

KQ7: How effectively were public health problems in Cardiff in the 19th century dealt with?

Reasons for the rapid growth of Cardiff in the 19th century

19th century:

- Transport – the Glamorgan Canal opened in 1794, enabled coal to be transported from the mines around Merthyr Tydfil to the docks in Cardiff; in 1841 the Taff Railway was opened, linking Cardiff and Merthyr.
- Docks – in 1839 the Marquis of Bute built the Bute West Dock. In 1855 the East Dock was built, followed by the Roath Basin in 1874 and the Roath Dock in 1887. By 1901 Cardiff had emerged as the largest coal exporting port in the world.
- Population growth – Cardiff grew from 1,871 people in 1801 to become the largest town in Wales by 1901 with a population of 164,333; migration of workers included the arrival of immigrants from Italy, Germany, India and Somalia.
- Money – Cardiff's Coal Exchange set the price of coal for the British market. There was also iron-making, steel-making, ship-building, rope-making, brewing, milling and paper manufacturing industries.

Poor living conditions in Cardiff

Rapid expansion of Cardiff created public health concerns:

- Lack of regulation and planning – housing was often of poor quality, frequently without ventilation, drainage and an adequate water supply; there was no regulation over what was built or who built it. Narrow streets were littered with rubbish and raw sewage.
- Poor sanitation – overcrowding was particularly bad in Herbert Street, Stanley Street, Love Lane, Mary Anne Street and Little Frederick Street. Sanitation was primitive and raw sewage flowed through many streets and sometimes seeped into the water supply.
- Overcrowding – chronic overcrowding added to the unhealthy environment as most houses took in lodgers to help pay the rent. Poor diet weakened the ability of the occupants to fight off disease, which spread quickly due to the dense population. Such squalid and overcrowded living conditions resulted in poor hygiene and the outbreak of disease was common. Between 1842 and 1848 Cardiff's mortality rate was 30 per 1,000, compared to the UK average of 20 per 1,000.
- Poor water supply – polluted water supplies contributed to the outbreak of disease. Contaminated supplies led to a series of cholera outbreaks, the most devastating being those in the years 1849 and 1854.

Cholera and typhoid in Cardiff

Serious outbreaks of killer diseases like cholera and typhoid took a heavy toll upon Cardiff's population.

- Typhoid – a bacterial infection spread through contaminated water and food. It often resulted in the death of the infected person.
- Cholera – an infectious disease usually spread as a result of a contaminated water supply. It had a high mortality rate and its symptoms were violent vomiting and diarrhoea. Wales experienced serious outbreaks of cholera in 1832, 1849, 1854 and 1866.

Cardiff was badly affected by a cholera outbreak during the summer months of 1849. The first recorded case was on 13 May and the greatest number of deaths was recorded between June and September. The last case was in November and by this time 396 people had died during the outbreak (206 men and 190 women). There were several attempts to manage the outbreak:

- On 26 May the Board of Guardians ordered that the town be divided into three districts.
- On 8 June a committee was appointed to manage the outbreak.
- Officers were appointed to visit houses to check for illness and to order the cleaning up of waste and the white-washing of walls.
- As death tolls rose the town was further divided into seven smaller districts and medical officers were appointed to each.
- Dispensaries were opened to give out 'remedies'.

The outbreak led to a rise of anti-Irish feeling in the town and the Irish community was blamed for the spread of the disease. Other factors suggested as a cause of the disease were an increase in drunkenness and the irresponsible spending habits of the poorer classes.

The outbreak of 1854 resulted in 225 deaths in Cardiff and there were 76 deaths in 1866. The last outbreak of 1893 resulted in three deaths – by then improvements in the supply of piped water and the building of sewers had had an impact in reducing the spread of the infection.

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Solutions to Cardiff's public health problems

Attempts at improving public health [can be used as an example in Key Question 6]

Dr Henry James Paine, a local GP, investigated the 200 deaths resulting from a typhoid outbreak in Cardiff in 1847. He concluded that the high death rate was linked to unsanitary conditions. Little notice was taken of his findings and it took government legislation to force change.

Public Health Act 1848 - This allowed towns to set up a Local Board of Health which would become responsible for sewers and drains, wells and supplies of water, refuse and sewage systems, burial grounds, parks and public baths.

The Rammell Report, 1850 - In 1850 Thomas Rammell, the Superintendent Inspector of the General Board of Health, published his inquiry into the state of public health in Cardiff. He identified many health concerns – open sewers, unclean water supply, poor quality housing, overcrowding. He recommended a range of changes to improve public health, which included:

- a safe water supply
- a system of drainage and sewage
- the collection of refuse
- better quality housing.

The work of Dr Henry James Paine In 1853 Dr Henry J. Paine was appointed Medical Officer of Health for Cardiff, a post he held until 1889. He attempted to carry out the Rammell recommendations and under his supervision:

- a new sewage and drainage system was completed by 1856
- a hospital ship, HMS Hamadryad, was set up in Tiger Bay to treat ill and diseased sailors
- inoculation against smallpox was encouraged
- by-laws were passed to stop rubbish and sewage being tipped into the River Taff.

The supply of clear water - The Cardiff Waterworks Act of 1850 led to the laying of mains water pipes across the town and the building of a pumping station at Ely. A reservoir was constructed at Llanishen.

The town infirmary - A rising population resulted in the building of hospitals:

- In 1823 a dispensary was set up to provide medical aid to the poor.
- In 1837 the Glamorgan and Monmouth Infirmary and Dispensary opened for the poor.
- In 1883 a new hospital was built and it had to be extended in 1894.
- In 1885 it was renamed the 'Cardiff Infirmary'.

Public baths and wash houses - In 1862 the Cardiff Baths Company opened facilities in Guildford Street. It contained two large swimming pools, hot water baths and a Turkish bath. It was later taken over by the Cardiff Corporation.

Improvements public health - The trigger for change came from government inquiries and the passing of specific legislation :

- Public Baths and Wash Houses Act, 1846 - Cardiff Corporation took over the running of the town baths in the early 1870s.
- Public Health Act, 1848 - This caused Cardiff to set up a Local Board of Health and appointed a Medical Officer – Dr Henry J Paine.
- Rammell Report, 1850 - This highlighted the need for change.
- Sanitary Act, 1866 - This forced local authorities to supply safe drinking water.
- Cardiff Corporation opened public parks – Roath Park in 1894, Victoria Park in 1897, Cathays Park in 1897. In 1859 it opened the Cathays Cemetery and the public library in 1861.