

**Report on the accommodation in St. Pancras workhouse / by Henry Bence Jones ; presented to both Houses of Parliament by command of Her Majesty.**

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# REPORT

MICROSCOPES

The microscope has found a useful instrument in the detection of the adulteration of food. In the Food Museum will be found two microscopes, one for opaque

## ACCOMMODATION IN ST. PANCRAS WORKHOUSE;

BY

HENRY BENICE JONES, M.D., F.R.S.,

*Physician to St. George's Hospital.*

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*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.*

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PRINTED BY GEORGE E. EYRE AND WILLIAM SPOTTISWOODE,  
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY,  
FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

1856.

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WORKHOUSE;

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# REPORT

ON THE

## Accommodation in St. Pancras Workhouse

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31, Lower Brook Street,  
31st January 1856.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN

I FIND from the master's statement that the average weekly number in the house for January 1856 is about 300 more than in 1846. During this period the new buildings and alterations have added about 150 beds.

During the last six years I find an increase in the infirmary of 102 patients in the month of January; that is, there are about one third more patients in the infirmary than in 1850. Within this time the space given to patients has only increased to the extent of 28 beds in the boys' school.

In the three principal wards of the men's infirmary there are now 121 cases with from 573 to 648 cubic feet per person.

In the six principal women's wards there are 152 cases, with from 612 to 656 cubic feet per person.

The College of Surgeons have refused to recognize as medical schools two hospitals which gave less than 800 cubic feet to each patient, on the ground that less space, even with good ventilation, was injurious to the sick.

As I consider that neither this standard nor any other can be correct, I shall proceed to my own observations, and the evidence I received as to the state of the infirmaries.

On the state  
of the in-  
firmaries.

In the men's infirmary on the ground floor I found the ward offensive, and the methods which had been adopted for constant ventilation almost entirely in disuse. At one time, on a cold day, I found six windows open.

In the rooms over this the means once used for constant ventilation were out of repair.

The upper ward was the least offensive of the three. In all, there were windows which opened into the adjoining burial ground.

In the women's infirmary also the rooms were close, and the means of constant ventilation scarcely attended to. In four of the six principal wards there was a draught of air from without passing through the privy into the ward. This was sufficiently strong in one ward to blow out a candle.

The medical officer, Mr. Waldegrave, told me that he constantly ordered the windows to be opened in all the infirmary wards; that he considered the crowding was the cause of the slowness of recovery of many of the cases; that frequently, from the crowding, patients were put on the floor. On one of the days of my visit there were ten men and two women on the floor.

Mr. Coster, the senior medical officer, said that the ground floor male infirmary had been so offensive that he had asked the opinion of a physician as to what should be done, and that he considered certain forms of disease, "ulcerative stomatitis and dysentery," causing death in some cases, had resulted in part from overcrowding.

In the boys' infirmary, Mr. Coster said that a few days previously to my visit he was nauseated by the excessive offensiveness proceeding from a sink and urinal in the ward. I found one window open, and the offensiveness of the ward was great. At a later visit the air was better. The master said that the pipe from the sink which opened into the drain had been trapped; but the nurse stated that

the sleeping room for boys immediately below the sick ward had become more offensive since the improvement above.

In the girls' school infirmary, or short nursery, I found the windows open before the children or nurse were up. Six children were sleeping on the floor. I was afterwards told that many of these children had been removed out of the workhouse.

In all the infirmary wards I consider the present crowding too great.

I find that the means for obtaining constant ventilation are most imperfect.

The necessity for occasional ventilation in all the wards becomes so great that the windows are opened for many hours daily ; and that even with this occasional ventilation disease is produced and recovery protracted.

In some wards the entrance of foul air is very imperfectly prevented.

To what extent the numbers in each room should be reduced, with the present ventilation, can only be determined by trial. If one third, or at least one fourth, of the patients were removed, I consider that unless the constant ventilation was improved the state of the air would still be worse than in any London hospital.

The total number of sick and infirm is so great that the infirmaries, properly so called, are incapable of containing them, and they are consequently put wherever room can be found for them in the various buildings of which the house consists. The greatest want of order and arrangement is thus produced.

My attention was very early in the inquiry directed to the men's receiving ward, and to the women's receiving and casual wards.

The women's wards consist of an upper and lower room communicating by an open staircase. In these two rooms eighty and sometimes more persons sleep. Being desirous to determine chemically the im-

On the men's receiving ward and the women's receiving and casual wards.

purity of the air, I went early to the workhouse. Directions had been given that the windows were not to be opened. On entering two windows were open, and when the inmates were asked why they had neglected the orders given, they said they should be stifled if the windows were not opened.

On the following morning I went still earlier. I found seventy women and ten children. Omitting the children, the average space was 164 cubic feet per person. The windows were said not to have been opened. The air, however, was by no means so offensive as I had expected from the account I had received. I collected the air, and on examination it contained considerably more than one per cent. of carbonic acid (1.14 per cent.) From the accounts I had received I think some casual ventilation of the ward had taken place before my arrival.

Both the medical officers of the workhouse stated that the offensiveness of these rooms was excessive. Mr. Waldegrave stated that he believed he had seen fever produced by the crowding in this room.

Phillips, the assistant nurse, said that the upper room is often so offensive at night that she would like to open the windows, but that the inmates will not allow her to do so. She has seen as many as three or four persons of a night made ill with headache and sickness from the air. She thinks the room has been more crowded lately than it used to be, and that she herself has become ill from the foul breath. She complained of giddiness of the head, sickness, and loss of appetite; and she was manifestly in a state of low fever.

She said the rooms were so crowded that many in the lower rooms have no beds or even ticks to lie on, but they sleep on the floor, on the table, the forms, or wherever they can find room to lie down.

In the men's receiving ward I did not find the air so close. The means of constant ventilation were the least possible. The crowding was such

that I saw three boys aged thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, in the same bed, four feet four inches broad.

The occasional ventilation caused by opening the windows in these wards alone prevents the danger of some of the inmates dying of suffocation. In confirmation of this, Mr. Coster told me, when I inquired why the windows in the women's wards had not been nailed up, as was proposed, for the purpose of ensuring the collection of the air, that it was thought advisable not to do it, lest some one should be suffocated, and thus give rise to a very undesirable inquest.

I consider that if these rooms were even one half larger, or the numbers diminished one half, that they would be too full, unless a better state of ventilation were adopted.

Great evil also must result from the casual women sleeping in the women's receiving ward, and thus introducing fever and other diseases into the house.

In the men's casual ward I saw in the evening, along the greater part of each side of the room, a wooden sloping frame, on which was placed some cocoa nut fibre bags, some blankets and rugs. About twenty-five adult men were expected to sleep that night on these planks. One medical man, Mr. Waldegrave, told me he had seen ten men lying naked as close as possible on one of the planks.

The room in the main building in which some of the lying-in women sleep at night and the night nurses sleep during the day appeared to me to have less constant and occasional ventilation than almost any other in the workhouse.

On the night nurses sleeping room.

In the morning early I found only four women in bed. On two or three occasions, in the evening, I found every bed full, and the beds were as close as possible. Sometimes there were ten people with 262 cubic feet each.

On two occasions I collected some air when all



the beds had been occupied from two to three hours. There were two and three quarters per cent. of carbonic acid in one experiment (2·75), and above two per cent. (2·02) in the other.

Both the medical men complained of the offensiveness of the room.

The superintendent of the nurses, Mrs. Gray, stated that the bed room smelt terribly, "enough to knock you down."

One old night nurse, who sleeps in the room, said, "it was very warm and comfortable," but that she thought it was as well to open the windows as soon as possible.

Though I cannot find certain evidence that the nurses are injured by exposure to the atmosphere of this room, yet the chemical evidence shows that such an atmosphere ought not to exist.

Moreover, this room was evidently taken off from the main passage of the north wing of the house. It is the west end of that passage; and thus the ventilation of the house through the window at the end of the passage has been made worse than it was originally.

The same encroachment has been made at the east end of the same passage. Here another window has been shut in by another room being formed. This is called the convalescent women's ward.

At the south end of the main passage of the building a similar encroachment is now being made, but the room is not yet completed. A portion of the length and the whole of its breadth is partitioned off, and this is to be inhabited this winter.

I consider that all such encroachments are signs that the rest of the house is so full that the authorities do not venture to run the risk of putting more people into the rooms, and instead of making new buildings these passages are enclosed, to the injury of the general ventilation. In confirmation of this opinion, I was told by the master that he had made frequent reports, verbally and in writing, to the

managers, that the bed rooms were too full. He considered that the whole of the rooms in the house nearly were too full; and though no illness had actually, to his knowledge, been produced by the crowding, yet he is constantly afraid of illness coming on.

I am of opinion that all these passages ought to be entirely cleared and opened.

The infants' nursery is a room which is more than other rooms liable to become offensive. I found in it one morning in bed 25 mothers and 30 children from ten months to five weeks old. The fire had been lit above an hour, and a window into a passage had been opened, though it had been ordered to be kept shut.

On the infants' nursery.

The air was collected, and on examination it contained nearly two per cent. (1·8 per cent.) of carbonic acid. The room was very offensive.

Mr. Coster, the surgeon, said that the room was very close; the children were always ailing, suffering with disorder of the digestive organs and loss of nutrition; partly, in his judgment, depending on the state of the atmosphere.

Mr. Waldegrave said the offensiveness was extreme, but he could not say that the mothers suffered from the atmosphere, though he considered that the amount of mesenteric disease among the children depended chiefly on the crowded state of the ward and on the want of ventilation.

The superintendent, Mrs. Gray, stated that this room was particularly offensive.

The old nurse of the ward, however, would not admit that she found anything objectionable, though she allowed that the mothers often complained of the atmosphere, and that she was glad to let in a little fresh air in the morning.

From the analysis this room is at least twice too full.

In one room eighty-three children sleep, and there have been ninety; they are from seven to sixteen years of age.

On the children's bed room.

The governess, Miss West, stated, that the offensiveness from the number of children was such that it nearly made her sick at night when she went into the room late, and that it would make her sick if she went in in the morning; that she should object to sleep in the room herself, as she is sure it would make her ill; that the children are not unfrequently sick in the morning; that she has known three sick in one morning; that the two nurses who sleep in the room often have sickness in the morning, and loss of appetite; that the health of one nurse is deteriorated; that the windows are never open at night; that at the present time there are fifteen ill, so that the windows cannot be open all day, but that they are open two or three hours; that the children in this room never sleep more than four in a bed; that in the next room there have been eight children between one and seven years old in one bed four feet six inches broad and five feet six inches long; that she has seen cutaneous diseases spread from the closeness of the children.

The nurse Fitzgerald said, that she had frequent attacks of nausea and sickness in the morning; that she is getting out of health from the closeness of the room; that she has known four or five children of a morning complain of sickness and loss of appetite.

The number of children in this room ought to be diminished until these symptoms disappear. When one fourth or one third are removed, if the same sickness still occurs, and there is the same offensiveness still, more must sleep elsewhere; and thus the proper limit in winter and summer may be found.

In the boys' sleeping rooms I did not hear of the same symptoms, but in three of the bed rooms at least there were unenclosed urinals, which on entering the ward caused for some distance great offensiveness in the air of the rooms.

There should be more beds, and the urinals would be less offensive to the rooms if outside the door.

In consequence of the crowded state of other parts of the house, some adults have been moved into some of the rooms of this building which ought to be occupied by the children alone.

In two long excavated rooms, the adult men congregate during the day.

On the men's day rooms.

Late one evening, in one I found fifty men; the room smelt of tobacco; and on examination the air contained above one and a half per cent. (1.6 per cent.) of carbonic acid; in the other, which was oftener cleared, and then the windows and doors opened, 150 are sometimes collected.

Mr. Waldegrave stated, that he had frequently been called to men who had fainted in the rooms when the wards were most full in the winter. He said, that occasionally the rooms are so full that there is no possibility of sitting down, and many are obliged to stay in the passages or to go to bed.

That the constant ventilation is very insufficient is shown by the fact, that in the larger room, when the inmates go to the hall for meals, the air is swept out by opening the door and all the windows.

The man who has the charge of this room stated that many constantly complained of head-aches. When asked what would happen if the door and windows were kept closed for an hour or two, he said that they would be suffocated; that he would not then stay in the room on any account.

Another man, who had been messenger, and from illness was obliged to be in this room, said, that though he had nothing to do in one place, and very much in the other, yet that the air was so bad he should like to be out of it.

Other inmates in this room gave me answers to the same effect.

Doubtless these rooms are improved by being

more excavated, so that instead of six feet six inches high they are now nine feet six inches or nine inches ; but even now they are not one half large enough for the persons they are made to hold. Many in the fine weather keep out, and in the wet weather walk in the passages.

At the end of the main passage I was shown an unfinished pavement around a pipe from a sink. I was told that this was sometimes very offensive, but I did not perceive that it was so at the time of my visit.

On the laundry and under-ground sleeping rooms.

In a cellar opposite the laundry, under ground, I was shown a place where fifteen persons sleep. I could obtain no satisfactory evidence as to the state of this room. There was no chimney to the room, and no means of ventilation, except one small window and the door.

The place was fit for a coal hole but not for human beings to sleep in. The laundry itself is formed out of a cellar on the other side of the passage. How the required work can be done in this place I cannot comprehend.

On the same level under ground was a low long room, seven feet two inches high, containing thirty-two sleepers. To prevent suffocation, the means for constantly ventilating this room had been attended to more than in any other room in the main building ; but even with this the superintendent, Mrs. Gray, said that there was great offensiveness in the morning, and that many of the inmates complained that they felt faint and ill, and refused their food.

Two wards, called separation wards, were also very low and underground, and in these night and day thirteen women and five children lived. More than one of the inmates said that the air was very offensive in the morning, causing them to be sick ; others, however, did not complain of it.

All these rooms, and the two day rooms for the women on the same level, are very unfit for the

purposes to which they are applied, and that they are inhabited at all is an evidence of the crowded state of other parts of the building. When the house was built these rooms could only have been intended for store-rooms.

The wards for insane men and women are in some respects very objectionable. Some of the rooms are also underground. In one of the rooms for the men a drain from the burying ground is said at times to be very offensive. In the outer ward I saw a small iron grating for the admission of cold air. I found when I went outside that instead of opening into the fresh air it opened into a privy.

On the insane wards.

I found two of the (insane) women's wards very offensive from putrid urine passed by bed-ridden patients. The windows were obliged to be constantly open.

Three insane women I saw in a part of the house called Little Bedlam. A more objectionable place could scarcely be found. It is fortunate that some serious accident has not occurred from the dangerous staircase.

The insane men's and women's airing grounds form part of a thoroughfare to the women's infirmary, the medical officer's room, dispensary, &c. Hitherto no evil has been known to result from this bad arrangement.

The bad arrangements which exist at St. Pancras Workhouse in relation to the system of out-door relief ought not to be endured.

On the waiting rooms for the out-door poor.

Before eight o'clock on a wet morning I counted nearly thirty people standing in the street before a locked gate. No one was allowed to find shelter from the wet by admission until nine, by which hour, I was told, above 100 persons would be there. None were admitted after twelve. (Since this was written I am told that on three days the poor are admitted until two, and on Saturdays until four p.m.)

Sometimes the admissions amount to 900; sometimes only 300. They pass into a floor which is partly below the level of the ground, and which is divided into pens, to prevent accidents from the strong crowding to the overseers' room for out-door relief.

At one o'clock another day, stepping over some urine, I passed through three pens which were crowded, some with men and some with women, and some of these had children in their arms. The offensiveness was extreme. I saw one sickly woman who had just been brought out to the women's receiving ward, having fainted from want, and from the offensive smell of the place. The medical men stated to me that two or three times weekly they were called to similar cases, chiefly among the women; sometimes among the men. Fresh air was the chief remedy.

At half-past five o'clock I passed again through the pens; still very many remained; at least 150. They had had no food all day, and many loudly stated that they should not get any until seven o'clock.

I was told that the want of air was so great that the windows were not unfrequently broken.

The relieving officer, Mr. Birchmore, said that the same applicant frequently came twice, or even, more rarely, thrice in the week; that all are relieved,—sometimes by half-past five,—sometimes not till eight p.m.; that the ventilation used to be so bad that his predecessor died from the foul air, I believe of typhus fever caught here; that even now, when he thinks everything that can be done for the place has been done, still the foul air passing through the door by which the poor enter the office has made him and others ill; that they feel the effect of the bad air; that it is so bad that the directors are unwilling to come down into the office; that he has had many scores of the poor brought into the office having fainted from the

atmosphere and the crowding, but that such cases are fewer lately than they used to be. That the poor often give up their tickets of admission, and go away without relief, in consequence of the air and the crowding; that the place is so low in the ground that he thinks no more improvement can be made in it; that he has suggested the entire removal of the relieving office, on account of the evils of the place as it is now.

Three of the medical district surgeons, Messrs. Sutherin, Morris Davis, and Wildbore, all attributed much of the illness they saw among the poor of the parish to the crowded state and suffocating atmosphere of the underground rooms. All stated to me that the poor constantly assigned this as the cause of their illnesses. One medical man stated that he had heard the place compared to the Black Hole; another said that he had frequently seen the poor brought out fainting. All said that the poor constantly applied to them for certificates of illness, that they might obtain relief without being obliged to apply at the office. Many of the poor stated to them that they would sooner go without relief than endure the crowding and foul air.

One of the surgeons said, that before the last improvements in this place the air was so bad that he had told the relieving officer that some one would die of suffocation, and that there would be a verdict of manslaughter.

He stated that even now the air is only a trifle better than it was.

I cannot sufficiently strongly express the opinion I have formed of the evils which result from the cold, wet, foul air, and fasting which the poor endure. Whilst endeavouring to obtain out-door relief they are exposed to disease and even to death.

Such a state of things ought not to be tolerated by the Government.



## Conclusions.

I come, then, to the following conclusions regarding the accommodation in St. Pancras workhouse:—

That there are one third or one fourth more patients in the infirmaries than they should contain, and that with the reduced numbers the constant ventilation would be insufficient; that the means of preventing the access of foul air seem hardly to have been considered; and that from the inadequacy of the buildings no order or arrangement can be observed.

That the women's casual and receiving wards should be separated, and the numbers reduced to one half at least; and that then the constant ventilation ought to be improved.

That the nurses' bed-room, the convalescent ward, and the room just made from the passage, should be entirely cleared away.

That the infants' nursery should contain only half its present numbers, and that with this reduction the constant ventilation also should be improved.

That a great reduction should be made in the girls' (aged 7 to 16) sleeping room. How far this reduction must be made can only be determined by trial.

That in the boys' school sleeping room and in all other rooms no open urinals should remain.

That the men's day rooms (underground) are twice too full, and should be better ventilated.

That the laundry and laundry sleeping room ought to be moved elsewhere.

That other underground sleeping rooms are very objectionable.

That no less than from 123 to 175 persons sleep under ground in this workhouse, and that from 143 to 206 have their day rooms on the same floor.

That almost all the insane wards are ill adapted for the insane; some are unwholesome, and some unsafe.

Lastly, that the cellars for out-door relief are the worst part of the workhouse.

That it is fortunate that death has not taken place among the poor in these cellars.

That disease and death has come out of them is certain; and although everything that can be done has been done, I know no word more suited to them than horrible.

I might have particularized other rooms, as the women's eruption ward, the men's infirm ward (31 and 32), the women's syphilitic ward, and, generally, I may say, that I found no room in any part of the house, except in the new building, tolerably ventilated; and in some of the rooms in the new building, and in many rooms in the older buildings, no attempt has been made to prevent the entrance of foul air from privies, sinks, drains, urinals, and foul patients.

The out-door relieving offices should be removed at once. Recommendations.

Immediate steps also should be taken to lessen the crowded state of the house, by entirely removing the schools; for this, among other reasons, that an epidemic of low fever is at the present moment in the parish, and among the inmates, as is shown by the fact that during the first four weeks of this month, 1st to 29th, forty-five patients have been attacked by fever. The arrangement by which the casual women are mixed with the women waiting for admission into the workhouse in the receiving ward is exactly that which is most liable to introduce and keep up an outbreak of low fever. These wards should be immediately separated.

It is very desirable that an entirely new building should be made for an infirmary, where the access of foul air would be prevented, and a perfect system of ventilation could be adopted. Mean-

while, if the only good building at present existing might be used as the infirmary, many of the immediate difficulties of the house would be obviated.

I have the honour to be,

My Lords and Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

HENRY BENCE JONES, M.D., F.R.S.,

Physician to St. George's Hospital.

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While the country was in the hands of the  
British, the only way to get the  
information of the state was to  
send the agents to the  
British headquarters.

I have the honor to be,  
Sir, your obedient servant,  
Your obedient servant,  
James Buchanan  
President of the United States

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