Profit is a Dirty Word: The Development of Public Baths and Wash-houses in Britain 1847–1915

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SUMMARY Research on sanitary reform in nineteenth-century Britain has focused mainly on the introduction of large-scale sanitary infrastructure, especially waterworks and sewerage systems Other sanitary measures such as the provision of public baths and wash-houses have been ignored, or discussed in the limited context of working-class responses to middle-class sanitarianism. Yet by 1915 public baths and wash-houses were to be found in nearly every British town and city A detailed analysis of these 'enterprises' can provide a useful way of understanding the changing priorities of public health professionals and urban authorities as well as the changing attitudes of the working classes Connections between personal cleanliness and disease evolved during the century, particularly after the formation of germ theory in the 1880s This paper demonstrates how the introduction of public baths and wash-houses in Liverpool, Belfast, and Glasgow was initially a direct response to sanitary reform campaigns It also shows that the explicit public health ideology of these developments was constantly compromised by implicit concerns about municipal finance and the potential profit that such enterprises could generate This city-based analysis shows that this conflict hindered the full sanitary benefit which these schemes potentially offered

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The term 'sanitary reform' usually conjures up images of large-scale waterworks and sewerage systems, and indeed substantial improvements to the condition of the nineteenth-century urban environment and its inhabitants were achieved through such schemes. These grand public systems form part of the explanation and they also formed part of the contemporary understanding of how the 'urban penalty' problem could be addressed.[1] However, there are a number of other components of sanitary reform to be investigated. This paper is concerned with one of these other sanitary systems—the provision of public baths and wash-houses There has been little research into this service and its relationship with public health activity despite recognition of its significance in disease-specific mortality studies Both Rosen and Luckin have identified the importance of more frequent personal and domestic cleansing in the decline of typhus.[2] This disease is spread by the body

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[1] This phrase was coined by Gerry Kearns to explain the urban–rural mortality differential in nineteenth-century Britain G Kearns, 'Biology, Class and the Urban Penalty', in G Kearns and C Withers (eds), *Urbanising Britain Essays on Class and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1991), pp 12–30

[2] B Luckin, 'Evaluating the Sanitary Revolution Typhus and Typhoid in London, 1851–1900', in R I Woods and J Woodward (eds), *Urban Disease and Mortality in Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1984), p 111, G Rosen, 'Disease, Debility and Death', in H J Dyos and M. Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City Images and Realities,* II (London, 1973), p 635

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louse, which thrives in dirty clothing and bedding, although the discovery of the body louse as the transmitting agent was not made until 1909.[3]

As knowledge increased during the course of the nineteenth century about the mode of transmission of various diseases, the public perception of the importance of personal cleanliness also changed. For Nancy Tomes this was specifically related in America to the dissemination of knowledge of 'germs' in all their guises, and the development of educational materials on the correct methods of domestic cleanliness.[4] Suellen Hoy focuses on the critical role of women as agents of cleanliness, both personal and domestic. She uses this theme to illustrate the diverse attitudes of nineteenth-century American sanitary reformers to the perceived problem of 'dirty' diseases such as cholera and the interrelationship between cleanliness and morality. A significant aspect of this was the use of hygiene education by the end of the nineteenth century to impart a sense of 'American-ness' to recent immigrants, who were considered to have poor standards of personal hygiene, through suggested regimes of daily teeth cleaning, bathing, and, in particular, the use of public baths.[5]

From the mid-nineteenth century in Britain, public baths and wash-houses were seen by sanitary reformers as an affordable and immediate way of improving the public's cleanliness and thus potentially also its health. This represented a culture-shift from the late eighteenth century, when Smith finds that on some occasions public bathing had been abandoned because of a fear of contagion.[6] Nineteenth-century municipal authorities were implicitly concerned with controlling the lives of the 'dangerous classes', and the sanitation argument provided an unparalleled justification for observation and intervention. State intervention in the cleansing of public places had already become an accepted and necessary part of urban management, which focused on street washing and removal of all 'waste products' through the use of water. Part of the motivation towards removing such material from public spaces derived from a fear of 'miasmas'—noxious gases which were believed to emanate from decaying matter.[7] This was most apposite in an era of cesspits and privies—the widespread introduction of water closets in Britain did not take place until the second half of the nineteenth century.

For the early nineteenth-century commentator, cleanliness formed part of one's unique constitution, which could be strengthened thus. 'Good diet, and good spirits, cleanliness, and fresh air, and good clothing, and exercise, may all contribute

[3] The discovery was made by Charles Nicolle. The number of typhus deaths in England had fallen from 4,281 in 1869 to 318 by 1885. By 1900 there were only a handful of isolated cases.

[4] N. Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), N. Tomes, 'The Private Side of Public Health: Sanitary Science, Domestic Hygiene and the Germ Theory, 1870–1900', *Bulletin of History of Medicine*, 64 (1990), 509–39.

[5] S. Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (Oxford, 1995), p. 88.

[6] V. S. Smith, 'Cleanliness: The Development of Ideas and Practice in Britain 1770–1850' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London School of Economics, 1985). I am grateful to one of the referees for bringing this interesting point to my attention.

[7] A. Corbain, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imagination* (Leamington Spa, 1986), p. 92. Paris had a street cleaning competition from 1779. See also the work of S. Williams, *The Rich Man and the Diseased Poor in Early Victorian Literature* (London, 1986).

to render the body less susceptible of disease' [8] Chadwick investigated all forms of cleanliness—of the body, of clothing, and of moral habits—in his progression towards an understanding of the relationship between poverty and disease.[9] Hamlin suggests that the Victorians operated with a fragmented view of a public health, which focused in the main on the health of economically active working-class males.[10] The cleanliness debate was hijacked to form part of a sanitary reform programme which attempted to ignore the underlying causes of disease. Thus *The Times* in 1840 claimed that the Poor Law Commission was

> insulting the country by taking legal measures to enforce cleanliness for the protection of health, while they pertinaciously refuse to prevent the diseases and deaths generated by their own miserable administration in starving their workhouse victims, and refusing out-door relief [11]

The poor were stereotyped as a 'smelly' group by most nineteenth-century commentators. Sigsworth and Worboys recall that the term 'the great unwashed' was often used for the working classes, who were purportedly ignorant on matters of personal hygiene and hence health.[12] Wohl recites the description given by the MOH for Whitechapel of the poor washing their clothing.

> They merely pass dirty linen through very dirty water The smell of the linen itself, when so washed, is very offensive, and must have an injurious effect on the health of the occupants The filth of their dwellings is excessive, so is their personal filth When they attend my surgery, I am always obliged to have the door open. When I am coming downstairs from the parlour, I know at a distance of a flight of stairs whether there are any poor patients in the surgery [13]

Wear also finds that there was a strong identification between the Victorian poor and ignorance, and that the campaigns to correct their physical and moral cleanliness were often close to intimidation [14]

I

The public baths of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were seen primarily as cultural facilities, not as public health services Smith suggests that in London, baths had fallen from reputable use because of the fear of syphilis. The hot baths were seen as 'infected' by luxury and the close association between baths

[8] W Heberden, *Observations on the Increase and Decrease of Different Diseases* (London, 1801), p 68 Cited in C Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick Britain 1800–1854* (Cambridge, 1998), p 59

[9] Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice*, p 26

[10] Ibid , p 12

[11] *The Times*, 25 November 1840 Cited in Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice*, p 131

[12] M Sigsworth and M Worboys, 'The Public's View of Public Health in Mid-Victorian Britain', *Urban History*, 21 (1994), p 237

[13] A Wohl, *Endangered Lives* (London, 1983), p 64

[14] A Wear, 'The History of Personal Hygiene', in W F Bynum and R Porter (eds), *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine* (London, 1993), p 1298

and brothels was partly dissolved by an attempt at a new 'seriousness' in bathing through the use of cold baths [15]

During the 1830s and 1840s the theme of cleanliness appeared in various permutations in official reports. The 1834 Select Committee report on Hand Loom Weavers' Petitions implied that workers were prevented from attending church because they could not obtain a clean and respectable set of clothes.[16] In 1840 a Parliamentary Select Committee reported that, in the interests of public health, the issue of public baths needed to be further investigated The subsequent 1844 Royal Commission into the Sanitary State of Large Towns and Populous Districts found that no public baths cost less than 6d and that there were no municipally owned wash-houses. Thus the opportunities for the working classes to cleanse themselves and their clothing were limited to what they could achieve within the overcrowded conditions of their houses. Due to the lack of water piped directly into homes, water often had to be collected and stored in containers. This recycled water was used for washing clothes, and, without drying facilities, rooms were permanently damp, thus aggravating sickness. A further disincentive for the poorest of the poor was the lack of a replacement set of clothes to put on while washing their everyday clothes. The difficulties of washing were publicized by *The Times* in an attempt to refute the claim that 'the poor love dirt' and willingly lived in dirty conditions.

> Take for example, the House of Lords, probably the cleanest assemblage of men which could be found, condemn them to cold water and no soap, and to wash all their own clothes with their own hands in their own drawing rooms for a single twelve-month, and how would they look at its termination?[17]

One outcome of the 1844 Commission was the creation in London of the Association for the Establishment of Baths and Wash-houses for the Labouring Poor Although it was a pressure group rather than an active constructor, the Association managed to open a public bath-house at St Pancras in 1846 Other large urban areas also had groups of enlightened individuals anxious to achieve change in their communities.[18] In Edinburgh in 1843 over 3,000 working men petitioned for further lectures on working-class improvement, with the profits to be put towards the development of the baths currently demanded by the Edinburgh Bath Movement.[19] Urban pressure groups of this type must be seen in the context of the wider movement for sanitary reform in the 1840s The formation of the Health of Towns Association in 1845 (which had local branches in towns throughout the country)

[15] V Smith, 'Prescribing the Rules of Health Self-help and Advice in the Late Eighteenth Century', in R Porter (ed), *Patients and Practitioners Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-industrial Society* (Cambridge, 1985), pp 249–82

[16] *Report of the Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers' Petitions* (P P , 1834, X) Q666–7 and 2694

[17] *The Times*, 18 October 1844

[18] There is a substantial amount of literature on the development of class consciousness in nineteenth-century urban areas, and the associated politicization of local government One of the best studies is that by G Stedman Jones, *Outcast London A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford, 1971)

[19] Smith, 'Prescribing the Rules of Health', p. 262

had the dual role of pressing for national public health legislation and developing effective local health education However, this was not primarily a working-class based organization, but a voice for the interested medical, clerical, and legal professions who acknowledged a relationship between poverty and ill-health in their localities Their observations were endorsed at a national level by the reports and calculations of Chadwick.

The erection of baths and wash-houses was aided by the Public Baths and Wash-houses Acts of 1846 and 1847.[20] These acts enabled parishes and town councils to build public facilities, meeting the construction cost out of the Poor Rate, and repaying this within a fixed term. The 1846 Bill was introduced by Sir George Grey, but the main case for the Bill was made in the House of Lords by the Bishop of London.[21] He made several statements about cleanliness, arguing that the 'subject nearly concerned the moral as well as physical welfare of the humbler classes of population', and suggesting 'that overcrowding and want of cleanliness caused an aggravation of the general type of disease in the metropolis' He also presented petitions, from the Committee for Promoting the Establishment of Baths and Wash-houses for the Labouring Classes, from bankers and merchants of the city of London, from the chairman of the London Dock Company, from the churchwardens, overseers and guardians of the parish of St Martin in the Fields, and one from 121 of the parochial clergy of London. Significantly, he cited the Liverpool establishment as an example of a profitable undertaking.[22]

However, it was stressed that the aim of the Bill was not to put existing private baths out of business, but rather to stimulate private enterprise, while at the same time enabling corporations and vestries to establish baths, 'that should make them on the one hand accessible to the poor, and on the other hand remunerative to the town and parish in which they were established' [23] The Act could be used by corporations and vestries to buy out only those private establishments which had failed to meet the demands of the public. The 1847 Act[24] was a modification of the 1846 Act which allowed for the provision of upgraded facilities at higher charges for those who wanted them. However, whatever the number of baths erected, at least two-thirds were always to be of the cheapest class.[25] Throughout the limited discussion on the Bills, the assumption that the baths and wash-houses would be self-supporting, if not profit-making, held fast. It was never seen as a potential increase in the burden on the municipal pocket, and a clause clarified that public baths were not to be for the exclusive use of the poor [26]

[20] An Act to encourage the establishment of public baths and wash-houses 9&10 Vict c 74 (1846) This was modified the following year by an Act to amend the Act for the establishment of public baths and wash-houses 10&11 Vict c 61 (1847)

[21] Hansard LXXXVII (4 June 1846–24 July 1846) p 104

[22] Hansard LXXXVIII (27 July 1846–28 August 1846) p 278

[23] Ibid

[24] 10 &11 Vict c 61

[25] E H Gibson, 'Baths and Wash-houses in the English Public Health Agitation, 1839–48', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 9 (1954), p 406

[26] The 1865 Return, showing the places where the Acts had been adopted, listed only 26 towns, and 167 towns which had not adopted the Acts This list, however, is misleading Some towns were operating public baths and wash-houses without having adopted either of the Acts

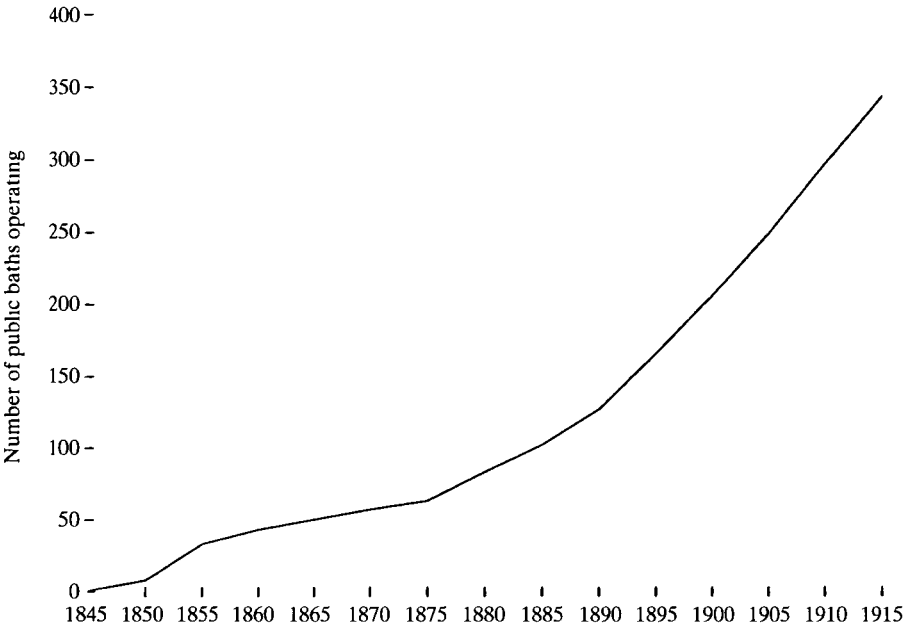

FIG 1 *Number of public baths in Britain, 1845–1915*

Source A Campbell, *Report on Public Baths and Wash-houses in the United Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1918)

By 1915 there were 343 public baths and 69 wash-houses in Britain, maintained by public authorities. All towns with a population over 50,000 had some public bathing provision (with the exception of Hornsey and Yarmouth).[27] The journey to this state of provision can provide a useful insight into the popular perceptions of the links between cleanliness and disease and the effectiveness of urban pressure groups and their motivations.

II

Although the potential contribution of public baths and wash-houses to sanitary reform was considerable, there was a wide range of experiences in British towns and cities Liverpool, Belfast, and Glasgow were initially selected for analysis because of their similarities in terms of mortality experiences, growth rates, and socio-economic profiles.[28] However, in response to these conditions, they developed very different packages of sanitary reform Liverpool gained an early reputation as a progressive public health town, being the first place in Britain to

[27] A Campbell, *Report on Public Baths and Wash-houses in the United Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1918), p 8

[28] S B Sheard, 'Nineteenth-Century Public Health. A Study of Liverpool, Belfast and Glasgow' (unpublished Ph D thesis, University of Liverpool, 1994)

appoint a Medical Officer of Health under its seminal 1846 Sanatory Act [sic]. There were a series of public health achievements in Liverpool but some of the more ambitious schemes, particularly concerning water supply, were hampered by poor planning and restricted finance. There was also a division in public health duties between the Town Council, Poor Law Board, and the Liverpool Vestry.

Glasgow, while starting from a similar demographic and economic base, appeared to be more successful in its course of sanitary reform. However, the configuration of public health services in Scotland, with substantial control vested in the police authority, effectively split the available resources to fund new investment. Belfast appears as the weakest of the three cities, despite a thriving industrial and commercial economy Much of the lag in the timing of sanitary reform in Belfast can be explained by the domination of the Town Council by one politician, John Bates, who effectively emasculated municipal authority until 1854.

The introduction of secondary sanitary systems reflects not only the financial capability of the towns but also necessary technical preconditions For example, the introduction of public baths and wash-houses is only feasible after the introduction of an adequate system of supplying water and an integrated sewerage system to remove the large amounts of water from the urban environment. Thus Liverpool, with its water supply problems which persisted until the 1890s, might be expected to lag behind Glasgow, which acquired a more than adequate water supply from Loch Katrine in 1858. Yet one would expect the identification of the sanitary advantage of public baths and wash-houses to be the same in all three cities, given the national dissemination of the reports of Chadwick and other sanitary reformers This knowledge should provoke the same demand by residents to the municipal authorities for sanitary services

Liverpool's chronic water supply problems should not distort the overall image of sanitary achievement in the city during the nineteenth century. One of the best examples of Liverpool's progressive attitude was the early introduction of baths and wash-houses for public use However, this piece of municipal enlightenment was initiated by private individuals.[29] The motives of the Corporation and these individuals provide clear-cut examples of the two variant theories concerning the provision of public facilities The individuals who initiated the service were concerned with ensuring that the poorest of the poor could 'attain cleanliness', while the Corporation in later years saw the baths as a profit-making concern They responded to the overwhelming demand not by increasing the capacity but by increasing the admission price to the point where demand fell to a manageable level. This generated the profit to fund the construction of other municipal schemes, but in the short term, at least until the end of the century, the poor had limited access to public baths and wash-houses due to the high price of the admission tickets

The first public wash-house facility was opened in Liverpool in 1832 by Catherine (Kitty) Wilkinson, who, due to the enormous demand for washing

[29] Liverpool had a very strong philanthropic community, whose activities were funded by the profitable merchant shipping interests See M Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 1951)

facilities during the cholera epidemic, had allowed the poor to wash their clothes and bedding in her kitchen. After the epidemic subsided her initiative was sustained by the District Provident Society, and supported by Councillor William Rathbone, who put pressure on the Council to provide a more 'official' establishment. This they did in the form of the Frederick Street Baths and Wash-house which opened on 28 May 1842.[30] Liverpool Corporation adopted the Public Baths and Wash-houses Act on 5 January 1848. It applied this through the Health Committee until a separate Baths Committee was formed on 9 February 1852—explicitly recognizing that the municipal provision of baths was a health-related activity.[31]

Liverpool Corporation was eager from the outset that the baths and wash-house should pay for themselves and not rely on subsidies from the main rating system. Consequently, when they found a great demand for the facilities offered, they increased the charges for washing from 1d. to 2d. (for 6 hours), for cold baths from 1d. to 2d., and for warm baths from 2d. to 3d. They installed a vapour bath at Frederick Street in 1849 for which they charged 1s.[32] However, even with these increased charges, a loss of £108 was recorded for the year ending June 1853. The committee thus decided to persist in increasing the charges, in the hope that the profits would finance a further extension of the city's facilities. The fact that the baths were used mainly by the better classes is reinforced by an extract from the Baths Committee Minutes in 1852

> Resolved That notices be put up at the several baths requesting visitors not to give gratuities to servants and informing them that a book is kept for entering remarks [33]

It is unlikely that the poorest of Liverpool's inhabitants would have sufficient funds to give tips, or that they would put comments in the visitors' book The Health Committee opened a second baths and wash-house establishment in Paul Street in November 1846 The sanitary benefit of the wash-houses was not entirely forgotten, as the Corporation continued to allow the free washing of infected clothing Liverpool was seen as a model for baths and wash-houses in the 1840s Representatives from the London Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Working Classes asked for details and plans of the new Paul Street building in 1845.[34] The Report of the Royal Commission for Inquiring into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts printed the design and operations of the Frederick Street establishment in detail [35] The Public Baths and Wash-houses Acts

[30] J Newlands, *Report to the Baths Committee Liverpool Corporation*, October 1856

[31] Liverpool Corporation Baths Committee Minute Book, 6 December 1852, p 79 (Liverpool Record Office, hereafter LRO 352 MIN/BAT 1/1)

[32] Vapour baths resembled Turkish baths and were for relaxation rather than for just cleansing the body It could be suggested therefore that this is an indication of the corporation moving away from their initial target market of the very poor, towards the middle classes who saw baths as a social activity

[33] Liverpool Corporation Baths Committee Minute Book, 1 March 1852, p 13 (LRO 352 MIN/BAT 1/1)

[34] Liverpool Corporation Council Minutes, 1 October 1845 (LRO 352 COU)

[35] *First Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts* (P P ,1844, XVII) Appendix pp 195–7

of 1846 and 1847 were also partly a response to the perceived success of the Liverpool experiment

The typhus and cholera epidemics which the new Liverpool sanitary administration faced in 1847 brought the shortage of washing accommodation to the notice of the Health Committee The provision of free baths for schoolchildren was halted due to opposition from paying customers who could not get in, while women queued to do their washing.[36] This sudden increase in the demand for clean bodies and clothes is the clearest evidence available that the connection between disease and dirt was perceived even among the lowest socio-economic groups. The Health Committee in early 1848 resolved to use the Public Baths and Wash-houses Act to borrow £25,000 to buy a further five sites for public facilities.

The health and 'moral' benefits of the Liverpool Cornwallis Street Baths were widely publicized by Hugh Shimmin, a Liverpool journalist who wrote extensively on local issues in the 1850s. When Shimmin wrote his report, nearly 25,000 people were using the baths each week, generating receipts of more than £500 per annum Shimmin toured the baths with members of the Health Committee and recounted an inspection of the cheapest baths

> Lord Alfred Paget, who visited it a short time since, in company with the Earl of Derby, expressed his great surprise and astonishment when looking at the clear skins, well knitted frames, and in some instances wonderfully developed muscles of the boys 'They might', he said, 'be all noblemen's sons' It is said that cleanliness is next to godliness, that health of the mind is in a great measure dependent upon that of the body, and that cleanliness of one will induce purity of the other [37]

Glasgow's entry into the world of public baths and wash-houses was considerably later than that of Liverpool. The Corporation made an initial attempt in the early nineteenth century to provide public baths, but the main initiative was taken up by the Police Commissioners in the 1860s. The necessity for public washing facilities was first impressed upon the Police Board in August 1863, when a typhus fever epidemic struck the city. The newly appointed Sanitary Committee of the Police Board commented on the link between dirty individuals and the spread of the disease, and the Medical Officer (Gairdner) was instructed to find a suitable site for a wash-house to wash infected clothing. It was explicitly stated in the Police Board minutes that this wash-house was to be a temporary measure during the fever.[38] In January 1864 the Police Board agreed to approach Glasgow Corporation to arrange the lease of some land for the wash-house. This was followed by another period of inactivity until the wash-house was built and made ready for use on 30 August 1864, a full year after the Medical Officer identified it as an effective sanitary measure in the prevention of the spread of disease.[39] There is no indication of how long this wash-house for infected clothes and bedding operated. However, in

[36] Liverpool Corporation Health Committee Minutes, 30 November 1847 (LRO 352 COU)

[37] J K Walton and A Wilcox (eds), *Low Life and Moral Improvement in Mid-Victorian England* (Leicester, 1991), p 214

[38] Glasgow Police Commissioners Sanitary Committee Minute Book Vol 1, p 6, 18 August 1863 (Strathclyde Regional Archives, hereafter SRA, E1/16/1)

[39] Ibid, Vol 1, p 58, 30 August 1864

May 1869, acting on the Police Act of 1866, the Police Board decided to provide permanent baths and wash-house facilities for the public.[40] It was not until February 1875 that a sub-committee for baths and wash-houses was appointed and in July 1876 the Police Board opened the London Road Baths at a cost of £2,250, followed by the Kennedy Street Baths in March 1877 costing £630 plus an annual lease to the Corporation of £30 In August 1878 the Greenhead Baths were opened by the Corporation, bringing to a conclusion the first phase of public baths and wash-houses trailing Liverpool's programme by some 20 years

In Belfast, due to the effective emasculation of municipal policy in the 1840s by John Bates, the impetus to provide public baths and wash-houses came not from the formal urban government (Belfast Municipal Corporation) but from a charitable concern, almost replicating the method of establishing waterworks in the town. The decision to install baths in Belfast was taken by the Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Working Classes which was founded on 13 February 1845 [41] The hygiene–health connection was evident from the start, with the local doctor and sanitary reform campaigner Andrew Malcolm appointed as Secretary of the Society at a salary of £50 per year.[42] A subscription was started, with the intention of providing a site and building if the Corporation would undertake the long-term management of the establishment. Several sites were considered, but potential locations in the centre of the town raised objections from the residents because of 'possible annoyance from a constant concourse of the poor' [43]

Malcolm went to England in April 1846 and inspected baths and wash-houses in Liverpool, Southport, Bolton, Manchester, Halifax, Hull, and London. From these investigations he found only one self-supporting establishment for the working classes [44] A site was chosen in Townsend Street, at an estimated cost of £3,044 for construction and fitting out, at this point the Society had raised only £1,200 through subscriptions. The initial size of the establishment was therefore scaled down, and eventually provided 13 baths at a charge of 1d. cold, 2d. warm and 4d vapour including free soap, towel, and flesh brush. Malcolm also saw the potential for making a profit on the enterprise by employing washerwomen in the wash-house There were also 68 washing stalls which cost 1d for three hours' use The establishment opened in May 1847. During the first nine days 1,328 people took baths and 222 people washed clothes; the total income was £24. The ultimate aim of the Society was to provide facilities for the poor, so they made available books of one dozen wash-house tickets costing 1s 6d to 'ladies and gentlemen' for free distribution amongst the poor.[45]

However, the Society could not make the baths and wash-house pay for itself, and they took out a loan after the first year. One possible solution was for the

[40] Glasgow Police Act 1866 The sections of the act which relate to the provision of baths and wash-houses are 387 and 389

[41] Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, hereafter PRONI, Ulster Museum papers D 1860/1

[42] H G Calwell, *Andrew Malcolm of Belfast Physician and Historian* (Belfast, 1977), p 79

[43] Ibid , p 81

[44] Ibid

[45] Ibid , p 83

Corporation to purchase the establishment from the Society, applying its newly acquired powers to provide public baths and wash-houses.[46] The Council rejected this option and a long dispute followed during the late 1840s [47] In 1848, during a severe epidemic of cholera, Malcolm appealed in three guises to the Corporation for them to take over the baths and wash-house—as Secretary and Treasurer of the Belfast Sanitary Committee, as Secretary of the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Working Classes, and as the Officer of Health to the Town Council In 1851 the Society organized a petition signed by over 1,300 people, including 88 doctors to ask the Corporation to buy the baths from them, as they had a debt of £1,400.[48] By 1853 there was considerable public concern at the threat of closure An increased entrance fee was charged in an attempt to reduce the debts.[49] The case went to Chancery, and the Corporation eventually agreed to buy the enterprise for a price of £950, once it had established a special rate for the purpose, but it later reneged on the promise

In January 1860 the Society put the baths up for sale, hoping to find a commercial buyer, with no success, and eventually sold the building in 1861 for only £200 Malcolm in particular must have felt disappointed at the failure of his grand dream which he explained thus:

> The bath is no longer a luxury, devoted to the exclusive gratification of the wealthy It is here for the labouring man, who at the close of the day may now refresh and invigorate his toilworn frame Glad should he be to see this day A new source of enjoyment and recreation is opened up to him which may supersede the nightly frequenting of the tavern—which will bring him home to the bosom of his family a new man renewed in body and in mind, and disposed to cultivate and improve his leisure hours [50]

There are common themes in this first phase of public provision of baths and wash-houses in all three cities The most striking is the apparent 'safeguard' which washing both bodies and clothes was said to offer during epidemics of cholera and typhus fever This association was obvious to both the poorer classes who queued to gain entry to baths and wash-houses, and to the management who manipulated the entry systems and prices to manage the demand. Yet paying for this clearly public health facility to cleanse bodies and clothes—something which Chadwick and other sanitary reformers were convinced was required for the physical and spiritual health of their urban populations—was always dependent upon the competing financial claims of other municipal services. In both Liverpool and Belfast, local philanthropy was involved in the formation of public baths and wash-houses, and in both places it is interesting to note that these groups also called for municipal involvement either through subsidy or buy-out.

[46] The Baths and Wash-houses (Ireland) Act was passed without any parliamentary debates It received Royal Assent on 26 August 1846

[47] *Belfast Newsletter*, 5 October 1847, 3 December 1847, 2 May 1848, 3 October 1848

[48] *Belfast Newsletter*, 2 January 1852

[49] *Northern Whig*, 27 January 1853, article by Revd William O'Hanlon

[50] A G Malcolm, *Cleanliness and the Advantages of the Bath* (Belfast, 1848)

III

From the 1880s municipal authorities were primarily concerned with providing large-scale systems for water supply and sewerage removal, road paving, and other urban 'improvements'. These schemes, financed through rating local property, often brought local authorities to the point of insolvency, and any additional projects were likely to be approved on the understanding that they were to be self-financing or possibly profit-generating for the municipal authority.[51] Total local authority indebtedness increased from £173,208,000 in 1884–85 to £435,545,000 in 1905–06. This represented £1.3s.4d. in the pound of rateable value in 1884–85 and £2.2s 10d in the pound in 1905–06. The amount raised in rates for the same dates was £25,667,000 and £56,048,000 respectively. Thus local authority debt increased 151 per cent, the yield from rates by 118 per cent and the rateable value by only 37 per cent.[52] The tension in these figures was manifested in an increasingly vociferous 'ratepayers lobby' in towns and cities throughout Britain. These groups had considerable influence over the course of municipal investment. Chamberlain's slogan 'High Rates and a Healthy City' was not actually the reality in his Birmingham domain In 1855 a Ratepayers' Protection Society was formed in the aftermath of a period of poor financial mismanagement. They vowed to keep the rates down to £2s.6d. in the pound, forcing the council to cancel their drainage and improvement plans.[53] A solution was eventually found through the municipal purchase of the Birmingham Gas Works in 1874 which for the next ten years contributed an annual £25,000–30,000 to the Borough fund, and enabled Chamberlain to keep the rates below the 1873 level for the decade (excluding two years). At the same time the much-needed sewerage and improvement works were finally carried out.[54]

Hennock has suggested that an 'improving' town council was likely to avoid a ratepayers' protest if it possessed revenues which could be used to subsidize its schemes.[55] Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, there was increasing concern that local authorities had pushed their range of trading activities to unacceptable limits. In defence of local government, a number of politically motivated intellectuals, some involved with the Fabian Society, argued that municipalities were right to have evolved into cooperative communities 'in which one function after another is organised and fulfilled for the common benefits of the collective forces of the social group'.[56] At a local level in many places throughout the country there

[51] E P Hennock, 'Finance and Politics in Urban Local Government in England, 1835–1900', *Historical Journal*, VI (1963), 212–25 Hennock discusses the problem of water supply in Manchester in the 1840s which was only solved by using the municipal gas profits as security for the loan to construct the Longdendale reservoir Manchester's water supply was heavily and openly subsidized by profits from the gas trading and Hennock states that the waterworks were politically dependent on that subsidy

[52] P J Waller, *Town, City and Nation* (Oxford, 1993), p 307

[53] Hennock, 'Finance and Politics', p 218

[54] H Finer, *Municipal Trading* (London, 1941), p 49 In 1882 an inquiry found that £182,000 had been set aside from the Borough Fund in Birmingham, partly because the Corporation had access to cheaper interest rates than private companies did

[55] Hennock, 'Finance and Politics', p. 222

[56] Sidney Webb quoted in H Laski, *A Century of Municipal Progress* (London, 1935), p 167

was dissatisfaction It was most clearly voiced in Manchester, where the ill-fated Ship Canal, set up by private entrepreneurs, had been saved through a municipal buy-out. This saddled the Manchester ratepayers with a debt three times larger than the London civic debt per capita One Mancunian ratepayer told his Council 'the State has scourged us with whips, but you have scourged us with scorpions'.[57]

What implications might this trend towards greater local authority indebtedness have for existing programmes to establish baths and wash-houses in British towns and cities? The revolution in disease transmission theories of the 1880s and the more rigorous application of sanitary reform through the Local Government Board after 1872 might suggest a demand for an expansion of facilities, which in some places could not be accommodated within tight financial controls. Additionally, the development of a clear sense of civic consciousness and pride, which particularly seems to have affected northern towns and cities in the late nineteenth century, may have added to pressure for the building of public baths as a visible sign of progressiveness

IV

The public baths and wash-houses which were opened in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s were often a direct response to a perceived threat from infectious epidemic diseases. However, with the changing disease panorama in British urban areas in the second half of the nineteenth century, there appears to have been a subjective reassessment of the benefits which could be gained by, first, providing public facilities, and, secondly, placing them within the means of the poorer classes both geographically and financially. Underpinning changing attitudes to the need for public baths and wash-houses was an ongoing discourse suggesting that the working classes themselves were reluctant to use them because their opening hours were limited, they were far from their homes, and they cost too much [58]

Liverpool's development of baths and wash-houses changed direction in the 1850s. The Corporation decided to separate off the profitable baths (which were used by all classes) from the loss-making wash-houses, which were primarily intended for the use of the poor. In fact, due to lack of demand, the wash-house side of the Cornwallis Street building was never opened. The baths were always the popular aspect of the service, with the number of bathers increasing 23 times between 1842 and 1858, whilst the number of washers increased less than seven times [59] Another public bath was built in 1863 in Margaret Street, under pressure from the residents of Everton District and the Poor Law Guardians of West Derby. In 1866 the Baths Committee was dissolved and responsibility for baths and wash-houses was transferred to the Water Committee. This was a period of water shortage in Liverpool, following the failure of the disastrous Rivington Pike scheme. Supply reverted from a constant to an intermittent service, often unavailable for

[57] J Kellet, 'Municipal Socialism, Enterprise and Trading in the Victorian city', *Urban History Yearbook 1978*, p 41

[58] Sigsworth and Worboys, 'The Public's View', p 246

[59] W Bate, 'Sanitary Administration of Liverpool 1847–1900' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Liverpool, 1955), p 127

most of the day It was therefore unlikely that there would be sufficient water to meet the needs of existing establishments, let alone any expanded facilities.

Liverpool, however, prompted by public demand, embarked upon a new phase of building baths and wash-houses in the 1870s. The Water Committee was repeatedly criticized for its lack of progress in creating additional bathing facilities, and because the existing establishments were not free for the poor. *Porcupine*, the satirical Liverpool newspaper, frequently carried articles on baths In 1870 its argument for free bathing was both olfactory and sanitary, if not entirely logical in targeting the clothes rather than the individual

> To intensify such odours it only requires a downfall of rain, when the clothing being wet and the body heated, the emanations during the process of drying assume a compound of odours of the most nauseous and sickening kind Each person in these circumstances becomes a moving nuisance, and carries about with him the elements of disease [60]

Another article in 1871 focused on the economics of providing free baths.

> better to tax the town to pay for free baths, than to pay for the disinfection of infected houses, for tons of carbolic to sprinkle our streets, and for a large extra staff to visit the homes of the victims of filth [61]

In 1873 the Baths Committee was re-established to administer the £40,000 the Corporation had been allowed to borrow to provide facilities in the new districts of the expanding town. However, this sudden demand from electoral petitioning groups was based on recreational not sanitary ideals, and the new facilities which were provided favoured larger plunge ponds (what we now call swimming pools) rather than individual baths. By 1883 Liverpool had eight public baths, which were used by approximately 448,000 bathers a year.[62] During the 1890s the Corporation completed a massive restoration programme and in 1898 planned two more public baths [63] A commemorative book for the Congress of the Royal Institute of Public Health, which was held in Liverpool in 1903, reviewed the baths and wash-houses and claimed that, by the 1890s, there were facilities within ten minutes walk for all Liverpool residents It also triumphantly announced that Liverpool had built the first 'People's Baths' in 1902, an establishment in Beacon Street which contained only showers and thus had none of the recreational potential offered by traditional plunge baths.[64]

However, despite the success of the recreational side of the plunge baths, at the end of the century the Baths Committee was aware that it had failed to meet the sanitary requirements of Liverpool, a specific objective when the first public baths were established in the 1840s. The public baths were not being used by 'the exceedingly poor, to whom twopence is a consideration'.[65] The Corporation had

[60] *Porcupine*, 23 July 1870, vol 12, p 166 'Free Bathing Needed'
[61] *Porcupine*, 18 February 1871, vol 12, p 573 'Free Baths'
[62] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 25 December 1883
[63] Annual Report of the MOH for Liverpool, 1898
[64] City of Liverpool, *Handbook Compiled for the Congress of the Royal Institute of Public Health* (Liverpool, 1903), p 235
[65] Liverpool Corporation Baths Committee Minute Book, 20 September 1899 (LRO 352 COU) Bate, 'Sanitary Administration', p 132

also failed to capitalize on the sanitary benefit to be gained from widespread provision and use of wash-houses. By 1900 there were only four wash-houses in the city, comprising 311 'tubs', which were used by an average of 168,229 washers a year.[66] Although the price was kept within the means of the poor, Newlands (Liverpool's first Borough Engineer) had found even in the early years that the wash-houses were used mainly by employees of the middle and upper classes or by professional washerwomen.[67] He justified his reluctance to embark upon a major expansion of the wash-houses by saying that

> these wash-houses are generally regarded as a public good, whereas they only indicate a great evil and are at best but an expedient to palliate the defects of structural arrangements in the houses of the poor merely to burden the public to supply that in charity which it is the duty of the houseowner to provide as a right [68]

In 1900 Sir Thomas Hughes, an Alderman and member of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, gave evidence at the Joint Select Committee on Municipal Trading. When questioned about the use of public baths and wash-houses, he stated that Liverpool had never tried to make a profit from this activity. This view is hard to reconcile with the manipulation of the pricing system over the previous half-century Hughes even went so far as to state that

> The total number of bathers at these various establishments is 1,235,215 persons The cost of management has been £10,033 and the receipts from the bathers £7,519 so that we have been losing about £2,500 a year on these public baths and washhouses deliberately to encourage the people to make use of them all this shows that we are anxious to contribute towards the public health [69]

Thus Liverpool incorporated public baths and wash-houses into its early programmes for sanitary reform in the 1840s and 1850s. Yet the impetus was lost and the shift in perception of public baths from a sanitary to a recreational function legitimized the Corporation's transformation of the service into a municipal trading activity, governed primarily by profit. The gradual erosion of public wash-houses was complemented by the provision of domestic washing equipment in the new housing constructed at the end of the nineteenth century, although, as Williams has shown for America, even the provision of facilities in the home did not guarantee their proper use [70]

Glasgow shows a similar decline in local authority interest in public baths and wash-houses towards the end of the nineteenth century. By May 1880 the Police Board had decided to reduce their involvement. They deferred a decision to build baths at Woodside Road until put under pressure by the ratepayers of that district They leased the London Road and Kennedy Street Baths to a tenant, who subsequently abandoned them in September 1883 when they failed to realize an

[66] Annual Report of the MOH for Liverpool, 1898

[67] J Newlands, Report to the Baths Committee of the Borough of Liverpool by the Borough Engineer, 1856 p 91 Fifty per cent of those using the Frederick Street facilities were washerwomen or servants, and only eight per cent were labourers' wives

[68] Ibid , p 92

[69] *Report of the Joint Select Committee on Municipal Trading* (P P , 1900, VII) Minutes of Evidence, p 180 Q2261–62

[70] M T Williams, 'New York City's Baths A Case Study in Urban Progressive Reform', *Journal of Urban History*, 7 (1980), 49–81

adequate profit.[71] Another three baths and wash-houses were opened by the Police Board in Glasgow in the 1880s. The extension of the city boundary in 1891 created new districts requiring local public baths and wash-houses, and the residents of Springburn and Maryhill petitioned the Board for facilities in 1892.[72] Again the initial method of enquiry had a sanitary bias, as shown in the motion put by Councillor Langlands:

> That it be remitted to the Baths and Wash-houses Committee and the Medical Officer of Health to enquire and report as to the sanitary condition of the district of Maryhill, with special reference as to its requirements for baths and wash-houses [73]

By May 1896 the total capital expenditure on baths and wash-houses in Glasgow was £119,000. There were five sites all offering similar facilities Each site had two swimming 'ponds' (male and female) and approximately 35 hot baths, the charge for which was: male first class 6d., male second class 4d. and female 3d. The attached wash-houses had stalls for between 44 and 78 washers and cost 2d. per hour to use Until 1896 there was also a laundry with a staff of professional washerwomen Bell and Paton provide some more detailed information on the habits of the users, suggesting that women did their washing on average once a week for two hours at a time, and that people took baths once a fortnight.[74]

A letter from the Medical Officer to the committee in 1891 raised the question of what percentage of Glasgow's poor used these facilities. He reported that the female sanitary inspectors were concerned that the washing deposits of 9d. were beyond the means of the poor. The committee responded to this by reducing the deposit to 6d. They also suggested that bathers should have the option of having their undergarments washed and dried while they bathed.[75] The monthly returns made to the Baths and Wash-houses Committee show that there were approximately 43,077 bathers and 14,133 washers per month and that most of these came from the immediate vicinity of the establishments [76] Russell, the Medical Officer for Glasgow during this period, was well aware of the difficulties of getting the poor to travel any distance to public facilities, especially if they had to negotiate tenement staircases with large bundles of clothes He recognized, like Newlands in Liverpool, that the provision of baths was ultimately a domestic concern rather than a public utility [77]

Total numbers of admissions to the wash-house may not accurately reflect working-class usage. Glasgow had a large number of professional washerwomen

[71] J Bell and J Paton, *Glasgow its Municipal Organisation and Administration* (Glasgow, 1896), p 175

[72] Glasgow Police Board Baths and Wash-houses Committee Minute Book, Vol I, p 67, 26 May 1892 (SRA E1/24/1) The committee minute book for this committee begins in May 1891, although the committee seems to have been created in 1875 Therefore there is no detailed information on the establishment of the other facilities The minutes are brief—detailing amounts of paybills authorized, considering applications from swimming clubs for reduced rates and reports of committee members who have visited the establishments in the past month

[73] Ibid , p 84, 16 September 1892

[74] Bell and Paton, '*Glasgow*', p 17

[75] Glasgow Police Board Baths and Wash-houses Committee Minute Book, Vol I, p 7. May 1891 (SRA E1/24/1)

[76] Ibid , p 5

[77] J B Russell, *Public Health Administration in Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1905), p 42

who used the wash-houses to do the laundry of the middle classes. In 1895, after the introduction of the Factory and Workshops Act, the Police Board considered whether it could legally continue to employ washerwomen in the wash-houses. The Police Act of 1866 (which established the baths and wash-houses) makes no mention of the right to provide staff or to run the facilities as a profit-making concern. This also raises the municipal–ethics question: 'whether, as a matter of public policy, the corporation should establish themselves as competitors in the laundry business with ratepayers in the city who carry on such a business for their maintenance'.[78] The Police Board withdrew its own washerwomen employees after this enquiry, thus losing a profit on the wash-house side of the operations of £248 per annum.[79] In fact, municipal enterprises in Scotland were in theory not allowed to make profits. Pricing and financing had to be manipulated to maintain a balance between income and expenditure. In 1908, when the Lord Provost of Glasgow suggested that—as in England—profits should be allowed to go towards relieving the burden of rates, there was considerable opposition.[80]

The provision of public baths and wash-houses in Glasgow thus partly responded to the demands of the residents. However, as in Liverpool, the pricing system meant that it did not fulfil the ultimate 'sanitary' aim of the Police Board as it kept away the poorest poor. The involvement of the Medical Officer in the expansion programme indicates the clear link seen by the municipal authorities between cleanliness and the suppression of 'dirt' related diseases in the city. In the 1890s schoolchildren were allowed free use of the pool and it was agreed to reduce the charges for occupants of property owned by the Glasgow Workmen's Dwelling Company. The Police Board also tried to encourage frequent and regular use of the baths and wash-houses by issuing advance books of admissions tickets at a discounted price.[81]

The relationship between the Corporation and the Police Board partly explains the way in which the public baths and wash-houses service developed in Glasgow. The range of options for expansion open to the Police Board was limited. Yet the Glasgow experience also highlights the fragility of the ratepayers' support for costly schemes which had a sanitary tone. The downfall of the Lord Provost Blackie in 1869 was brought about because of the escalating cost of the compulsory purchase of slum property through the 1866 Glasgow Improvement Trust Act. Glasgow had a very hostile 'shop-keeping' element which imposed restrictions on investments. Fraser cites their successful campaign to defeat the Free Libraries Act which would have resulted in an increase in the rates. This 'spendthrift' influence on the

[78] Glasgow Police Board Baths and Wash-houses Committee Minute Book, p. 359, 24 January 1896 (SRA E1/24/1).

[79] The accounts for the year to 31 May 1895 show an income of £1,378 and an expenditure of £1,130 (which was mainly the wages for the washerwomen), thus realizing a profit of £248. Glasgow Police Board Baths and Wash-houses Committee Minute Book, p. 355, 24 January 1896 (SRA E1/24/1).

[80] H. Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism and Social Policy', in R. J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds.), *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History 1820–1914* (London, 1993), p. 277.

[81] Glasgow Police Board Baths and Wash-houses Committee Minute Book, p. 95, 11 November 1892 (SRA E1/24/1).

Council, combined with the economic depression that hit Glasgow in the 1880s, partly explains the lack of enthusiasm for expanding municipal services. In addition to this negative force, Glasgow also lacked the political participation of a large proportion of its working classes, up to 50,000 of whom were disenfranchised because they had not paid their rates in full before the elections.[82]

In Belfast, it was not until 1879 when the Peter's Hill establishment was opened, that the Corporation finally provided public washing facilities. In 1888 baths were opened in Ormeau Avenue, a further set of baths were provided in Templemore Avenue in 1893, and in 1896 in Falls Road The attempt by the Corporation to introduce public wash-houses under the Baths and Wash-houses Act of 1897 was a failure, possibly because they refused to provide facilities for self-employed washerwomen.[83] The opposition of the Corporation to providing baths and wash-houses was prompted by financial rather than ideological concerns. Bates' policy from 1842 until 1855 was to restrict funding to what he saw as the 'essential services' such as street improvements, increased market space, cheaper gas supplies, and investment of Corporation finances in property speculation. In Belfast in the second half of the nineteenth-century, the changing perception of the primary use of public baths and wash-houses did not stress the public health potential.

V

The quarter century from 1890 to 1915 witnessed a sea-change in public perceptions of personal hygiene. The British experience was paralleled by similar transformations in Europe and America. In Germany the *Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Volksbader,* which was founded in 1899, used as its slogan 'for every German, one bath a week'.[84] Showers were exhibited for the first time at the 1883 Berlin Public Health Exhibition. These could be built much more cheaply than conventional baths and had no recreational connotations In France, from 1882, hygiene lessons were included in the primary school curriculum, which instructed children in the correct use of toilets and washing techniques and also regularly inspected children for cleanliness.[85]

In America, as in Germany, there were disputes over whether to build large numbers of small and functional public facilities, or, alternatively, to opt for fewer grander establishments. Williams observes an upsurge in interest in personal cleanliness after the acceptance of germ theory in the 1890s, yet urges caution in identifying who was making renewed claims for cleanliness. She suggests that pressure did not come directly from the 'slum dwellers', who would be unlikely to see themselves as missing out on baths. Pressure was usually exerted on behalf of this group by middle-class sanitary reformers such as the New York Association for

[82] Fraser, 'Municipal Socialism', p 261
[83] R. Blaney, *Belfast 100 Years of Public Health* (Belfast, 1988), p 12
[84] B Ladd, 'Public Baths and Civic Improvement in Nineteenth Century German Cities', *Journal of Urban History*, 14 (1988), p 383
[85] Wear, 'History of Personal Hygiene', p 1302

Improving the Condition of the Poor, which accepted a donation towards public baths from the philanthropist Elizabeth Millbank Anderson in 1902 [86]

In Britain the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust funded an investigation and report into the public baths and wash-house facilities which were available in 1915 [87] The Trust was considering investing in such establishments, but wanted information on what had already been achieved through voluntary and municipal efforts The introduction to the report makes the Trust's concerns explicit

> It appears probable that practical education in cleanliness will in future be looked upon as an essential part of physical training At present cleanliness implies only its outward appearance for large numbers of the community and even where adequate facilities are available, it is obviously impossible for parents to teach children what they have never learnt themselves. The offensive conditions of many of our schools are due not only to clothes on which bodily dirt has accumulated, but to the unwashed persons of the children The amount of health lost in a year as the direct result of breathing an atmosphere rank with impurity cannot unfortunately be measured in numerical terms [88]

The Carnegie report focused on the lack of coordination between the various official agencies which had an interest in cleanliness and it identified loopholes in the system· 'By the Children's Act 1908, a verminous child can be cleansed at public expense, and the parents summoned for neglect. sanitary authorities have powers which enable them to cleanse the house, but the adult is at present free to infect the community if he so pleases' [89]

Despite the negative tone of the Carnegie report, substantial progress had been made by 1915 in providing public facilities for all classes to cleanse themselves and their clothes Baths and Wash-houses Acts were passed in 1878, 1882, 1896, and 1899. These, in addition to clauses in the Public Health Acts for England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, allowed local authorities to supply water free of charge to public baths and wash-houses [90] By 1915 there were 343 public baths in Britain The total number of wash-houses was a modest 69, perhaps reflecting the relative failure of this area of municipal activity.[91]

There was a clear increase in the provision of facilities from the 1880s, and this was sustained through the following 25 years.[92] Provision becomes more patchy the further down the urban hierarchy one goes Of 148 towns in the 20,000–50,000 category there were 108 with some provision (often uncovered swimming pools) and 40 with no facilities at all The cost of maintaining public baths and wash-houses varied considerably throughout Britain However, it is possible to express the receipts from customers as a percentage of the total expenditure on these services This can illustrate the degree of local authority subsidy and thus

[86] Williams, 'New York's City Baths', p 70
[87] Campbell, *Report on Public Baths*, p 77
[88] Ibid , p 78
[89] Ibid , p 93
[90] The Scottish Acts relating to public baths and wash-houses did not, like their English equivalents, contain maximum charges clauses Thus the cost of the cheapest bath in Scotland was often twice the price in an English bath
[91] Although the Carnegie report shows 69 establishments, these were located in only 26 towns
[92] However, the data give no indication of the size of the additions

perhaps the degree of commitment to maintaining a cheap service. Gaining true comparative financial information is difficult. Some towns received their baths and wash-houses as gifts (either the site or the cost of construction). These fortunate places did not have to bear the cost of interest and capital repayments. Operating costs could also vary widely, with some local authorities not charging establishments for the water and power they used. It was common for a separate rate to be levied for these services, and Table 1 shows that some authorities subsidized their establishments more than others, either by levying a higher rate or by meeting a bigger deficit between income and expenditure. The variation indicated in Table 1 suggests that some towns clearly viewed the provision of public baths and wash-houses as a public health function rather than a trading enterprise. The Carnegie report states that only two places offered free baths—York and Dunfermline—while others such as Birmingham, Bradford, and Brighouse charged a nominal fee.

As a further advantage, municipal establishments had access to cheap loans for construction. The Public Works Loans Commissioners offered favourable rates of

TABLE 1 *Public baths and wash-houses in a selection of towns in five urban size groups, 1913–14*

Town	Number of facilities	Attendance per 1000 of population	Receipts as percentage of expenditure	Rate aid
Population over 200,000				
Liverpool	18	2114	42	0 95d
Manchester	18	2718	28	1 97d
Glasgow	21	1195	60	0 74d
Belfast	5	872	46	0 5d
Population 100,000–200,000				
Cardiff	2	963	76	0 17d
Preston	2	1146	28	0 77d
Burnley	3	2064	48	1 66d
Aberdeen	1	799	87	n d
Population 50,000–100,000				
Wallasey	1	1695	44	1 0d
Ilford	1	404	55	0 13d
Barnsley	1	959	41	1 5d
Northampton	3	5696	6	n d
Population 20,000–50,000				
Exeter	3	1894	46	0 68d
Stafford	1	2340	58	2 0d
Goole	1	713	37	1 5d
Perth	2	1051	94	0 1d
Population under 20,000				
Sowerby Bridge	1	2103	68	0 48d
Nantwich	1	1326	39	2 0d
Stevenage	1	358	78	0 09d
Forfar	1	2114	55	0 96d

Source: Compiled from A. Campbell, *Report on Public Baths and Wash-houses in the United Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1918)

interest compared with the open market rates.[93] This advantage, however, was partly offset by the limitations imposed by the Local Government Board, which had the task of sanctioning all local authority borrowing and imposed a maximum amount to be borrowed. An authority which wished to borrow more than 25 per cent of its annual rateable value had to obtain a Provisional Order, which required special parliamentary approval.

VI

The case studies show that neither Liverpool, Belfast, or Glasgow achieved the ultimate aim of providing an affordable system of public baths and wash-houses for those urban residents who required it. They only partly attempted to meet demand in terms of the number of establishments, their location throughout the cities, and through the manipulation of ticket prices. The Carnegie report of 1918 confirms that these are typical stories of the development of public baths and wash-houses as 'secondary sanitary systems'. Liverpool and Belfast recognized the need to install facilities at a comparatively early stage in the 1840s. They were responding directly to recent sanitary reports which linked dirt and disease, and to the intermittent threat of infectious epidemic diseases such as cholera and typhus. They were also responding to the visual and olfactory effects of poverty in their urban environments. Thus, this first phase of investment in public baths and wash-houses had three main objectives. First, the development of healthier citizens, not 'walking nuisances' who may have been seen as a threat to the other urban inhabitants Secondly, by tackling personal uncleanliness, sanitary reform campaigners felt that they were going some way towards improving the lives of the poor, in particular their spiritual and moral health. This is highlighted by the testimonies of Andrew Malcolm in Belfast and Hugh Shimmin in Liverpool and echoes the national sentiments expressed by Shaftesbury, Chadwick, and others. The motivations of such 'ultrasanitarians' in other urban areas have been ably disentangled by Sigsworth and Worboys to reveal similar concerns.[94] The third objective was the establishment of a 'going concern', a municipal service that would enrich the lives of all city dwellers in the same way as public libraries and parks did, but which at the same time raised some profit to subsidize the costs of the insanitary urban environment.

The second phase of investment in public baths and wash-houses coincides with the peak period of local government investment, particularly in public health infrastructure. Recent research has re-positioned the focus of sanitary reform firmly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This helps to explain some of the discrepancy between the established view of sanitary reform as a mid-nineteenth century activity, and the much later period in which mortality levels from

[93] J Wilson, R Millward, and S Sheard, *Trends in Local Authority Loan Expenditure in England and Wales 1870–1914* (University of Manchester Working Papers in Economic and Social History, 22, 1993), p 4

[94] Sigsworth and Worboys, 'The Public's View', p 246

related diseases actually began to fall.[95] This paper serves to illustrate the lengthy planning and implementation process which encumbered so many sanitary reform projects. A further outcome from recent research is evidence of the correlation in the timing of local government investment with both national economic fortunes and local political pressures [96] Municipal expenditure on public baths and wash-houses only accounted for a relatively small amount of the total local authority expenditure. for the five-year period 1895–99 the amount sanctioned by the Local Government Board for baths and wash-houses totalled £710,000 [97] Yet on the eve of the First World War the overall scale of total outstanding loans for municipal capital investment shocked many people. It had increased from £84 million in 1873–74 to £652 million in 1913–14, at a time when the total national debt was £706 million.[98] A Second Joint Select Committee had been formed in 1903 specifically to investigate the problems of inadequate municipal accounting procedures, but it failed to develop a satisfactory plan for their improvement In 1905 *The Times* published a series of articles re-opening the accusations that local authorities were extravagant, incompetent and had faulty accounting systems There was increasing concern that local government was extending its operations to an untenable point, both financially and politically

These city-based case studies and the broader national narrative have attempted to illustrate the interplay between politics, information and finance in the choice and timing of baths and wash-houses as both public health policies and municipal trading commodities The beginning of the period 1847–1918 was characterized by comparatively limited local authority investment This was based on the advice of new public health professionals such as Medical Officers of Health and Borough Engineers, working with flawed theories on disease transmission, and with scarce resources By the end of this period, the sea-change in awareness of the significance of personal cleanliness, and more accurate techniques of public health surveillance, had provided public health professionals with the evidence needed to press for greater investment in public health services. The decisions made by people to use public baths and wash-houses were influenced by cultural and personal values but ultimately the use made of these facilities was constrained by the prioritization of spending within limited working-class household budgets Increasing recognition of such dilemmas is apparent in the transition of nineteenth-century stereotypes of the poorer classes. There is a perceptible shift from the 'poor love filth' view of the 1840s to the poor as 'victims of filth' as articulated by *Porcupine* in Liverpool in 1871 Paradoxically, by the end of this period, local authority activities had become so complex and the provision of domestic washing facilities had become

[95] F Bell and R Millward, 'Public Health Expenditure and Mortality in England and Wales 1870–1914', *Continuity and Change*, 13 (1998), 221–49 See also S Szreter, 'The Importance of Social Intervention in Britain's Mortality Decline *c* 1850–1914 A Re-interpretation of the Role of Public Health', *Social History of Medicine*, 1 (1988), 1–39

[96] R Millward and S B Sheard, 'The Urban Fiscal Problem, 1870–1914 Government Expenditure and Finance in England and Wales', *Economic History Review*, XLVIII (1995), 501–35

[97] *Report of the Joint Select Committee on Municipal Trading* (P P , 1900, VII) Q946 The figure of £710,000 comprises £608,000 sanctioned under general acts and £102,000 under local acts

[98] Wilson, Millward and Sheard, '*Trends*', p 4

so much more common, that the sanitary necessity of public baths and wash-houses was no easier to perceive. The problem of disentangling the sanitary from the recreational demands for public baths is not an easy one to address The transition from individual baths to swimming pools in Britain failed to provoke comment or analysis. However, Hoy provides an interesting American quote from the *Cleanliness Institute* in the 1880s that 'swimming is not cleansing' [99]

Investment in all types of public health systems, from waterworks and sewerage systems through to smaller initiatives such as the public baths and wash-houses discussed here, needs to be carefully evaluated. In addition to the necessary technical knowledge and ability, these schemes all required willpower and money to translate them from the sanitarian's wish-list into practical reality. However, as this paper has attempted to show for public baths and wash-houses, it is important to consider the wide range of attitudes across the social spectrum to the potential sanitary and financial value of such sanitary reform initiatives The key factor is choice, particularly within the local authority in deciding when to invest and how to manage the services. Equally important however, is the choice of the individual—moving from an appraisal of the cost of cleanliness versus the threat of infectious diseases such as cholera and typhus, later responding to a more subtle assessment of the benefits of a clean body and clean clothes

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[99] Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, p 86 (caption to photograph)