

The poor in Victorian Carlisle

Sanitary Inspectors examined all the streets, lanes and yards in the centre of Carlisle to report on the condition of the houses and the availability of clean water and proper sewerage, issues with a direct bearing on public health. This is an extract of their report that was published in 1850 and describes the situation they found in Rickergate Ward. This area of the city was home to some of the poorest people in Carlisle.

“RICKERGATE WARD.—The committee can hardly find words to express the amount of filth, or to depict the abominable nuisances existing in this ward. The lanes on the east side of Scotch-street, those in Rickergate, and East Tower-street, Drover’s and Lawson’s-lane, Moffat’s-yard, in Lowther-street, a lane in Finkle-street, and Castle-lane, are, without exception, dirty, and some of them quite intolerable. In Earl-street an open drain of the most offensive kind is loudly complained of by the people in the neighbourhood.

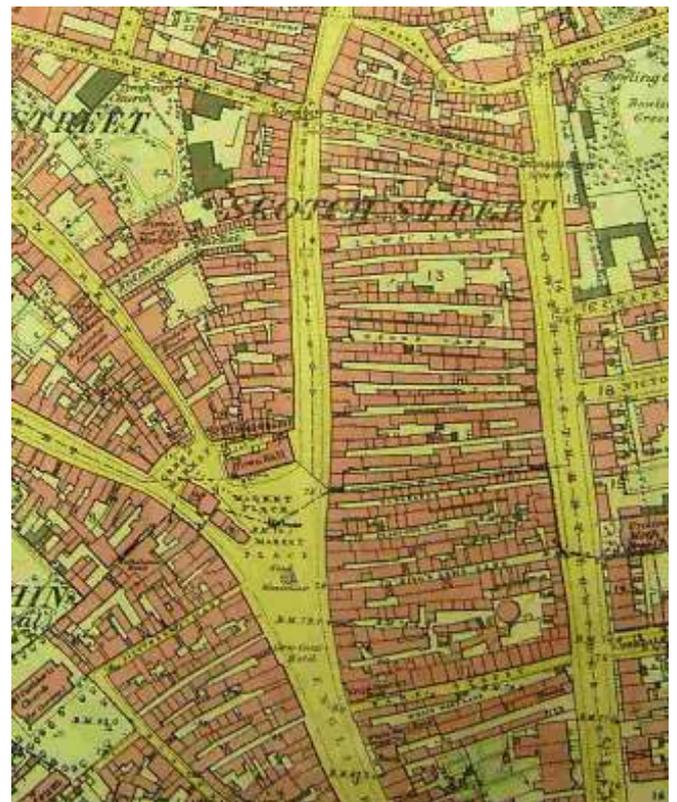
“Fever has found numerous victims in East Tower-street and Drover’s-lane, and the adjacent lanes—a fact by no means surprising when it is known that in Moffat’s-yard there is only one privy for 28 families, other properties being without conveniences at all, and in some of the lodging-houses more than 20 people are living in one room, and that adjacent to the filthiest privies and dunghills.

REMARKS ON HOUSE ACCOMMODATION.—The working classes in Carlisle live almost entirely in “lanes” or passages between the principal and secondary streets. Courts and alleys they would be termed in other places. Many of these lanes are entered by a covered passage, and some are closed at one end, forming a *cul de sac*. They are in general only a few yards in width. In some the doors are opposite each other, and are not more than three yards apart; others have houses on one side alone, a high dead wall, forming the backs of the houses in the next lane, rising on the opposite side. This arrangement obstructs light and free ventilation. In many instances there is only one

privy to a whole lane, and this is ruinous and filthy. In some lanes privies and middens are crowded amongst the houses, and not unfrequently under the same roof. They are in contact with a dwelling-house on each side, and have living and sleeping-rooms above and over them. The infiltration from the middens and liquid refuse in contact with the wall in some instances passes through, to the great inconvenience of the adjoining occupants.

It has been asserted that from nine to ten thousand persons in Carlisle reside in the lanes, courts and alleys so situated. Some of the cottages are in single rows, but more have the back-to-back arrangement; that is, the centre partition wall divides two sets of tenements; but those which are built single have all the faults of the double structures, as there are no windows or openings for ventilation in the back or side walls.

These houses are let off in room tenements, having one common stair to several tenancies. This is generally of stone. Many of these tenements are exceedingly faulty in all their means of ventilation; either the windows do not open, or only one “pane” or square can be opened, or the bottom sash alone can be raised. This does not allow of any regular change of air at the ceiling, and consequently ventilation is most imperfectly carried out.



This map shows the centre of Carlisle as it looked in 1865.

Thousands of people lived in back-to-back houses in the lanes, described earlier in the Sanitary Report, which ran between Scotch Street and Lowther Street and along Rickergate to the north. These conditions were mirrored in most of the county’s large towns.

The 20th century fight against disease - problems of working class housing

Photographs taken around 1900 in Carlisle



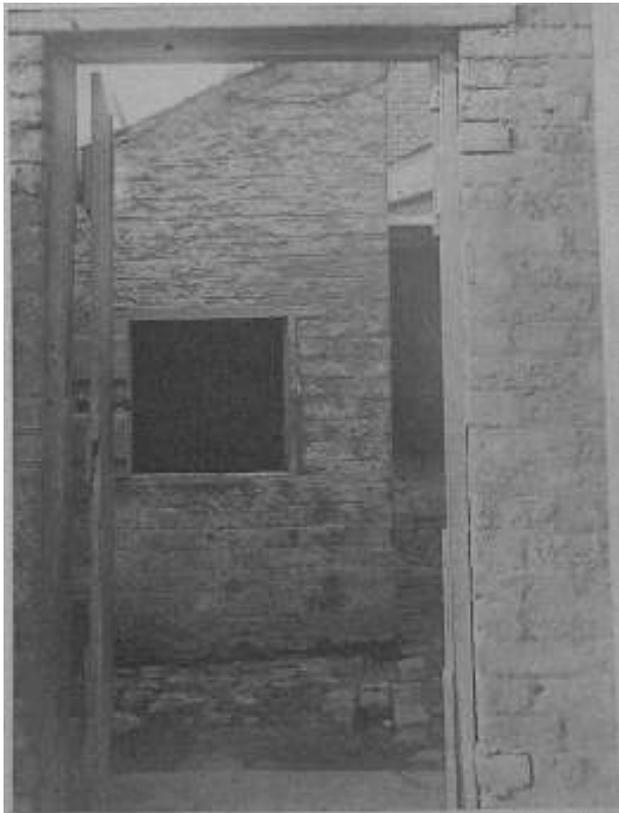
Charlotte Terrace, Botcherby, Carlisle

This shows a heap of privy midden refuse [waste collected from outside toilets] deposited in front of the terrace.



Scotland Road, Kingstown, Carlisle

For about a distance of 200 yards, there is no drainage of any description to the houses. The whole of the slop and refuse water is thrown into the channel in front of the houses. This channel is composed partly of cement, partly of earth and partly of cobbles.



Kell's Place, Stanwix, Carlisle

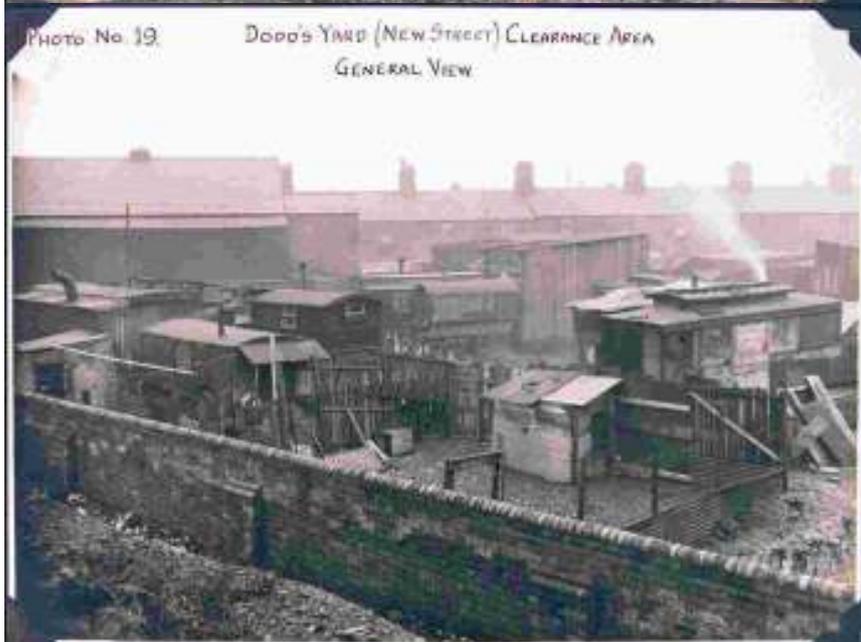
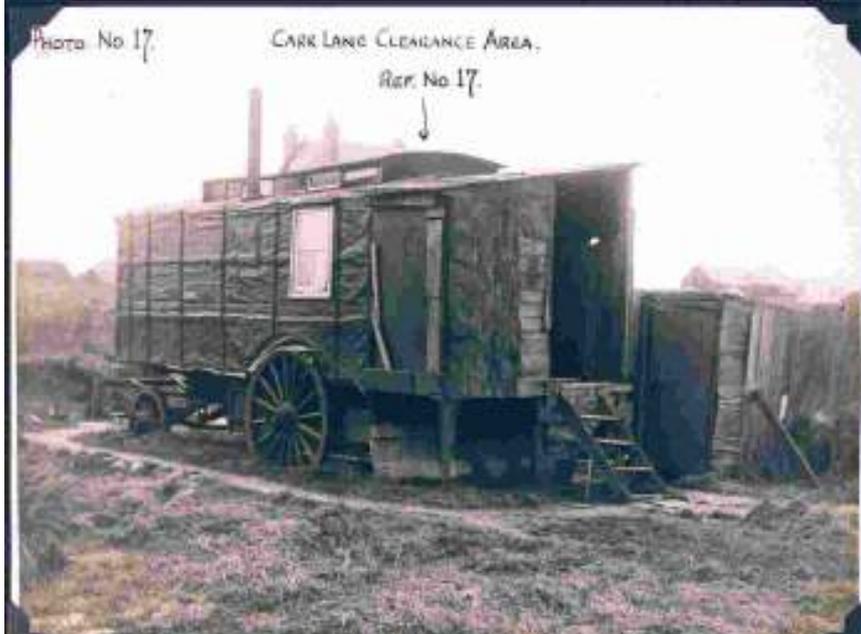
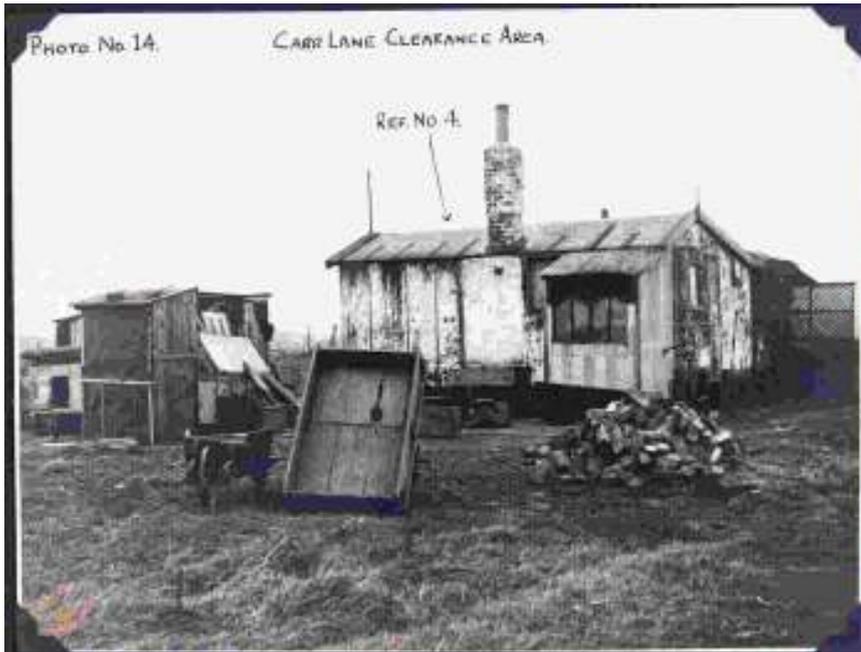
A privy midden [outside toilet] is situated in a confined yard and only 3 feet distant from the doors of dwelling houses. It is used by five families.



Back yard of a house in Upperby, Carlisle

A typical privy [toilet] and back yard. The wire netting is fixed to the side of a privy which belongs to the next yard. Note the heap of refuse and excrement.

The 20th century fight against disease - problems of working class housing



Photographs taken around 1937 in Barrow-in-Furness

The battle against poverty and its ally, disease, carried on in many local communities as the 20th century progressed.

The 1935 Housing Act had a dramatic impact on over crowding and slum clearance in Barrow.

The Medical Officer of Health identified 15 clearance areas throughout the borough which comprised of huts and caravans built mainly of wood, corrugated iron and tarred felt.

These evocative photographs show us clearance areas amongst the living accommodation on Carr's Lane, and Dodd's Yard on New Street.