

people from Abingdon had expressed interest in the Trust, decided, among other things, to amend the rules at the next meeting to increase the number of Trustees to nine. This will bring Abingdon's representation to four, making a more balanced membership of Trustees from both towns and remedying the imbalance following the decision of Abingdon Town Council to withdraw some years ago. It is to be hoped that Fr. Terence Tanner of Dover, the prime mover of the saving and restoration of the chapel in the 1960s and 1970s, would have approved.

Following a full day's activities the Dover contingent left the town associated with the name of the Saint whose name also forms part of Dover's history. He was the first Doctor of Divinity of the University of Oxford and a Canon of Salisbury before becoming Archbishop. He died on 16th November (his feast day)

1240 while on his way to Rome and is buried in Pontigny Abbey in Burgundy, France. He was canonised in the thirteenth century by Pope Innocent IV and the one surviving medieval Hall in Oxford, St Edmund Hall, is named after him. Abingdon is well worth a visit, with its wealth of history and architecture so, perhaps, should be a destination of the Dover Society for one of its outings (if it hasn't already been). Such a visit would help to maintain connections between the two towns. A warm welcome is assured.



St Edmund's Memorial Plaque in Church of our Lady and St Edmund, Abingdon

Public Health Act 1848

Jean Marsh

From a report to the General Board of Health, on a preliminary inquiry into the sewage, drainage and supply of water, and the sanitary conditions of the inhabitants of the town and port of Dover By Robert Rawlinson, Civil Engineer, Superintending Inspector, London, May 1849

After the influenza and typhoid epidemics in 1837 and 1838, Edwin Chadwick, now believed to be one of the great social reformers of the nineteenth century, was asked by the government to carry out a new inquiry into sanitation. His report, *The Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population*, was published in 1842. Chadwick, who began his career as a clerk to an attorney, progressed to the legal profession and was admitted to the Inner Temple. To support himself he wrote

articles for newspapers, an occupation that brought him into contact with the lower classes and all their social problems. Abandoning the law, he took up a new career of social reform. His research revealed that the labouring classes living in the towns and cities had a lower life expectancy than those living in the countryside. He believed that the poor sanitary conditions, bad drainage, poor water supplies and overcrowded living conditions were the causes of cholera,

typhoid and other diseases prevalent among the labouring classes. The Conservative government refused to take action on his report. However, after the 1847 General Election, the new Liberal government in 1848 passed the Public Health Act that provided for the formation of a Central Board of Health. Within months councils up and down the country were instigating public enquiries on the state of their towns.

On the 4th December 1848, the Dover Town Council instructed Robert Rawlinson, a civil engineer to act as the superintending inspector and submit a report on his findings. The inquiry began in the *Maison Dieu*, the new Town Hall, and continued all week, either in open court or by public inspection of the streets and areas around Dover. The formation of a central board of health with powers to create local boards to oversee street cleaning, refuse collection, water supply and sewerage systems was not welcomed by all. The local authorities were resentful of any central government interference. This was confirmed by Mr. Rawlinson who stated that, there was a portion of the Paving Commissioners who opposed the Act. Bavington-Jones, in his book *The Annals of Dover* wrote "Public opinion on this subject was demonstrated at a Common Hall in 1849, with the Mayor in the chair, when the vote was three to two in favour of the Act being adopted."

The Report was in several sections, the first being a description of the town and where it was situated in relation to Canterbury and London. It was reported as being one of the Cinque Ports, returning two Members of Parliament, a market town, having separate jurisdiction and the head of the Union, locally in the lathe of St Augustine, east division of Kent. The population of the town proper

was 13,872, but the figures taken from the 1841 census showed that the borough had 19,168 inhabitants. By the time the report had been written, however, it had risen to upwards of 20,000. Although some of the information does not appear to be relevant to the sanitary conditions of the town, it does put the report into context.

The authors have included a wealth of information for the historian: in many sections they digressed from the main issue to report on side issues. For example: details of four Acts of Parliament are included. Each of the acts relate to paving, street cleaning, lighting and watching in the streets and lanes in the town of Dover and several parishes of St. Mary the Virgin and St. James the Apostle... and for removing and preventing nuisances and annoyances therein. All these acts came under the auspices of the Paving Commissioners. Their jurisdiction also extended to the parishes of Buckland, Charlton and Hougham. It then digressed to explain the necessary qualifications for a man to stand for election as a Commissioner. He had to be in possession of £500 of personal possessions or freehold property in the town or the annual value in rent of £20 above reprises. He could not hold the post of mayor or Justice of the Peace. An election was held each January to replace the annual outgoing 35 of the 105 Commissioners. Only the inhabitants who were rated under the Paving Acts and who had paid their rates were entitled to vote. Though this section was not relevant to the report it could explain why the commissioners were against the Public Health Act, but at the same time it also begged the question of why they allowed the town to be in such a state of decay.

The descriptions of the condition of the town sewerage and drainage system

conjure up a horror scene for the 21st century reader. According to the report there was not a combined system of sewers and drains in many parts of the town and suburbs. Many of the better class houses stood over a cesspool, into which all the refuse of the house and water-closets passed. The cottages generally had an open tub placed under a privy seat, and this was emptied at intervals during the night into scavengers' carts; the whole operation was expensive, inconvenient and repulsive to the inhabitants. It was also noted that if the scavengers did not call at night to collect the soil from the tubs, they would be emptied by the inhabitants on the nearest waste land.

The surveyor's report to the Commissioners stated that the sewage and drainage system in the Pier District were either non-existent or in ruins. The sewers passed under houses in Oxenden Street and continued in various sized pipes into a vault that measured 30 feet wide by 8 feet high, the base of which was covered by a foot of decomposing filth. The vault was emptied through sewage pipes into a dock below the water line. Unfortunately the iron flap that should have prevented the tide flowing up the pipes was broken, and consequently the tide forced the soil back up the pipes into the streets and yard grates. In the same district there were 14 houses built over a large cesspool, in which a solid accumulation of refuse took place annually amounting to 218 tons. This was a description of only one part of the town, namely the Pier District, but the evidence that was given in the public enquiry, revealed the horrific conditions that were prevalent throughout the whole town.

The statement of Mr Stephen Pain, the relieving officer for the parish of Charlton,

tells of the poor conditions the people were living in. There was no drainage for the 650 houses, and the whole parish was a receptacle of filth. An area called Barwick's Alley had about 50 separate huts built in steps, one over the other on the steep hillside. For the occupants there were only 3 privies attached and only one dirty draw-well to supply the whole neighbourhood. The total sum paid out to the parish, for outdoor relief, illness, age and infirmity came to £1,146. The Surgeon and Medical Officer, Mr Hunt, stated that fever and smallpox had raged in the area for the last 6 months and all this must be attributed to the defective sewerage system. The number of deaths within the last year was 65 out of a population of 2000. The state of Barwick's Alley was confirmed by Bavington-Jones, but he also wrote about all the new properties that had been built in the 1830s and 1840s. The evidence submitted by Mr Pain and Mr Hunt appears to be selective and it would seem that they were both keen for the Act to be implemented. Mr Hunt as a medical man was aware that good sanitation and water supply would create a healthy environment. Mr Pain, probably agreed, but for monetary reasons, namely that a healthy person could work and would not be a financial burden on the parish.

Not everyone supported the Act. Mr Robinson, a local auctioneer and one of the Commissioners of Paving, presented a petition signed by 40 inhabitants, saying that the town generally was considered very healthy. Mr Sims, one of the signatories, stated that he was the proprietor of 3 lodging houses and not one person had died in any of these. Mr Huntley, the surveyor, said the Mr Sims had the same cesspool problems that so many inhabitants had complained of, but

to speak of dirt and disease would injure his property. In comparison to Mr Sims's petition, the local vicars and curates and many other inhabitants, when interviewed, were willing to tell of their own problems of sewage seeping up from under kitchen floors and the contents of drains spilling out on streets into houses. The report submitted by the Superintendent Officer regarding the responses from the public, makes apparent just how bad the conditions were and the general willingness of people to air their grievances.

Not all reports were actually truthful. Mr John Baker, a box maker and overseer of the parish of Buckland gave his reasons why Buckland should be excluded from the Act. He said that Buckland did have the advantage of being a one street village, formed by dwellings built on a section of the Dover to Canterbury turnpike road. One side of the road was bounded by hills and running along the other side was the River Dour. He also said that most houses had gardens and the use of a water-closet or privy that drained straight into the river. Because of this good drainage all the water-wells and pumps produced clean uncontaminated water. Buckland, in 1848 did have the turnpike road running through it, but there were many other roads leading off it. Mr Baker was also less than truthful about the population. He was quoted as saying that in 1841 the population was 1,199, all of whom according to a medical gentleman were in good health. In fact in the last year only one child had had a serious illness and the only death had been caused by childbirth. The 1841 census gave the population for Buckland including the union workhouse as 1472. The burials recorded in the Buckland parish registers also tell a different story. A total of 55 deaths were

recorded in 1848 of which 25 were children under the age of 12. For reasons that are not obvious Mr Baker did not include the union workhouse as part of Buckland, and as overseer and receiving officer for the parish he must have known approximately how many people had died in the last year.

The submissions from the medical fraternity on the sanitary conditions of the town clearly brought to light the bad conditions and the affect they had on the local population. Dr Soulby considered that the conditions in the Pier District were similar to the conditions of 1665 when the plague killed 900 of its inhabitants. He had tried to encourage cleanliness in the town and had, where the local laws allowed, enforced the removal of nuisances. For his efforts he had received many insults and criticism which would indicate that many did not recognise the connection between dirt and disease.

During the week of the inspection an inspector asked a young boy to draw up a bucket of well water and found it not fit to drink. The young boy advised him that it was worse in the summer when worms and maggots would also be found in it. The sample was handed to Mr Bottle an operative and pharmaceutical chemist for testing. The results proved that the water contained organic matter from the nearby cesspool and the burial ground. Alexander Bottle had been a chemist in the town since 1840 and had been campaigning for the improvement of the sanitary conditions, which resulted in the adoption of the Public Health Act. Mr Bottle also had reason to be concerned about the water supply as it was being contaminated by organic matter from the burial grounds.

The inspecting officer after

interviewing sextons, grave-diggers, parish clerks and churchwardens in the different parishes on the state of the graveyards, reported on the appalling conditions. The parish clerk of St. James the Apostle, Mr William M. Bushell, gave a general view of all the burial grounds in Dover. They were full to overflowing, the grave-digger having to open graves that a body had been interred in only a few weeks previously, the sight and smell of the corpse being injurious to health. In some there were many corpses not three feet under the ground. The brick built vaults had air bricks and apertures for ventilation, with children often peeping inside the vents and smelling the odours. All the burial grounds were surrounded by houses and these suffered badly from the odours. The report does conjure up horrific scenes. A meeting had been called to discuss the situation of the overcrowded churchyards in 1846; a committee was appointed, but it was decided to wait for the introduction of the Health of Towns Bill. The report went as far as discussing where a new cemetery should be placed in relation to the town. However, as the new municipal cemetery at Copt Hill did not open until 1855, six years later, it could be suggested that the legislation for creating a new cemetery was extremely slow or it was not regarded as a priority.

The water supply, sewer and drainage occupy a large section of the report, arguably because it was central to the whole question of public health. It was suggested that the water supply, then owned by independent companies, should be taken over by the borough and managed for the sole benefit of the community. It was a very comprehensive report, giving chemical data on how to soften the water from each of the proposed waterworks, how many gallons

of water would be required each day by the town and shipping in the harbour. It was considered that the waterworks could supply the necessary 2,000,000 gallons at a cost of 25s a day, or £375 per year. The estimated cost of building the waterworks, sinking wells, laying of drains and sewers, including all the costs of the required materials, the excavation of the ground and the laying of the pipes and tiles all had been carefully considered. An annual charge of 3s 9d, or less than a 1d a week had been estimated for the cost of installing house drains and water-closets in each house, a halfpenny for perfect pavements and grates and an additional farthing for washing and cleaning the streets. The financial benefits of selling the sewer refuse to the farmers at 8s a wagon-load had also been taken into consideration of the costs. The conclusion was that these improvements would increase the health and comfort of all classes and reduce the amount of the poor-rates.

The construction of the waterworks in Dover began in 1850 and was completed in 1854, remarkably soon after the publication of the Board of Health report.

If Edwin Chadwick had not written his *Inquiry on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, it is possible that the appalling conditions would have continued for many years. Chadwick was not an altruistic man. His argument was based on a theory that if the poor were healthier they would cost the ratepayer less to maintain. However, because of his forceful personality he did improve the lives of the urban poor. The inquiry made society recognise that slum conditions should not be a normal feature of life and that by eradicating them, life and health would improve for all classes of society.