



COURTS AND TENEMENTS IN WELLS

Introduction

Governments in the 19th century operated a policy of *laissez faire* which meant minimal intervention in people's lives. Wealthier people had little idea of the lives of the poor and believed that poverty was the fault of the people themselves. If a person was poor it was as a result of their failure to save any money, drink, gamble or refuse to work. Or because some people were simply inferior as shown in the last verse of the hymn 'All things Bright and Beautiful' which is not sung today:

The rich man in his castle/The poor man at his gate/God made them, high and lowly/And ordered their estate.

It was believed that the poor should help themselves to avoid poverty, an idea called self-help. However, there was an increase in the number of charities set up at this time to provide help and support. Some were large organisations such as the Salvation Army or Dr Barnardo's children's homes, but most of them were run by well-meaning middle class women. It was believed that charities would prevent the uprising of the poor against the middle and upper classes. Charity provision often depended on where you lived and whether you were considered to be the deserving or undeserving poor.

Wells, at this time, was a city of contrasts: substantial houses sitting in generous sized plots housed the affluent and well-to-do of the city, whilst many of the poorer labouring classes lived in cramped, poor-quality housing known as 'courts' or 'tenements', usually with inadequate sanitation and water supplies.

What do we know about these poorer areas of the city?

St Thomas Street

The censuses, started in the early 1800s, provide a wealth of information which can paint a picture of life over this century and beyond. (See Appendix 1 for more information on censuses.)

The area of St Thomas Street was an ancient part of the city and was known as Byestwelles in the 12th century. It was always impoverished and inhabited by artisans and labourers. By the 19th century, diseases such as typhoid and cholera were common and the area was known as 'Turkey,' perhaps because it was considered primitive and heathen as at that time there was no church. It is an example which shows the changes in street name. In 1841 St Thomas Street was known as East Wells and extended further than the present street.

From 1841 to 1861 the population remained constant at 650 persons as did the number of households. In 1851, there were 635 people in 146 households. Various occupations were listed such as an excise officer and two policemen as well as agricultural labourers. By 1851, there were additional occupations such as rag and bone collectors and by 1861, paper workers and railway labourers were listed. Married women were often described as not working outside the home but many took in washing or did seasonal work. The number of agricultural workers declined between 1841 and 1861 by about half. By 1891, 639 people lived in 148 households.

Housing in St Thomas Street

Some houses which faced the street had large plots behind them and others had long narrow plots left over from the medieval system of farming. More houses were erected on these plots forming a square, known as a 'court', accessed by a narrow passageway or tunnel from the front and sharing a courtyard and services. The end wall marked the boundary of the property and was where the privy was built and the ash bins sited. Sometimes the far end was also built up so the privy would be in the middle. If the access to the courtyard was difficult for the dustmen and night men (who cleared the privy waste), this was a serious health hazard. A family could produce about two tons of ash annually. In the early 19th century there was no sanitation and water was not laid on. Water had to be collected from a well, spring or pump. The courtyard might also have housed livestock. If the houses were several storeys high, the amount of light and ventilation available was limited. The house facing the street commanded a higher rent as it would have windows facing out and thus access to more light.

In the volume entitled *'Estates of the Town Council of the City of Wells'*, 1848,¹ Mr Edward Lovell

¹ Wells City Archives, WCC/382

and others lived in five tenements with a wash house, privy and yard.

There were ten courts along St Thomas Street on the 1871 census with a total of 57 dwellings and 219 residents. The largest was Millers Gardens with nine houses and 34 residents. Lane's Court had seven houses with 21 residents and Candy's Court, seven houses with 27 residents. By 1881 there were nine courts (three had disappeared with two new ones) with 52 houses and 205 inhabitants.

The 1891 census was the first to give details of the accommodation in each house with fewer than five rooms. None had more than four rooms and Millers Gardens had four houses containing only two rooms. In 1891, there were eight courts with 42 houses and 180 inhabitants. Lane's Court had disappeared by 1891.

On the Wells Sewerage Plan of 1860, houses numbered 25-32 and 35-36 appear to have access to two privies behind those houses (figure 1). There is no symbol for a pump or well so it looks as though the inhabitants had to go through the passage beside No 25 to use the well there. There was also a pigsty at the end of the plot.

Further down the street, on the opposite side to Fountain Inn (still in use today as a restaurant) houses 128-134 had access to possibly two privies but no well or pump. The nearest pump is behind the Goat Inn.

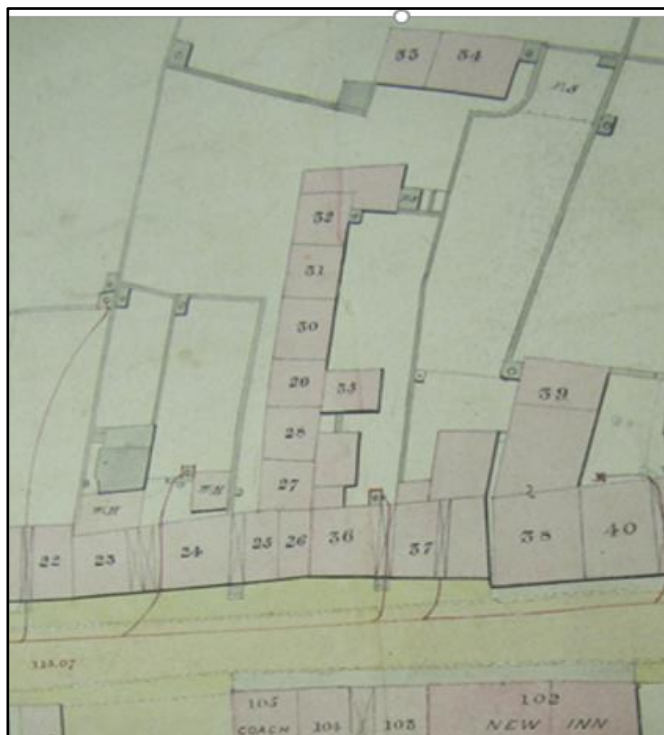


Figure 1 Extract from Sewerage Plan of the City of Wells (1860) showing houses 25-36. © Wells City Council Archives (WCC/108/2)

The smell from the slaughterhouse behind No 13, the stables behind the Goat Inn and

No 135, not forgetting the pigsty, must have been very ripe in the summer.

Reports made at the time by the Medical Officer of Health and detailed in the local paper (Wells Journal) (see Appendix 2) highlighted the conditions in which residents of St Thomas Street lived and the type of housing.² The Council also considered the state of the housing at its Council

² The original reports of the Medical Officer of Health are preserved in Wells City Archives, along with reports by the Inspector of Nuisances and by the Surveyor.

meetings.³ Lane's Court came in for particular attention and was the subject of many reports of Council proceedings over the years.

In January 1884, the Sanitary Inspector and Medical Officer inspected Lane's Court and concluded that the poor condition of the closets was not as a result of the drainage but lack of regular cleaning and that the houses were dilapidated, recommending inspection of all the courts in the town. The situation had not improved by January 1889 as Mr Lane was issued with a notice for the demolition of the cottages which he objected to on the grounds that he had whitewashed them and the floors were in good repair. He was ordered to repair the front cottage and demolish the rest. He didn't carry out this order and craftily sold on the properties to Mr Merrick in November of that year. Mr Merrick was told to ensure that all the residents moved out. Mr Merrick suggested that he remove the roof to make sure they did. It would seem that they did move out as the Wells Journal for 9th October 1890 lists '*Plans for the conversion of premises in Lane's Court into St Thomas's Coffee-room; for a shop and residence for Mr Lockyer in St Thomas Street*'

Residents' living conditions were not the only concern. Dr Richard Jenkyns, Dean of Wells, 1845-1854, was concerned for the spiritual health of the inhabitants of St Thomas Street, which was considered a "*ghetto for the poor and disreputable*"⁴, and made plans for the erection of a church which still stands today. Dr Jenkyns died in 1854 before the project could be started but his widow, Mrs Troth Jenkyns, carried out his wishes and the foundation stone of the Church of St Thomas was laid in 1856 and the building was consecrated in 1857. By this time, Mrs Jenkyns had also died as she caught a chill at the laying of the foundation stone. The first Vicar, George Blisset, was a relative of Mrs Troth. The building was an impressive sight on the main road from Bath into Wells, the main thoroughfare entering that side of the City.

³ Wells City Archives holds the Minutes of the Council meetings.

⁴ http://www.stthomaswells.co.uk/about_history.html (accessed 26/04/17)

The Courts of Southover

There was a similar housing situation in other parts of Wells including Southover.

The volume entitled 'Estates of the Town Council of the City of Wells', (1848) shows plans of properties in Southover.⁵ The properties inhabited by Mr William Allen and others (numbered 49,

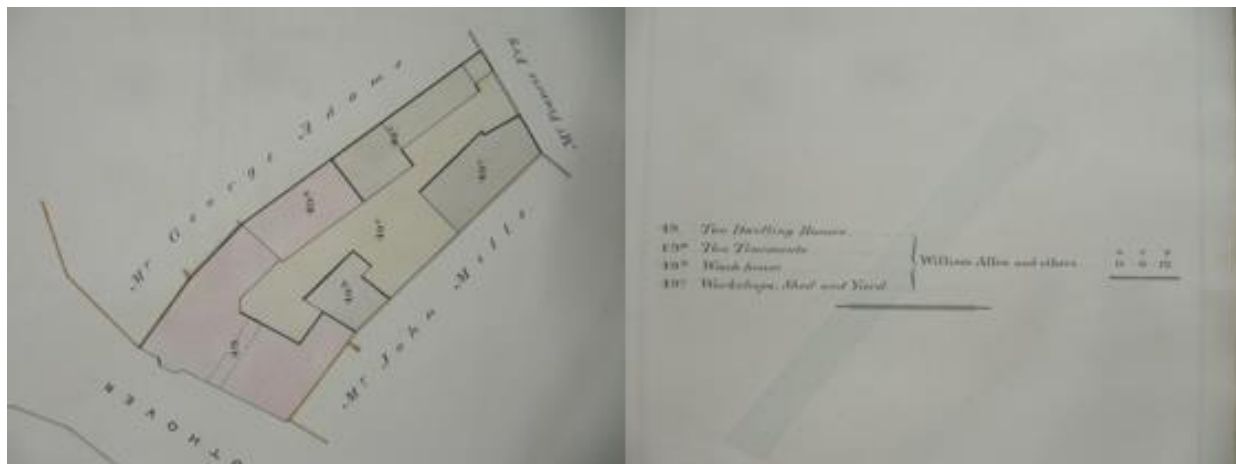


Figure 2 Properties on Southover inhabited by William Allen and others, as shown in 'Estates of the Town Council of the City of Wells' (1848). © Wells City Council Archives (WCC/382)

49a, 49b and 49c in figure 2) amounted to two dwelling houses, two tenements, a wash house and workshops, shed and a yard.

The courts were unpleasant but the Medical Officer of Health was unwilling to recommend

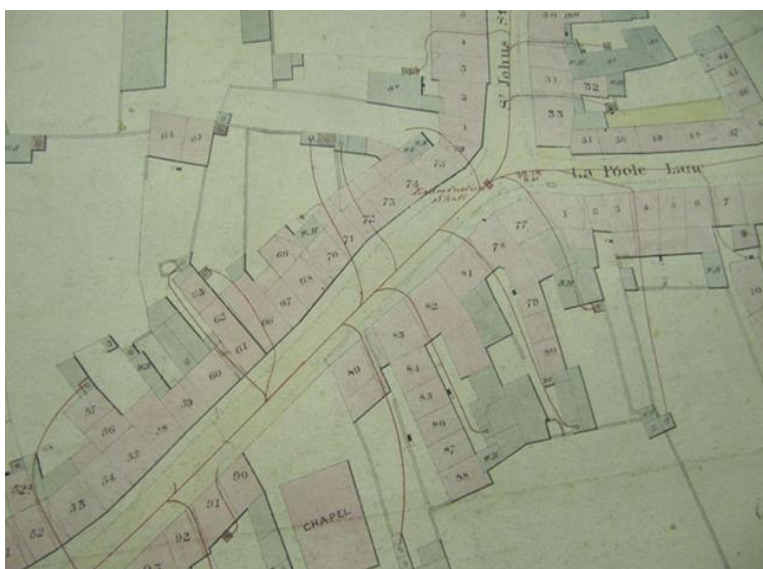


Figure 3 Extract from Sewerage Plan of the City of Wells (1860) showing the courts at Southover. © Wells City Council Archives (WCC/108/1)

closure as there was little alternative accommodation so the inhabitants would have nowhere to go. The Wells Journal for 26th June 1858 describes "the stench in Southover from the blood from slaughter houses, decayed vegetable matter, the water in which vegetables had been boiled with sundry unmentionable ingredients, all mixed together in the gutters, sent forth an odour...the stench was so intolerable that it

would have filled us with wonder that human beings could endure it". There were several slaughter houses shown on Southover on the Sewerage Plan of 1860.

⁵ Wells City Archives, WCC/382.

The Courts of Chamberlain Street

The 1861 census shows the numbers of inhabitants of the houses in Chamberlain Street and their occupations. The houses at the eastern end were large, with several bedrooms and living areas and the owners or lessees employed servants. Accommodation at No 8 consisted of three sitting rooms, six bedrooms, good kitchens and a garden. George Blisset lived here with his widowed mother, two unmarried sisters, a butler, garden lad, housekeeper and lady's maid. He was the first vicar at St Thomas Church and later moved into the new vicarage. Other occupations included an engineer, solicitor and land surveyor. Dr Livett, who was then Mayor of Wells, also lived in the street.

The other end of the street was known as Beggar Street. Those who did work were servants or agricultural labourers. The Almshouses were built here and housed many who were retired or unemployed

By 1875 the owner of a property was responsible for keeping it in good order and the Council had the right under the Artisans Dwelling Act to buy and demolish slums if they were not improved. Smith's Court was on the corner of Chamberlain Street and Priest Row and was owned by Mr Sherston. Mr Sherston agreed to sell his properties to the Council but then decided that the sum agreed was not acceptable. It took several months for the situation to be debated and in the end Mr Sherston agreed to their demolition. The original correspondence of 1890 is in Wells Museum Library.

Houses 2-4 (shown in figure 4) were typical back-to-back housing, sharing a rear wall with houses 9-11. Houses 1-6 and 9-14 shared a privy and a well but occupants of the houses fronting Chamberlain Street had to go round to the entrance to the back yard in Priest Row. There was no easily accessible washhouse.

These courts were the subject of reports by the city's chief medical officer and surveyor in February 1890⁶. The former *“reported the dwellings to be unfit for*

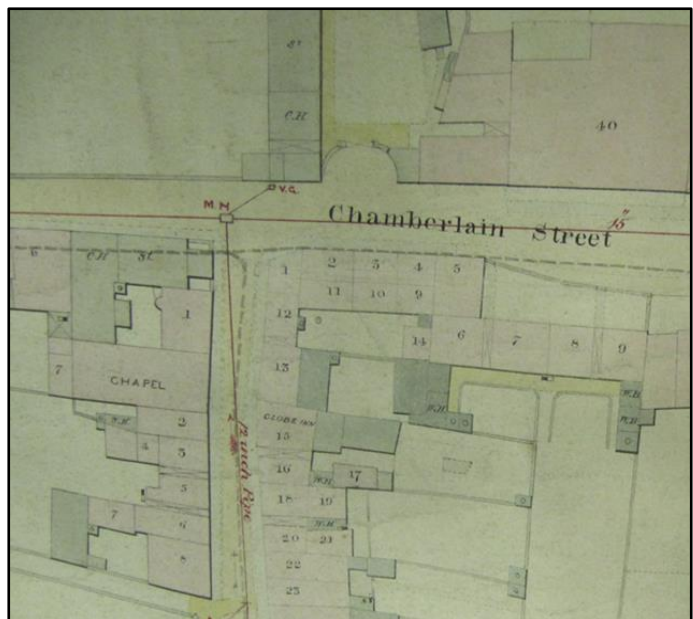


Figure 4 Extract from Sewerage Plan of the City of Wells (1860) showing Smith's Court on the corner of Chamberlain St. and Priest Row. © Wells City Council Archives (WCC/108/1)

⁶Advertiser for Somerset, February 1890



Figure 5 Extract from Plan of the City of Wells (1860) showing more substantial housing on Chamberlain St. © Wells City Council Archives (WCC/108/1)

No 25, (shown in figure 5), further up the street, with access to a privy, pump and washhouse. The well-to-do inhabitants would use a chamber pot emptied by the maid and water would be brought to the room for washing.

Whilst living conditions in the courts and tenements of Wells were poor they were far worse in larger urban areas.

The Sanitary Report of 1842, the work of Edwin Chadwick, showed that in 1840 86,000 persons in Liverpool lived in 2,400 courts.



Figure 6 London slums, engraving by Gustave Dore, 1872 (From Dore, Gustave and Jerrold, Blanchard, London: a pilgrimage. Grant, London. Facing Page 120). Wellcome Library, London. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Sewage Treatment in Wells

Sewage was initially allowed to run off into the street, or the nearby stream or river. Courts such as those in St Thomas Street had a privy which became full very quickly as so many families used the same facilities.

The privy was a small pit latrine or dry toilet which emptied into a bucket or directly onto a compost heap. The bucket was emptied into the street or the contents removed each night by the night soil man with his horse and cart. The structure was either built of wood or brick with a

human occupation, because, first, they were in a ruinous and he believed dangerous condition and secondly, because there were no sanitary arrangements whatsoever". The medical officer also noted in his report that these dilapidated Courts and others elsewhere in the city "were a disgrace to any civilised community". (See Appendix 3 for complete article.)

Contrast this with the large house at No 25, (shown in figure 5), further up the street, with access to a privy,

slatted wooden seat or a plank with holes cut into it. A chamber pot was used at night and then emptied into the privy. Ash was often poured into the privy in an attempt to keep it fresh.

A sewer to drain East Wells was first proposed in 1854 by the Turnpike Trust which would drain into a ditch south of the Palace moat, the ditch to be covered over.⁷ In 1858, Wells City Council initiated its Sewerage Scheme. This arose from a move to improve public health (especially to respond to cholera epidemics). The scheme provided new public sewers and drainage, and all people with property on the line of the new sewers could connect their private drains if they wished. The Sewerage Plan of 1860 was produced as a consequence of the Sewerage Scheme.

As pollution of water courses became a concern, cities attempted to treat the sewage before discharge. Early techniques involved application of sewage on agricultural land and this was the case in Wells in 1882. In the late 19th century some cities began to add chemical treatment and sedimentation systems to their sewers. There was a 'settling pond' in Wells which was an unsatisfactory way of separating solids and allowing the water to flow away. The Local Government Board in Wells recommended the septic tank system be installed in 1898.

With advances in technology, the flush toilet was introduced with a u-bend to prevent gases and smells from entering the house.

Water supply in Wells

In 1451, Bishop Bekynton granted a charter allowing the use of water from the well pools within The Bishop's Palace grounds to be used by the inhabitants of the city. Bekynton built a new Well House in the grounds of the Palace and channelled water from this to the new conduit in the Market Place, thus providing a source of fresh water to the townspeople. The overflow from the conduit was channelled down the gutter on the north side of High Street helping to wash away the detritus from the market stalls and other rubbish. At the same time, he diverted a stream, coming from one of the well pools, to run under new houses, known as 'New Works, that the bishop had had built on the north side of the market place. This underground stream was accessible to the householders within their houses and it is believed that it was used to wash away household rubbish as well as serving as a primitive water closet. This stream was further diverted to feed into St Andrew's Stream which had long fed the mills of the town. An additional set of pipes brought drinking water from the Well House to the inhabitants of New Works. It wasn't until 1803 that pipes, feeding water from the moat, were installed to provide a flow of water down a gutter on the south side of High Street

⁷ Wells Journal 2nd September 1854

The 1848 Health Act encouraged local Boards of Health to provide sewers and by 1866 local authorities were responsible for sewers, water supply and street cleaning. In 1866, there was an editorial in the Wells Journal putting the case for no water supply in the City as it was unnecessary, the poor would be too lazy to use it and it would be a cost to the ratepayers. The 1875 Act made this a duty. In August 1874, the Medical Officer of Health for Wells reported, "The City has been provided with an abundant supply of pure water through the [Water] Company's mains, yet most of the inhabitants are unwilling to avail themselves of it, and prefer to go on with the slow poisoning of themselves and their families by using water from suspicious sources".⁸

By 1890 the Council were overstepping their duties and piping the water in the channels to standpipes to provide water for street cleaning rather than pay the Water Board. This matter was soon resolved as reported in the Wells Journal (5th June 1890).

The first reservoir in Milton was constructed in 1871 and fed by a pipe from the spring at Hole's Ash, Upper Milton. In 1894 a second reservoir was proposed. At the same time concern was expressed over the increased use of water and the danger of supplies becoming depleted.

In 1889 and 1894 the water (which was initially supplied by a private company) was cut off at 10pm and not restored until 6am as supplies were low. There was no water on Wednesday afternoons so that repairs could be carried out. This caused many complaints as sewage could not be washed away, and there was no water available in an emergency such as a fire.

Health and safety

As well as the belief that governments should not interfere in people's lives, it was obvious that public health improvements would be costly meaning that taxes would have to be raised.

As the incidence of diseases like cholera and typhoid increased, and the investigations of reformers like Edwin Chadwick and John Snow showed the ways in which diseases were communicated, the government had to react. Several new laws were passed which dealt with hygiene, housing, working conditions and medical care but to begin with these were often permissive.

The second cholera epidemic resulted in 21,000 deaths in 1848. The first Public Health Act was passed in this year but it was only compulsory in towns which were Municipal Corporations and Wells was a Corporate Borough. The Act established a central Board of Health and local boards could be set up if more than 10% of the local population petitioned for one. There was no central

⁸ Wells City Archives, WCC/40/7.

inspection authority for Boards outside the legislation. Towns where the death rate exceeded 23 per 1000 were obliged to set up a Board of Health. Measures taken in Wells over public health at this time are well documented in papers surviving in Wells City Archives. Boards of Health had been set up in the city to combat a possible outbreak of cholera in 1831-32.⁹ On 16th October 1848, a public meeting was held at the Town Hall, to consider ways and means of better cleaning the town and removing nuisances.¹⁰ A special Contagious Diseases Committee was set up the same year by the Board of Guardians of Wells Union and Wells City Council. The Minute book of this Committee survives, and includes measures taken to deal with the outbreak of cholera in 1848.¹¹

In 1853 vaccinations were made compulsory nationally but there was no means of enforcing this. There was a second major outbreak of cholera.

By 1866 it was realised that the 1848 Act had not had results. The Sanitary Act made it compulsory for local authorities to provide sewers, water and street cleaning. All houses had to be connected to a main sewer. There were also definitions of the use of cellars as living accommodation and what constituted overcrowding. Each town had to appoint a Sanitary Inspector.

The Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Act of 1868 emphasised the improving or demolition of slum housing.

In 1871 a further Vaccination Act was passed to ensure that the first was carried out.

The Public Health Act 1872 divided England and Wales into districts each with its own Medical Officer of Health. However, the duties of the Medical Officer of Health were not specified and money was required to introduce reforms. As a result of this Act, Wells appointed its first Medical Officer of Health, Dr Thomas Purnell, in 1874. His first report that March stated that there was scarlet fever in several streets and typhoid fever in Candy's Court. He observed that one of the most successful means of stopping the spread of disease – isolation of the sick – is seldom practicable in dwellings of the poor.¹² The next Medical Officer of Health, Dr Henry William Livett, urged the establishment of an Isolation Hospital,¹³ and one was later built in Burcott Road.

Richard A Cross, Home Secretary at the time, drafted the Public Health Act 1875 which

⁹ Wells City Archives, WCC/8.

¹⁰ Wells City Archives, WCC/48.

¹¹ Wells City Archives, WCC/342.

¹² Wells City Archives, WCC/600.

¹³ Wells City Archives, WCC/413.

consolidated the previous legislation. It required local authorities to be responsible for many aspects of health including water supply, drainage and sewage disposal; the removal of nuisances; regulation of offensive trades such as tallow boilers and slaughterhouses; the destruction of contaminated food; markets, street lighting and burials; the reporting of infectious diseases to the Medical Officer of Health. A 'nuisance' covered many aspects 'injurious to health' such as cess pits, black smoke from chimneys and overcrowding.

Another 'Artisans Dwelling Act' in the same year made house owners responsible for maintenance and the local authority could buy and demolish the property if it was not improved

The Control of Disease

Edwin Chadwick conducted a national investigation between 1839 and 1841 and published his findings as the *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* in 1842 under his own name, so it did not have the authority of an official document. He pointed out the correlation between the lack of sanitation, disease, high mortality rates and low life expectancy. In Liverpool the average life expectancy was 35 years for professional trades, 22 for tradesmen and 15 for labourers, whereas it was 52 years, 41 and 38 respectively in

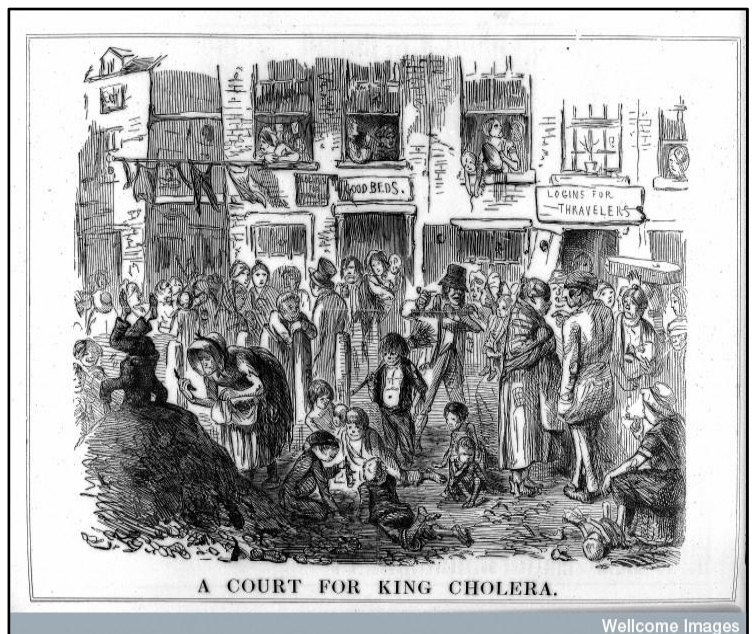


Figure 7 'A court for King Cholera' is hardly an exaggeration of many dwelling places of the poor in London, Punch Publications Ltd., [London: 1852 Page 139, Wellcome Library, London. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Rutland. As a result, a Royal Commission was set up leading to the Public Health Act of 1848. Mr Chadwick was considered rude and the following letter was sent to 'The Times';

*'We prefer to take our chance with cholera than be bullied into health. There is nothing a man hates so much as being cleansed against his will or having his floor swept, his hall whitewashed, his dung heaps cleared away and his thatch forced to give way to slate. It is a fact that many people have died from a good washing.'*¹⁴

Although the germ theory emerged in the second half of the 1800s, in 19th century England the miasma theory was prevalent. This theory stated that diseases were caused by the presence in

¹⁴ The Times, July 1854

the air of a poisonous vapour in which the suspended particles of decaying matter caused a foul smell. During the improvement of housing and sanitation, levels of disease were seen to fall so 'proving' the theory. The improvements also removed the bacteria which were the real cause of diseases. Chadwick was the first director of the general Board of Health. He was also appointed first Sanitation Commissioner.

John Snow was apprenticed to a surgeon at the age of 14 and was made a member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1838 at the age of 25. His theory was that cholera was spread through an impure water supply and he published his thoughts in an essay in 1849. He carried out a more detailed study during the severe outbreak of 1854 in Soho, London, and published a further paper in 1855.

The Wells Journal of 23rd September 1854 gives details required of cases in an outbreak of cholera and other notifiable diseases which were to be sent to the General Board of Health, including the patient's residence, type of disease, treatment and outcome. The article also gives details of the latest thinking about treating cholera with castor oil. In 1866, a notice was issued by Wells City Council to all inhabitants, urging on them the need for the utmost cleanliness in and about their houses.¹⁵

If you would like further information on the history of Wells and its buildings, you are welcome to contact or visit Wells City Archives (archives@wellsmuseum.org.uk) and Wells & Mendip Museum (admin@wellsmuseum.org.uk).

¹⁵ Wells City Archives, WCC/80/5.

Appendix 1

Censuses

The first census was held in 1801 and the only information requested by the enumerator consisted of the number of occupied and unoccupied dwellings, the number of people living in them, whether they were male or female and their occupation. In England, the government census has taken place every ten years since then, however, these earlier censuses were taken strictly for statistical purposes by the Overseers of the Poor and the clergy.

People were listed by name for the first time in 1841 with the census traditionally being taken every ten years since then except for 1941 (due to WW II). The 1931 census records were destroyed by fire during WW II.

The questions posed in the censuses subsequent to 1801 varied and became more detailed, but related to the persons resident in a dwelling on a particular date and time. Age was inexact as many did not know how old they were. By 1851 medical disabilities were to be declared but many would have been unwilling to admit that a relative had a mental or physical disability.

Appendix 2

Newspaper articles relating to Lane's Court in St Thomas Street

Wells Journal 10th January 1884

Sanitary Inspector's Report

The Inspector reported that he had accompanied the Medical Officer in the inspection of a number of dwellings in St Thomas Street and Tor Street, and had found the greatest cause for complaint to be in the courts in the rear of the former street, where the closets were used in common; and not so much from the defective drainage as from the dirty state in which they were kept, which seemed to call for some arrangement and supervision on the part of the owners to ensure periodical cleaning. In one court on the north side, known as Lane's Court, the cottages he found in a very dilapidated state. He had taken some samples of water from the different wells, and submitted them to the Medical Officer for analysing, and had also notices for removal of pipes and other nuisances. Mr Vonberg thought that there ought to be an inspection of all the courts and bad dwellings in the town.

Quarterly Report of the Medical Officer of Health

He had also examined sundry other samples of water and for the results referred them to the report of the Sanitary Inspector, in whose company he had visited and inspected various premises, especially in East Wells. In some houses the closets were in a filthy state, not the fault of the construction, but that of the occupants. One or two only required more ventilation. He likewise called attention to a block of small tenements in East Wells, named Lane's Court, which were in so bad a state of repair that they were, in his opinion, quite unfit for habitation.

Advertiser for Somerset 10th January 1889

Lane's Court

Mr Lane, the owner of the cottages in St Thomas Street that have been condemned as unfit for human habitation, appeared to show cause why the order for their demolition should not be carried out. All he had to say was that the officers who went to inspect the premises only saw one of the cottages – that he whitewashed them last summer and they needed no repairs; the floors were as good as that in the Council room. In reply to questions by Alderman Vonberg, he said he wanted £200 for the property or an annuity of 8s a week and a house. This was considered altogether unreasonable and far exceeding the value of the property, and Mr Sheldon proposed, and Ald. Barnes seconded, and it was carried, that an order to repair the front cottage

be made, and that the others be closed by the 25th March.

Advertiser for Somerset 6th June 1889

Amongst other small matters that came before the Council were the dilapidated buildings in Lane's Court, St Thomas Street, and the absence of artificial illumination during the dark nights that prevailed last month. Mr Slater rightly complained that though the miserable hovels in Lane's Court had been condemned by the Medical Officer over and over again no steps had yet been taken to close them, and he obtained a promise that the notices should be served this week.

Wells Journal 14th November 1889

Lane's Court

The Mayor intimated that just before the meeting he had had a message from Mr Merrick that he would like to see him in reference to Lane's Court. He had been told that Mr Merrick had purchased the life interest of Lane in the cottages for 6s a week, and he wanted the order to demolish the condemned cottages to be suspended for a few days. The Surveyor said he sent a notice to Lane on Saturday that he should commence to pull down the places on Monday. The Town Clerk said the order of the Council for their demolition still stood whoever bought the property. Mr Richards asked if they could not be renovated; he thought that they might be made habitable for labouring men. The Town Clerk said they were too bad for that, and had been condemned. Mr Richards proposed, and Mr Sheldon seconded, that the carrying out of the order of the Council be suspended till the next meeting. The Surveyor said that he thought it was Merrick's intention to pull down the cottages. Mr Merrick then had an interview with the Council, and explained that he wanted the Council to delay executing their order with reference to the cottages till he had had time to see what he could do with them. He had only completed the agreement with Lane that morning. He said in reply to questions, that he intended to pull them down; they were too bad to do anything with them. The Mayor said that he must see that the people left the hovels at once. Mr Merrick estimated that there would be some difficulty about that, but said he would do what he could. He would take the roof off, and if they stopped after that he did not know what he should do. The Council appeared to be satisfied with this, and Mr Merrick retired.

Appendix 3

Newspaper article relating to Smith's Court

Somerset Advertiser 6th February 1890

A letter was read from the Local Government Board, under date 27th January, stating that the Board having had under consideration the annual report for 1889 of the Medical Officer of Health, they required to know what steps the Authority proposed to take in reference to the dilapidated tenements in Smith's Court and elsewhere, which the Medical Officer described in his report as disgraceful to any civilised community, and to which he said he had drawn the attention of the Authority four years ago.

The Medical Officer reported under date February 3rd, that with regard to Smith's Court in Chamberlain Street, he reported the dwellings to be unfit for human occupation, because, first, they were in a ruinous and he believed dangerous condition and secondly, because there were no sanitary arrangements whatsoever.

The Surveyor reported as follows: - Cottages in Chamberlain Street, Priest Row and court (known as Smith's Court) in rear, - I have in conformity with your instructions inspected these premises, and beg to report as follows. They comprise four tenements, numbered 29,31,33, and 35, in Chamberlain Street, in the respective occupations of Eliza Tutton, Jos Vincent, Elizabeth Barrett, and Elizabeth Smith: a cottage in Priest Row, No 24 (now void), and four tenements in the court in the rear, two of which are void, and two in the respective occupations of Ellen Durbin and Mrs Russell, the whole belonging to the representatives of the late Geo Smith. The cottages in Chamberlain Street, and three in the court (consisting of living-room and bedroom over of small dimensions) are back to back, under one roof: consequently, both are most unsanitary from want of ventilation. They are also very dilapidated and in a ruinous condition (more particularly three in the court), and quite unfit for human habitation. The roof and chimneys are in a dangerous state. The floors of the living rooms are rough and uneven, so that it is scarcely possible to keep them clean: the lath and plaster partitions and ceilings are broken down, and the doors and windows are, from their defective state, of little use to keep out the weather. The interior walls are wet and damp, evidently arising from the water course under. Three of the cottages in Chamberlain Street have no communication with the court in the rear, nor have they any slop sink or other accommodation, without going round into the court. Consequently, the slops are stored in a vessel within the cottage during the day, and removed after dark. Closet accommodation consists of three in the court for the use of all the cottages: there is also a common tap for water supply. Having regard to the very unsatisfactory and dilapidated condition

of the houses and their relative position, he thought it desirable that the four cottages in Chamberlain Street and the three in the court at the back of Priest Row should be demolished. The house facing Priest Row and the detached cottage in rear are in a fair state of repair, although the latter, in my opinion, is unfit for occupation, but may be converted for the use of the front cottage. He concluded by pointing out the urgent necessity for providing small cottage accommodation.

Bibliography

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