

Special report by Dr. Gairdner to the Magistrates' Committee, on the proposed temporary fever hospital in Nassau Court, Anderston.

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SPECIAL REPORT

BY DR. GAIRDNER

TO THE

MAGISTRATES' COMMITTEE,

ON THE PROPOSED

TEMPORARY FEVER HOSPITAL

IN

NASSAU COURT, ANDERSTON.

FEBRUARY 2, 1865.

GLASGOW :

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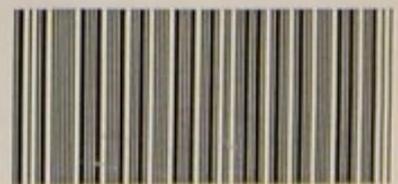
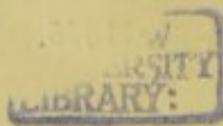


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SPECIAL REPORT

BY DR. GAIRDNER TO THE MAGISTRATES' COMMITTEE, ON THE PROPOSED TEMPORARY FEVER HOSPITAL IN NASSAU COURT, ANDERSTON.

GLASGOW, *2nd February, 1865.*

MY LORD PROVOST AND GENTLEMEN,

I AM sure you will not consider it as part of my duty to you, or to the public, to reply in detail to the strangely inconsiderate statements made at the last meeting of the Board of Police, on the subject of the proposed Fever Hospital in Anderston; but it may be desirable that a few plain facts, such as can best be furnished by your Medical Officer, should go forth to the public along with the other statements and documents, which, as I understand, are to be made the subject of a reference. These facts I shall endeavour to supply in as few words as possible, and as much as possible without prejudice and without controversy.

When, on the invitation of your Medical Officer, the Magistrates of the City called into existence, for the first time, the special powers of the Glasgow Police Act with reference to epidemic disease, they charged themselves with all the duties and responsibilities involved in Clause 261 of the Act; the part of which Clause relating to the matter now in hand, is comprised in the words—"Directions and regulations for the

dispensing of medicines, and for affording to persons afflicted by, or threatened with, Disease, such medical aid and such accommodation as may be required."

This Clause is very generally expressed, and at an early period of the present epidemic, during the term of office of the late Lord Provost, there had been much careful and anxious consideration as to how far it might become expedient to bring the special powers of the Magistrates' Committee into operation during the present epidemic, in the absence of a very clearly proved necessity. I believe that I rightly interpret the conclusion arrived at, in saying that my instructions were to rely as far as possible on the ordinary powers of the Act, and on the liberality of the Parochial Boards in extending beyond the sphere of pauperism, strictly so called, the relief afforded in cases of epidemic disease, until it should be clearly proved that an absolute necessity for further interference existed. On this principle, further action was postponed, until it became evident that the epidemic of typhus fever, now prevalent, was likely, ere long, to outrun all the existing means of accommodation; and, further, that many persons, quite above the rank of paupers, and to whom the Parochial Boards positively declined to afford relief, were suffering very serious hardships and privations, under circumstances dangerous to the public at large.

At the same conferences with the authorities to which I have referred above, the opinion of your Legal Adviser on the bearing of the Clauses 255-265 of the Police Act was obtained, to the effect that these Clauses must be considered strictly as *Clauses of emergency, in operation for a limited period*; and that it would not be competent for the Magistrates to entertain the idea of providing permanent hospital accommodation of any kind, or to assess the community with a view to such accommodation under these Clauses. This legal opinion had an important influence on the proceedings of the Magistrates, as well as on the policy adopted, in the first instance, in reference to the Special Clauses of the Act.

How far the Act, as it stands at present, tends to fetter

injuriously the action of the executive, and how far it might be susceptible of improvement, are questions which can hardly be advantageously discussed in this letter; but the knowledge of these preliminaries is essential to an understanding of the position of the Magistrates' Committee in reference to the proposed Hospital in Anderston.

The Magistrates had charged themselves, under the Clauses referred to, with the responsibility of providing "medical aid" and "accommodation" for all who required it in epidemic disease, and who were not properly provided for otherwise; and they had to secure to the public this aid and accommodation on the footing of a temporary arrangement, under regulations adopted, in the first instance, for a period of six months only, and in this form transmitted to the Privy Council for approval.

The problem, therefore, before the Magistrates, was—How to obtain the means of temporarily accommodating a number of fever cases, on the supposition of an emergency which might at any moment become extreme, and might cease and determine within six months, leaving them devoid of powers for the erection of a permanent hospital. And this problem had to be dealt with at a season of the year when, according to the statements of their Architect, the Magistrates were led to understand that building of any kind was possible only under great disadvantages, and building of stone or brick absolutely impossible.

It thus became a matter of very great importance to discover, if possible, some disused building, or buildings, which could be adapted with reasonable facility, and in a moderate short time, to the purposes of a temporary fever hospital; and with this view inquiries were made, through the Superintendent of Police, in every quarter of the City in which there appeared to be a probability of accomplishing the end in view. The details of these inquiries need not be further alluded to at present; but the general result was, that after carefully investigating every place reported on as likely to be suitable, the Magistrates had all but abandoned the attempt,

and had directed Mr. Carrick to prepare plans and specifications for a wooden building, on a piece of vacant ground adjoining the Parliamentary Road. The Magistrates were fully sensible of the disadvantages, especially in point of delay, attending this course as compared with the other; and while Mr. Carrick's plans were proceeding, with full authority from the Magistrates to lose no time in erecting a suitable building, new inquiries were set on foot, which resulted in the discovery, and after an examination of the locality by Mr. Carrick and myself, in a lease, for a term of three or five years, of the Mill in Nassau Court. I need hardly say, though the contrary has been implied in some of the remarks of the objecting deputation, that the Magistrates were influenced in concluding this transaction solely by the representations made to them of the gravity of the emergency, and the extreme danger to the public involved in delay. It was more than probable that the new wooden building for which they had given authority, could not possibly have been ready for use in less than two or three months. To decline a suitable opportunity of obtaining accommodation for a large number of fever patients in a few weeks would have been, under these circumstances, a dereliction of duty to the public.

I shall now describe briefly the buildings in Nassau Court, premising that the carefully drawn plans of the projected hospital, prepared by Mr. Carrick, and intended to be submitted to the referees, will render it unnecessary for me to involve this description in any technical details, or to advance any very positive opinions of my own as to the merits or defects of the buildings in question, considered as a fever hospital. I trust it will be kept in view throughout, that the buildings in Nassau Court were never under consideration from any other point of view than as a temporary hospital, to be occupied under circumstances of emergency. I need hardly say, also, that no thought entered into the minds of any one concerned in this transaction, of injury or offence to even the most sensitive inhabitant of Anderston, and still less of such

a sense of injury as led to the extraordinary threat of a wall, sixty feet high, to be erected, apparently for the sole purpose of rendering the proposed hospital useless to the community. It may be at once admitted, indeed (supposing this proposition seriously made), that it would be vain for the Magistrates to proceed in the face of such a resolution; but the rest of this Report may probably give some reason to believe that among the chief sufferers by such an obstructive course would be the inhabitants of Anderston itself.

The proposed Hospital in Nassau Court is an edifice of six stories, formerly occupied as a Cotton Mill, and still containing machinery and engines. It is situate in an enclosure which has an entrance to Main Street, Anderston; but the Mill itself is 135 feet north from Main Street, the intervening distance being partly occupied by out-houses and offices of low elevation, leaving the south wall of the Mill perfectly clear of every kind of obstruction, and open to the air and light. Towards the North the ground rises a little, and to a corresponding extent encroaches upon the north wall of the Mill; but as the lower storey was not intended by the Magistrates to be occupied, it may be said that here also the Mill is perfectly open to air and light, the nearest building (saving the wall above alluded to as proposed to be erected) being at a distance of 47 feet, and even this being placed diagonally, so that only its nearest angle is at the above distance. On the East, the upper stories of the Mill are separated from all other buildings by a low-roofed shed of one storey, which, together with a pond still further to the east, give a clear space of 78 feet between the Mill and the nearest houses in Bishop Street. On the West side, the Mill is in contact and communication with a large wing, placed crosswise as regards the main building, which it is proposed to devote to the accommodation of nurses, and of such patients as may be ascertained, after admission, not to be suffering under infectious disease; the main body of the Mill alone being to be occupied by fever cases. Still further to the West is a range of buildings fronting Church Place, and entirely outside the enclosure of Nassau

Court. The larger part of this block is at present occupied by members of the Police Force, the remainder being the Congregational Library and Session-House of the Anderston U. P. Church. On the opposite side of Church Place, and about 90 feet from the nearest possible fever patient, supposing the Mill fully occupied, are the Congregational Schools, while the Church itself, within its enclosure and surrounded by its Church-yard, is set diagonally towards the Mill at a distance of 47 feet (say 50—60 feet, at least, from the nearest possible fever patient). There is every facility for proper drainage and sewage, and the lower storey of the Mill, not being intended for occupation, gives thus an additional security to the upper stories against any possible noxious emanations from the soil. The upper stories, indeed, command an exceedingly extensive view far over the roofs of all the surrounding houses in all directions; and as regards the three uppermost stories, at least, it may be said that it is scarcely possible to imagine a situation more perfectly free, as regards contact with the external air, from all reasonable objection. Kitchen and laundry accommodation are abundantly furnished by the out-houses. One of the two Chimneys attached to the Mill will serve the purpose of a ventilating shaft, and the boiler, besides being in a condition to furnish hot water for baths, &c., may be made accessory to the heating of the entire building, which, however, it is proposed to accomplish chiefly by open fire-places. The windows, though rather small, are very numerous, and there will be at least one window between each bed, there being ample space also between the beds of opposite sides. These circumstances compensate, to a considerable extent, for a rather low roof, and it will be easy to adapt the number of beds to the amount of space and the freedom of the ventilation. There will be ample space also for Bath-rooms, Lavatories, Water-closets, Sculleries, &c. Finally, it is proposed to introduce one or more Mechanical Lifts into the wing, so as to avoid the inconvenience of using the stairs, which are somewhat narrow, for the convenience of patients, furniture, &c., to the Wards.

I have described above a building which certainly makes no pretensions to being a model hospital, but which appears to be, on the whole, considering the emergency, tolerably well suited for its purpose, and certainly a great improvement on *no hospital accommodation at all*, which seems to be the probable alternative, for some months at least, for many of our fever cases, in the event of this building being rejected. Under these circumstances it would be idle to discuss too minutely the objections in detail which have been made to this building on the score of *suitability*. To the Magistrates the question presented itself simply in the light of a choice between the occupation of this Mill within a few weeks, and the erection, under the greatest possible disadvantages, and a delay probably of several months, of a possibly much more suitable, but still only temporary, fever hospital, perhaps too late to be of service in the present epidemic. This objection of the *unsuitability* of the proposed building, however, has been made in such exaggerated terms, that I have thought it right to place the simple facts, as above recorded, in the plainest possible language before the public. And with this brief statement, I shall avoid further commenting on this point in the argument; not wishing to be led, as a set-off to exaggerations on the other side, into any statements in excess of my own personal convictions.

The other objections made by the Anderston deputation to the proposed temporary use of this building as a Fever Hospital, seem to resolve themselves into the following:—

1. Danger to the inmates of the Church and Schools.
2. Danger to the general population of Anderston, in the neighbourhood of the Hospital.
3. "*Panic*," or apprehended danger, even when no real danger exists, but from which imaginary danger it is presumed to be the office of the authorities to protect the public.

In regard to the last of these three heads of objections, I shall only say, that neither facts nor reasoning can be expected to control a panic, if deliberately inflamed by the language reported in the newspapers as proceeding from the Anderston deputation; but if

it can be shewn that no real ground for panic exists, the Magistrates are surely justified in expecting that the assistance of all reasonable men will be given, not to minister to an unreasoning sense of danger, but rather to allay it.

As regards the Anderston Church and Schools, I think it better here also to let facts speak for themselves, rather than to adduce complicated arguments or multiplied authorities; although it may be mentioned, in passing, that the authorities are all, without exception, on the side of the Magistrates; inasmuch as they all concur in assigning a very limited range to the infecting power of fever, unless in confined air, or when carried by direct human intercourse.

So far as my own observation is concerned, this fact is as well ascertained as any fact of the kind can possibly be; for, in the course of an experience of very many hundreds, perhaps some thousands, of cases of typhus fever, treated in hospitals and in private dwellings, I never heard of a well-authenticated case in which epidemic fever was propagated from one detached building to another, except through the medium of persons, or articles of clothing, &c., carried from the one to the other more or less directly. But as this inquiry is a rather complicated one, and could scarcely be popularly stated in a perfectly impartial manner, I prefer to appeal to one or two simple cases, in which the conditions of the proposed Hospital in Anderston have been accidentally imitated as closely as can be expected in instances not made for the purpose.

The existing Fever Hospital in Glasgow stands so close to the New Surgical Hospital, that it was even proposed, at one time, to connect the two by means of covered gangways on each floor, so as to convert the half of the Fever Hospital into an addition to the Surgical House. I do not mention this proposal otherwise than as an illustration; and I do not say that, in the abstract, this close proximity is desirable; but if the very close neighbourhood of a Fever Hospital, containing from 150 to 200 beds, and frequently, during the last two years, occupied to an extent far greater than was prudent according

to modern scientific requirements, were at all capable of infecting the general atmosphere of an adjoining building, it ought to have been frequently shown in the history of the Surgical House, especially during the past two years. So far from this being the case, however, the Surgical Hospital is notoriously one of the healthiest in the kingdom; and I believe I am correct in stating that nothing has occurred during the last two years to inspire serious misgivings as to the consequences of its proximity to the Fever House, unless it be that nurses, or convalescent patients of the two establishments, associating together in the airing grounds or otherwise, may sometimes have communicated or received infection in isolated cases.*

A more analagous case, however, to the Anderston one, is that of the Town's Hospital Fever Wards, which are, as it happens, in the immediate neighbourhood of a large block of houses called Miller's Court, facing to Dobbie's Loan, and tenanted by exactly the class of population most liable to the diffused infection of epidemic fever. The distance, in this case, between this Fever Hospital (which has been largely occupied during the past year, to the number, I believe, of 60 to 80 cases), and Miller's Court is much the same as between the proposed Hospital in Anderston and the Schools so often referred to as exposed to infection; while the latter have the advantage that there is an intervening block of building, thirty to forty feet high, which might surely be expected, on the principles professed by the leader of the deputation, to make the Schools "as safe as if they were at Dowanhill." I have had a special inquiry made as to the condition of Miller's Court during the present epidemic, and the result will be found below, in a letter from

* It is difficult to obtain very precise facts bearing on this subject over a length of time, without some risk of error; but I have this day, February 2, made particular inquiry as to the last three or four months, and ascertained that, during this period, when the Fever Hospital has been at the very fullest, and undoubtedly very dangerously full as regards its own inmates (nurses and medical staff), there has not been a single case of fever originating in the Surgical Hospital.

Dr. M'Gill, to the effect that only one very doubtful case of suspected fever has been reported from this block of houses (containing 53 poor families, and about 300 inhabitants) for the last two years. Had it been far otherwise, no one could have been surprised; for in many parts of Dobbie's Loan there have been numerous cases of fever.

The Members of the Anderston Deputation insisted strongly on the danger to the Church and Schools, and to the population of Anderston, from the proximity of the proposed Fever Hospital; but they altogether omitted to consider the much greater danger of delay caused by their own interference with the proceedings of the Magistrates. Even now, as I write, Fever is rapidly advancing, and in a brief period, whether of days or weeks, may be greatly in excess of all the existing means of accommodation. What will then be the position of Anderston, and even the immediate neighbourhood of the proposed Hospital itself, should the delays caused by this intervention cause an absolute deficiency of proper accommodation for fever cases?

To answer this question we must look to the facts of the past year. In the records carefully kept from day to day, and submitted in summary to the Board of Police, I find that during the year 1864 there were reported, in streets within a quarter of a mile of the proposed Fever Hospital, no fewer than 232 cases of typhus fever, some of them, no doubt, in the houses of the very population from which the congregation and schools of the U. P. Church in Anderston are supplied.

Thus there have been reported in—

Argyle Street, . . .	2	cases of fever,
Brown Street, . . .	11	“ “
Bishop Street, . . .	29	“ “
Bothwell Street, . . .	2	“ “
Catherine Street and Lane, . . .	8	“ “
	<hr/>	
Carry forward, . . .	52	“ “

Brought forward,	52	cases of fever,
Cheapside Street, . . .	2	“ “
Clyde Street, . . .	46	“ “
Carrick Street, . . .	22	“ “
Main Street, . . .	13	“ “
North Street, . . .	2	“ “
M'Alpine Street, . . .	34	“ “
Piccadilly Street, . . .	47	“ “
Pitt Street, . . .	2	“ “
Sharpe's Lane, . . .	4	“ “
Washington Street, . . .	8	“ “

Being . . . 232 cases in all

within this very limited area, without including cases not reported in these streets, and numerous cases in other parts of Anderston, at a somewhat greater distance, in which fever has been equally prevalent. Moreover, since the beginning of the present year a considerable increase of fever in Anderston has been reported to me, and up to the present moment it seems probable that a still further increase may be looked for in the course of the Spring.

I am sorry to write these words, as it has never been a part of my policy, as Medical Officer of Health, to do or say anything with the purpose of exciting needless uneasiness, or of creating a “panic;” but it seems absolutely necessary to shew, by a reference to plain facts, that the Magistrates were justified in providing against a real danger, by setting at nought the unreasoning fear of an imaginary danger. It can hardly be maintained, in the face of these details, that the risk to Anderston itself (to say nothing of the city of Glasgow as a whole) from a Fever Hospital under proper control in Nassau Court, was for a moment to be weighed against the risk of epidemic fever smouldering unchecked in the houses of the poor. Yet this was the dilemma in which the Magistrates were placed, when they deliberately chose the lesser risk, and determined to secure the Mill in Nassau Court as a measure of protection for the neighbourhood, and for the community

at large. The objectors, on the other hand, yielding without resistance to the first impulse of a panic, have entirely overlooked the great and serious positive danger to which their interference has exposed, and is still exposing, the whole community. The public must judge whether the Magistrates or the objectors have the best claim to be considered as their protectors in the hour of danger.

I am,

My LORD PROVOST and GENTLEMEN,

Your very obedient servant,

W. T. GAIRDNER.



APPENDIX.

Letter from DR. M'GILL to DR. GAIRDNER, referred to in the preceding Report.

GLASGOW, 25th Jan., 1865.

MY DEAR SIR,

IN MILLER'S COURT, 281 Dobbie's Loan, there are 53 families which give a population of 265, at an average of five in each family: but the Proprietor, whom M'Kay met while going through the property, thinks there will be 300. There has not been a single case of fever in that property, since the use of the Town's Hospital as a Fever House.

I find, on examining our books, that there has been only one case of fever reported to us from that place during two years, and that was in March, 1863. And on enquiry, the Proprietor states, that it did not turn out to be a case of fever, although it was sent to the Infirmary. Such being the state of the case, the establishment of a Fever Hospital has no connection with the supposed case of fever referred to.

I am, my Dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

WM. M'GILL.

DR GAIRDNER.



APPENDIX

Letter from Dr. McGee to the Government, referred to in the preceding Report

Glasgow, 25th Jan, 1855

My dear Sir,

In Mr. McGee's Report, 251 Dalrymple Street, there are 53 families which give a population of 255, at an average of five in each family; but the population when the houses were built was only 100. There has not been a single case of fever in that property, since the time of the Town's Hospital at 4-1/2 Princes Street.

I find on examining our books that there has been only one case of fever reported to us from that place during the years and that was in March, 1855. And on enquiry, the Registrar states that it did not turn out to be a case of fever although it was sent to the Infirmary. I think being the state of the case, the appearance of a fever hospital has no connection with the appearance of fever referred to.

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

Wm. M'GILL

Dr. Gurnea