

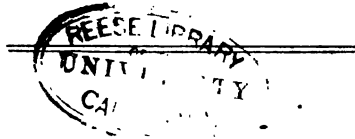
L. S. 505-0

**METROPOLITAN SANITARY COMMISSION.**

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**FIRST REPORT.**



**MINUTES OF EVIDENCE**

TAKEN BEFORE THE

87522

**COMMISSIONERS**

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE WHETHER ANY AND WHAT SPECIAL  
MEANS MAY BE REQUISITE FOR THE IMPROVEMENT  
OF THE HEALTH OF THE METROPOLIS.

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**NEW YORK :**

McSPEDON & BAKER, PRINTERS TO THE COMMON COUNCIL.

1852.

The average age of all classes who died, being, in your district, twenty-three; whereas, in better conditioned suburban districts in the metropolis, it appears to be as high as thirty-four and thirty-six: are these results in coincidence with your own observations?—I think they are; but there are in operation, in this district, causes which affect all classes, rich and poor.

What is the condition of the district in respect to house and street drainage?—the houses are very badly drained; they have mostly cess-pools, very few draining into any sewers; but the most depressing influence upon the health, arises from the number of open sewers which surround and intersect the district; these ditches and sewers are sluggish, and evolve noxious gases. Typhus fever is always prevalent in the vicinity.

What is the condition of the covered sewers? They emit very offensive effluvia. In the house in which I live we have experience of it. When the wind is in particular directions, we have a severe experience of it.

Do you consider it of advantage, in the present state of the sewers, to open any communication with them?—I have been led to consider that point, and to doubt it very much; more particularly since the storm of August, 1846, when the water from the sewers was conducted from the drains into the houses, and burst through them. A number of houses were flooded with sewer water; mine was saturated throughout, four feet deep. The walls have not yet got rid of the stench.

What was the condition of those houses which had no drains to join on with the sewers?—They were certainly better off; they had none of the sewer water.

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No. 3.

DR. MURDOCH, OF ROTHERHITHE.

How long have you practiced in Rotherhithe?—Between fourteen and fifteen years.

Were you there at the time of the visitation of the cholera?—I was there only at the time of its close, in January, 1833, when there were only a few straggling cases, such as appear at the end of an epidemic. I had been previously thirteen years in Paris. I had been two years

as externe, or dresser, and four years as interne and house surgeon, in the large French hospitals. I was there during the dreadful attack of cholera, in 1832.

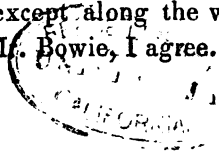
Will you describe the present condition of your district in respect to disease?—There has been more fever than usual within the last six weeks.

What is the state of the locality where fever mostly prevails? The houses are badly drained, badly supplied with water, and an open ditch receives the contents of privies. There is a block of houses where the privies hang over the ditch; the paths in the fronts of the houses are unpaved and filthy. The district of Rotherhithe is altogether excessively ill drained, intersected with ditches and stagnant water.

In what respect has its condition been altered since the cholera last visited it? A few of the sewers have been arched over within the last few years, and some new sewers constructed. In some parts they have water laid on, which they had not before; but some of the dwellings are wretched hovels, as in the district of Kenning's buildings and Norfolk place, in Swan lane. In that district, in which typhus is always most prevalent when in the neighborhood, one brother practitioner, Mr. Chandler, attended ninety cases of typhus and typhoid fever within twelve months.

Should cholera reappear, in what places would you expect it?—I expect it would follow the law of typhus and typhoid fever, and visit that neighborhood, and others similarly situated, at first. Between Staple's-vents and Lucas street there is a filthy ditch; there is one in Lower Rotherhithe street, opposite the playing place called the Pageants; another between Thames street and Russell street, Lower Rotherhithe, and many others. Many of these places are below high-water mark, and the houses are subject to inundations from these sewers when the Thames overflows. The neighborhood is always more unhealthy for a considerable time after such inundations, catarrhal and rheumatic affections prevailing.

You have read the evidence of Mr. Bowie with relation to the condition of the district on the opposite side of the river. How far is it parallel to that of Rotherhithe?—Rotherhithe is not so overcrowded; there is more unoccupied ground about it, and a greater degree of dilution of the miasma, and I should not expect the cholera to be so severe in Rotherhithe, except along the water-side. In the general conclusions stated by Mr. Bowie, I agree. In Paris, the cholera followed the



same law as typhus, visiting most severely the Cite, the Faubourg St. Marceau, and the crowded neighborhood at the back of the Hotel de Ville, or Town-hall, the most filthy and ill-ventilated districts. For several days the deaths were at the rate of from one thousand to one thousand one hundred per diem.

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No. 4.

MATTHEW FRENCH WAGSTAFFE, Esq.,  
*Police, District and Parochial Surgeon, Lambeth.*

Where were you in practice when cholera prevailed in the metropolis in 1832?—In Southwark, Bermondsey, and Lambeth.

Did you see much of the disease?—Very much; and I observed its course along the edge of the river, and found that it prevailed principally in low marshy situations in crowded, ill-ventilated courts and alleys.

What was the condition of the house and sewer drainage in the streets, courts, and alleys in which the disease principally prevailed?—The drainage was extremely bad; the privies were very often in the cellars. I have myself passed through two feet of water to get to the houses, being obliged to walk along planks, and the door-ways of the houses, at the time of high tide in Fore street, Lambeth, being blocked up with boards and plaster, to prevent the water from getting into the dwellings. This state continues occasionally at the present time.

Are cesspools general in the district?—Yes, they are very general; and I have often seen the soil from these cesspools swimming about in the water.

Are the houses in these localities in general damp and dirty?—Yes, they are; and it is quite impossible for the inhabitants, under such circumstances, to keep them dry and clean.

Whenever typhus is prevalent in the metropolis, is it in these localities that you constantly find it?—Invariably, and common fever is very apt, in these places, to assume a typhoid type. This is the case at the present time with several cases now under my care. Scarlet fever, measles, and small-pox also are very apt to become malignant here. Under certain atmospheric conditions, for example, when I