



PARLIAMENT WEEK

Parliament Week 2012: London Health Reform Trail

Parliament Week aims to build a greater awareness and engagement with parliamentary democracy in the UK and this walking trail takes you to a handful of key locations in central London that help illustrate the story of Parliament and health reform during the 19th century.

During the 1900s, London became the world's largest city, with a million inhabitants at the century's start and 6.7 million by its end. With this growth came a multitude of health issues that forced the government into action.

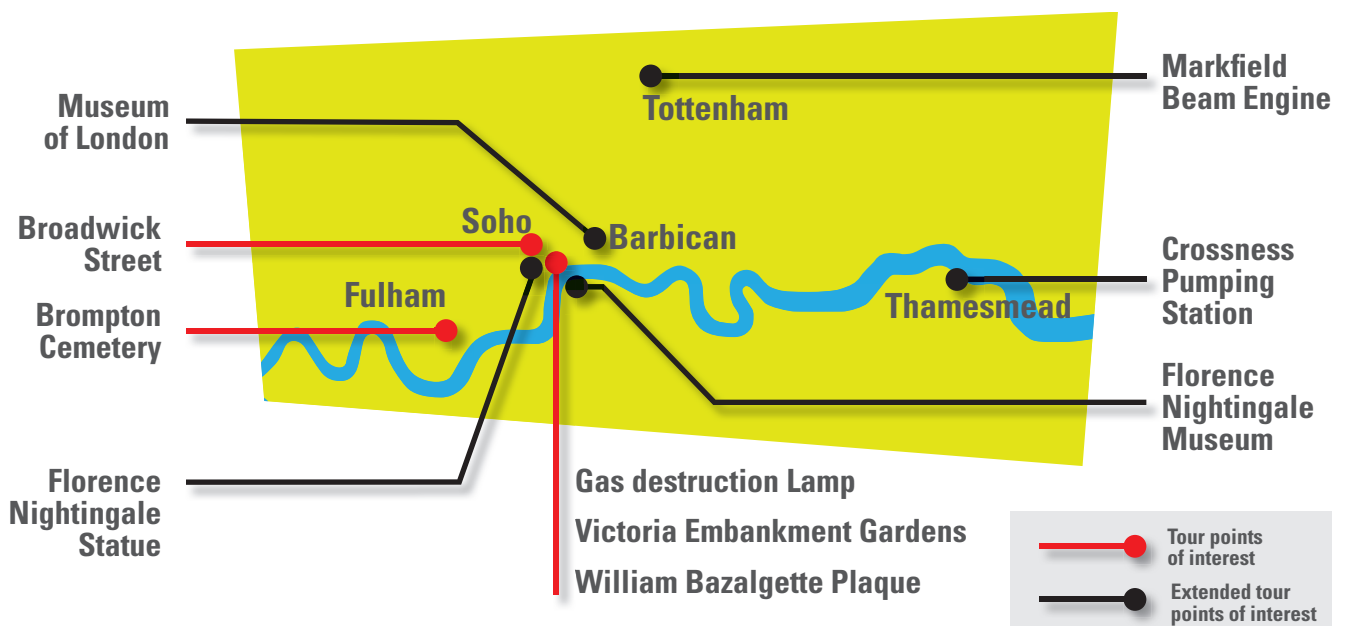
Between the first Board of Health in 1805 and the Public Health Act of 1875, a plethora of reports, committees, boards, acts and legislative measures wrestled with poor sanitation and health, in a city where the Thames was both open sewer and water supply.

The serious problem of overcrowded graveyards led to the Public Cemeteries Act of 1832, laying the foundations for a series of privately run cemeteries outside the city that today offer valuable insights into Victorian society.

Fetid inner city conditions and filthy water saw the first cholera outbreaks in 1832. In response, Parliament passed the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act of 1846, subscribing to the miasma theory of "disease spread by air" as espoused by Edwin Chadwick, the health reformer behind the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

Meanwhile, physician John Snow studied a chronic outbreak of cholera in Soho in 1854 and made vital connections between sewage and water supply. Parliament may not have readily accepted his theories, but it pressed ahead with the Metropolis Management Act of 1855, which created the Metropolitan Board of Works.

The resulting sewage network and Thames embankment, created by chief engineer Joseph Bazalgette, is perhaps the greatest monument to health in the capital.



Begin the trail at Brompton Cemetery, nearest Tube Fulham Broadway or West Brompton (District Line Wimbledon branch). South Gate off Fulham Road. North Gate off Old Brompton Road.

① Brompton Cemetery

Fulham Road, SW10 9UJ



Opening times: 8am – 4pm (October to February) rest of year times closing times vary from 6pm – 9pm. Telephone 020 7352 1201 for full information.

Brompton Cemetery is just one of the Magnificent Seven – a set of seven commercial cemeteries opened to encircle the city following the 1832 Public Cemeteries Act. The act responded to a dramatic population increase and shortage of burial space which saw London's dead literally spilling out of overcrowded churchyards – with disastrous health consequences.

Today these great cemeteries – with their Victorian family mausoleums, colonnades and catacombs – make intriguing and informative places to visit. Brompton is one of the best. As well as some of the great and good of Victorian society, a visit reveals a multitude of young and old who succumbed to the many public health perils in London during the 19th century.

It also offers the chance to visit the grave of John Snow, the man who convinced Parliament of the real dangers of Cholera.



From Brompton Cemetery take the District Line from Fulham Broadway or West Brompton Underground Station to South Kensington, where the Piccadilly Line will take you to Piccadilly Circus. (12 minutes). On foot, head west along Regent Street, right onto Air Street, right again onto Brewer Street, north on Lower James Street via Beak Street and Marshall Street onto Broadwick Street. (5 – 10 minutes).

② John Snow and the Soho cholera outbreak



The health problems of 19th century London were varied, but one of the most deadly killers of the era was cholera. The Broad Street pump puts you at the heart of the lethal outbreak of 1854 in the area around Soho's Broad Street, today known as Broadwick Street.

In the mid 19th century this area of Soho was a teeming area of overrunning cesspools and basements filled with "night soil" effluent. A belief in "miasma" theory of disease spread by bad air had already encouraged Parliament to pass the 1846 Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act, which tried to persuade property owners to connect to local sewers.

These sewers ran into the Thames, whose water was duly fed back into Soho's water pumps by the Southwark and Vauxhall Waterworks Company. In 1854 cholera struck.

John Snow's 1849 report *On the Mode of Communication of Cholera* had already promoted germ theory, and he proved the Soho outbreak was caused by polluted water from the Broad Street pump. After exploring the streets, a visit to the John Snow pub – on the site of the original pump – boasts some Snow-related displays and the chance to raise a glass in his honour at the plaque outside.





From the John Snow pub walk down to the Thames Embankment via Broadwick Street onto Lexington Street, down Haymarket and onto Northumberland Avenue to the Thames Embankment (10 – 15 minutes).

William Bazalgette and the Thames Embankment

- ③ **William Bazalgette Plaque,
Thames Embankment, Northumberland Avenue, WC2N 5BY**
- ④ **Victoria Embankment Gardens, WC2N 6PB.**

Open Monday – Saturdays 7.30pm; Sundays and public holidays 9pm. Closing times vary from 4.30pm in winter to 9pm in summer.

- ⑤ **Gas destruction lamp, Carting Lane WC2R 0ET**



Snow's pioneering work in relation to germ theory may not have convinced many in the Houses of Parliament, but it did establish the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1856 and promote a man who, more than anyone, improved sanitary conditions in London.

In 1858, the year of the Great Stink, Parliament passed an enabling act and the Board's chief engineer William Bazalgette oversaw the construction of more than 1,000 miles of sewers beneath Victorian London. Between 1865 and 1870 he also supervised the construction of the Thames Embankment, which transformed the tidal mud of the foreshore into riverside walks and roads backed by public gardens.

A memorial statue and plaque on the river wall of the Thames' north bank, opposite Northumberland Avenue, commemorates Bazalgette's foresight. Inside his tranquil Victoria Embankment Gardens, the original York Watergate – marooned 150 yards from where the whiffy waters of the Thames originally lapped – can be seen near the Villiers Street entrance.

As for Bazalgette's rushing sewers beneath your feet, there's a clue to be found a short stroll across the Gardens. A working copy of the last example of a sewer gas destruction lamp – fuelled by the gaseous methane – stands proudly and brightly outside the Savoy Hotel on Carting Lane.





Want to go further?

Museum of London, London Wall EC2Y 5HN

Admission free. Open daily 10am-6pm. Telephone 020 7001 9844 for more information.



The Museum of London charts the history of the city from prehistoric times to the present day with a range of thematic displays of objects.

The Expanding City: 1666-1850s and People's City: 1850s-1940s displays provide life-sized streets and a multitude of exhibits which put the health reforms of the 1900s into context. The Great Stink is recalled in objects including chloride of lime, thought to protect against disease from bad smells, and depictions of the Thames personified as Old Father Thames, complaining about the pollution of his river.

Recalling the cholera outbreak of 1854, the display is in the shape of a water pump. There is also Charles Booth's map of London poverty 1887-89, which shows where the most impoverished areas were.

The exhibition Doctors and Resurrection Men currently takes visitors on an atmospheric journey through the early 19th century world of dissection and the trade in dead bodies in the light of another Parliamentary health act, the 1832 Anatomy Act.

The great Victorian pumping stations

Markfield Beam Engine and Museum. Markfield Road, Markfield Park, Tottenham N15 4RB

Opening times: Open on the second Sunday of every Month from March to November 11am – 4pm. Admission free. Telephone 01707 873628 for more information.



Crossness Pumping Station. The Old Works, Thames Water S.T.W. Belvedere Road, Abbey Wood SE2 9AQ.

Limited opening times. Admission £5. Telephone 0208 3113711 for more information.



The problem of London's sewage required more than physical tunnels and a redesign of the Thames Embankment. The enabling act that Parliament passed in the wake of the Big Stink of 1858 called on that other great Victorian feat of engineering; the sewage pumping station and treatment works.

Again, Sir Joseph Bazalgette rose to the challenge with a series of monumental structures, some of which still stand today. One of the best places to experience them in action is the Markfield Beam Engine at Markfield Museum in Tottenham. Housed in its original Grade II listed engine house, the Wood Bros Engine of 1886 has been restored and can be seen operating under steam power on Sundays throughout the year.

An even more dramatic remnant is Bazalgette's own Crossness Pumping Station (or "Cathedral on the Marsh") which opened in 1865. It can also be visited – sadly less frequently – on certain days of the year, but is currently undergoing a major restoration.





Want to go further?

9 Florence Nightingale Museum, St Thomas' Hospital, Lambeth Road, SE1 7EW

**Opening times: 10am – 5pm. Admission Adults £5.80; Child / Concession £4.80;
Children under 5: Free**

10 Florence Nightingale statue, Waterloo Place SW1Y 4AN

Florence Nightingale was the Lady of the Lamp and no stranger to Parliament, most notably when giving evidence to the 1856-57 Royal Commission on the Health of the Army.

She would probably pronounce the museum dedicated to her as being in rude health today, having reopened at St Thomas' Hospital following a £1.4 million refurbishment. Three galleries follow her life, filled with objects including her pet owl and her writing slate.

Across town her ghostly statue, sculpted in 1910 by Arthur Walker, peers intently across the traffic as part of a Crimean War memorial at Waterloo Place. Drawing death toll parallels with London – where the ratio of deaths by disease was spiralling – the situation in the Crimea saw unsanitary conditions become more deadly than battle wounds.

Nightingale gave reflective evidence upon her return, lobbying for a Royal Commission investigation into care in India which reduced soldier deaths there dramatically. Four intricate bas-reliefs beneath the statue symbolise Nightingale's roles.



Parliament Week aims to inform, connect and engage people across the UK with Parliamentary democracy. Coordinated by the House of Commons and the House of Lords, Parliament Week looks at the people, places and events that shape democracy in the UK and offers something for everyone. Across the UK, charities, schools, museums and community groups are organising events and online activities that demonstrate how you can engage with different aspects of democracy in the UK.

To find out more visit www.parliamentweek.org.uk/

Follow us on  @parliament_week