

**Report to the Special Sanitary Committee of the Commissioners of Sewers,  
on the sanitary condition of the City of London, for the three weeks ending  
August 11th, 1866 / by H. Letheby.**

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Royal College of Surgeons of England

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REPORT

TO THE

SPECIAL SANITARY COMMITTEE OF THE  
COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERS,

ON THE

SANITARY CONDITION

OF THE

CITY OF LONDON,

FOR THE THREE WEEKS ENDING

AUGUST 11<sup>TH</sup>, 1866.

BY

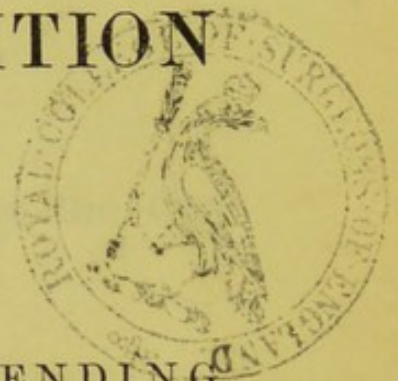
H. LETHEBY, M.B., M.A., PH.D., &c.,

PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY IN THE COLLEGE OF THE LONDON HOSPITAL,  
AND MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH FOR THE  
CITY OF LONDON.

LONDON :

M. LOWNDS, PRINTER, 148 $\frac{1}{2}$ , FENCHURCH STREET, CITY.

1866.



# REPORT

SPECIAL SANITARY COMMITTEE AND THE  
COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERAGE

## SANITARY CONDITION

CITY OF LONDON

FOR THE THREE YEARS ENDING

THIRTY-NINTH 1866

TO BE PRINTED AND A COPY SENT TO EACH

MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL AND OF THE COURT OF ALDERMEN  
H. LATHBURY, M.B., M.A., PH.D., &c.

PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE IN THE COLLEGE OF THE LONDON HOSPITALS

AND MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH FOR THE  
CITY OF LONDON

JOSEPH DAW

PRINTED BY

LONDON:

AT LATHBURY'S, 107, FLEET STREET, E.C.

*At a Meeting of the Special Sanitary  
Committee of the Commissioners of  
Sewers of the City of London, held  
at the Guildhall of the said City, on  
Tuesday, August 14, 1866 :—*

The Medical Officer of Health for the City  
submitted the following Report.

IT WAS ORDERED—

To be printed, and a Copy sent to each  
Member of the Court, and of the Court of Com-  
mon Council.

JOSEPH DAW,  
*Principal Clerk.*



At a Meeting of the Special Committee  
of the Corporation of the City of London,  
held at the Guildhall of the said City on  
Tuesday August 14, 1886.—  
REPORT OF THE  
COMMISSIONERS OF SEWER

The Medical Officer of Health for the City  
submitted the following Report.

It was Ordered—

To be printed, and a Copy sent to each  
Member of the Court and of the Court of Com-  
mon Council.

Principal Clerk.  
JOSEPH DAW, Esq.  
The above Report was presented to the Court of Common Council on the 14th inst. and was read and approved. A copy of the Report was ordered to be printed and a copy of the Report to be sent to each Member of the Court and of the Court of Common Council.

# REPORT

TO THE

SPECIAL SANITARY COMMITTEE OF THE  
COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERS,

ON

## THE SANITARY CONDITION

OF THE

## CITY OF LONDON.

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TO THE SPECIAL SANITARY COMMITTEE OF  
THE COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERS OF THE CITY  
OF LONDON.

GENTLEMEN,

I have to report that the Inspectors have inspected 480 houses during the last fortnight, and that 218 orders have been issued for sanitary improvement. Besides which there has been a very vigilant inspection of all the public dust-bins, and privies; and a staff of from twelve to thirty men have been employed in disinfecting houses, and performing work of a compulsory



nature. Nearly all the courts and alleys of the City have been regularly flushed and cleansed, and then drenched with a solution of Carbolic Acid. The acid has also been largely used with the water for watering the streets, and in this way the very atmosphere of the City has been disinfected.

Bills containing sanitary notices and precautions have been extensively distributed throughout all the districts of the City.

The markets, slaughter-houses, and cow-houses have also been duly inspected, and the officers have condemned large quantities of unsound meat as unfit for human food; and two persons have been prosecuted and convicted of sending diseased meat to the City Markets.

In accordance with your request, the New River Company has furnished a supply of water on Sundays to the courts which, in my opinion, required it; and I have, as usual, made a chemical analysis of the water supplied to the City by the New River and East London Water Companies. The results of those analyses are in both cases satisfactory; for they show a marked decrease in the amounts of saline and organic matter. The total quantity of solid matter in the water of the New River Company has been only 17·16 grains per



gallon, of which only two-tenths of a grain were organic; and that of the East London Company has been 18·06 grains per gallon, four-tenths of a grain of which were organic. These proportions are below the averages for many years, and they indicate the great care and attention bestowed by the Engineers of the Companies in the filtration of the water supplied to the public; for not many years ago the proportion of organic matter in the water was at least three times as large as it now is. It is, however, still possible that the minute germs of choleraic poison may pass the most perfect filters, and that even the most refined processes of chemistry may fail to discover them. It is, therefore, a very important question what methods should be employed to ensure their destruction in potable water, or at any rate to deprive them of their morbid action. A reliance on chemistry alone, without assistance from the facts of physiology, would lead us into dangerous errors, for there is no proof that the common agents of oxidation are capable of destroying the living germs of disease. As far, indeed, as observation has yet gone, especially by the light of pathology, it would seem that the agents of many infectious diseases, as certain fevers, small-pox, the rinderpest, and even cholera, are living germs, and not dead organic vapours or miasms. The chemical agents, therefore, which are suited for the oxidation of dead organic matter passing through its final stages



of decay, may be altogether unsuited for the destruction of living germs. That, however, which we do know in respect of these germs is that they are destroyed by heat—as the temperature of boiling water; that they are killed by such caustic substances as Chloride of Zinc, Chloride of Iron, &c.; and that they cannot resist the action of such compounds as sulphurous acid, carbolic acid, &c., which act upon them in the way of specific poisons. We must look, therefore, to these agents rather than to processes of oxidation for reliable disinfectants. In the case of water, the only prophylactic which can be used with safety is heat; although it is well to filter water through animal charcoal, or to treat it with a little permanganate of potash, before it is boiled, in order that decaying organic matter may be destroyed.

I have thought it necessary to refer to this, because of the recommendations which have lately been made for the disinfection of choleraic poison. It has been seriously proposed, for instance, to treat the discharges from the body, and even the clothing of patients affected with cholera, with permanganate of potash; and a still more unreasonable proposition has been made for the disinfection of rooms by oil of vitriol and common salt, under the supposition that these substances, when mixed together, will evolve chlorine. I need scarcely



say that modern science does not justify any such propositions. That which the medical officers of health for this metropolis have recommended, after a careful consideration of the subject, is that the best disinfectant for clothing is dry heat, at 250 degrees Fahrenheit, where it is possible, for woollen fabrics, and boiling water for linen. The disinfectants for the discharges from the body are chloride of zinc, chloride of iron, or carbolic acid.

As regards the progress of cholera in the City during the last three weeks, I regret that I cannot furnish you with any reliable information; for with one exception, namely, that of Dr. Wilson of the West London Union, I have received no returns of sickness from the medical officers who attend the poor of the City. It is right, however, to mention that the instructions of the Privy Council, of the 21st July last, with regard to the duties of the medical visitors in the metropolis, is that they shall report daily to the medical officers of health the results of their inquiries, and shall report any nuisances which they may find existing in any premises visited by them, and shall make such suggestions as to the state of the parish or district as they shall deem advisable.

I need not tell you that it is of the greatest importance to the public interests, that I should be able to report to you weekly, or even daily if



necessary, of the progress of choleraic disease in the City; for without such returns it is not possible for me to inform you of the state of the public health. I submit, therefore, that a request should be made to the City Unions, asking for this information in accordance with the provisions of the 5th section of the Order in Council relating to the metropolis.

The mortality in the City during the last three weeks, as taken from the Returns of the Registrar General, has been excessive; for 225 deaths have been registered, against an average of 148 for the corresponding period of the last ten years; and of this number 70 are returned as deaths from cholera or choleraic diarrhœa, and 13 from diarrhœa. But of these 70 cases of cholera, 30 have occurred in the City workhouses, which are not in the City, and 27 of them have been in the workhouse at Bromley, which is in the midst of the cholera field. Nine of the cholera deaths have also been recorded at the ward for the houseless poor in New Street, which is now converted into a cholera hospital. The real number, therefore, of deaths among the residents of the City is but 31 from cholera, and 11 from diarrhœa. In the corresponding period of the last two years, the average number of deaths from diarrhœa is 23, so that the excess of mortality from alvine flux is not very large.



Lastly, I have to report to you that, with the view of maintaining active inspection of the City during the next few weeks, I have appointed the four general Inspectors to make a thorough and systematic inspection of all the houses in their respective districts. The Inspector of common lodging-houses is to devote all his attention to that class of property; and the Special Sanitary Inspector (Parsons) is to attend to all the complaints of nuisances made to the Board; while the other Inspector (Clark) is to perform with his staff of labourers all work of a compulsory nature, and all special processes of disinfection. The staff of men employed in flushing the courts will also disinfect them with a solution of carbolic acid; and the streets will be watered as usual with this solution. In this way I hope that the sanitary condition of the City will be maintained in as perfect a manner as possible.

I remain,

GENTLEMEN,

Your obedient Servant,

HY. LETHEBY.

*Guildhall, August 14, 1866.*



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In this way I hope that the sanitary condition of  
the City will be maintained in as perfect a manner  
as possible.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

GEORGE W. W. W.

Your obedient servant,

H. J. LATHBY.

Guildhall, August 14, 1860.