

THE ROYAL COMMISSION
ON THE HOUSING OF THE WORKING CLASSES
1885

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This remarkable report is the most important and comprehensive statement on the reform of public health and housing to emerge from Parliament in the late nineteenth century. Even by Victorian standards it is vast. The three reports (England and Wales: Scotland: Ireland) occupy only 111 pages but the evidence, 24,663 verbatim questions and answers together with appendices and indexes, takes up over 1,300 pages. They occupy eight command papers (a set of which could be brought for 17 shillings and a halfpenny) contained in two volumes of Parliamentary papers. The rather complicated arrangement is typical of such multi-part blue books. A brief explanation will be found in the separate accompanying document.

The 16 members of the Commission, including chairman Sir Charles Dilke, the Prince of Wales, Cardinal Manning, Lord Salisbury, Sir Richard Cross and William Torrens, are listed at the end of the report. There are portraits and bibliographical sketches of several of them in Anthony Wohl's *The Eternal Slum*. Between 11 March 1884 and 20 February 1885 they interviewed 119 witnesses in Whitehall. They spent only four days in Edinburgh (4-8 April 1885) to hear from the 31 Scottish witnesses, and a further four in City Hall Dublin (23-27 May 1885) with 41 witnesses for Ireland.

Public health reform in the nineteenth century moved in stages; the hard won victories of one stage became the accepted minimum standards of the next. Until the 1840's the chief concern was with the evils of corruption and profiteering by companies concerned with water and sewerage. Chadwick moved the emphasis towards technical and engineering aspects, practical solutions which entailed, in his strongly held view, a concomitant need for central direction. From 1885, with Sir John Simon at the Board of Health and then the home office and Privy Council, this strong urging of centralisation diminished, local authorities were prepared to seek advice from Central Government on engineering and other technical matters, and public health was increasingly defined in strictly medical terms. In the last quarter of the century the main concern was overcrowding, with resurgence in the concern in the wider spread of public utilities and the development of municipal trading and Municipal Socialism. The report touches on all these matters but, as Wohl puts it, "from beginning to end the Commission concentrated on overcrowding". In its concentration upon London it provides the most detailed picture of London housing conditions before Booth's 17-volume survey appeared in 1902-03.

The First Report has three main sections.

[All page numbers given here refer to the original printed page numbers.]

- 1. Urban Housing**
 - Review of existing law 3-6
 - Overcrowding 7-8
 - Tenement houses 8-9
 - Sanitary defects 9-11
 - Structural defects 11-13
 - Immorality and incest 13
 - Health and overcrowding 13-15
 - Dirty Habits 15-16
 - Wages and rents 16-18
 - Labour market 18
 - In-migration 19
 - Demolitions 19-21
 - Property market 21-22
 - Local government 22-24

- 2. Rural Housing** 24-27

- 3. Remedies and recommendations**
- Problems of legislation for London 27-29
 - Problems of legislation for areas outside London 29-30
 - Cellar dwelling 31-32
 - Building bye-laws 32-33
 - Sanitary inspection 33-34
 - London government 34-37
 - Public loans 37-40
 - Lodging house legislation and rating procedures 40-42
 - Cottage gardens 42
 - Early housing associations 43
 - Difficulties with Cross's Acts 44-48
 - Restrictions on the use of trust funds 48
 - Legal expenses 48-49
 - Workman's trains 49-51
 - Rehousing by railway companies 52-53
 - The problem of large scale demolitions 53-54
 - Model dwellings 54-56
 - Sanitary problems 56
 - Peripatetic workers 56-58

Supplementary materials

- A statement by 10 Commissioners on the evils of leasehold tenure 59
- Eight minority memoranda dissenting from certain passages of the report 60-82

Finding your way in the Royal Commission Report

The references given here are in the full British Parliamentary Paper (BPP) conventional form with the Command Paper numbers in square brackets and the official manuscript page numbers after the volume number in roman numerals. See accompanying explanatory document.

First Report [England and Wales and general analysis and recommendations]... 82 pages
BPP (HC) 1884-5 [C.4402] XXX, 1-86

Minutes of the evidence of the First Report [18,260 questions and the answers]...690 pages
Appendix...38 pages
BPP (HC) 1884-5 [C.4402 i] XXX, 87-790 and 781-818

Indexes to the First Report...318 pages
BPP (HC) 1884-5 [C.4402 ii] XXX, 819-1136

Second Report...Scotland...13 pages
BPP (HC) 1884-5 [C.4409] XXXI, 1-13

Minutes of Evidence [for the Second Report] [Questions 18,261 to 21,757]...125 pages
Appendix...40 pages
Index...6 pages
BPP (HC) 1884-5 [C.4409 i] XXXI, 15-139, 140-179 and 180-185

Third Report...Ireland...16 pages
BPP (HC) 1884-5 [C.4547 XXXI, 187-202

Third Report...Minutes of Evidence &c for Ireland [Questions 21,758 to 24,663]...99 pages
BPP (HC) 1884-5 [C.4547 i] XXXI, 203-302 and 302-312

Index relating to Ireland...25 pages
BPP (HC) 1884-5 [C.4402 iii] XXXI, 313-339

The three reports and all supporting material listed above are available in two places in the Library. There is a set of British Parliamentary Papers on microcard (ask at the Enquires Desk on the lower ground floor); with the full references above you will have no difficulty in finding the 16 small sheets of plastic containing all the material. Everything listed above is also reproduced in full in two volumes of the Irish University Press set of British Parliamentary Papers in the URBAN AREAS: HOUSING set, volumes 2 and 3: press mark J302 U71. Volume 2 contains C.4402 and C.4402 i. The rest are in volume 3.

Each member of the class is asked to read the First Report (fairly rapidly), one set of evidence, and one other work which will act as a commentary on the evidence.

1. Anthony Wohl *The Eternal Slum, Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (1977) pp.200-249
 - a. The evidence of Lord William Compton Q.584-789
 - b. The evidence of Henry T. Boodle Q.790-1250

 2. Anthony S.Wohl "Sex and the single room: incest among the Victorian working classes" in A.Wohl (Ed.) *The Victorian Family* (1978) pp.197-216
 - a. The evidence of the Earl of Shaftesbury Q.1-225
 - b. The evidence of Dr. John W. Tripe Q.9,484-9762

 3. Gareth Stedman Jones *Outcast London. A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (1970) pp.197-230
 - a. The evidence of Henry T. Boodle Q.3,558-3,660
 - b. The evidence of Dr. John W. Tripe Q.9,484-9,762

 4. David Owen *The Government of Victorian London 1855-1889: the Metropolitan Board of works, the Vestries and the City Corporation* (1982) pp, 213-225, 283-323
 - a. The evidence of Mr. Thomas Jennings Q.2,888-3,994
 - b. The evidence of Mr. Robert Paget Q.17,470-17,882

 5. Ken Young and Patricia L.Garside *Metropolitan London: Politics and Urban Change 1837-1981* (1981) pp.1-62
 - a. The evidence of Sir Sydney Waterlow Q.11,905-12,093
 - b. The evidence of Mr. Shirley F.Murphy Q.1,572-1,892

 6. Samuel E.Finer *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (1952) pp.453-482 and 501-515
 - a. The evidence of Mr.Edwin Chadwick Q.13,452-13,988
 - b. The evidence of the Rt Hon Joseph Chamberlain Q.12,354-12,625

 7. Asa Briggs *Victorian Cities* (1963) Chapter 8: "London, the World City"
 - a. The evidence of Revd Andrew Mearns Q.5,344-5,601
 - b. The evidence of Miss Octavia Hill Q.8,825-9,231
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