

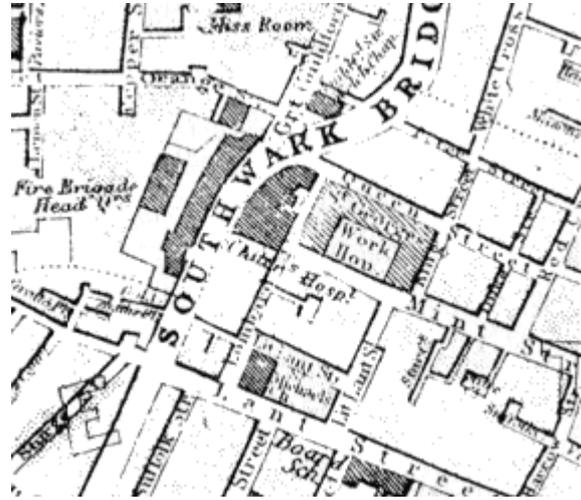
MINT STREET WORKHOUSE, SOUTHWARK (c1875)



This house is situated in Mint Street, Southwark, a densely crowded district on the S.E. of the Thames, with a population of 55,510 and is surrounded with every possible nuisance, physical and moral. Bone-boilers, grease and cat-gut manufactories represent some of them, and there is a nest of thieves, which has existed ever since the days of Edward III. The house is a brick structure of three storeys, forming three-fourths of a square. The south front consists of low buildings, which are used for offices; it dates from 1782, with additions made in 1844 and 1859.

The main portion of the house has a north aspect; the west and east wings running at right angles, leaving a paved yard between them. The main drainage is said to be perfect, and the water supply good; there are tanks on all the landings. The house was built for 624 inmates, but when we visited it there were only 420 in residence, and yet it appeared very full. Classification there is none, excepting the common division of male and female wards, and the separation of the "foul cases." In a house so conditioned there can be neither order nor method.

During our visit to the infirmary wards, fourteen in number, scattered over the entire house, we were accompanied by Mr. Brown, the medical officer and his very intelligent assistant. The official return states that each ward contains almost 500 cubic feet to each bed; but we doubt this statement from our measurement. The efforts made to ventilate the wards, consisting of perforated zinc shafts, extending on a line with the ceiling, with openings in the floor, appeared to us very ineffectual; the wards smelt very musty and suggested a mischievous state of things.



The bedsteads were partly wood, and in some wards iron, on an average six feet in length and two feet six inches in width. The beds of flock were in good canvas cases, as were also the pillows, and the sheets and blankets were moderately clean. The rule of the house is to supply a clean sheet every week, and oftener if required. Towels were in abundance; but the custom amongst the women, not amongst the men, was to wash in the "chamber", a habit so inveterate that no threats avail to stop it. Air-cushions and macintoshes were found in abundance in the wards, and regularly used.

Each ward had an open fireplace; a lavatory and water-closet in a recess or lobby; in some instances the latter served for two or three wards. In several cases the grossest possible carelessness and neglect were discovered in some of these wards. Take the following in illustration:-Thirty men had used one closet, in which there had been no water for more than a week, and which was in close proximity to their ward; and in an adjoining ward so strong was the ammoniacal smell that we had no doubt respecting the position of the cabinet, which we found dry. In No. 4 ward (female), with 17 beds, the drain-smell from a lavatory in a recess of the room was so offensive that we suspected a sewer-communication, and soon discovered that there was no trap; indeed it had been lost for some considerable time.

Apart from this source of contamination of the ward, there were several cases with offensive discharges: one particularly, a case of cancer, which, no disinfectant being used, rendered the room almost unbearable to the other inmates. The absence of the usual decencies and needful cleanliness of the infirmary will at once suggest the class of nurses in charge: for we feel assured that no properly trained nurse would have tolerated such abominations as we witnessed.

The number of the sick and infirm amounts to between 200 and 300, all of whom are nursed by pauper nurses, who receive in money from 1s. to 2s. per week, meat and beer daily, and dry tea and sugar. The female nurses are dressed in brown check, and have a marked superiority over the paupers; the male nurses have no distinction. On interrogating some of the pauper female nurses on the subject of their duties, and especially on their mode of washing those who were incapable of doing it for themselves, they admitted that the "chamber" was the favourite utensil, and even defended its use.

Intemperance is common amongst them; indeed, so great is the evil that the medical officer considered it prevailed to the extent of 90 per cent. The result of our examination of the different classes of food and drinks was, as is usually the case, very satisfactory. The mode of preparing the food, too, is generally good and moderately cheap; in respect of prices many of the guardians have made excellent bargains for the poor in this season of scarcity: the poor, therefore, in our well-regulated houses are so far better off than the same class of poor in our rural districts; but in many cases the amount of food supplied is really defective, and in St. George's the supply of animal food is not sufficient either for the able-bodied or the sick, unless to the latter class the medical officers specially order a larger quantity.

On some future occasion we shall again allude to this subject. In order, however, that our readers may judge for themselves, we subjoin the dietary for the sick, as directed by the guardians, but not ordered by the Poor-law Board.

SICK DIET OF ST. GEORGE-THE-MARTYR, SOUTHWARK.

Full Diet (Male and Female.)

Breakfast: Bread-and-butter, 4 oz.; tea, 1 pint.

Dinner: Bread, 4 oz. ; broth, 1 pint; potatoes, 8 oz. meat, 4 oz.

Supper: Bread-and-butter, 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. ; tea, 1 pint.

Low Diet (Male and Female.)

Breakfast: Bread-and-butter, 4 oz. ; tea, 1 pint.

Dinner: Bread, 4 oz. ; broth, 1 pint.

Supper: Bread-and-butter, 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. ; tea, 1 pint.

The "infirm", at the discretion of the guardians, can have tea for breakfast and supper not exceeding one pint per meal, sweetened with $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of sugar to each pint of tea each; and with 7 oz. of butter weekly, in lieu of gruel, for breakfast and supper-the ordinary diet.

The salary of the medical officer is £80 per annum which, with the extras, midwifery, and lunacy, amounts to £150 per annum: he has to supply all the

drugs, even quinine and cod-liver oil The number of sick and infirm now under treatment is 165, but the average is 230. The medical officer visits daily, and is often summoned several times in the day.

For the last three years and a half this house appears to have suffered from various epidemics, and especially from typhus. Many cases are admitted into the house from the neighbourhood; but many are developed in the house, and apparently in this way: The tramp ward for the women is a miserable room, foul and dirty, with imperfect light and ventilation, the floor being simply bedded with straw. Into this open sty the women are passed in, often with little or no clothing; and there, in considerable numbers, they pass the night. There being no water closet attached, a large can or tub is placed in the room. This is the sole accommodation which the apartment possesses. The master informed us that there is no matron to look after the women, and that the place was really "a den of horrors," in which from twenty to thirty persons passed the night.

After a very limited term of occupancy of this place, the women were struck down with fever, the place proving a perfect "fever bed." It is due to the Poor-law Board to state that they have refused to certify this most objectionable room; and we are glad to hear that other and more suitable quarters are being provided for these poor outcasts, who had better sleep in the streets and on door-steps than be entrapped into this manufactory of fever. Nothing more striking than this has come under our cognizance; and it would be very interesting to inquire the cost of this tramp ward to the guardians of St. George-the-Martyr; apart from the amount of the sacrifice of human life, which might form another subject for examination. From what has come within our knowledge here in connexion with the creation of fever, we doubt whether a greater or more flagrant instance of recklessness about human life could be pictured. We may fairly hope it is an exceptional case.

Again, taking up the subject of fever, we learn that during the months of April, May, and June in 1864, there were treated 145 cases of typhus, 130 having been admitted, and 15 occurring amongst the inmates; 12 died out of this number, all adults except one.

In addition to epidemic fever, erysipelas prevailed in the house four months ago, having been brought in from the district. There were 20 cases, and 2 deaths. This was followed by dysentery to the extent of 50 cases ; but there were no deaths. To complete the catalogue of infectious diseases, we were told that about a month ago there were 10 cases of scarlet fever, all of which, however, made good recoveries. The average mortality of the house is 300. Last year the number was 296. We cannot doubt that, with such a history and so many surroundings, it is our duty to condemn this workhouse, which ought

to be removed, and one built better adapted to fulfil its duties to the poor and sick of the neighbourhood.