister's Manse caught fire. 'The ringing of the woollen factory bell notified of the event' and CWS workers moved furniture and possessions out of the house. However the Fire Brigade soon arrived with their hoses and put the fire out.¹⁰⁸

Floods

Flooding was a perennial problem and affected the condition of housing. A newspaper article in 1925 was headed 'Buckfastleigh Urban Council and the floods.' Church Street was flooded again, the Mardle had overflowed into Hunt's Court and some of the Abbey Meadow Council houses were also affected.¹⁰⁹ In 1928 the Mardle started overflowing into Station road because the Strode bridge, a part of the new by pass, was blocking some of the heavy flow.¹¹⁰ Nearly two years later the problem still persisted. Chairing a meeting of ratepayers Mr Ridgway said 'The County Council, in spite of protests, had declined to do anything, and the Ministry of Transport had decided that people had to be flooded out again before anything was done. The ratepayers wanted a bridge of sufficient capacity so that the inhabitants of the lower part of the town could sleep in peace.'¹¹¹

Crime and violence

Buckfastleigh was not a hotbed of violent crime. There were a number of petty thefts, thefts of charitable collecting boxes, a break in at a café to steal food and a schoolgirl robbing a fellow pupil. The most dramatic event to finish up in court was a brawl involving a couple and another woman over the disposal of a hake's head and bones. The Bench described it as 'an unseemly quarrel' and dismissed both cases.¹¹² At the same court session two young men from Buckfast were fined for playing cricket on the highway. In 1929 four mill hands were fined for a snowball fight which resulted in a postman getting a dislocated shoulder.¹¹³

11. Mental health

Although there was a greater interest in mental health in the 1920's only extreme local cases find their way into the public domain. In Devon there were a number of cases of what was known as

¹⁰⁶ WT 8 January 1926

¹⁰⁷ WT 3 December 1926

¹⁰⁸ WT 12 April 1929

¹⁰⁹ D&E G 7 January 1925.

¹¹⁰ WMN 5 January 1928

¹¹¹ WT 29 November 1929.

¹¹² WT 11 July 1922

¹¹³ WMN 12 March 1929

'shell-shock' at the time, which included physical problems such as injuries from gassing and mental distress which would be call PTSD now. There were frequent suicides. In Buckfastleigh there was one distressing one reported, an ex soldier who had been wounded 4 times and was now unfit for work and living on a pension and sick pay, attacked and threatened his wife over a period of six months and finally pushed her head through a window, whilst drunk. He had no objection to a separation order and agreed to pay her and their children £2 a week ¹¹⁴. Stress was only talked about in such severe cases but doctors such as Dr Williams were very aware of the damage poor living conditions had on mental health. There were two suicides in 1927. ¹¹⁵

12. General state of health

Some of the Medical Officer of Health Annual reports were reported in the press¹¹⁶ and these give an indication of how the mortality rate of Buckfastleigh residents compared to the rest of the country – it was lower every year: (national figures in brackets¹¹⁷). Figures are rate per 1000.

1922	11.92	(12.74)
1923	8.75	(11.56)
1926	10.46	(11.60)
1927	9.48	(12.33)

The national death rates did not exceed these figures by very much until the 21st century, however life expectancy was lower. The average age of death excluding those who died under the age of 50 (in both 1926 and 1927 there were 3 such deaths) in Buckfastleigh was 67 in 1926 and 70 in 1927.

In the 1924 report causes of death were given : 6 from 'senile decay', 3 from cancer, 3 from pneumonia, 2 from appendicitis, 2 from heart disease, 1 from TB and 3 from other diseases

13. Education

The school was of course a crucial factor in the welfare of the children of Buckfastleigh. An inspection in May 1920 praised the school, particularly its provision of outdoor activities and practical skills, which included engineering and gardening.

In 1922 the Headmaster Mr Abbott retired to be replaced by Mr Herbert Jeffery. ¹¹⁸ The following year the Boys School amalgamated with the Girls School. Over the next few years equipment for 'girl's practical subjects', for cookery and needlework was bought. The school got good reports from an HMI (His Majesty's Inspector). In 1925 the headmaster was praised for his aim to 'train the scholars to use books in a profitable manner and to gather information by their own efforts. A good library, numerous sets of reading books and class textbooks have been provided.' The scholars

¹¹⁴ WT 17 September 1926

¹¹⁵ MOH report 1927

¹¹⁶ WT 9 May 1924, 6 May 1927, 11 May 1928. Copies of the reports themselves for 1920,1924,1925,1926,1927 and 1928 have recently been found at the local medical centre.

¹¹⁷ ONS Annual deaths and mortality rates 1838 -1920

¹¹⁸ Buckfastleigh School logbook.

were commended for their good behaviour and it was said that "the atmosphere of the whole school is bright and pleasant". The only criticism was that with a few exceptions their 'powers of expression are not above average'..

The following year the boys' gardening classes were inspected. This syllabus was praised, including the way practical work related to classroom lessons, as well as experimental science and weather record keeping, and the enthusiasm of the boys was noted. In the same year the school was renovated and combined with the infants all under Mr Jeffrey. There were 7 classes, the infant and junior ones covered two academic year groups, with an age range of 4 to 14. Every year some 11 years olds got selected to go to grammar schools in Ashburton or Totnes. Some class sizes were big, with over 40 children. 4 of the teachers had teaching certificates. In 1928 the school was again inspected by another HMI and received another glowing report. The curriculum was wide, poultry and bee keeping had been added to it, the scholars had 'many and varied interests'. English was well taught, 'a good grounding had been laid in arithmetic'. There could, it was suggested, be more oral work. There was an excellent spirit throughout the school.

At the end of the year the school organised a collection of toys ,clothing and groceries for a school in South Wales. They had their own Christmas party and every child got a present from Father Christmas.

Physical activity was not neglected, they had the use of fields for various sports, including one lent to the school by Mr Weeks who had also supplied them with coal after the school doctor had said the school was too cold to continue. They had Sports days in Victoria Park and they also made good use of the local swimming pool.

In 1924 the Workers Educational Society started Adult classes. There was a demand for English, arithmetic, geography, needlework and woodwork.

14. Women

The decision makers in Buckfastleigh were men. There were no women councillors in a decade when women were gradually being elected, more often in the larger towns. They did serve on the Totnes Board of guardians, which administered the Poor Law, the use of which was declining as a result of the Welfare laws, and on the board of the local hospital. Another notable local woman was Sylvia Calmady- Hamlyn who moved to Buckfast in 1922. She was one of the first women magistrates in Devon, initially in Okehampton but after her move transferring to Totnes. She joined a new organisation, the Devon Council of Women on Public Authorities (DCW), a society founded in 1923, affiliated to the National Council of Women. Politically at this time she had moved away from the Liberals towards the Labour Party.¹¹⁹

Many Buckfastleigh women were in paid employment. including Dr Eva Ironside, the local nurse Eliza Cook, almost half the employees at the CWS Mill, women shopkeepers and women teachers.

¹¹⁹ Julia Neville *Mary Sylvia Calmady-Hamlyn*

They were active in voluntary associations (see below). As described above the Town Hall started providing facilities for them in 1920. There was a long standing Mothers Union attached to the church, there were sports facilities (see below), a branch of the Women's Co-Operative Guild¹²⁰ and a Women's Club was established in 1926¹²¹

15. Politics.

Elections for Buckfastleigh Urban District Council show no evidence of the candidates political allegiances so it is difficult to see how local politics affected choices made by BUDC. Judging by earlier campaign material there would have been alliances and policy differences. Reports on the local elections are sketchy in the press. At an election for 4 vacant seats in 1921 there were 11 candidates but only 456 people voted out of a population of 2,265 (males under the age of 21 and females under the age of 30 had no votes), There seems to have been a political change at this time, John Willcocks, who was elected and became Chairman for the next 4 years said 'the Council wanted business men to ginger them up. He did not blame them (the previous council) but they had got the town into a mess.' In the 1925 election the Co op manager, A H Ridgway, topped the poll, followed by Edward Coulton, who became Chairman, with Ridgway as his deputy.¹²² It was at the following meeting that Dr Williams made his angry speech about the lack of progress on housing which was followed by a renewed commitment and development to the programme.

National politics

During the general election campaign in 1922 the Conservative candidate for the Totnes Constituency, Major Harvey, address a crowded hall. Dr Williams was on the platform as well. There were three cheers for Harvey at the end of the meeting followed by 3 more for his Liberal opponent.¹²³ In 1923 the Buckfastleigh branch of the National Union of General Workers organised a meeting addressed by its General Secretary J.R. Clynes M.P. who was also leader of the Labour Party at the time. His talk included references to the Budget being a 'a rich man's', unemployment and housing, as well as the trade union movement. The meeting was chaired by the local branch chairman, Mr J Pengelly, who "regretted that the hall was not as crowded as he had seen on some previous occasions. He was afraid that the working class used to take more interest in political matters than they did nowadays"¹²⁴

In 1924 a meeting chaired by John Willcocks had a talk about the League of Nations.¹²⁵ By this time there was a minority Labour Government. An election was held in October 1924. At a public meeting in Buckfastleigh Town Hall the Unionist (Conservative) candidate, Major Harvey, said that 'those who voted for the Socialist party at the last election were really putting this country into the hands of aliens. The party was dictated to by its own extremists ... who received their orders from Moscow.' This was a reference the 'Zinoviev letter', supposed to be from the head of the Communist International suggesting that the USSR would support a communist uprising in the UK.

¹²⁰ D&E G 1 December 1921

¹²¹ WT 3 December 1926

¹²² WT 9 April 1925.

¹²³ WT 10 November 1922

¹²⁴ WMN 19 may 1923

¹²⁵ WT 15 February 1924

The letter is now accepted to be a forgery.¹²⁶ Major Harvey won the seat, beating the Liberal Henry Harvey Vivian who had won it the previous year. The Labour Candidate, a woman, was a poor third.¹²⁷ His tour of victory included Buckfastleigh, also Ashburton, where youths threw mud at his wife. The Conservatives won the election.

In 1926 17 new Devon magistrates were appointed including 3 women and 2 Labour representatives, the latter included Mr S.J.Chudleigh, from Buckfastleigh.¹²⁸ In 1928 the Newton Abbot branch of the I.L.P. hired Victoria Park for a Sunday meeting to be addressed by the Miner's Federation leader, A.J.Cook. Posters had gone up. Then BUDC decided it should not hold political meetings on a Sunday, especially during 'the hours of divine service'. The I.L.P. could have it any other day, but not on a Sunday.¹²⁹ In 1929 the Liberals held a meeting in Buckfastleigh in support of their local Totnes candidate. It was addressed by Mrs Walter Runciman, who was the Liberal MP for St Ives. She told the meeting 'the housewife could give Mr Churchill excellent advice, because the same rules which governed domestic finance should rule Imperial finance'.¹³⁰

16. Amenities and social life

The quality of life is about roses as well as about bread. What can be known about social life, about sport and hobbies and culture, about celebration?

As described above Buckfastleigh benefitted from gifts of amenities from benefactors, most notably but not only the Hamlyns, including the town hall facilities, sports facilities and the swimming pool.

Churches

The Buckfastleigh churches were attended by many Buckfastleigh inhabitants. There was Holy Trinity up on the hill, another Anglican church, St Luke's in Lower Town, the big attractive Methodist Church in Chapel Street and the chapel in the grounds of the Abbey, the Congregational Church and Buckfast Abbey. There are frequent references to clergymen involving themselves in the life of the town. There was fundraising for religious causes. For example this cutting from 1926¹³¹. The school records show churches provided Sunday School outings, the school would close to enable these to take place.

The Churches were also important for major life events. There are many examples 'pretty' weddings, the standard description.



¹²⁶ WMN 18 September 1924

¹²⁷ WMN 31 October 1924

¹²⁸ WMN 25 August 1926.

¹²⁹ P&E G 1 June 1928

¹³⁰ WMN 19 March 1929

¹³¹ WY 5 November 1926

An example is a 'pretty double wedding' at the Congregational Church when sisters Winifred and Bessie Butchers got married. They wore dresses of crepe satin trimmed with pearls and lace panels. The weddings attracted a large attendance at the church. The reception was in the Town Hall and both couples went off for a honeymoon in Cornwall.

At the other end of life there were funerals. That of the Chairman of BUDC, Albert Stone, in 1921, was an Co-op affair, as well as his family, including his parents, there were representatives of the Co-op movement and councillors, past and present, council officials and many friends.

There were also present members of the Co-operative Management and Educational Committees, a large number of the Co-operative employes, members of the Women's Guild, representatives of societies at Brixham, Ashburton, Exeter, and Okehampton, Mr. H. Paxman (representing the Co-operative Wholesale Society), members of the Urban Council, Messrs. A. G. Abbott, Joseph and William Hamlyn, H. Cairo, W. J. Chaffe, Isaac Dyer, J. R. Dyer, E. Windeatt (clerk), L. Williams (surveyor), A. Warren (Totnes, late surveyor); W. Saunders and Lane (Fire Brigade), Messrs. R. E. Churchward, C. Hoare, W. Chaffe, W. L. Bennett, L. Foster, T. J. Trist, H. Wilton, W. Wilton, F. Rowland, S. Wakenam, G. Scott, C. Bartle, John and James Dunning, G. Skewis, J. Midgley, C. Heywood, F. Petherick, H. Foster, Robt. and Philip Jackson, E. J. Petherbridge, W. Bonathan, W. Furness, W. Hoare, J. Tooley, W. Mitchell, J. Willcocks, W. Coulton, J. B. Pearse, G. Percy, W. Cove, G. Churchward, J. Weeks, G. Moore, F. White, S. Gillard, and several members of the Loyal Abbey Lodge of Oddfellows, of which the deceased was the secretary for a number of years.

Childrens' Sports

There were plenty of sporting activities available. The rugby and cricket pitches, and the swimming pool, already existed at the beginning of the decade, and the 1920 Hamlyn donation described above added bowls, cricket nets, tennis and hockey facilities. Buckfastleigh Rangers Football Club dates back before WW1. They played in the South Devon league. The Rugby Club, Buckfastleigh Ramblers, was formed during the early 1920's. The Cricket Club is older, dating back to 1862. The Bowling Club had 6 rinks and there were 3 tennis courts.¹³²

In 1928, at the annual Cricket Club dinner, there was a discussion about Buckfastleigh's sports facilities. A Major Campbell, who was there to present the Devon County Cricket Shield, which Buckfastleigh had won for the second time. referred to the lack of playing fields in many towns and cities but, he said, 'Buckfastleigh, happily, was well provided for.' Mr R.T. Willcocks said 'Buckfastleigh was well supplied with playing grounds for cricket, Rugby, Association Football, tennis and bowling and also amateur athletics.' Money was being raised for a stand for spectators.¹³³

Buckfastleigh Amateur Athletics Club started around 1924. In 1927 it held its second annual sports day, clubs from other towns and villages were invited to compete. There were various running, walking and jumping events, boys as well as mens' events. But no girls or women. Winners came from Exeter, Yealmpton, Saltash and Paignton. The event included the Devon County Championship, the cup was presented by Buckfastleigh and won by a local man, L.J. Lane. The Town

¹³² Sandra Coleman *The Book of Buckfastleigh* 2003

¹³³ WT 7 December 1928

band played during the event and for a dance in the evening, when the prizes were presented by Dr Williams.¹³⁴ Athletics events were also held at other events, for example the annual Buckfastleigh Show (see below), including events for boys and girls.

The school had the use of a local meadow for games and athletics, it had its own sports day and its football and netball teams played other schools. They also made good use of the local swimming pool. Buckfastleigh was very lucky to have a pool, another benefit to the town of the Hamlyns. A newspaper article in 1921 whilst reporting that Devon County Council was going to grant proficiency certificates to boys from elementary schools bemoans the fact that Buckfastleigh was only one of three towns in the County which had a swimming bath.¹³⁵ Buckfastleigh school held a swimming gala in 1929, girls were now participating. There was a 'crowded attendance' After the school races were completed and the prizes given out, a visiting swimming club, the Oddicombe club, which included women, gave demonstrations of various swimming strokes, diving and lifesaving. In the evening the visitors and teaching staff had a dinner in the White Hart.

The Buckfastleigh Races

The sporting activities also provided entertainment for spectators and perhaps none more so than the annual Buckfastleigh horse races. These were initiated and organised by the Coulton family, held under National hunt rules on the Whitsun bank holiday weekend. In the 20's Edward Coulton, the local councillor, was the secretary of the Buckfastleigh race committee. It was "one of the most popular attractions of West Country attractions", appealing "not only to the regular race goer by reason of the excellent sport that is invariably provided but also to a large number of the general public who find pleasure in making the event the occasion of a picnic amidst the picturesque surroundings of Dean Marshes and subsequently entering into the enjoyment of the afternoon's programme"¹³⁶ Having a drink and another on the way home was popular too, demonstrated by the accident to Kate and her husband described above. A memory from Sandra Coleman's book describes the races from local children's point of view.

"When there was racing on at the racecourse some of the girls, including me, used to stand at the top of Station Hill ...and see all the jockeys come in by train. We would go dancing when the jockeys were here. There were always dances on Whit Saturday, and Whit Monday" (Rene Lewis)

"All the pubs had stables and there were stables up at Silver Street where we lived" (Maurice Lane)

Other Outdoor activities

There were other outdoor pastimes. There must have been fishing for trout and salmon, there were a number of reports from the Dart Conservators, who had Buckfastleigh members on their Board, and were concerned about Buckfastleigh pollution affecting pollution further down the Dart, (see above) but I didn't come across references to fishing further upstream or in the Mardle. There were some cases of rabbit poaching, including fines on two men caught doing this in Hembury Wood.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ WT 19 June 1927

¹³⁵ WT 1 November 1921

¹³⁶ WMN 28 May 1928.

¹³⁷ WMN 10 January 1928.

Both these activities put more food on the table as did another more legitimate activity, gardening. Most of the cottages in the town had small gardens or small plots of land and there were also allotments provided by the town council. In 1922 the council called a meeting of allotments holders to consider the problem that their rents did not cover to costs of running the allotments.¹³⁸ The prowess of Buckfastleigh gardeners was on display in the town hall at the annual Buckfastleigh and Dean Horticultural Society show. The day started with the town band parading through the town. There were three classes, local postal area, cottagers and market gardeners, and open, the latter included classes for flowers and collections of vegetables. All sorts of vegetables were judged. There were sports events in Victoria park.¹³⁹ ¹⁴⁰ A similar show is still held by Scoriton. There was also a bird fanciers club, the Ashburton, Buckfastleigh and District Bird Fanciers Association.¹⁴¹

Charitable/social organisations

There were a number of charitable/ social organisations, most of them only for men though this did start to change by the end of the decade as described above. There was a Freemasons Lodge and a number of Friendly Societies. The Freemasons had a lodge in the centre of Buckfastleigh called Trinity. . Dr Williams was a leading member. In 1924 there was a ceremony to install a new Worshipful master, followed by a well attended banquet at the Kings Arms.¹⁴² There was also a lodge of the 'Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes' a fraternal charitable Association which had provided ambulances during WW1. It would seem that there was also a branch of The Ancient Order of Frothblowers, as a party from Buckfastleigh attended the inaugural dinner of the Ashburton 'Vat', which was followed by a Smoking Concert'. A speaker 'Blaster Thomas' said he resented the AOFB being looked upon as 'a society of boozers' . It had the 'welfare of poor children at heart' and had given money for work in the slums of East London and miner's children orphaned in a pit disaster. Money at this event was raised by the 'Vat Scrounger' who 'wrought rare havoc with the Oast box' and fined everybody.¹⁴³ More seriously there were the friendly Societies, which had grown from the simple premise that if a group of people contributed to a mutual fund, then they could receive benefits at a time of need. In Buckfastleigh they supported the local hospital (see above). One of them was a branch of the Rational Society which I think was influenced by the ideas of the social reformer Robert Owen. At a meeting in Buckfastleigh in 1925 of 'Branch no.160' it was reported that the membership was 'on the fraternal side 350 and on the state side 270'. (I'm not sure what area that covered). As described above a branch of the St John's Ambulance Brigade was set up.

The Territorials, Scouts and Guides

The Territorial Army had an active Branch, 'C' division on the 5th Devonshire,. At their Annual prize giving dinner it was said that this Ashburton and Buckfastleigh had a full platoon, which Plymouth

¹³⁸ WT 10 November 1922

¹³⁹ WT 11 August 1922

¹⁴⁰ WMN 17 August 1925

¹⁴¹ D&E G 13 November 1926.

¹⁴² WT 17 October 1924.

¹⁴³ WT 25 march 1927

did not. A drill hall and a club were proposed.¹⁴⁴ There was also by the end of the decade Guides and Brownies, presumably scouts as well.

Culture

As for culture, Buckfastleigh had its Picture House, operated by a chap from Plymouth. It had 270 seats. In the 20's it only showed black and white films, and, lacking the equipment to show 'talkies' it closed at the end of the decade (it opened again under new ownership in the mid 30's)¹⁴⁵. Apart from this Buckfastleigh made its own entertainment. There was the brass band which was also in demand by other towns, and a jazz trio. Various groups put on musical and dramatic entertainments, sometimes as a part of another event. In 1928 the Wesleyan Church staged a performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with a 70 strong choir, a chamber orchestra and soloists. There was a large attendance.¹⁴⁶ There was no branch of the County library at this time, though it was seen as a possibility in 1928.¹⁴⁷ There were reading rooms in the town hall, the school had a library and the co operative society and the WEA also provided books.

Fundraising social events

Many of the clubs and associations described above, and the local hospital, held fundraising events which provided more social activities. There were innumerable whist drives. An example is one held by the Buckfastleigh Supporters' rugby club in the Town Hall. A hundred people came, there were prizes for men and for women, (including a man playing as a woman). "Dancing followed afterwards until the early hours of the following morning, the music being played by the jazz trio."¹⁴⁸ They even played Whist at the Hunt Ball of the Dart Vale Harriers, again held in the Town Hall. "The arrangements were made and well carried out by the Ladies Committee". 150 turned up to this. No local jazz or brass band here, but a band from South Brent.

Pubs

I was surprised to find no mention of Euchre matches, however they would have been played in the pubs, which were also a backbone of Buckfastleigh social life. There were 10 of them and I came across no references to any of them losing their licences or being in trouble because of alcohol related incidents. Some of them were very small, The Valiant Soldier, which is now a museum and houses the Buckfastleigh archive is medium sized. It has changed little since those days, being 'mothballed' in the 60's and it was old fashioned then.¹⁴⁹ There is a main bar with wooden benches and tables and a 'snug', a smaller more comfortable bar for ladies. There was a collecting box for the blind on the bar counter, it was stolen by a Plymouth man in 1927, the box seemed to have contained a large amount of copper coins.¹⁵⁰ The pubs were always full to bursting on the races weekend. The Kings Arms was often a venue for celebrations and social gatherings after events.

¹⁴⁴ WMN 27 February 1927

¹⁴⁵ <http://cinematreaasures.org/theaters/65120>

¹⁴⁶ WMN 3 February 1928

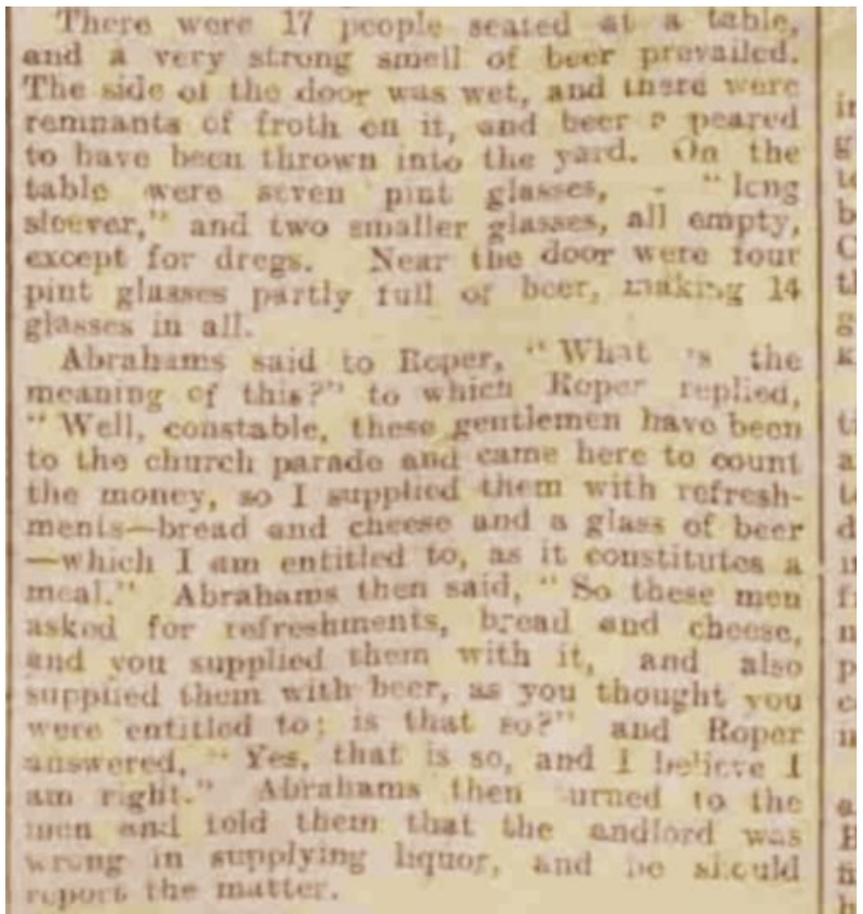
¹⁴⁷ E&P G 3 March 1928

¹⁴⁸ WT 29 October 1926

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.valiantsoldier.org.uk/>

¹⁵⁰ WMN 20 September 1927

Possibly out of hours, as is demonstrated by an article entitled 'Police Raid on Buffaloes. Incident after Church Parade.' At a previous court case the landlord, Frederick Roper had been convicted of supplying "liquor to 14 persons during prohibited hours". The 14 persons, and the landlord, were all members of the Buffaloes and had attended a Church Parade. Afterwards they had gone to the Kings Arms where they used a room for meetings. They included visiting Buffaloes from other towns who had arrived in a charabanc. The local PC noticed this vehicle outside the hotel, accompanied by another constable he investigated. They are having refreshments, said the Landlord, but no liquor had been served since lunchtime. Then he ran upstairs and called out 'Police'.



See the cutting for what the constables said they found. The Buffaloes said they had had the food and drink at lunchtime, and had come back after the church parade to find it still on the table, they also said the police had no warrant to search the premises. They got off.

Carnivals

There were no records in the press before 1928 for the Carnivals which were to become such big events in the mid 20th C. In 1928 the Rugby club held one, processing through the town led by the Town band. It also involved sports.¹⁵¹ In the same year Buckfastleigh also participated in a British Legion Carnival with Ashburton, held in Ashburton, the procession headed by the Buckfastleigh Town Band. Floats came from many different towns. Money was collected for the cottage hospital, for St John's Ambulance and for the Ashburton nursing association.¹⁵² The following year Buckfastleigh had its own British Legion one, again raising money for local medical charities. On two preceding evenings there was a concert given by the 'Vagabonds of 1929' to a packed house in the town hall. On the Saturday afternoon there was a children's fancy dress ball and a gymkhana in Victoria park, and then a torchlight procession, accompanied by the Buckfastleigh, Chudleigh and Landscope bands. This was followed by a dance in the town hall and the presentation of prizes, the

¹⁵¹ WT 7 September 1928

¹⁵² WT 31 August 1928

Co-op won first in the local 'trade cars' section.¹⁵³ One lad got fined for having an 'unofficial' collecting box.

17. An accurate picture of Buckfastleigh?

To what extent do the newspaper sources give an accurate picture of the lives of Buckfastleigh inhabitants? The voices heard there are largely the Buckfastleigh activists, the Councillors, the organisers of charitable events, the professionals. Reports of accidents and court cases are interesting but are not that frequent, it is too late now to gather oral history. Sandra Coleman gathered such accounts¹⁵⁴ from people remembering the thirties and some of these were children in the 20's, here are a few quotes:

"We had a happy life when we were young. On Sundays we would go trouting in the streams, or climb trees in the woods. Sometimes we would play in the fields or play cricket in the Recreation Ground. It was a happy environment and a healthy one. What a different world it is now," (Cyril Heath)

Maurice Lane said that he and his brothers and sisters had a very happy life growing up in the town, though times were tough and their parents had to work very hard. His Sundays were different from Cyril's:

"We were Anglicans and as children we had to go in the choir. We used to go to Sunday school in the morning and then go up to Holy Trinity church for the morning service, go home, change and stay indoors. We lived in Silver Street and the vicarage was nearby and then Mum would say 'the Vicar mustn't see you in the street on a Sunday'. Then in the evening we used to go to the service in St Luke's."

He also said "Growing up in Buckfastleigh was great and I never really wanted to live anywhere else."

Marian Harvey: "Many people were keen gardeners and had allotments up at Wallaford Road and at Fairy Lane, -before the housing estate was built. There was a barn at the back of Gipsy lane and the local boys used to box there on a Saturday afternoon. They made us pay a halfpenny to leave! At harvest time people would turn out to help local farmers. There was much more of a community spirit as everyone knew, and was involved with, each other. Front doors were never locked – there was no need to lock up as we all went in and out of each other's home. A great sense of humour existed as we were all in the same boat. Even the employers mixed with the men and women they employed and did as much as they could for them."

I don't want, or feel able, to sum up the state of health and welfare in Buckfastleigh in the 20's but a few things stand out. There was poverty but the town had the benefit of its rural surroundings, of benefactors, notably but not only the Hamlyns, of the Co-operative Societies, of a good school, of a Council who looked after the infrastructure, and in the latter part of the decade, was starting to provide decent housing, of an active Medical Officer of Health and by the standards of the time,

¹⁵³ WMN 13 November 1929

¹⁵⁴ Sandra Coleman *The Book of Buckfastleigh* 2003

reasonable medical care. There were social activities, there were whole town events, there was dancing.

18. The 1929 Co-op Gala

To conclude, here is an account of one of the annual Co-op galas, at the end of the decade which had seen the Co-operative movement play a big role in the town.

Maurice Lane recalled these galas from his youth:

“The Co-op used to have a gala at Molefield up Crest Hill. On the right hand side going up the hill there were some old buildings then a field which used to belong to the Co-op where their horses were kept. At the Gala there was a marquee with fancy cakes and everything, sideshows and sports with prizes. There was also a competition to see who could clean the most boots with Co-op polish whilst sitting on an old wagon.”¹⁵⁵

In 1929 the Buckfastleigh Co-op celebrated its Diamond Jubilee with such a gala. The town band marched around the town playing, finishing up in the Co-op field. All school children got a free tea. The sports events for the children included 50 yard races for the under 7s and other athletics events for the older children, and bun, treacle tin, egg and spoon and thread needle races. Visiting Co-op delegates gave speeches and ‘. “Selections of music were rendered throughout the afternoon and evening by the town band. Dancing was later indulged in” ‘.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Sandra Coleman *The Book of Buckfastleigh* 2003

¹⁵⁶ WT 2 August 1929