

Document 23 (Online Companion)

General Board of Health: Instructions to the special investigators assigned to undertake house-to-house inquiries in the cholera outbreak area¹

Benjamin Hall, the president of the General Board of Health, issued a set of instructions for a house-to-house investigation in the St. James, Westminster cholera field. The three investigators structured the first portion of their summary **report**¹ as a seriatim reply to these instructions.

Heads of inquiry in the districts of St. James, Westminster
which has suffered most from Cholera

report: Excerpts in Document 28 of the book, fully transcribed and annotated in Document 28 (Online Companion).

1. The inquiry to be a house-to-house inquiry, especially and primarily in the streets which have suffered most and in regard to the houses in those streets which have had cases and deaths.

2 [a]. The inquiry will resolve itself into the condition of the atmosphere before and at the beginning of the attack.

A. Structural peculiarities of the streets as regards ventilation.

B. Nuisances, slaughter-houses, noxious trades, etc.

C. Smells in the streets and their source, gully grates, gutters, etc.

Whether the gully grates are trapped, whether cases and death [were] more numerous in houses near gully grates.

D. Smells in houses and their source; [were] such smells worse during the night or in the morning before the houses or shops were opened?

E. Whether the house had privy or water closet or cesspool, and the position of these; whether complaints of smells from them; whether they were in good condition; whether the water closets were supplied with water; whether the house drainage stopped; whether the sinks were in good condition; their position; whether smells from them. This district has been lately drained. Ascertain how many of the houses have drains connected with the new sewers; whether the house drains pass under the house to reach the sewer; the structure of the house drains, pipe or brick drains, and their

¹ General Board of Health, *Report on the Outbreak of Cholera in the sub-districts of Berwick Street, Golden Square, and St. Anne's*, by Donald Fraser, Thomas Hughes, and J. M. Ludlow (London: HMSO, 1855), in References (Online Companion).

condition; whether subject to stoppage or smells from them.

F. Examine the basements as to the depth of the floor below the level of the street; whether there had been any accumulations of house refuse in these basements or in the adjoining cellars before the outbreak. Consider the effect of these conditions on the general ventilation of the house, especially at night. Ascertain whether the dustmen and scavengers are regularly employed in removing rubbish, what their contract is, [and] whether it is fulfilled.

G. Examine the houses as to their general cleanliness and means of ventilation. Examine also the back yards and inquire what their condition was before the epidemic. Note if they were flagged, or filthy, etc.

H. Examine whether the disease occurred in the upper or lower flats. Get, if possible, the proportion of cases in the flats.

I. Estimate as closely as you can the condition of the inhabitants as to overcrowding, personal cleanliness, habits, diet, etc.

K. Get the number of cases in each house, and the number of deaths of persons who lived in each house.

K.: If a J sub-heading existed, the instructions, the inspectors did not address it in their report.

2 [b]. Examine the water supply as to—

A. Its source.

B. Quality

C. Amount.

D. Whether drawn from pipes or water butts, and the condition of the butts.

3. Note the general condition in the streets and courts, and inquire what was the state of the cleansing before the outbreak.

4. Examine whether the disturbance of the ground in making a sewer through the old burial ground in Little Marlborough Street, or the filtrations from it into the sewer, or the drainage of any nuisance into the general sewerage of the district had had any effect, or whether the sewers had accumulations in them that might have been injurious.