

The report of the Committee of Health of the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London, on the report of the Medical Officer of Health of the City of London, of November 6th, 1849.

Contributors

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THE REPORT

OF

THE COMMITTEE OF HEALTH

OF THE

COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERS

OF

THE CITY OF LONDON,

ON THE

REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH
OF THE CITY OF LONDON,

OF NOVEMBER 6TH, 1849.

Ordered to be Printed 26th March, 1850.



London :

BREWSTER AND WEST, PRINTERS,

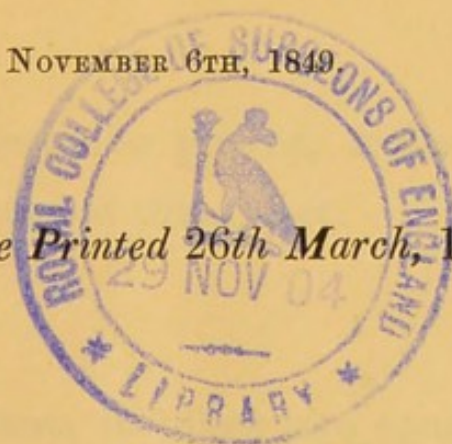
HAND COURT, DOWGATE.



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BREWSTER AND WEST, PRINTERS,
HAND COURT, DOWGATE.

At a Meeting of the Commissioners of Sewers
of the City of London, held pursuant to
an order of the Court of Aldermen, the 20th March, 1850.

Present, Messrs. Aldermen, Sir Alderman,
The Honorable the Commissioners of Sewers
of the City of London.

The Report of the Committee upon the
subject of the Sewers, which was presented
to the Commissioners on the 15th day of
November last, and which was read and
considered at the Meeting of the
Commissioners on the 15th day of November last,
and to report our opinion as to the course to be
adopted thereupon, and especially with reference
to those matters recommended therein which do
not come within the powers of the Commissioners,
to report our opinion, for aforesaid, that we have
from time to time met together, and have been
attended by the Medical Officer of Health, and
having minutely considered the various sections
of the above Report in the order in which the same
has treated them, we beg to report upon them in
the following order, as follows:—

JOSEPH DAWKINS

At a Meeting of the Commissioners of Sewers
of the City of London, held pursuant to
an order of the Court of Aldermen, the 20th March, 1850.

REPORT.

TO THE HONORABLE THE COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERS
OF THE CITY OF LONDON.

WE, whose names are hereunto set, your Committee upon Health, to whom on the 21st day of November last it was referred “to consider the Report of the Medical Officer of Health presented to your Court on the 6th day of November last, and to report our opinion as to the course to be adopted thereupon, and especially with reference to those matters recommended therein which do not come within the powers of the Commissioners to carry into execution,” Do certify, that we have from time to time met together, and have been attended by the Medical Officer of Health, and having attentively considered the various sections of the above Report in the order in which Mr. SIMON has treated them, we beg to report upon them in the same order, as follows:—

1st.—As respects the question of House Drainage. We beg to say that we are fully impressed with

the great importance of this branch of the Works in connexion with sanitary operations ; an importance which your Court has also recognized for several years past in the most decided manner, as may be estimated by the large amount of Sewage works which have been constructed within the City of London in order to facilitate the extension and improvement of domestic drainage ; and especially since the passing of the City of London Sewers' Act, by the application of the powers which that Act confers to enforce the Drainage of Houses, and the Supply of Water for Domestic and Sanitary purposes in connexion therewith. In furtherance of these views, we have endeavoured to ascertain as near to the fact as possible the number of houses within this City which are not drained. There are considerable difficulties in getting at this information from the very complicated nature of the private drainage of various estates and premises, the work of successive generations of owners and occupiers. We directed your Surveyor to enquire into, and report to us upon the subject, which he did as follows :—

“ In pursuance of your instructions, I beg to report approximately as to the number of Houses within the City of London that are drained.

“ The number of Houses and Premises within the City is assumed at 16,300.

“ The number of Outlets of Private or Service Drains which stand recorded upon the books of this Commission as entering the Public Sewers up to the 31st December 1848, is 6814.

“ This would appear to give 9486 Houses as undrained at that period; such, however, is not the case, and for the following reason:—

“ Although many houses have each a distinct and separate drainage, yet such separate drainage is by no means universal; in many instances one drain serves the purposes of two, three, or more houses; in other instances courts of six or eight houses collect their separate drains into one main drain, which ultimately connects with the Public Sewer, and which is recorded in your books but as one drain only. Again, a large portion of the premises south of Thames Street is known to be drained into the River, and is therefore not entered upon your books as entering the Sewers at all.

“ I think, therefore, that the number of Houses drained up to the 31st December, 1848, may be assumed as follows:—

“ The number of drains or outlets connecting with the Sewers, was . . . 6814

“ And the number of premises known by the Inspector of Sewers to be drained by them was . . . , . . . 7986

“ Adding to this the houses assumed to be drained into the Thames or otherwise, in manner before stated 1500

“ It leaves as the number of houses drained upon the 31st December, 1848 9486

“ And the number of houses undrained at 6814

“ And as the number of houses drained during the present year (1849) is about 900

“ The total number of premises drained within the City of London at the present time may be taken at 10386

“ Leaving of houses undrained 5914

“ This will not give the number of cesspools which have periodically to be emptied, which at present may be assumed to exist within the City, as in a very large number of cases one cesspool serves for two houses, and oftentimes for more; and in the poorer courts, where there is a public privy, one cesspool only most frequently exists.

“ I think that I may safely deduct from the 5914 houses undrained 500, and that 5414 may be taken as a fair approximation of the number of cesspools at present in existence within the City of London.

“ The number, however, can only be accurately determined at the termination of the Inspector's examination of the houses.

“ In this number of cesspools, also, I do not

include those existing upon premises having overflow drains into the sewers.

“This mode of construction was formerly very common, although not so much so during later years, and entirely interdicted since you have had control over internal works. The number of such cesspools, I think, can never be accurately ascertained but by breaking open the drains of those premises that are suspected of having such cesspools, a work which appears to me almost superfluous, excepting in special cases—such as complaint of effluvium, &c.—for most of such constructions are in the better class of houses, where they are securely domed over, where the connections are securely trapped, and where for the most part they have water-closets and other appliances likely to prevent inconvenience from them; besides which, most of them having now been in use some years, and it being more than probable that at the date of the construction of the drain they were not emptied, excepting to the level of the bed of the drain; they would, I apprehend, upon examination be generally found to be filled with almost solid residual matter, so solid that they virtually cease to retain any additional sullage which now may be delivered into them.

“It is proper, before I conclude, that I should state the reason why the number of houses within the City drained, cannot be more accurately determined.

“Until the commencement of the present year the officers of this Commission had no power to enter premises for inspection, nor had the Commission power to direct the internal drainage of buildings; but their functions were exclusively confined to the Sewers and such portions of the drains as laid under the public thoroughfares.

“When, therefore, a person applied for a drain to a particular house the drain was constructed up to the front of such house as required by the applicant, and was so registered in your books; but as to where the applicant led the drain within his own premises, how he constructed it, what other drainage he induced to it, your officers having no power to control or to supervise, could not take account thereof, and of such drainage the Commission have therefore no record.

“For the same reason this Commission cannot be held accountable for the prevalence of so defective a system, as that of leaving unemptied cess-pools upon premises which had drains constructed beneath them.”

We recommend that your Honorable Court should persevere in calling upon the owners of property to effect these necessary works with the least possible delay, but more especially in those neighbourhoods which are exclusively or mainly inhabited by the poor.

In reference to the remarks of Mr. SIMON in connexion with this subject, upon the propriety of intercepting the contents of the public sewers before they reach the Thames, and upon his suggestion, that while the various plans for effecting this great object are under consideration, the existing nuisance caused by the overflow of the drainage on the banks of the River at low water should be got rid of by the construction of culverts, so as to convey the sewer water to beyond low water mark. We beg to draw attention to the experiment making by Mr. MOFFATT, with your sanction, at the mouth of the Sewer in Puddle Dock, which, if successful, as we trust it will be, may prove the first step towards effecting an object which all must desire—the purification of the River Thames, and the systematic adaptation of the Sewage Manure to agricultural improvement. Meanwhile, we have conferred with the Committee for Navigation of the River, upon the subject of the proposed Culverts to the Sewers, and they have stated their willingness to co-operate with your Honorable Court in reporting to the Court of Common Council upon the advisability of such a system. Though pending the general enquiry now going on in the Metropolitan Commission of Sewers upon the system of drainage for the whole metropolis, and the question of outfall for the same, we recommend your Honorable Court not to take any steps therein, but to await the result of that enquiry, which will probably not be very distant.

In reference to the Public Docks mentioned as a source of nuisance to their neighbourhood, we find, that they were formed under the provisions of Acts of Parliament of a very distant period, and it is not in your power as Commissioners of Sewers to effect more in connexion with them, than to remove all impediments to the Sewage that may drain through them, and to enforce the periodical cleansing of them by the proper authorities, namely, the City Lands Committee as the representative of the owners, the Mayor, Commonalty and Citizens of London. These Public Docks are *three* in number, Puddle Dock, Whitefriars Dock, and Dowgate Dock. And we are of opinion, that that Committee should be requested to exercise a vigilant control over them, so as to prevent them from being made a nuisance and injury. And we recommend that your Honorable Court should suggest to the Corporation, to obtain authority to fill up these Docks, leaving the river frontage to be used as public wharfs, as in a sanitary point of view they are extremely objectionable.

In reference to the recommendation of the adoption of a more perfect system of trapping the street gullies, we draw the attention of your Honorable Court to the circumstance that there does not exist within your jurisdiction a single gully which is untrapped; and also that the trapping of street gullies, as a system, was first adopted by this Commission about 17 years ago, and although the

example was followed to some extent by the then existing Metropolitan Commissioners of Sewers, yet we believe we are correct in stating that the City still presents the only metropolitan area throughout which the gullies are uniformly trapped, and that you have been fully aware of the necessity of perfecting the system, is evinced by your giving a fair trial to all such traps as have been from time to time submitted to you, and which have appeared to possess sufficient merit to justify their being put to a practical test.

We also draw your attention to the statement of your Surveyor, in his Report upon the works executed in the year 1849, in which it is shewn that the number of gullies trapped during that year upon improved principles was 619.

With regard to the present mode of ventilation of the Sewers, we admit, as indeed it always has been admitted by your Honorable Court, that the system is defective, but we believe that it is nevertheless the best which has hitherto been devised. The ventilation of Sewers is a subject of much difficulty, and perhaps a perfect system may be only attainable at a very large outlay and a considerable future annual charge; but we have reason to think that the increased care and attention given of late years to the cleanliness of the Sewers has very much diminished the escape of effluvium from these ventilating shafts.

This mode of ventilation was likewise first adopted by your Honorable Court about 14 years ago, and it was rapidly followed throughout the whole of the metropolis. It is still we believe the only mode adopted for the ventilation of Sewers, and we fully concur in opinion that a more perfect system of ventilation is highly to be desired.

In reference to the very important question of water supply, which forms the subject of the *second section* of Mr. SIMON'S Report, we have been in communication with the New River Company, who, as you are aware, supply almost all the City of London with water; and also with the East London Company, who supply a very small portion in the Easternmost part of the City. We have had a return made from them severally, of the nature and extent of that supply, from which we are informed that

The number of houses supplied with a separate service pipe in the City by the New River Company, is	15864
The number of courts by them supplied, by means of a common cock, is 67, containing about	500
The number of courts by them supplied, having a common cistern, is 14, containing about	181

The Company also state that the supply to the courts having common cocks, is twice a day.

From the East London Water Works Company we have the following return :—

The number of houses supplied from the main constantly	42
Ditto once a day	89
Ditto by common cocks and cisterns	16
Ditto by common cocks only	5

We also directed the Surveyor and the Medical Officer of Health to report to us their opinion, as to what would be a sufficient supply of water to the houses and premises within this City, and the best principle upon which to effect such supply; and they having severally made their reports, we have directed them to be printed, and annex copies thereof for the information of your Honorable Court.

Having attentively considered the question, we agreed to the following Resolutions, which we directed the Clerk to transmit to Mr. MYLNE, the Engineer of the New River Company, namely :

“ That the quantity of water daily supplied to the City, being upon an average for all purposes of consumption 25 gallons, and for domestic supply $21\frac{1}{2}$ gallons per head per diem, is sufficient, with the present usages of water, if properly economised; but that the Water Companies should be bound to supply 30 gallons per head per diem,

should the anticipated prospective fair increase of consumption take place.

“That it is desirable that a supply, at a pressure sufficient to deliver water at the tops of all the houses, should be given uniformly throughout the City of London.

“That application should be made for the trial of the system of constant supply at high pressure upon a particular district within the City of London for a given period, in order to determine accurately what are the effects of its introduction as regards waste, and what benefits may practically be derived from it, and that the details of its execution should be carried out under the joint superintendence of the Surveyor and Medical Officer of Health.”

We were subsequently attended by Mr. MYLNE, who expressed his opinion that the New River Company cannot at the present time afford the quantity of water necessary to make an experiment of the constant supply at high-pressure to such a district of the City as we proposed, as he anticipated the waste would be so great, that with the dry season approaching, the Company would not be able to give the necessary supplies to other districts. But he stated that in the month of November next there would be no difficulty in rendering

the necessary supply for such experiment. Mr. MYLNE informed us that the New River Company had last year tried this experiment in a district north of the Regent's Canal, consisting of 3000 houses, and had found such result to follow. Mr. MYLNE suggested by way of meeting the difficulties at present experienced in affording the needful supply of pure water to the houses of the poor situate in courts and alleys where a common cock is now only fixed, that capacious iron tanks should be erected in the open court, at a height of about 10 feet from the ground, and covered to avoid pollution of the contents, so as to be accessible only to the officers of the Company. He proposed that pipes should then be carried through the houses on the ground-floor, so that all might have access to a supply thus to be drawn off by spring taps within their houses, and he engaged that, if erected, these tanks should be constantly filled. Mr. MYLNE expressed to us an opinion that the Company might be induced to erect such tanks at their own cost where required, if your Court would use its power to compel the owners of property to pay for the supply of water. And to obviate the objections of the water being thereby polluted, it should be a part of this system that no pipes should be allowed to take water from these tanks for the flushing of privies, but for that purpose water should be laid on from another source.

Mr. MYLNE further intimated to us that if the

three days a-week high supply at present given to the City of London be deemed insufficient, a further high service might be afforded during three nights in the week on alternate nights, in accomplishing which no alteration of the time of supply during the day need be made, nor would it require any additional machinery or pipes; and he also stated that if the New River Company succeed in passing their Bill now in Parliament, they will be enabled to supply to the City of London and their other districts one-fourth more water than at present, which will exceed the quantity recommended in our before-mentioned Resolution as proper to be supplied to the inhabitants of this City.

We having heard Mr. MYLNE to this effect, he intimated his desire to report to the Directors of the New River Company the result of our conference, and signified that they would no doubt communicate in writing their reply to our Resolutions, and we therefore adjourned the consideration of the matter.

At our next Meeting we received from the Company the following letter :

“ NEW RIVER OFFICE,
“ 14th March, 1850.

“ SIR,—I am instructed by the Directors of the New River Company to state that in compliance with the request of the Committee of Health of

the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London, as expressed in their Letter and Resolutions of the 1st instant, addressed to Mr. Mylne, the Company's Engineer, they instructed Mr. Mylne to attend the Meeting of the Committee on Monday last, and they hoped that the information which he had given in reference to those Resolutions, and the additional enquiries then made, had been satisfactory.

“ If, however, the Committee of Health are desirous of any further information on any points, and would transmit their wishes in writing to this Company, the Directors will give them their earliest consideration.

“ The Directors regret that their Engineer, being engaged with one of the Engineers of the Metropolitan Sanitary Commission appointed by the Government in the inspection of the works of the New River Company (which will occupy the whole day), will be unable to attend the meeting of the Committee of Health to-morrow.

(Signed) “ FREDERIC INGLIS, *Clerk.*

“ To Joseph Daw, Esq.”

We very much regret this unsatisfactory issue of our enquiries with the New River Company, so different from that which our interview with Mr. MYLNE had led us to hope. But as Mr. MYLNE distinctly informed us they cannot for some months make the experiment we had desired, and as the New River Company had also before

stated their inability to render a high service supply to the City of London generally, we think it most expedient to terminate our proceedings therein, and no longer delay our Report. We therefore recommend to your Honorable Court to adopt as a principle for water supply to the City of London our two Resolutions already recited, namely,

“ That the quantity of water daily supplied to the City being upon an average for all purposes of consumption 25 gallons, and for domestic supply $21\frac{1}{2}$ gallons per head per diem, is sufficient with the present usages of water, if properly economized ; but that the Water Companies should be bound to supply 30 gallons per head per diem should the anticipated prospective fair increase of consumption take place.

“ That it is desirable that a supply at a pressure sufficient to deliver water at the tops of all the houses should be given uniformly throughout the City of London.”

In reference to the third section of the Report, which treats of Offensive and Injurious Trades, we beg to remind your Honorable Court that upon your attempting to put in force the powers of your Act of Parliament in reference thereto, it was found that considerable difficulties were opposed to your efforts. Sufficient powers are not given by the City of London Sewers' Act to meet some of the cases we allude to, while other legal and technical objections presented themselves to the enforcement of the powers in question. In reference to Slaughter-houses, and more particularly to underground slaughtering, the proceedings which the Court have taken to obtain the opinion of high legal authority on your power to suppress the same in connexion with your other proceedings to which we have alluded, are evidence of the desire felt by the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London to carry out these provisions. And we beg to report that after considering all these various points, we think it very desirable that means should be taken to remove the sanitary evils which belong to intramural slaughtering, and other offensive trades, and to point out to you the necessity when the question of renewing your Act shall come into consideration of procuring additional powers which may enable you effectually to remedy these evils.

Section 4.—In taking up the matters referred to in the 4th Section, we agree unanimously to report to your Honorable Court that in our judgment all Intramural Interments within grave-yards, or within vaults, should be discontinued ; an opinion in which your past proceedings have entirely proved that you agree. We would add that it is right that attention be called to the necessity of having one uniform law in this respect through the metropolis, otherwise the evils resulting from such interments would only be removed from one locality to another. As we find the attention of Government and the Legislature are called to this matter, we do not think it necessary that your Honorable Court should at present take any further step therein.

Upon the vast and difficult questions referred to in the 5th Section of Mr. SIMON'S Report, we feel that we are to some extent spared the necessity of entering, the Court of Common Council having (as it belongs to them in reference to this City) taken up the questions connected with the filthy and bad condition of the houses of the poor in many of the confined courts and alleys of London, and the best means of remedying the alarming evils that result therefrom. We feel it due to Mr. SIMON to add, from the result of personal in-

vestigation, that the statements contained in his Report under this Section, distressing as they are, are not exaggerated. The very filthy habits of some of the lowest portions of the community which we have had opportunities of witnessing, are such that it becomes an exceedingly difficult question to deal with them. Already under your directions in many of these localities various works have been effected of a nature calculated to improve materially the condition, and to increase the comforts of the inhabitants, and yet experience has shewn that they have been far from appreciating these improvements. We do not mean to say that this is so in all cases, and we can only hope that the Court of Common Council will not cease from their efforts to improve the conditions of the localities in question, by widening the avenues and admitting more freely the light and air to these homes of poverty. The erection of Lodging-houses for the Poor upon an improved plan, of Public-baths and of Wash-houses, are among the questions of serious importance connected with this subject. But however desirable it may be deemed that these propositions should be carried out, yet we do not consider that they come within the objects for which the Rates under your authority are raised. We cannot pass this subject, however, without recording our opinion that the operation of the Window-tax is directly opposed to the sanitary interests of the population of the City, and that its continuance must in a great degree neutralize the

effect of those exertions which your Honorable Court is making for the purposes of sanitary improvement. We find that it affords inducements to the construction of houses with defective supply of light and air, that it opposes great obstacles to the improvement of such houses as have already been constructed on a faulty principle, and that these circumstances tend to aggravate the frequency and malignity of epidemic diseases, and to increase the mortality of the population.

We have taken into consideration the various suggestions which have been made by the Medical Officer of Health for the more effectually obtaining that extent of information necessary for the duly carrying out of a system of sanitary improvement within this City by means of periodical returns, to be procured from the Medical Officers of the City Unions. We consider it is quite indispensable that any Committee on Health that may be appointed should receive the largest and most accurate returns which can be procured of all sickness occurring among the poorer classes, and particularly in respect of all epidemic, endemic, and infectious disorders; that the Medical Practitioner who communicates the fact of illness should likewise report the existence of any local causes or other influences of general operation which have

tended to produce, or are tending to continue, such illness. Having duly weighed the various considerations connected with this subject, and your past communications thereupon, with the Board of Guardians and with their Medical Officers, and believing that it would not be judicious to appoint eleven Medical Officers, or any additional Medical Staff, to be attached to your Court; but at the same time deeming it necessary that the information asked for in Mr. SIMON'S Report should be obtained, we recommend that your Honorable Court empower Mr. SIMON to obtain such information at an aggregate annual expense not to exceed £250.

We have also taken into consideration the suggestion contained in Mr. SIMON'S Report, page 71, viz. :—

“That an account should be kept corrected year by year of every house in the City, as to the area of the buildings—the number of floors—rooms and windows—as to its ventilation, drainage, water-supply, and other facilities for cleanliness—as to its method of occupation and number of inhabitants.”

And having had a Report from your Surveyor upon the matter laid before us, we are of opinion that it is desirable to have information in the from

prepared under the direction of the Surveyor, and that such additional assistance be obtained for that purpose as may be necessary.

We have thus endeavoured to give to the leading points of Mr. SIMON'S Report our best consideration, and to offer our opinions to your Honorable Court on the course to be pursued in reference thereto.

The question of the Sanitary condition of the City of London is one in which not merely its inhabitants but the whole metropolis are interested. And we have regarded it in that light while considering the details of the works requisite to carry out a system of improvement therein which have been suggested to us.

The question of applying to Parliament for a renewal of your Act must occupy your attention at the close of the present session; and as the provisions of the Act in connexion with some of the subjects upon which we have reported will need to be amended, enlarged, or modified in various ways, as the past year's experience has shewn, we feel it right to draw the attention of your Honorable Court to the importance of taking early steps to carry into effect the suggestions we have ventured to make, either by reporting to the Court of Com-

mon Council to invite their concurrence in the work of sanitary improvement, or otherwise, as may seem to you best.

All which we submit to the judgment of your Honorable Court.

Dated this 25th day of March, 1850.

(Signed) **W. A. PEACOCK,**
JAMES JOSIAH MILLARD,
JAMES WATERLOW,
W. STEVENS,
R. B. WHITESIDE,
EDWARD HARRISON,
HENRY BLAKE,
R. OBBARD.

your Council to invite their concurrence in the
work of auxiliary improvement, or otherwise, as
may seem to you best.

All which we submit to the judgment of your
Honorable Court.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,
dated this 25th day of March, 1830.

(Signed) W. A. PRACOCK,

JACOB JOSIAH MILLARD,

JAMES WATKINSON,

W. STEVENS,

J. B. WHITEHEAD,

EDWARD HARRISON,

HENRY BLAKE,

ROBERT BARRARD.

As at the meeting of the

Board of Trustees of the

City of New York, on the

25th day of March, 1830.

Witness my hand and seal

this 25th day of March, 1830.

W. A. PRACOCK,

Secretary of the Board of Trustees.

Attest my hand and seal

this 25th day of March, 1830.

W. A. PRACOCK,

Secretary of the Board of Trustees.