‘Pure air, pure water and good light’
Sanitary reform in the Dublin hospitals, 1858-1898

Gerard Fealy, Martin McNamara, Ruth Geraghty

29 April 2010

Acknowledgements
IRCHSS
Overview ...

- Discourses of public health in C19
- Urban sanitation in Dublin, c. 1850
- Public health and hospital sanitation
- The Board of Superintendence of Dublin Hospitals
- Discussion
- Questions
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)
Dublin: Decline and disease, 1800-1898 ...

・'Shoes and stockings are seldom worn by these beings, who seem to form a different race from the rest of mankind.' Philip Luckombe *Travels Through Ireland* (1780)

・'[Since the Act of Union], the increasing poverty of its citizens is most melancholy and most rapid ... Many of the most valuable houses and streets of the city of Dublin, as it stood in the reign of George 1, have fallen into decay, and are now inhabited by the most abject poor, or at least by the humblest traders and the poorer description of merchants and artisans' (House of Commons 1822)

・'[Dublin] was formerly a great capital, the seat of legislation; it is now a great place of passage ... it contains a large mass of human beings in the most squalid and wretched conditions ... In Dublin he must step warily who desires to avoid the view of wretchedness. It is not possible to walk in any direction half an hour without getting among the loathsome habitations of the poor' (*New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 1822)
‘Pure air, pure water and good light’
Sanitary reform in the Dublin hospitals, 1858-1898

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)
Hospitals and hospital sanitation in Dublin...

The hospitals of Dublin are ‘never without fever cases’ ... [even in the best managed hospitals], ‘it almost invariably happens that when a patient, labouring any acute, or any chronic disease, is admitted into a fever ward, he gets fever in the course of a fortnight or even sooner’ (Graves 1843: vi). (Robert Graves 1843)

'We wish to remark that many of the cases of the disease occurring in the city were concealed and not notified to the authorities ... so keen were the relatives to nurse their own sick and to avoid their removal to hospital’ (House of Commons, hereafter HC, 1895: 5).
The Board of Superintendence...

‘Supervision of all the institutions, with an annual report to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, is recommended ... [The Commissioners recommend] ‘the appointment of a permanent commission to supervise the conduct of these [Dublin] institutions...and to attach to this Commission ... a salaried officer ... whose chief duty it would be to inspect all these Hospitals not less than twice in the year or whenever directed by the Commissioners and to report to them the result of such inspections ... [The commission] ‘should 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 (South Commission 1856)
‘Pure air, pure water and good light’
Sanitary reform in the Dublin hospitals, 1858-1898

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
'Pure air, pure water and good light'
Sanitary reform in the Dublin hospitals, 1858-1898

Annual reports of the Board of Superintendence ...

- '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)
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.
General sanitary improvements ...

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

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

• The reduced incidence of deaths from puerperal fever is due to ‘the strict observance of sanitary principles and to the precautions that are taken by all persons attached to the institution in matters of personal cleanliness, as well as the arrangement of the ward, and the distribution of the patients’ (HC 1891).

• ‘The most careful antiseptic precautions’ [and] … ‘use disinfectants previous to examining patients’ (HC 1897)
Discussion & Conclusions …

• The technology of urban, domestic and hospital sanitation would not only address the filth of the city, but would also improve the moral wellbeing of its poorer citizens and, in Chadwick’s view, would reduce public dependency on medical and poor relief by reducing the incidence of contagious diseases (Hamlin 1996).

• The essential requirements for a modern operating theatre are ‘pure air, pure water and good light’ (Adelaide Hospital Dublin 1899).
‘Pure air, pure water and good light’
Sanitary reform in the Dublin hospitals, 1858-1898

Gerard Fealy, Martin McNamara, Ruth Geraghty

29 April 2010

Acknowledgements
IRCHSS