



The King David  
High School  
For Excellence in Education



# Learning Links

## Public Health in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Manchester

### Sanitation

#### Teacher's Notes

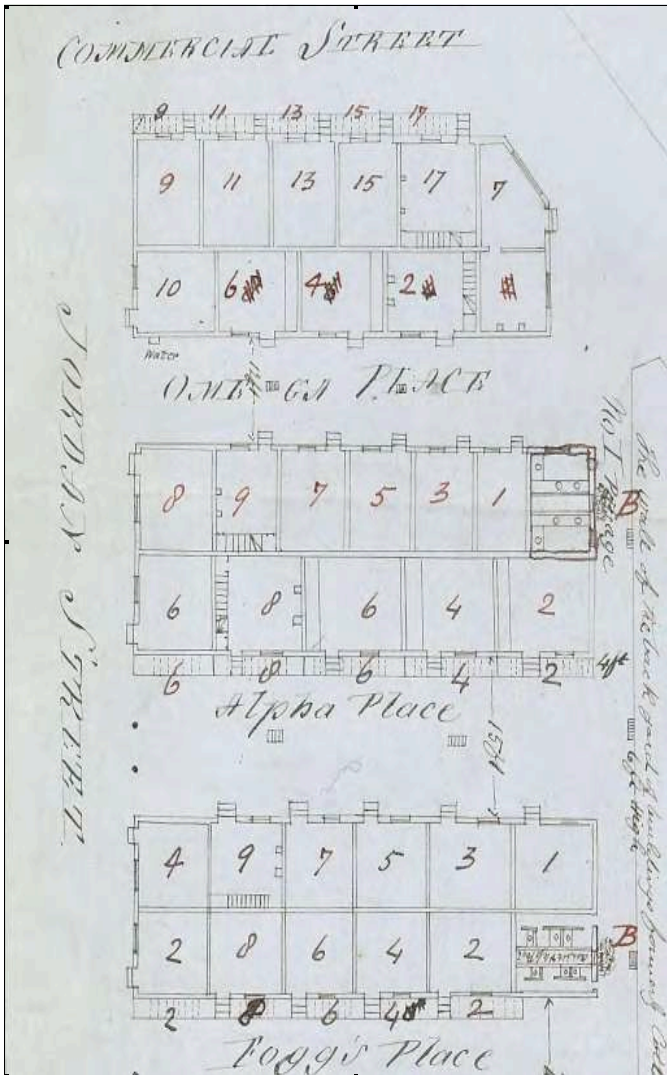
King David High School History Department worked with Manchester Archives and Local Studies in 2008 to produce resources using the archives for Key Stage 3 History teachers to use in class. The project was funded by Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) North West.

This resource sheet uses digitised archive sources to investigate the provision of sanitation in the city. It is intended as an introduction to the archives and the ways in which they can be used in class, both to convey the content of the sources and to analyse their reliability. Please feel free to copy or modify the notes for educational use. All of the images can be downloaded from the website.

Teachers should call 0161 832 5284 or email [archiveslocalstudies@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:archiveslocalstudies@manchester.gov.uk) to arrange class visits to the archives, for access to more digitised sources, or for more information.

# Sanitation

In early nineteenth-century Manchester, working class houses in the city had very basic toilets, often shared between many families. Privy middens were open holes leading to cess pools, which could flood. The city authorities gradually replaced them with pail middens, an early form of dry toilet which relied on regular collection, and eventually water closets. Even in 1894, when the Davyhulme Sewage Works opened, the city had almost 36 thousand privy middens, 78 thousand pail middens and only 24 thousand water closets. The following report describes the sanitary facilities in the Deansgate area in the 1850s:



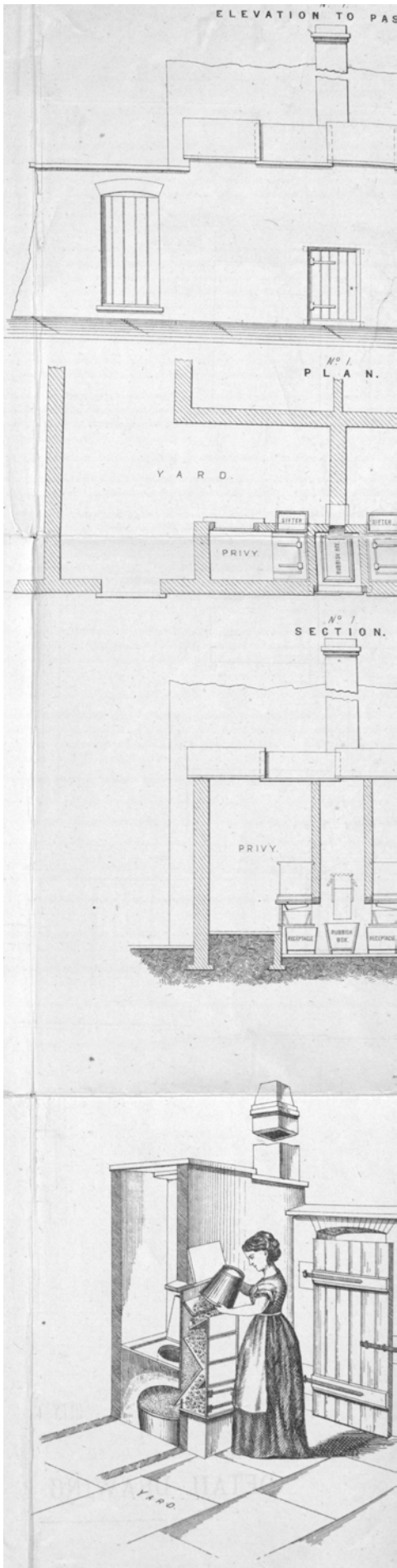
M126/2/3/23

These sixteen cottages are inhabited by 16 men, 21 women and 33 children making a total of 70 persons. The 5 cellars are inhabited by 4 men, 8 women & 12 children; total 24 persons. The total of both cellars and cottages together 20 men, 29 women, & 45 children.. 94 persons. These 94 persons have 2 privies only (as marked B on sketch) for their accommodation, or 10 men, 10.5 women, and 22.5 children, to each privy. Your visitors would call attention to the plan of the privies as on the margin, a plan, which the Committee of Council on Education, will not allow in schools under their inspection, each privy must be a separate enclosure; if this be necessary for children, much more for adults. Your visitors would also call attention to the provision made in these privies for children (marked A), a good feature, and one which your visitors are sorry to say exists nowhere else, so far as their inspection has gone. There is only one water tap placed as marked on the sketch, for these 94 people.

M126/2/3/23



- How many water taps are there in your house? How many people per tap?
- Does the inspector think the toilet arrangements are good? How can you tell?
- Are there any back doors on the houses?



This diagram comes from a Medical Officer of Health report from the late nineteenth century. The Medical Officer of Health was a City Council official first appointed in 1867 to look after the health of the city. The diagram shows the way the pail privy could remove both household and human waste. It relied on regular collection by city employees.

- What advantages does a pail privy have over an open midden privy?
- Can you think of any disadvantages in the system for removal of waste?

This is a table from the annual report of the Cleansing Department in 1878. It describes the amounts of different kinds of waste being disposed. The 'unaltered closets' are privy middens, while 'altered closets' are pail middens of the type described in the diagram on the previous page.

District.	Number of Closets in District.	Altered Closets in District.	Unaltered Closets in District.
No. 1 .....	16258	12255	4003
No. 2 .....	10900	10569	331
No. 3 .....	16155	12256	4429
No. 4 .....	12688	12256	432
Totals .....	56001	47336	9195

Unless unforeseen circumstances arise, all the cesspools and middens in the City will have been abolished and dry ash-closets substituted by the end of 1879.

During the past year 16,630 tons of Nightsoil have been collected from the 18,761 midden-closets, and 41,592 tons of rubbish which was taken from the same middens had to be carted to the tips ; whilst out of 122,455 tons of soil which was taken from 37,240 dry ash-closets, not a particle had to be taken to the tips.

The total number of emptyings of the new closets for the past year amounted to 2,745,000, and the total number of emptyings of the old closets was 133,380.

3,651 tons of slaughter-house refuse have been collected, 182 tons of Fish-mongers' and Tripe-dressers' refuse, and 1,467 tons of stable manure.

The whole of the matter collected from all sources amounts to 192,556 tons to dispose of. Of the 122,456 tons of Daysoil which have been collected from the dry-closets, 24,500 tons have been liquid matter, which under the old system would have drained into the sewers.

M595/2/2/2

- In 1894, there were still over 35 thousand privy middens in the city. What does this tell us about the author of the 1878 report?

This is a letter from the Head of the Cleansing Department to a teacher who requested information on the city's sanitary department in the nineteenth century. It describes the reasons behind the purchase of Chat Moss, west of Manchester, to dump the city's waste:

Towards the end of the last century, expansions of the City of Manchester arising from development of assimilated neighbouring districts and influx of population created the position that resources within the city for the disposal of privy midden refuse and pail closet content became inadequate. To provide an outlet for the disposal of this material the Corporation purchased 2,595 acres of land at Chat Moss in 1895 from Sir Humphrey Francis de Trafford. It consisted of 737 acres of virgin mossland, 713 acres of very poor wet land (not far removed from virgin moss), 259 acres in fair condition and 793 acres in better condition. Of the 793 acres in better condition, Doctor J.A. Voelcker, B.A., Sc., Ph.D., F.I.C., observed that the soil was up to 12" in maximum depth, but in its composition was only in a transitory state towards becoming of proper agricultural texture. Of a total of 47 buildings, 24 were reported upon as beyond repair (some were described as shanties and unfit for human habitation) and only seven were in reasonably good condition. There was no piped water supply, the inhabitants depended upon streams for all their water whether for domestic uses or other purposes.

M595/4/6/9

- What advantages do water closets, drained by sewers, and treated by sewage works, have over pail closets, which were emptied by cart onto waste land?

# Glossary

Cess pool (noun) *the open waste which gathered at the bottom of a privy midden*

Inhabit (verb) *to live in something or somewhere (e.g. your house or Manchester)*

Official (noun) *a worker for an organisation (e.g. a policeman or a refuse collector)*

Pail midden (noun) *a dry toilet which needed to be regularly emptied by refuse collectors*

Privy midden (noun) *an open toilet which drained into the a cess pool, which could flood into the street*

Provision (noun) *the goods or services provided (for example the water supplied to your house)*

Sanitation (noun) *the work done to keep homes clean and people healthy*

Tipper toilet (noun) *a toilet that was drained using waste water from the sink*

Water closets (noun) *modern toilets which flush into the sewers*

## Further reading

[M126](#) Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association, 1848-1924

[M9/30/4](#) Minutes of Manchester Township Main Sewer Committee, 1828-1843

[M723](#) City Engineer and Surveyor's files, 1890s-1960s

[M595](#) Cleansing Department Records, 1805-1985

[MISC/968](#) Papers of John Walker, sanitary engineer, 1908-1912

*Manchester Region History Review*, Volume 2 Number 2, Autumn/Winter 1988/89  
[http://www.mcrh.mmu.ac.uk/pubs/pdf/mrhr\\_02ii\\_john\\_guest.pdf](http://www.mcrh.mmu.ac.uk/pubs/pdf/mrhr_02ii_john_guest.pdf)

Museum of Science & Industry: 'Underground Manchester' Gallery  
<http://www.msim.org.uk/explore-mosi/people/water-supply-and-sanitation>

# Teacher feedback form

Name of Teacher:

Date:

School name and address:

Postcode:

Phone number:

Email:

## What year group do you teach?

(Mixed year? Please tick all that apply)

Pre 5 <input type="checkbox"/>	Reception <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Year 3 <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 5 <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Year 7 <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 8 <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 9 <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 10 <input type="checkbox"/>
Year 11 <input type="checkbox"/>	Year 12 <input type="checkbox"/>		

## Service provided

Did you find the resource sheet useful? Very  Moderately  No

Please explain why:

.....  
.....

Which part of the resource worked best?

.....  
.....

Which part did not work for you?

.....  
.....

How did you use the resource with your class?

.....  
.....

What could we do to improve the resource?

.....  
.....

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(Cross Curriculum? Please tick all that apply)

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Geography <input type="checkbox"/>	Personal, Social, Health Education <input type="checkbox"/>
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Strategic Commissioning <input type="checkbox"/>	Renaissance Funding <input type="checkbox"/>
MLA Regional Agency <input type="checkbox"/>	Arts Council England <input type="checkbox"/>
Heritage Lottery Fund <input type="checkbox"/>	Local Heritage Initiative (HLF) <input type="checkbox"/>
Big Lottery <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>

Please name: .....

## Thank you

Please return this form to [archiveslocalstudies@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:archiveslocalstudies@manchester.gov.uk) or to Greater Manchester County Record Office (with Manchester Archives), 56 Marshall St., Manchester, M4 5FU