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‘Perfect ventilation, good sewerage and effective water closets’: Urban factors in the development of modern nursing

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Acknowledgements
IRCHSS
Overview ...

- Discourses of public health in C19
- Urban sanitation in Dublin, nineteenth century
- Public health and hospital sanitation
- Hospital sanitation and the Board of Superintendence of Dublin Hospitals
- Nursing arrangements and nursing reform
- Conclusions
Filthy habits and sound morality ...

‘Various forms of epidemic, endemic, and other disease [are found] in connexion with the physical circumstances [of people]’

The grossly insanitary conditions of the poorer classes tended to produce a population that was ‘improvident, reckless, and intemperate [and] ... less susceptible of moral influences.’

‘The promotion of civic, household, and personal cleanliness, are necessary to the improvement of the moral condition of the population.’

(Chadwick 1842)
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Public health: The case of Dublin, 1800-1898 ...
Dublin: Decline and disease, 1800-1898 ...

Since the Act of Union, the increasing poverty of its citizens is most melancholy and most rapid ... (House of Commons 1822)

"Dublin experienced] retarded material progress, lack of population expansion, widespread and continuing unemployment, an abominable housing situation, pockets of the direst poverty, and some of the most daunting vital statistics to beset any metropolis" (cited in O’Brien 1982)
Dublin: Decline and disease, 1800-1898 ...

‘So abundant an intermixture of putrid lanes, and dense niduses of diseased, ragged, starving poverty, or of bold, shameless, stench vice, as to appear ... like a field of rubbish and manuring composts’ (Parliamentary Gazette of Ireland 1844)
“Perfect ventilation, good sewerage and effective water closets”:
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Dublin: Sanitary improvements ...
Hospitals and hospital sanitation in Dublin...

The hospitals of Dublin are ‘never without fever cases’ (Robert Graves 1843)

In placing infected cases ...in the most favourable circumstances as to ventilation and cleanliness’ ... hospitals are a great safeguard against the spread of infection [and] the means of protecting a whole community’ (James Foulis Duncan 1858)
‘[The Commissioners recommend] the appointment of a permanent commission to supervise the conduct of these [Dublin] institutions...and to make an annual report to your Excellency (the Lord Lieutenant) on the state of the Hospitals, and that their report should be laid before Parliament on the presentation of the Estimates for the year (Dublin Hospitals Inquiry Commission 1856)
Hospitals inspected ...

- Westmorland Lock Hospital
- House of Industry Hospitals
  - Richmond Surgical Hospital
  - Whitworth Medical Hospital
  - Hardwicke Fever Hospital
- Meath Hospital & County Dublin Infirmary
- Steevens’ Hospital
- Cork-street Fever Hospital
- Coombe Lying-in Hospital
- Rotunda Lying-in Hospital
- St Mark’s Ophthalmic Hospital
- Hospital for Incurables
Defective sanitary arrangements ...

・’Perfect ventilation, good sewerage and effective water closets’ [are absolutely necessary to the proper running of a hospital] (HC 1858)

・The water closets at the Westmorland Lock Hospital were ‘highly objectionable and ... a positive nuisance’ (HC 1858)

・’Several of the patients, two of the nurses, and three of the resident pupils suffered from fever, of which one nurse died’ (HC 1879)

・’offensive cases likely to contaminate the air’
・’offensive effluvium’ (HC 1884)
Annual reports of the Board of Superintendence ...

The extensive dairy yards with collections of filth and reeking manure heaps in close proximity to the [Richmond] hospital walls, must deteriorate the atmosphere, and the wonder is that disease due to such conditions is not more rife among the inmates ‘the isolation of patients affected by septic conditions or offensive cases likely to contaminate the air.’
General sanitary improvements ...

• ‘The general sanitary improvements in the city, and the comparative efficiency with which the public health regulations are now carried out’ (HC 1891)

Nursing arrangements ...

• ‘A great part of good nursing consists in preserving cleanliness’ (HC 1883)
Conclusions ...

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