

**Letter and suggestions from the Medical Officer of Health for Paddington,
on the pollution of the water and the cleansing of the canal basin.**

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CHAIRMAN OF THE SANITARY COMMITTEE

1881

LETTER AND SUGGESTIONS

FROM THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

FOR PADDINGTON,

ON THE

POLLUTION OF THE WATER AND THE CLEANSING OF THE CANAL BASIN.

WM HARDWICK

TO THE
CHAIRMAN OF THE SANITARY COMMITTEE.

Richmond Villa, Park Place,
Paddington ;

July 6, 1868.

MY DEAR SIR,

Acting under the instructions sanctioned by the Paddington Vestry, and with the concurrence of the Sanitary Committee, I have prepared and forwarded a letter to the Secretary of the Grand Junction Canal Company, of which the enclosed is a copy.

I feel assured that if the Vestry will insist upon the recommendations therein being carried out at once, the long standing nuisance of the Canal will cease to exist.

A large number of persons are interested in knowing what steps are taken by the Committee to abate this nuisance, and I ask permission to circulate copies of this document for future reference. I must at the same time thank you, as Chairman of the Sanitary Committee, for the valuable aid you have rendered me with regard to it.

I am, SIR,

Your obedient Servant,

WM. HARDWICKE.

BENJ. SHAW, Esq.,

9 Cambridge Square.

(Copy of Letter.)

To the Secretary and Chairman of the Grand Junction
Canal Company.

GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE again to inform you that numerous complaints have again been made of the putrid state of the Water in the Canal Basin, and that upon personal inspection I find the nuisance intolerable to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and dangerous to public health. It is now only five weeks since the cleansing was so imperfectly done, and that in this short time the nuisance is quite as bad as at any former period. I must therefore most urgently request that the work of cleansing shall be forthwith efficiently done.

You are aware that the fouling of the water of the Canal Basin has on numerous occasions been a subject of serious complaints, and that memorials have been presented to the Vestry. One of these was signed by the most influential traders on the Basin; another by the Governors of St. Mary's Hospital. In the latter which was addressed to the Lords of Her Majesty's Privy Council, and by them referred to the Vestry, it was alleged that the emanations proceeding either from the water or from the offensive accumulations on the wharves, seriously interfered with the welfare of the patients, and in particular with the Surgical practice of the Hospital; the contamination of the air induced a liability to erysipelas and pyæmia after severe injuries and operations, whereby the chances of recovery of the unfortunate sufferers were materially diminished.

On the 16th of March 1866, the Vestry resolved—"That the
"Sanitary Committee be empowered to resort to legal proceedings."

In the month of May this year, letters * and a numerously-signed petition of the inhabitants living in the immediate vicinity of the Canal Basin, was presented to the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee, (BENJAMIN SHAW, Esq.), complaining of the offensive and injurious condition of the water, and the filth contained therein, and earnestly requesting that in pursuance of the powers vested in the Vestry, the Nuisance Removal Act should be put in force in respect of the contents of the said Paddington Canal Basin. After numerous meetings and much correspondence upon the subject at different times, and from the manifest desire on the part of the Chairman and Secretary of the Canal Company to meet the wishes of the Sanitary Committee,† legal proceedings have been hitherto delayed. It has however been considered desirable by the Sanitary Committee and myself as Medical Officer of Health to subjoin herewith certain suggestions and recommendations to which we attach the greatest importance, and if acted upon, will

* 140, Praed Street;
25 May, 1858.

SIR,

I have to call your attention to the putrid *air* arising from the *Canal*: the smell in my rooms is quite *unbearable*, as well as injurious to the health of my family and trade. A medical friend informs me it ought to be seen to at once, and I shall feel obliged by your immediate attention.

I am, SIR,

Yours obediently,

GEO. F. JEFFRIES.

Mr. SULLIVAN, Inspector, &c.

† Grand Junction Canal,
Office, 21, Surrey Street, Strand, W.C.
9th March, 1868.

DEAR SIR,

I will give every attention to your letter of the 7th, respecting the Paddington Basin. During the winter months, many millions of gallons of water might have been run from the bottom of the Basin, had the Company the free use of the valves as they formerly had.

The present system, of having to apply for so many permissions to run off water, prevents it being done, hence the injury not only to the Public, but to the Canal Company.

Pray make this fact known to the Paddington Board of Health, and endeavour to get them to move in the matter, so as to enable us to draw

materially assist you in overcoming the difficulties in the way of preventing the recurrence of this nuisance. These suggestions, though made in the most friendly spirit, I am instructed to inform you, they are prepared to insist upon in the strongest manner, and which they cannot consent to abandon.

One of the greatest difficulties that arises in obtaining an effectual and permanent remedy for the Canal nuisance, is the want of concurrence in the various Authorities who are concerned in drainage works. For 50 years the Grand Junction Canal Company

the Paddles when we have such a supply of water as will warrant our doing so.

I am, DEAR SIR,
Yours truly,

CHARLES ROGERS,
Secretary.

Dr. HARDWICKE,
Medical Officer of Health for Paddington.

Grand Junction Canal,
Office, 21, Surrey Street, Strand, W.C.
27th May, 1868.

DEAR SIR,

I am much obliged to you for your letter of yesterday, in which you inform me "That you have got the consent of the Metropolitan Board of Works to have the water let off from the Basin after Thursday at 6 P.M., unless some other obstacle comes in the way." The Company will be put to very great inconvenience in running off the water from the Paddington Basin to-morrow evening, but nevertheless, to meet the wishes of the Vestry, this shall be done, and every effort made to remove as much of the mud as possible from its bed. It appears, however necessary it might become for the health of the neighbourhood to run off the water, the step cannot be taken without the authority of the Metropolitan Board of Works, and then only after the lapse of 48 hours after such permission has been given. This is only part of the system which the Grand Junction Canal Company have had so long and so justly to complain of, and until the Parish Authorities take up the matter and get the whole control of the water into the hands of the Company, the evil must and will continue. I have no hesitation in repeating that I believe, if the Company had the power of opening the Valves in the Basin whenever they wished to do so, no complaints could possibly arise of the state of the water in the Basin.

I beg that our correspondence, commencing on the 22nd Inst., be read to the Parish Authorities, and, if it be necessary, I will wait upon the Sanitary Board at any time you may appoint.

I am, DEAR SIR,
Yours truly,

CHARLES ROGERS,
Secretary.

Dr. HARDWICKE,
Medical Officer of Health for Paddington.

had power to run off water into the main drains, that is, to pull up the paddles or sluices at such times and seasons as the quantity of water might have accumulated by rain, when the reservoirs were well supplied. If the engineer of the Company had the privilege to do this at his discretion, it is believed that no complaint of foul water would arise, because the water could be gradually changed before it had reached that point of concentration in filth which makes it an offensive or dangerous nuisance. Since the Metropolitan Board of Works require the engineer to give 72 hours notice, an unnecessary delay permits millions of gallons of surplus water to pass over the weirs, which might otherwise be used for re-filling the basin, and for effecting the necessary change of water so needful to preserve the whole in a proper state of purity. It is obviously necessary that the Board of Works should withdraw such a restriction as they now place upon the Company draining the canal, and give them the permission to drain into the sewers in the ordinary manner, with proper precautions. The necessity for making timely and effectual arrangements for the protection of the lives of men working in the main sewers was the original ground for demanding 72 hours notice from the engineer of the Canal Company. That such a notice should be required is unreasonable, and it is doubtful whether any danger would arise from any efflux of water into the sewers from the canal even if no notice at all were given—for a sudden storm will at any time let more water into the sewers in a short space of time, and causes greater danger, but it is found practically that the men have ample time to take care of themselves.

The second recommendation for the prevention of pollution of the Canal Basin is the making and enforcement of Bye-Laws, by which all persons who wilfully or carelessly neglect them, shall be subject to a penalty. Inasmuch as the Company have a statutory power to make and enforce Bye-Laws, they have in their own hands the means of preventing the evils which the Sanitary Committee are perpetually struggling to remedy. The interests of the Company would be materially protected by the employment

of a more efficient staff of men, or one responsible and instructed man to watch the loading of barges, and to report to the office of the Company instances of depositing offensive matter in the Basin, and offences against their Bye-Laws, and dangerous to public health. It is imperative that an efficient Water Bailiff should be appointed; he would have a marvellous effect in a short time in checking many of the present malpractices with regard to loading, in preventing those accumulations and detentions of offensive matters, and reckless loading on the wharves, which cause nearly all the mischief.

A third recommendation which the Sanitary Committee ask to be carried out by the Company, is an increased water-closet and urinal accommodation for the numerous men, women and families employed both on the wharves, and living on the barges. The fæcal matters of at least 400 persons are daily disposed of in the canal. The reports of the Inspector of Nuisances show that the owners or occupiers of wharves have much neglected to provide this provision for the comfort of persons engaged in work on the wharves.

A fourth recommendation consists in the adoption of a more regular and systematic plan of cleansing once or twice a year. Cleansing once a year would probably be satisfactory, if other precautions and suggestions were adopted, and the cleansing operations were done in a more complete manner, and in accordance with the following suggestions:—It is quite practicable to let off the water from the basin during the night, to fill the barges with mud, which will be ready for loading about 9, A.M.; the boats can be filled and made ready for floating off in the afternoon, when the water could be let in to take them away. With a proper and vigilant arrangement beforehand, this has been, and can at any future time be accomplished. The practice of partly loading a few barges, and of throwing up the remainder of the putrid mud on the wharves or bank is highly objectionable, and ought not to be permitted in hot weather. It not only calls for much additional labour, but the offensive mud lying some days exposed to the sun

on the banks until the owners of each wharf can take it away, is a dangerous practice, and altogether unnecessary. Between 30 and 40 barges are required to be in readiness, moored over night in the middle of the Canal, and a gang of 20 to 30 men, will in a few hours load all the mud within reach of them.

From want of these preconcerted arrangements, the letting off and refilling of the Canal, has on several former occasions been inconvenient, dangerous and ineffectual. Such precautions and arrangements for the work to be done speedily, will render less necessary any process of deodorization, that would otherwise be safer to adopt, and which on the last occasion was used at the expense of the Parish with satisfactory results. After the water had been run off, and the mud was exposed, the Parish fire engine was employed to irrigate the exposed surface with a solution of Condry's liquid—one gallon to 200 gallons of water being the proportion used.

Having taken great pains to point out the remedy for preventing a future recurrence of so dangerous a nuisance as now exists in the centre of such a populous district of the Parish, the Sanitary Committee hope this Statement will be of service in obtaining an effectual and permanent settlement of the question, which has so long been a grievance to them and to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

I am,

GENTLEMEN,

Your obedient Servant,

WM. HARDWICKE,

*Medical Officer of Health for
Paddington.*

July 4th, 1868.