

Public Health Report 1849

The Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain published in 1842 was written by Edwin Chadwick. This led to the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, setting up a Royal Commission on the health of Towns. This published its report in 1844. The Report of the Royal Commission into the Sanitary Condition of Large Towns and Populous Districts upheld Chadwick's findings. Following on from these reports Parliament passed a Public health Act (1848) and a Central Board of Health was set up with the power to set up local boards of health in any area where the death-rate was 23 per 1000 or higher.

A report to the General Board Of Health regarding Bacup's sewerage, drainage, and water supply and sanitary conditions of the inhabitants of Bacup was sent on May 20, 1849, by William Lee. Superintendent Inspector. The following are extracts from the report.

The inhabitants of the town or village of Bacup, in the county of Lancaster having petitioned for the application of the Public Health Act, I have, according to your instructions made a preliminary inquiry into the sanitary condition of the place and beg to present the following report.

CIVIL AND MUNICIPAL CHARACTERS OF BACUP.

The civil and municipal Character of Bacup, formerly written Backup, is very peculiar. Its population is from 8,000 to 10,00 and yet it is neither a parish nor a market town. It does not pose any local government whatever nor has it with the exception of the Mechanics Institute, any of the institutions or arrangements usually found where large masses of people are congregated together. It is situated partly in the township of Newchurch, in the parish of Whalley, and partly in the township Spotland in the parish of Rochdale., and in fact is scarcely more than an immensely overgrown village.

In religious matters, the inhabitants seem to be exemplary. There are a church and four chapels, besides preaching rooms, a fifth chapel is about to be erected, and also an additional church. I spent one Sunday in Bacup, and the orderly and respectable appearance of the population was very gratifying. Regular attendance on divine worship appears to be universal. On the weekdays all the working classes male and female the children and wives of some respectable shopkeepers and even several mill persons who were pointed out to me as mill owners wore wooden clogs and a kerchief instead of a bonnet was almost the exclusive headdress of the female population. On Sunday the transformation was so great that the town had quite a different aspect among both sexes and all ages the clogs were displaced by shoes and the kerchiefs by neat and genteel bonnets.

GENERAL CONTOUR OF THE SITE WITH RESPECT TO SURFACE DRAINAGE.

I could not ascertain the altitude of Bacup above the level of the sea, but it must be very considerable. The River Irwell rises within the district about 2 and a half miles to the North. and descends through a deep valley with a rapid fall. In the centre of town it receives a large augmentation from the Greaves Brook which rises about 1 and a half-mile to the northeast. this also passes through a deep gorge. and between the twp is a deep hill.

At the confluence of these lies the greater of the town. But as might be expected the mills and dwellings houses of the people employed in them, extends along the neighbourhood of the streams.

POPULATION AND RATE OF INCREASE, AND THE NUMBER OF HOUSES.

From the fact already adverted to, that Bacup is not a parish and from its forming portions of townships in the two several Unions of Haslingden and Rochdale, neither the reports of the registrar general nor the census returns afford me any information respecting either the number of the population or of the houses. One of the inhabitants states that the population was 10,000 and another that it was 8,000 the latter may be taken as the more probable number.

PREVALENT DISEASES, AND CAUSES OF MORTALITY IN THE DISTRICT.

The medical testimony on this head is very valuable and serves the most serious consideration of the inhabitants. John Crabtree, Esq, M.D. Says, " I am a physician in general practice here. My professional duties enable me to form a correct opinion as to the physical circumstances under which the people of Bacup live. I have often to visit. people in the lower classes of society. The prevailing diseases are continued fever of a low character, that frequently passes into the lower typhoid form. Sometimes the typhus becomes virulent and at other times it remains sporadic. This fever is not confined to any particular locality. It prevails at all periods of the year, but is most prevalent, in Autumn and Winter.

These fevers do not necessarily exist on earth. In order to have fever you must have Malaria and infectious poison. This poison is generated by decomposing animal and vegetable matters. Malaria is transmitted by aqueous vapour at certain temperatures of the atmosphere. If the temperature was favourable to the transmission of existing malaria. There are abundant sources of Malaria in Bacup. The town is very subject to pulmonary disease, Children are very subject to diarrhoea, scrofula, and continued fevers.

Malaria is most apt to attack children and young persons. The inhabitants of Bacup live generally on wholesome food and are also generally clean in their houses or else fever would be even more prevalent and fatal than it is. The carrying of water for domestic use in Bacup is too severe labour to be performed by females, and the consequence is that femoral hernia is very common. I do not think that any disease is more common.

Females thus afflicted cannot work with the same ease, or do the same amount of work, and are also subject to cholic and other inflammatory disorders. The infantile mortality of a town is a good criterion of its sanitary condition. There is an excessive mortality among children in Bacup, but we must not lay the whole of this the want of sanitary arrangements.

After being asked what was the cause of infant mortality in Bacup by Mr Lees, Dr Crabtree replied. " Dear Sirs, bad nursing, unwholesome food, and the administration of narcotics, are great causes of the infant mortality. among infants". These three act with great force in Bacup, in consequence of the majority of the children being nursed by their friends and grandmothers whilst the mothers go and work in the mills. Hence arises the prolific source of the great and constant use of unwholesome food and narcotics. The present unhealthy conditions of the sewage system in Bacup and the accumulation of surface filth of every kind also aid in causing the mortality of infants particularly in

those children of a state already mentioned ". Dr Stewart also furnishes valuable evidence as to the excessive sickness and mortality of the town.

He says, " I am a physician carrying on a general practice in Bacup, and am medical officer of the Spotland district of the Rochdale Union. I have been resident here nearly ten years and in that time I have had abundant opportunities of becoming acquainted with the sanitary condition of the inhabitants, of all classes. The average length of life in Bacup may be lengthened by by improved sanitary arrangements.

I perfectly coincide with the whole of the evidence given by. Dr Crabtree . There s is a intimate connection between dirt and disease. Dr Worrall states " Rheumatism is very common here commencing in the acute form and passing into the chronic but not often with contractions of their joints. Bronchitis and influenza are also very prevelant at certain seasons of the year and under peculiar conditions of the atmosphere, continued fevers have commenced in the vicinity of the river, and I have reason to suppose that the disease has been carried by infection to the higher parts of the town.

My practice has been principally among the poorer of the inhabitants of the town and I have become acquainted with their sanitary condition, and the diseases to which they are especially liable. Having heard Dr Crabtree's evidence I have to say I agree with him .

CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSES AND OVERCROWDING.

Most of the houses in Bacup are constructed of stone of which is abundant in the neighbourhood. The best cottages in the place are however 28 Clay Street, belonging to Messrs James Smith, and Son and constructed of brick. They let from 7 to 9s each and are never empty. A great number of the houses are built in flats, or floors, with flights of steps outside of to the upper dwellings. It is to be feared that in them there are many more inhabitants than is consistent with health. There are 26 cellar dwellings in the town and some of these I visited. The following is a description of one in Back Irwell Street, or Garden Street. John Whittaker, occupant, husband, wife, and three children the interior of the house is in a most filthy state.

The wife of the tenant says " We have never been well since we came to live here. We have had low fevers. We pay 1s per week rent, and the rates. We have to go to the privy at Bank house ". Bank house privy is 170 yards from Back Irwell Street. In some of the more commodious cottages there is great crowding. The following is a account of one in the same street. Daniel Clegg, is the owner occupier,. There are three pigs kept within one yard of the window. One of the pigs as Scrofula (a form of tuberculosis characterized by swellings of the lymphatic glands) very bad and Wm Stewart, Esq, M.D, medical officer of the Spotland district, said that among the human inhabitants of these houses scrofula and consumption was very common. The wife and the owner occupier of this house said " My husband ins a greengrocer.

We have lived here for three years. We have 10 of family , my husband and myself, a son 30 years of age , a daughter 22 a daughter 20, daughter 18, son 17, 16, daughter 14, daughter 12. We have two lodging rooms". In Bacup, as in all other towns, the public lodging houses are a great evil. They are the hotbeds of disease and vice. The greatest immoralities are common, and no questions asked by the proprietors. There are exceptions and among them I should place such men as tinkers and

chimney sweepers, many of who have settled homes, but have periodic circuits for the purpose of their trades. The great majority of the tramps it is to be feared, are thieves and sturdy beggars. Men, women and children and frequently dogs, form a promiscuous herd, all sleeping in the same close confined room, from which every breath of pure air is excluded, while their unwashed bodies filthy stinking clothes, and frequently foul straw beds, produce an atmosphere that is horrible on first entering the room. Most of the lodgers sleep in a state of absolute nudity. and decency with the greater portion of them as long since ceased to exist.

I generally visit these houses after the inmates have retired to rest, and being already somewhat exhausted by my first days duties at Bacup., the effluvium of these bedrooms was so obnoxious that on the following day I was scarcely able to perform my duties. The following are some of the statistics of a 4 roomed house . 3 Beds, containing 4 females and 3 males, 4 beds containing 3 females and 4 males. 4 Beds 6 females and 8 males. In this room were 5 persons in 1 bed, in another a man, woman and child.

The man says they go out with a basket, but the stock of matches and tape never exceeds 2s 6d to 3s and sometimes less. 2 Beds , 8 persons , in one a man, wife, and 3 children, and in the other a woman and 2 sons , one 16 and the other 14 years old. Some of these beds consists of a quantity of straw spread on the floor, and covered with a rug, and for the use of this wretched accommodation the family of 5 pay 8d. per night, being at the rate of 2d each for adults and 1d for children. The totals are 4 rooms, 13 beds, and 36 persons. In another house visited there are only two rooms appropriated to lodgers. In one room there were 6 beds containing 4 females 9 males and a dog. In one was a man and a woman, when asked as to his means of obtaining a livelihoods he replied that she begged for them both because he could not face it.

This was a fine athletic man apparently full of good living and about 38 years of age. In another bed was a young man blind. He stated that he was begging, his wife and child, and dog were with him. He said he was from Bradford in Yorkshire and had come from Todmorden that day, and was going to Blackburn the following day. In the other room were 4 beds containing 3 females and 5 males. One of the women about 25 years old, and of handsome person, said she got married 6 weeks previously and had parted from her husband, who had a home in Rochdale.

She was going a hawking. Total 2 rooms 10 beds 21 persons. In a third house, one room was furnished for lodgings and contained 17 beds and 16 persons, 7 females and 9 males. In one of the beds were 2 women, one was from Bolt-le Moors, a loom weaver, 36 years of age, spitting large quantities of blood and very far gone in consumption. She said she had buried her husband and three children and had no home.

In a fourth house there were in one room, used for lodgers 4 beds and 7 persons, 3 women and 4 men. In one of the beds was a young man and his wife, married two days previously. He was in work as a weaver, and she had left a situation as servant in the principal inn in the town. STATE OF THE ROADS AND HIGHWAYS. Some of the streets are paved with square stone, and the greater part of the public footpaths are flagged.

The material is abundant and cheap. The streets called King Street, Irwell Street, Union Court etc, are paved in this manner, but they can scarcely have been repaired since they house were erected. The pavements of the carriageways in nearly every part of the town are in a dilapidated condition. This

will not be wondered at when it is stated that no surveyors of the highways have been elected by the inhabitants for the last two or three years and that there have been no rates collected, not any reparation of the highways during that time. The Old Tonge road is in a very disgraceful condition, with a foul stagnant channel alongside. Mr Robert Smith, mill owner there, informed me during inspection that for ten years he had been anxious to have this road repaired, but the owners of the property on the opposite side would not pay half the expense. Many of the lanes and the greater part of the courts are entirely unpaved, and the surface soaked with excrementious matter.

DEFECTIVE PRIVY ARRANGEMENTS AND CONSEQUENCE STATE OF THE SURFACE OF THE TOWN.

A great number of the privies in Bacup are constructed of rubble stone, without lime, they are placed frequently in front of the street, have no doors, no drain, no seats, nor any receptacle behind for the soil. The details which I will bring before the board are revolting to humanity. I was informed during the inspection that it is commonplace for two females to go together, and for one to stand outside and spread her garments to screen the other.

The following is some of the evidence given. At the opening of the enquiry George Ormerod, Esq, J.P. complained at the state of the privies and pigsties in the town. Mr James Haslam, Innkeeper says, " Many of the privies are built against houses, and close to the doors and when they are emptied emit a bad stench " Daniel Baron, Esq, Says " I am a mill owner in Bacup I myself have had to go to half a dozen privies before I could enter one without pollution. I have started at the top of Irwell Street and down Back Street, and visited all I have come at, some I have found occupied and others as I have already described. I have gone round by the water course and given them all a call in the same way, and then come out at the top again without any success. I could add more but this will be sufficient for my conviction ".

George Hamilton Esq, says " I am a cotton spinner, and having just heard the evidence of Mr Whitaker respecting the indecencies practised within view of the inhabitants passing along the streets, I beg to say that I can fully corroborate his testimony, and would add that it extends even to grown up individuals. I have frequently witnessed myself". In the place called Down The Yard, there is such a scarcity of privies that the people send their children out into the open air, and the soil is accumulated in heaps. In the New Waterloo beerhouse, there is an open privy in the kitchen. At Bank House on the western side of Newchurch road, there is a plantation, and inspector Norris, of the county constabulary, informed me that people are obliged to come from the town into the Plantation to obey calls of nature. In Newchurch Road, there are several open privies in front of the houses in a most filthy state.

Ann Hardman keeps a bakehouse, and has a privy at the end of the house, on inquiry she said "The other night we could not eat in the house for the horrible stench". In King Street, Dr Stewart says. " Some of the people use chamber utensils, and empty them into the street, and in summer the smell is very offensive". In Cat Banks there are 23 families to one privy, and 12 families to another. Dr Stewart stated that there is very much low fever present there. In St James street adjoining the river, there are privies in the houses, and the soil drops down into the river bed. In the Old Tonge road there are 42 dwellings and a factory with only 2 privies. In Bridge Street, the principal street of the town, Mr Lawrence Lord has a privy constructed under the public highway. In the Door stones, John Pilling's wife, makes tea cakes for sale she says "

The damp and water from the privy at the back comes through the wall on the staircase. I stuffed a rag in to stop it, but it still runs onto the floor". In Newgate there is a similar privy draining through a wall and in front of a house in Higher Newgate there is a most filthy channel with about half a cubic foot in every foot run of semifluid offensive soil and other refuse. It is stated to be carried down with the refuse from the privies and by every flood and deposited in the cellars of the lower part of the town. Immediately adjacent is a house occupied by James Stansfield .

He has a daughter 39 years of age, who had a bad fever 12 months since, and has never recovered her health. There are heaps of night soil, all about this house to such a extent that it is scarcely possible to walk without getting the feet into it there is one small filthy privy for 12 houses. In Yorkshire street there is one privy for 20 houses and in Earnshaws new road one privy for 10 houses, In Lord and Howarth's property there is 10 houses with one filthy privy., stated by the tenants to be very offensive. In Lane Head Lane. there is one privy for 16 houses the maximum distance which the inhabitants have to go to reach it is 96 yards and the minimum is 35 yards.

It is also used by persons passing by. In Higher Hempstead's, the inhabitants are better supplied with privies than any other part of the town. But here there are no cesspools or underground drains. and the windows and doors of houses opening in immediate contiguity. Mr Samuel Stott inspector of nuisances says " I was appointed last Friday week. Before that time nothing was done to remove the surface nuisances from the town. I consider Bacup to be a very filthy place". During the inspection of the town the nuisance inspector pointed out to me various localities from which he had , within a day or two, caused from two to six cart-loads of decomposing surface refuse to be removed. In the Down The Yard, he stated that from one place six tons were taken the day previously. In Yate Street I saw a great heap of offensive matter, thus spoke of by John Fielding's wife, " We have lived here five years.

That heap was before the house when I came and had Never been removed. When the sun shines it smells very unpleasant. I have five of family. The passage adjoining the home is very filthy. There are many houses that have to get their water from a well 100 yards away". On the Rochdale road I saw and accumulation of about 20 loads of ashes and refuse on the road side.

PRESENT STATE OF THE RIVER IRWELL.

The River Irwell is made the receptacle for all solid matters that are found to be inconvenient or unprofitable. All old building materials, and all ashes and cinders from the houses, and from all the steam engines in the town. The inhabitants never seem to have considered that while it is was very easy to raise the level of the bed of the river, it was not easy to raise the level of their houses. Every flood sees the water overflow into the cellars and lower portions of the town. I saw many hundreds of loads of ashes, cinders, lime, and brickbats, in heaps as much as eight or nine feet high, and sometimes extending two thirds across the stream, all of which had been hot in since the last preceding flood and were waiting for the next flood to be levelled or carried away.

ARTIFICIAL PUBLIC DRAINAGE OF THE TOWN

There is no public drain on the Spotland side of the river. On the Newchurch side there are several, but of the most inefficient kind. The main drain, which is intended to carry away the sewage of the town is about 4feet deep from the surface of the ground to the bottom and formed with a flat stone

bottom and top and dry rubble sides, 3feet by 2 feet 6inches. In the house occupied by Mr James Greaves, in Temple Street, I saw a drain in the kitchen, immediately below the floor, full of decomposing refuse and the hollow below the ash grate, under the fire place was full of sewage water. In the same neighbourhood the drain near Mr Carters stable was quite stopped up. I was requested to examine the cellar of the New Waterloo beer house, which has a public drain passing on two of it's sides and found that it had very recently been shoe top full in foul water. I found in several parts of the town strong complaints of the stench from slaughter houses the refuse of which runs along the surface of the streets 40 or 50 yards.

PRESENT SUPPLIES OF WATER.

I visited the places from whence the water is chiefly obtained and the following are some of my own observations and the information obtained on the spot. The first was Down The Yard spout,. Here people were getting water for cleansing, and other domestic purposes though it was said not to be used for food. The stream was about half a inch in diameter and looked more suitable for application to agricultural land as liquid manure than for any domestic use. There were at least a dozen women and children waiting with cans for water.

The water at Bank house spring is of much better quality but the supply is very small. Dr Stewart advised me that about 200 houses obtain their water from this well. and that they often have to wait many hours before they obtain a canful. Persons of all ages and sexes of course have to wait and it was stated that the most demoralizing conversations took place. Dr Stewart added that illegitimacy is more common than in many towns.

Peggy spout is a well at Lane Head some distance from the bulk of the population and about 340 yards from the centre of the town. I selected from the persons waiting for water, one of the eldest the wife of Abraham Stott, who said in answer to my enquiries "We have lived at Lane Head about 10 years. We have no other water near but Peggy spout well. We are not short of water in winter but in summer it dries up , and then we have to to Broad Clough, to Mr Whittakers Cawl, where it comes through the wall, and we catch it in a pint pot. That will not be less distance than half a mile and we have to carry it up hill.

Many scores fetch their water from there. They fetch it into Bacup which will be about three quarters of a mile. People sometimes get up at 2 or 3 o'clock to get a canful. They often have to wait a hour for a canful". Esther's spout or well is on the Yorkshire road is said to be the most copious spring and the best in the place.

STATE OF THE BURIAL GROUNDS.

I never saw burial grounds in a more objectionable condition than some on Bacup. The burial ground attached to the Baptist chapel at Irwell Terrace is much crowded it is not only small.

The ground at the old Baptist or Ebenezer Chapel, has all thee appearance of being quite full. At the Wesleyans Chapel the graves are numerous but the ground is not full, because a recent alteration in the buildings as afforded more grounds. The Wesleyan Methodist association burial ground is of very small area and not full. The churchyard has been raised considerably by the numerous interments and foul drainage water oozes through the wall in wet weather and runs across the footpath on the Burnley Road. In hot weather the smell is stated to be very offensive. I found fragments of human

bone, and coffins in several places especially where a grave was opened about a week previously. I was informed that graves are dug six feet deep where it is possible but there are coffins covered only half a yard with soil. The following is the evidence of Mr Lawrence Bridge, "I am sexton of the church in Bacup,. About 8 internments take place per anum in the churchyard,. The greater half of the ground is watery in wet weather the water would be within three feet of the surface. Many graves have numerous bodies interred in them.

I come as near as two feet sometimes from the coffin lid to the surface. The greater part of the churchyard is clay the remainder soil. I have been sexton for 21 years. In breaking up old coffins, I find besides bones , decayed bodies, even if the bodies have been interred 40 years or more I find this black stuff like slime. I do not know all the graves and their depths. I sometimes use a iron rod and lush it down to see if I can find a grave.

There are two drains in the churchyard they are below the bottoms of the graves, and make the church yard more dry than it would be otherwise. Those drains run direct into the River Irwell. and the drainage of the churchyard passes through the town".

The full Public Health Report can be read by visiting the Bacup Natural History Museum. Areas mentioned in the report : Cat Banks... Was situated on Rochdale Road and covered the area from the Empire Theatre upwards to the area once known as Station Steps. Down The Yard ... Was the area once known as Temple Court or the are that we know today as being the Market.