

' From lightning and tempest, from plague pestilence, and famine, from battle, murder and sudden death, Good Lord deliver us '

John Stow, the Elizabethan historian told that in the 5th century AD when the Britons were engaged in a lingering war with the 'Scots' a bitter plague fell among them, consuming in a short time such a multitude that the quick were not sufficient to bury the dead'. Later antiquaries cast doubt on this chronicle but certainly from shortly before the Norman Conquest until 1665/66, the years of the most popularly recorded 'Great Plague', at least twenty epidemics of various virulent infectious diseases took savage toll of the population of London and other parts of the country, the worst of which without doubt was the Black Death, or 'Great Mortality', in 1348-49, which not only devastated England but many other parts of the world. Accompanied as it was by a period of natural disasters, earthquakes, storms, floods, droughts and famines it must have convinced Christian populations at least that the end of the world was imminent.

Half to one third of the people of England perished, devastating the economic and agricultural structure, cattle roamed unattended, the crops rotted in the fields and the dead laid unburied. The Lord Mayor of London, faced with overflowing graveyards in the City, bought 13 acres outside the walls to bury more than 50,000 people in a year and the Bishop of London contributed another 3 acres called Nomans' Land. Later epidemics in 1603 and 1625 claimed a total of over 70,000 London dead, a similar toll to that of the Great Plague of 1665/6.

' Whereas it has pleased Almighty God to visit the United Kingdom with the plague called Cholera ' the preface to the Cholera Prevention Act 1832 is synonymous with the resignation to disaster as Divine Judgement which persisted into the 19th century, thus regarded as something nothing could be done to prevent, and which might even have a higher purpose. In later years a Nonconformist preacher could tell his congregation ' There have been three great social agencies, the London City Mission, the novels of Mr Dickens and the Cholera.... '

Charles Strutt, along with others of his time, called it ' King Cholera ', perhaps with superstitious deference to the disease which still ruled in the less salubrious parts of his circulation area and there is no doubt of the power which this scourge wielded , even in an age when disease and death were so commonplace. However one might well speculate that without its visitation, as the preacher opined, the progress of public health improvements in the first half of the 19th century would have been much slower, so perhaps in some mysterious way, for all its fearfulness and the terrible toll it took of unfortunate souls, it was an Act of God.

The first outbreak of Cholera had occurred in Britain in 1831, with the earliest cases reported in the north of the country. It was believed to have originated in Russia, two English doctors went to St Petersburg to study the disease and a board was set up to advise on preventative measures.

A few years earlier, in 1829, the radical writer , Robert Southey included a prophetic statement in his work ' Sir Thomas More ' that the plague, ' that scourge ' was still possible as in former times ' and were it once imported, do you suppose it would take with less violence among the crowded population of the metropolis than it did before the Fire ? On the contrary, the ravages would be more general and more terrible for it would inevitably be carried everywhere. What if the sweating sickness show itself again ? Can cause be assigned why it is not likely to break out in the 19th century as in the 15th ? What if manufacturies were to generate new physical plagues ? What if smallpox should have assumed a new and more formidable character ? '.

Smallpox was another killer, despite the introduction of free vaccination and the opening of the London Smallpox Hospital in 1850. Other serious infectious diseases were Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever, and Typhoid. In the 1840s, the Headmaster of Rugby School, Archibald Tait, who was later to become Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury , lost his five young daughters in the space of a month with Scarlet Fever. ' God has dealt very mysteriously with us' he wrote in his diary, again significant of the popular belief that disasters of this kind indicated some divine reprimand.

That disease was so rife is not surprising when one makes even a superficial study of conditions in cities in the first decades of the 19th century and especially the early years of the reign of Queen Victoria when whole areas were being developed in frantic haste, with homes of all kinds, from mansions to the most squalid jerry-built terraces and tenements, to accommodate the rapidly increasing urban population. During the period from 1841 to 1861 the population of Greater London rose from 17 to 23 million and every year thousands more inhabitants were somehow piled into the ants' nests of mean streets, some fallen from better times, others hastily thrown together by speculating builders. Not a cellar or a shed that <sup>could</sup> accommodate a human soul was overlooked.

The tenements told their own story in the name they were given, rookeries, and such places existed only yards from Charles Dickens' comfortable little home in Church Street, Kensington. Dickens' novels especially 'Bleak House' gave a vivid picture of London at that time when the last thought of any builder, even of the highest class, was whether there was an adequate sewerage system or water supply to serve the occupants of his new houses.

Jennings Buildings, situated just south of Kensington High Street, on an area roughly that now covered by Kensington Court, was one of several of the necessary colonies of working people needed to serve the more affluent residents of a new neighbourhood, providing homes, however squalid, for the 'brickies' building the new houses, the washerwomen, market gardeners, dustmen, yardmen, scavengers and sweepers. This particular community was already notorious as one of the worst in London, being described as 'for closeness and filth without parallel west of St Pauls'. In addition to Jennings itself there was Birds Alley, Palace Place (no less suitable name could be chosen) and New Court. The 1851 census showed a population of 500, many from Ireland, numbers of lodgers and families living in one room.

Even the dead suffered from overcrowding with the old church yards literally bulging with bodies and cemetery companies struggling with legislative and financial problems.

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' The Times ' described burial grounds as 'consecrated cesspools ' At St Olave's Burial Ground in Bermondsey a woman reported seeing four heads of dead bodies protruding from the newly made graves and at Bunhill Fields the 100,000 bodies already interred there were being added to at the rate of fourteen fresh corpses being buried in a single grave.

The mistaken belief that Cholera was caused by the miasma or evil smells which arose from such places inspired the early moves to tackle the ever increasing problems of the cities ' dead, which were long overdue , although it was not accepted until many years later that the disease was transmitted mainly by water borne bacilli. John Snow, a General Practitioner in Soho who charted the area of an outbreak of the disease there in 1854, found that everyone infected had used the same pump in Broad Street (now Broadwick ) and asked the Board of Guardians to put it out of action. Snow had already published his theory of a link between pollution from excretia and water-borne fever in a booklet in 1849 but he could not convert his fellow doctors who remained convinced that the general causes were airborne atmospheric impurities which emanated from dirt, poor drainage and lack of ventilation. In fact it was not until the 1870s and even later, following the research and discoveries of Louis Pasteur, that it was generally accepted that cholera was conveyed by bacilli in the intestines transmitted in various ways, wither physical contact with excrement, by flies carrying the organisms from excrement to food, or by the drinking of water polluted by excrement ( germs surviving in a watery environment for two weeks or more ).

Strutt, in common with others of the times was obviously convinced that bad smells were a certain cause of infectious disease. Malaria ( contrary to popular belief, a European disease which we took all over the world) is named from the Italian ' ' Mala ' ( bad ) aria ( air ).

In 1849 Cholera caused 14,000 deaths in London alone and a further serious outbreak occurred in 1854, among the victims being the Rev E. Proctor Denniss, the Vicar of St Johns , Notting Hill, recorded in ' The Gazette '

Charles Strutt gave many editorial inches to the nuisances of 'putrid pools ' in various parts of the parish as well as open ditches and sewers , although this was over twenty years since the first English Cholera outbreak and a decade after the first

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efforts to reform public health and sanitation laws.

Henry Mayhew, wrote thousands of descriptive words on the horrific conditions of squalor endured by thousands of London's poorer citizens. His 'London Labour and the London Poor', two massive volumes published in 1851, were collated from a series of articles he wrote for 'The Morning Chronicle'. Mayhew drew much of his material from the streets, not only the pavement sellers, entertainers, and pedlars, but the sweepers, scavengers, touts and beggars, and those who found their living from the city's debris. It seems incredible today that such trades should have included the disgusting occupation of collecting dogs' excrement to be used in the tanning of leather, a process which gave it the euphemistic description of 'pure'.

Compared to this livelihood, the manure-gatherers who made their living from the tons of horse droppings in the streets, were engaged in a relatively genteel occupation. One of Henry Mayhew's statistical studies (of which he was extremely fond) was to calculate the total weight of horse droppings, not to mention those of all the sheep, cattle and pigs brought into London 'on the hoof' for slaughter. The many nurseries and market gardens around the city were ready buyers of this comparatively innocuous waste, but would also accept human sewage (the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park made a considerable profit from the sale of waste from its lavatories. !)

These trades may have been among the most spectacularly nauseous but the living conditions of many thousands of people in so called 'respectable' occupations were such that it is amazing that, as they had feared, even more virulent diseases such as the Black Death did not decimate the Victorian cities and it is interesting that it was the economic consequences of disease rather than its effect on human suffering that inspired the early reforms.

Many names have survived from the Victorian era into modern times. honoured for the part they played in social reform, but that of Edwin Chadwick does not trip readily off the tongue, perhaps because he was a civil servant rather than a politician and because his business was so often concerned with the mundane subjects of sewage and cemeteries. Chadwick's involvement with the control of disease sprang originally from his realisation that sickness was a major contributor to poverty and destitution.

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Whether Chadwick would have been so zealous in his crusade to clean up the country had he not been a disciple in his young days of Jeremy Bentham is a matter of conjecture. Benthamites had been schooled in practical progress without the hindrance of traditions with the maxim 'Does it serve the greatest happiness of the greatest number?'. Drains and graves seem hardly likely to arouse great feelings of rejoicing but a little thought convinces how unhappy we could be without their proper care. Oddly enough, the Benthamite principles which featured efficiency and democracy, also included less government interference in people's affairs, or 'laissez faire' as the policy was called, and Chadwick's measures for improved public health certainly did not conform to this. The pigkeepers of Notting Dale, for instance, had no wish at all to be cleaned up.

When reforms in the system of Poor Law relief set up the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834, Edwin Chadwick had been appointed their secretary and his advocacy of central control to co-ordinate services quickly stirred up parochial feelings among those who did not want to see their petty power usurped, But this was minor compared to the re-action to his Report of 1842 on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain which aroused the fears, if not the conscience of the more literate citizens, especially as the squalid disease-ridden areas he exposed were not necessarily separated from the more salubrious districts. Often, as in the case of Jennings Buildings, they were in the heart of them, owing to the need of the well-to-do to have their tradespeople and servants close at hand, with mews, stables, courts and alleys behind the elegant terraces. In 1853 when Charles Henry Harrod, wholesale grocer and tea merchant from Cable Street, Stepney, took over a small shop in Brompton Road, the side lane next to his premises was occupied by a rat-ridden wood-yard and the nearby North Street was described as 'a mass of filth from end to end'. Chadwick's reports and the writings of Henry Mayhew, who garnered his information from the sewer men and scavengers, made horrifying reading.

In the heart of Westminster was an ancient sewer behind Great Smith Street which was disintegrating and discharging a sickening smell into the nearby houses. The official survey of sewers from the Westminster Workhouse in 1849 revealed a 'chamber in which hangings of putrid matter three feet in length hung from one of the

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underground chambers like stalactites '. At the end of the chamber the sewer passed under the public privies the ceilings of which could be seen from it.

In Belgravia and Eaton Square ( where the great builder-developer Thomas Cubitt had only recently constructed numbers of stately mansions ) there were many faulty places in the sewers which abounded in noxious matter stopping up the drains and smelling horribly '. Matters were no better in Hanover and Berkeley Squares where the sewers ' were in such a fragile state that to flush them through to remove their loathsome deposit might result in their collapse '.

In 1825 during the development of smart Brompton Square, there was a problem because the main sewer ran into an old inadequate gully and the early inhabitants, including the speculator developing builder himself, petitioned the Westminster Commissioners of Sewers urging them to rebuild the Yeoman's Row sewer. They claimed that Brompton Square sewage was wholly inoperative and serviceable only as a cess-pool, containing a ' continual depth of water and filth 3 feet above the bottom to which the houses of the petitioners are rendered damp and unwholesome and the foundations injured in various ways.'... Fashionable Pelham Street in South Kensington may be surprised to know today that in 1842 one of the developers, James Jolley, was relying on an open sewer called Blacklands to drain the houses, but shortly before building began part of the sewer was diverted, upsetting his plan and leaving the new homes ' so inundated as to render them uninhabitable ' and the new residents soon left them in consequence of which Jolley went bankrupt.

Living as he did on the outskirts of London, although Kensington was rapidly being built over in common with the other suburbs, Charles Strutt and his family were at least within the reach of fresh air, even if their sewers were in no better condition than any other part of the metropolis. Kensington Gardens was only yards from their front door with its grassy slopes, groves of trees and the Serpentine, although the latter was a dubious amenity as that too was fed by a polluted stream.

Until 1855 the Westbourne , originally a clean rivulet which fed the Serpentine, of Long Water, as it is officially called,

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was linked to sewers from Kensal New Town and Hampstead. In January 1849 a meeting was held at the Cadogan Institute, Sloane Street, to discuss the 'filthy state of the Serpentine'. The Chair was taken by a Dr Copland who said that in his travels he had 'seen many unhealthy rivers in Africa but none as bad as the Serpentine' and only the cooler climate of England was stopping its breeding of fatal diseases, the water was polluted with sulphur and ammonia as found in cess pools, bathing was dangerous and rowing disturbed the mud and released stinking gas. A resolution was passed demanding that the Serpentine should be cleansed, following up an earlier petition signed by 2,000 residents of the area and sent to the Commissioner of Woods and Forests who administered Hyde Park.

The response to the petition does not appear to have been very effective or speedy, for six years later, in 1855, Strutt's 'Gazette' reported on September 12 that on the previous Wednesday the Commissioners of Woods and Forests had given orders for covering the piece of water which runs from the Serpentine river known by the name of Hudsons Strait, and the clearing out of the Serpentine. The holes in which too many people have lost their lives are to be filled up and the bed of the river levelled. The various sewers which have long run into it from Notting Hill and Bayswater will be carried into a new channel.'

Despite this apparent improvement, there are reports much later in the 1850s that a load of lime had been put into the water in an effort to clean it, having little effect other than driving the eels and fish up to the surface so that crowds of people waded into the water in an attempt to catch themselves a free dinner. At the north end of the lake a dirty pool which served as a catchment for the Ranelagh sewer remained until 1860 when the Serpentine was eventually drained and filtration installed, and this became the attractive garden with fountains as we know it today.

Charles Strutt did not need to walk to the Serpentine to savour putrid pools for he had plenty nearer at hand and used his journalistic skills to describe them and urge their removal. On October 11 1854, his 'Mirror of the Month' a summary of local and national news, records that the main topic had been 'the Cholera and the Crimea'. 'In the metropolis during the early days of September the epidemic exhibited a local intensity

beyond that of any of its previous ravages, The Registrar General in his special appendix to the return of all deaths from Cholera and Diarrhoea recorded the fearful fact that in the dense neighbourhood of Golden Square there were streets of houses in which it might be said there was not one in which one had not died.' A month earlier, Strutt had commented in his editorial that 'the Cholera epidemic was fearfully thinning the population of our towns but drawing from the visitation the moral lesson ' the voice of the devastation to the living is obey the conditions of life and ye shall not die - fulfil the easy impositions of Providence and in health and happiness you will find the certain reward . Such at the present period is the cry of the Cholera, to the government, to municipal bodies, know your duties and perform them; to the private individual it proclaims personal carelessness leads to public calamity; to the rich, bringing all the sanitary appliances suggested by knowledge to the properties over which they are stewards; employers of labour must not be satisfied while those under them daily break the laws of health; workshop and counter must be cared for and seen to, ventilations and cleanliness made a diurnal performance. The mechanic must reform his habits in his home and become temperate and clean for himself, his family and his fellows '.

The way the authorities dealt with outbreaks of epidemics and in particular Cholera is described in a ' Times ' report of an earlier outbreak in September 1849 at the end of a week in which 3183 had died of the disease in London. A meeting had been held by the Directors and Guardians of the Poor of St Pancras in the new Vestry Rooms in Kings Road Camden Town ' to receive an Order from the Board of Health relative to the progress of the Cholera '.

The Order enjoined a system of house to house visiting by four duly qualified medical men who should carry medicines with them to administer on the spot to all persons labouring under diarrhoea or other premonitory symptoms of cholera.' This plan was opposed by members of the Vestry who considered there was no necessity whatsoever for such a measure which one member described as ' a perfect farce calculated rather to produce than to check the progress of the disease and tend to create fear and alarm in the minds of the inhabitants which might bring on attacks.' The Board's

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A Plague on all Your Houses.

spokesman agreed that fear might do this, but he thought the house to house visiting would produce confidence.

'The Times' continued to describe a case of Cholera in Birmingham in which the Board of Guardians had been told of one Mary Manning, a poor widow, with two young children, residing at No 7 house in No 10 Court, London 'rentice Street, <sup>who</sup> had been attacked with Cholera and 'despite every possible assistance, medical and otherwise warm clothing, fuel, bedding, brandy, beef tea and other stimulants, plus two active nurses and a messenger, the poor woman had sunk under the disease. The Committee ordered that the house in which the woman died should be thoroughly cleansed and fumigated and that the owners and occupiers of all houses in the street should be ordered to whitewash them or face prosecution under the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act'.... but no one thought of examining or improving the water supply !

In another part of Birmingham a row of houses was set aside for Cholera contacts, isolated and cut off from the workhouse by means of a brick wall. In Newcastle ninety-one cases had been reported in the same week, thirty-four terminating fatally. 'The disease made its appearance first in Low Walker' reported 'The Times' where it raged with great virulence especially in two places generally known as Scotch Row and Battle. In these two rows of houses which may be compared with most for filth and dirt, 25 fatal cases occurred'.

This report is typical of the concern and effort ( or perhaps panic would be a more accurate description ) shown when epidemics occurred, only to be replaced by the old apathy when the disease abated. After the first Cholera outbreak the Poor Law Commissioners had set up a Medical Committee to enquire into the conditions of the poorest areas of London, but their horrific report was disbelieved by Parliament which considered it an exaggeration, although Bishop Blomfield, the Bishop of London, persisted, and asked for a further report. This called for Boards of Health to be appointed and paid for by the local parishes who were naturally only too keen to disband them once the danger of the disease abated. Remedies were based on sanitary measures, especially water supplies but no one took much notice until the re-appearance of Cholera in 1848 when areas where the death rate was over 23 per thousand were compelled by law to establish Boards of Health, as well as those where ten per cent of the residents petitioned for one. (call)

Edwin Chadwick's work in London had its parallel in that of another north countryman, James Kay (later Sir James Kay Shuttleworth) Almost the same age as Chadwick, he practised as a physician in Manchester, which was also Chadwick's birthplace, and it was during the Cholera outbreak there in 1832 that he wrote a pamphlet on 'The Moral and Physical Conditions of the Working Classes,' in which he said 'No event is more calculated painfully to excite the public mind than the invasion of pestilence.'

'He whose duty is to follow the steps of this messenger of death must descend to the abodes of poverty, must frequent the closes and alleys, the crowded courts, the over-peopled habitations of wretchedness where pauperism and disease congregate round the source of social discontent and political disorder in the centre of our large towns and behold with alarm in the hot-bed of pestilence ills that fester in secret in the very heart of society.'

Shuttleworth, (who was later in life to become the Secretary of the Privy Council Committee on Education and was instrumental in much of the work on the establishment of state-supported schools) laid the blame on the disinterest as well as the ignorance of the moneyed classes and certainly twenty years later, when Charles Strutt was labouring on his editorials in his Church Street print shop the "ensington aristocracy appeared to be largely unaware of the terrible conditions which still pertained within yards of their newly-built mansions and terraces.

They might have been better informed had they read the 'free sheet' which was now weekly fluttering through their letter boxes (provided it was not, as Strutt had feared, 'detained too long in the kitchen'). Strutt's mouthpiece (or more likely his own pseudonym) for most of his rhetoric on the subject was 'The Inspector'. 'Anxious for the public good' he writes, 'We have secured the services of the above personage to ..... beat the bounds of this and surrounding parishes and at the same time beat anything bad that he may happen to find in them....'

The Inspector was soon to report that 'the open filthy sewers through Middlesex are really a disgrace to the country.... Not to speak of the effluvia or the unwholesomeness of such sinks of disease the very sight of them makes the stomach loath and turn with disgust.'

' The Commissioners of Health and Sewers are a mere humbug while such nuisances are permitted to exist .....'

He was right that the Metropolitan Sewers Commission which had been set up in 1843 after Chadwick's report had been miserably ineffective. In the City of London vested interests had even managed to keep independent of the statutory requirements imposed on the rest of the metropolis and appointed its own Medical Officer of Health . This apparently re-actionary decision was actually the most progressive they could have taken for the man they chose was a young surgeon on the staff of St Thomas's Hospital John ( later Sir John ) Simon, who was to become one of the most brilliant medical men of the century, although he was one of those who in the first Cholera epidemics opposed John Snow's theory of a water-borne infection. In fact Simon's policy of flushing through the City's sewers actually spread the disease to other areas .

In August 1855 the ' Inspector's Notebook ' in ' The Gazette ' drew the attention of the Board of Health to ' several open dykes and sewers in the neighbourhood . For the preservation of life it becomes necessary that these abominable and offensive sinks of nastiness and disease be covered over. We are surprised the Police authorities do not look after one of these stagnant sewers which lies at the rear of the Police Office, Brook Green ' and in the next issue the complaint is repeated with a plea to 'cover the dykes over as they are a most filthy nuisance and fruitful source of discomfort and disease'. ( Leigh Hunt had moved to Brook Green that year and must have noticed that the fresh air was not at all 'free from anything repulsive,' as he had said of Kensington)!

Mr Strutt's own favourite putrid pool was situated at Warwick Road, Kensington, which he described luridly on August 22 1855 as ' half an acre of stagnant water covered with a reeking skin, apart from islands of rotting flesh counted in scores, the carcasses of animals starved or slaughtered by boys, and thrown therein for easy riddance. Turning away nauseated from the festering flood a large factory meets the eye and the beholder trembles for the hundred operators doomed to labour for bread on the frontiers of death '.

Strutt's protests and appeals for action are echoed by numerous correspondents. A long letter signed ' Ratepayer ' complains that

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if his child let off a squib in the street he would be liable to a penalty for endangering the lives of Her Majesty's subjects, whilst the lives of the whole neighbourhood were endangered by this impurity complaints having been made a year earlier, yet here we are in the middle of August with a temperature of over eighty and the stagnant pool grown richer with festering carcasses '

Through the baking hot summer of 1855 Charles Strutt and his correspondents kept up a ceaseless campaign of protest. 'Is there no useful inhabitant who will take up these matters? Must we be conservators as well as journalists?' he complains. In September an inhabitant of Kensington Crescent, who may or may not have been useful, reported that living in that elegant street (which is now the site of Charles House a large block of government offices) he and his neighbours were so much annoyed by the very offensive smell coming from the Warwick Road pool that many were compelled to keep their back windows entirely closed. 'A lady residing in one of the houses being obliged to seek medical aid entirely from this nuisance which is a great distress to the parish'.

This was supported professionally by Dr George Hull of nearby St Mary Abbots Terrace who reported having had three calls to severe cases of 'diarrhoea bordering on Cholera'.

Meanwhile Strutt was drawing attention to 'yet another and far fouler pond on the boundary of Holland House near the Holland Arms another source of intolerable and suffocating smell. This foetid tank derives a constant supply of filthy fluid from the sewer flowing from the more distant upland, indeed it is the sewer itself.' There was a cab stand planted within the focus of disease in this valley of death, he warned, cautioning all those who might hire the vehicles not to open the windows 'lest their conveyance should prove to be the boat of Charon bearing them to the Stygian shades' (Strutt's poetry was not confined to his verse!).

He had also found another 'fruitful source of disease in a large field on the north side of Gloucester Road leading from Kensington to Old Brompton Road. 'The proprietor should look to it at once the effluvia is so offensive and the clouds of insects and miasma are so perceptible to passengers that the stomach rises as they pass.

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A letter signed ' Young Kensington ' included an extract from a pamphlet on ' Man in his Physical, Intellectual and Moral Relations ' on the influence on health and comfort rising from noisome and pestilential effluvia , extracted from masses of animal and vegetable matter and putrefactive changes undergoing by heaps of refuse allowed to accumulate in stagnant pools and so impregnate the atmosphere with gases incapable of supporting life '. These when breathed and received into the blood, said the writer, were capable of producing that disorder generally termed fever hence the importance of cleanliness drainage, sewerage , the removal of accumulating nuisances and an abundant supply of pure and fresh water in the dwellings of the poor '. Although the writer does not give the author of his information it could well have been Edwin Chadwick whose progressive views were identical with these, although little notice had been taken of them.

Strutt's rhetoric , as that of all those who supported the cause of a cleaner and healthier London , was literally bogged down by smells. In a booklet published the same month as Strutt's local campaign an unknown author describing himself as ' Pedestrian ' records the ' thick grey mist filling the Thames valley for the space of four miles or more. Not smoke, for it hangs there at sunrise before the fires are lighted and <sup>s</sup>equally dense on Sundays although half the fires are out, the ball and Cross of St Paul's is totally obscured and city spires scarcely perceptible to spectators on Waterloo Bridge '.

He then describes a walk from Hampstead to Brixton. ' on reaching Camden Town the sun's rays are sensibly weaker, at Holborn , the cloudless sun at noon ceases to throw definite shadows. We left Hampstead with the perfume of fields in our nostrils but now a semi-putrid smell, distinct from <sup>the</sup> well known odour of coal smoke, is everywhere perceptible and as we pass forward a sense of nausea commences, followed in a short time by feelings of uneasiness in the bowels.

' The river is crossed and discomfort of both stomach and bowels continues until when ' Pedestrian ' reaches Brixton or Tulse Hill, the nausea abates and at Norwood the irritation subsides in great measure , but leaving behind it the unmistakable symptoms of approaching diarrhoea'. From this account, Pedestrian considers why some densely-populated areas escaped the full ravages of the disease while other more salubrious districts

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were stricken and became ' valleys of death, regions of pestilence in which both rich and poor, clean and unclean, were seen perishing with sudden pains '.

No one, of course, deduced that they were all drawing their water from the same contaminated supply . That is if they had any water to draw, for in between his pleas for a clean up of the parish's stinking pools and sewers Strutt writes of ' Drought in Kensington ' where the right water in the right place is alarmingly absent, having written previously about the wrong water in the wrong place. ' It is hardly believable that a community professing Christianity should exhibit an anomaly that reduces its character below the better practical ethics of pagan Rome. '

' Yet within the circumference of this fashionable and salubrious suburb there is an extensive portion of its inhabited district consisting of some hundreds of houses and containing more than a thousand souls existing with a supply of water not only wholly inadequate to the hourly wants of its numerous labouring population but of so deleterious a quality, being poisoned in its sources by the percolations from neighbouring impurities. '

The area to which he is referring was ' the long thoroughfare known as Earls Court and the newer more westerly street called Warwick Road. ' This privation, he says, owed its origin to ' the gross neglect and utter forgetfulness of human health and happiness in parties entrusted with the public weal. It matters little to know with whom the original fault of this serious omission lies, the builders of the houses in question in neglecting to furnish these tenements with proper means for the supply of that necessity of life, <sup>or</sup> the present landlords, that may or may not be prevailed upon to correct this past neglect and prevent further evil under the Metropolitan Water Act of 1852, which he quotes as empowering the Church W<sup>ar</sup>dens and O<sup>ver</sup>seers of the Poor to order a landlord to instal such a water supply if it could be provided at a rate not exceeding threepence a week and if the owner failed to comply, carry out the work themselves and recover the cost from the owner.

For all this apparent enlightenment, Strutt's missionary zeal is directed more towards the popular conception of cleanliness of the body's exterior being next to Godliness rather than on the internal effects of bad water on those who drank it.

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Dirt, he said was ' the barrier at the school door and at the temple of God. Dirt, the pernicious presence of which suffocates the pores of the skin and breeds disease, making man a walking pest , it chokes the finer channels of the mind and suffocates his soul. Strutt may have been reading Henry Mayhew who quotes a street scavenger as saying he never went to any church or chapel because ' sometimes I hasn't clothes as is fit and I suppose I couldn't be admitted into such fine places in my working dress.'

London's water supplies, in common with those of all other cities and large towns had been poor enough when their populations had been a half or even a quarter the size of the great Victorian urban emigration. Just as the city dweller threw most of their filth into the streets so they drew their water from the wells and streams into which much of the waste matter seeped, parish pumps could give only a limited supply and a fraction of the people's needs ( In 1855 the House of Commons was told that in St Pancras there were fourteen public pumps for the use of 170,000 inhabitants

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In medieval days conduits carried water from places such as Tyburn to the City, but as these fell into disrepair water carriers made a living by transporting filthy Thames water in leather bags on paniers borne by horses . The first London water company was at Chelsea at the beginning of the 18th century but this only drew its supplies from the contaminated Thames . The fact that nearly a century and a half later the Southwark Water Company was drawing its supply from Battersea ( described as the 'filthiest stuff ever drunk by a civilised community ' ) is significant that these private water companies, whose workmen often resorted to blows as they battled for their rights of installation , were more interested in profits for their shareholders than the public good. There were two water companies in Liverpool paying high rates of interest but the city had no public pumps or fountains no standpipes and no water for fire fighting.

In the 1830s the artist-engineer, John Martin had visualised a romantic plan to bring fresh water into London from the River Colne in Essex, presenting his scheme pictorially with Elyssian scenes of sparkling streams flowing through verdant valleys with water falls and fountains. Some years later he turned his artistic and engineering skills in the direction of sewers presenting another plan for two enclosed conduits, one on each side of the Thames

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to carry the City's 'excrementitious matter' from Millbank to the Regents Canal where it could be taken by train to Essex, and the other, on the south side, to transport it to Surrey, where it could be sprayed over the crops ! The sewers were to be constructed beneath promenades beside ornamental quays of unrivalled grandeur. The Institute of British Architects received Martin's plan with acclaim, doctors welcomed the exercise its promenades would provide for the working classes 'lack of which produced a melancholy and morose disposition and encouraged drunkenness.' The proposed cost of £ 1,500,000 was considered cheap and MPs were enthusiastic, even the Archbishop of Canterbury gave the project his blessing. Then in 1844 the Royal Commission for "Metropolitan Improvements rejected it, preferring another scheme and being unconvinced that the manure provided would be useful. Meanwhile the private water companies were assuring "Londoners that God provided special organs to prevent one being poisoned by water, . . . No wonder poor Martin went quietly mad !

The power of the water companies, many of whose prominent and wealthy shareholders were Members of Parliament, was so great that even when the Metropolitan Water Act 1852 ( quoted by Charles Strutt in his 'anti drought' campaign ) forbade the taking of water from the Thames below Teddington there were so many legal loopholes that the legislation had little effect . It was not until 1902 that the private companies were totally bought out, receiving large amounts in compensation, to establish the Metropolitan Water Board.

In 1851, when the Great Exhibition, forbidden to sell intoxicating liquors, was required to supply pure glasses of water , free of charge, to visitors 'Punch' commented that whoever could produce a glass of water fit to drink in London would be contributing the rarest and most universally useful article in the whole exhibition !

The inadequacy of the water supply not only effected drinking water ( and water was not regarded as a beverage by the Victorians ) but the efficiency of any attempt at the modernisation of sanitation, even the richest houses which had installed water closets could not make them work without proper water pressure . The furore over London's drains continued for over two decades after Charles Strutt was making his impassioned pleas for an end to drought and putrid pools

Although cess pools were made illegal in London in 1847 and house waste had to be disposed into sewers these sewers still flowed into the Thames which consequently stank even in the coldest weather. In 1859 the authorities were depositing 250 tons of lime a week into the river in an attempt to dispel the stench and Sir Joseph Bazalgette of the Metropolitan Board of Works reported that in that year a total of 4281 tons of chalk lime, 478 tons of chloride of lime and 50 tons of carbolic acid had been used at a cost of £17,000. As the sewer outlets were exposed at low tide even the Houses of Parliament did not escape the noxious fumes and sittings had sometimes to be suspended when the members could no longer endure them.

If some of the most illustrious in the land had to suffer in this way it is perhaps surprising and commendable that a 'little man' such as Charles Strutt should have shouted so loudly about the conditions on the outskirts of London. Perhaps this is why, although very concerned about smells around the area which is now Kensington High Street, he did not waste too many column inches on the Piggeries and Potteries up the hill in the Dale.

William Faulkner, writing his 'History and Antiquities of Kensington' in 1820, described this north west corner of the parish in terms which are so glowing it seems impossible that such a dire change should have taken place within such a short time.

'The whole district appears to have undergone but little alteration in respect of culture and division of land for several ages' he said, 'The distance from London is scarcely three miles yet the traveller may imagine himself to be embosomed in the most sequestered part of the country and nothing is heard to interrupt the course of his mind but the notes of the lark, the linnet and the nightingale'.

Faulkner was writing this when Charles Strutt was a year old, but even as late as 1840 maps of the district still showed meadows with rural names such as 'Pond' and '18 acre, Middle Meads and Marshes', but by the time 'The Gazette' was born, with Strutt not even in middle age, the scene had changed to one of abject urban poverty and squalor.

It was clear that the days of the hawthorn trees and primroses in the woods were numbered by the time that Princess Victoria left Kensington to become Queen, as potteries began to overtake the Green Lane that led to Notting Barns Farm.

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It began with the tradesmen of Westminster and Mayfair, such as the chimney sweeps and tinkers being driven out as these areas became fashionable and when building development reached Paddington the pig keepers of Tyburn were also forced to emigrate westwards. The story goes that the first of these to set himself up in the Dale was Samuel Lake, who, turned out of his home and business as a sweep and scavenger in Tottenham Court Road, found a hovel there and was soon joined by a bow-string maker from his old neighbourhood. Already a brickmaker called Stephen Bird was capitalising on the heavy clay around the base of St Johns Hill having been joined in the 1830s by Richard Adams, the building lessee for most of the houses in the new Holland Park Avenue who was manufacturing clay tiles, drain pipes and chimney pots.

The Green Lane was now known as Pottery Lane, kilns had replaced the willow trees along the meadow streams and the Poor Law Commissioners reporting on some of the Dale cottages in 1838 said they were actually built over pools of stagnant water. In some instances the floors had given way and the other end of the hovel being a bit drier, contained the bed or straw mattress on which a whole family slept. Until 1844 there was no control of any kind over the standards of building and any sort of shed or shack, pig sty or hen house could be put up for human or animal habitation. In between the cottages were marshy patches where pig manure and rubbish lay and rotted in the pits left behind after the potters' clay digging.

Although the Poor Law Guardians complained to the Westminster Commissioner of Sewers, in whose jurisdiction the area lay, it was to be told that the ditches were private and therefore beyond their control. A building/speculator, Richard Roy, who was working on the adjoining Ladbroke Estate and wished to extend his province westward was also told when he complained about its disgraceful neglected state that he should undertake the drainage and sewerage work himself.

No wonder that in 1848 Cholera broke out in the Dale, for in the two previous years conditions had become so appalling that the average age at the time of death was 11  $\frac{1}{2}$  years old ( the average for the rest of London was 37 $\frac{1}{2}$  ). When Edwin Chadwick ordered the Commissioners to survey the area in 1849 it was found that 130 people lived on each disgusting acre, plus 300 pigs. The largest of the stagnant lakes had become so big that it was known as 'the Ocean', on the shores of which stood

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the new St James National School.

The Commissioners report also disclosed that the whole district was skirted by 'foul and pestilential ditches with smaller but equally noxious gulleys running into them from the houses, loading the atmosphere with their exhalations . The unpaved streets were rutted and choked with refuse and the houses of a most wretched class many being mere hovels in a ruinous condition filthy in the extreme and containing vast accumulations of garbage and offal '

The water provided by the well in many of the yards was said to be 'so percolated by the foul drainages as to be wholly unfit for domestic use ' and the only reasonable water supply the residents could obtain was that sold to them by Mr Bird the brickmaker. The only covered sewer in the area was too high a level to be any use and although in 1851 the Commissioners were beginning to lay sewers to the east and west ( including Counters Creek on the Hammersmith border which was to be filled in to allow the building of the Birmingham Bristol and Thames Junction ailway ) Cholera had claimed many victims. When these deaths, and those from typhus and typhoid fever, rose to an even more alarming level the Board of Guardians decided that something must be done about the pig-keepers. Spurred on by the General Board of Health they issued prosecutions to force their removal.

At Hammersmith Police Court in September of the year of the first Cholera outbreak a court order was issued for the clearance of the pigs from one of the worst places, plus a threat to clear the whole area of offending livestock. The magistrate however tempered his ruling with a plea that the poor people who owned the pigs would not be too greatly injured by the loss of their livelihood. The inhabitants immediately petitioned the Guardians and were reprieved so long as they kept their house, or perhaps more correctly, their sties, in order. Their success may also have had something to do with the fact that a member of the Board of Guardians owned property in the Dale and the fear of the Board that they would have more paupers on their hands is the pig-keepers lost their businesses.

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In 1853 another prosecution was brought, conditions having deteriorated rather than improved, and this time the 'Islanders', as they were now known, were defended by their own lawyer, who claimed they had a right to keep their trade and that they had been there long before the area became built up. 'If a pig is a nuisance, why we should have no more pork !' It was a nuisance to the pig-dealer, he said, to have a respectable neighbourhood and the best thing the new residents could do if they did not like their swinish neighbours was to remove.

The pig population did fall between 1849 and 1856 but deaths were still spectacularly high and when Cholera broke out again in 1854, with more fatalities than in the previous epidemic, the death rate rose to between 40 and 60 a thousand, the greatest number of victims being children under five. A statement by one of the medical officers of the General Board of Health in 1850 had already said that the amounts of sickness and death in the Potteries district could be equalled but scarcely exceeded by any part of England.

The re-organisation of London's municipal bureaucracy in 1855, the Metropolis Management Act, made new vestries and district boards responsible for local sewers with statutory powers to force owners of houses to construct drains leading to the sewers and new houses could not be built without proper drainage. The vestries were also made responsible for the paving of the streets and lighting them, a job which they did not do very well if Charles Strutt's readers' complaints can be credited.

A new Nuisances Removal Act gave a wider scope for other official action and the vestries were also ordered to appoint their own medical officers of health. One of the first of these to be installed by the Kensington Vestry was Dr Francis Goodrich, who reported to them that the inhabitants of the notorious Dale were 'sallow and aged, the children pale and flabby, their eyes glistening as if stimulated by ammonia'. They were living in old railway carriages and vans and 'the water supply was exiguous'. Small pox was ten times more fatal than in surrounding districts. Their principal sources of livelihood, he said, were still the rearing and fattening of pigs ( totalling 1,041 in 1856 ) and the preparation of pig-wash. This consisted of animals' entrails, often in a state of putrefication, which they collected from hotels and clubs in the West End and from local slaughterhouses, boiling it down in coppers which gave off 'the most sickening odours.'

Dr Goodrich recommended the removal of the pigs and that water should be laid on to each house, privies replaced with proper drained water closets and the 'ocean' filled in. The Vestry was still concerned about the livelihood of the pig men and said they should be dealt with cautiously. There were more prosecutions but over fifteen years later there were still 1,000 pigs in the Dale and the area was not fully cleared until the end of the 180s with more prosecutions and even violence towards the new sanitary inspectors who enforced the orders and many of the piggeries being moved only a few yards over the border into neighbouring Hammersmith.

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