

Inaugural Address

Held on Thursday 17th October 2019

'A Tale of Two Cities'

Presidential Address by Dr Steve Ryan 17th October 2019

Dr Ryan spoke about the remarkable similarities of two remarkable cities. Their famous churches and cathedrals identified them. The audience readily spotted the Liverpool Cathedrals and St Pauls in The fourth was St Mary Le Bow – where the famous Bow Bells hang. Hence the 2 cities were Liverpool and London and he'd worked in both.

His tale starts in the City of Newcastle where he was a candidate for a consultant post. When it was suggested to him by a consultant interview panel that, "Your career seems to resemble Brownian Motion", he responded by asking whether the small steps or the randomness had caught the panel's attention. Needless to say that he didn't get the job!

He gave a brief insight into the impact of public health, which he'd come to in detail later. As the sole resident (1st Year SHO) on-call on site at Bradford Children's Hospital and Leeds Road infectious diseases hospital he recollected just how many children were admitted with haemophilus influenzae Group B meningitis and how effective he needed to be at doing lumbar punctures. Such meningitis was now rare due to advances in immunisation.

At his next interview in Liverpool for a position at Liverpool Maternity Hospital and Alder Hey, he was asked, "If you had a million pound grant – how would you spend it?" To which I replied "Quickly". The Liverpool panel were clearly more comfortable with the use of humour – even in formal situations and he was appointed to the role. So he made a little "Note to self". May be there is something different about this humorous aspect of Liverpool life.

He recollected a clinic soon after he started. Father recognised that my accent was not exceedingly fair and asked where I'd come from? He said Leeds and father said "Oh. I see. Do you know what the definition of a Yorkshire man is?" "No." He answered. "It's a Scotsman – but with the generosity kicked out of him!" Father also told him he bore more than a passing resemblance to Alan Hansen and he asked if he was any good as a centre back? He wasn't; acknowledging he had all the necessary attributes other than tenacity, speed, skill and fitness. He looked after this young person in my clinic for many years and never forgot the positivity of that encounter and the importance of that positivity and honesty in providing care – and a little humour goes a long way – and if you are looking for a conversation topic – football of course is a great choice in Liverpool.

Now move forward 19 years to 2010 when Dr Ryan moved to London to become the Medical Director of Barts Health, which has deep historic roots in St Bartholomew's Hospital in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral. But also deep and long standing roots in Whitechapel (The Royal London Hospital was established some 600 years after St Bartholomew's in 1740) in the East End.

As in Liverpool, he came to feel very much at home, and in feeling and spirit there is a kinship between these two places – both fantastic to work in as a doctor and got me thinking what are the factors, attributes, history and events that have shaped such resonant communities and how they compare and how they differ. Another aspect of the Two Cities that struck him was the leadership they have shown in public health. He paid respect and acknowledge Professor John Ashton and Professor Sally Sheard whose lectures on this subject he'd attended.

He then turned to the subject of Scousers. Of course the origin of the term is thought to be related to the Stew – Scouse, itself a derivation perhaps of a Scandinavian stew eaten by sailors – e.g. Lapskaus from Norway. However it is also conjectured that the term "Scouser" really became widely known at least nationally only in the 1960's when used by Warren Mitchell's character "Alf Garnet" who used the term "Scouse git" when talking to or about his Liverpudlian son-in-law.

Scouse of course also refers to the distinctive Liverpool dialect, was first noted in the 1890's emerging from a broader Lancashire dialect. Why? There are several theories:

The melting pot of languages and customs one of the world's great ports. Think Jan Molby's very unnaturally excellent Scouse dialect that sits well with his first language of Danish.

The nasal congestion theory in which constant rhinosinusitis due to the "prevalence of colds" which was mimicked by those acquiring the language. Nasal congestion was also prevalent in Manchester with "Salford Pearls" and the "Wilmslow Catarrh" also manifestations of viral and atmospheric factors – but in these cases without the same apparent effect on dialect.

Although originally confined to Liverpool itself following the North West diaspora of Liverpoolians the accent became a northern regional dialect base around the Mersey Estuary - the first "Estuarine English" perhaps? Unlike Cockney rhyming slang, Scouse is famous for its very idiomatic phrasing.

Here's an example of German Scouse Translation – Being for the benefit of Mr Klopp

Am Boden Zestort means "devastated"

Das geht mir auf den Sack means "that P***es me off"

Like Scousers, Cockneys also have a distinct dialect and geography. The term Cockney was originally applied to all Londoners. The term may have arisen as a humorous description of Cockneys by others. Candidate sources from medieval times are "coken-ey" - a misshapen hen's egg or "Cockayne" - a sarcastic reference to the mythical land of luxury. From the 1500s and 1600s it came to refer to the rather "civilised" inhabitants of London when compared to their more rugged rural peers. By 1617 it appears that the geographical association with the sound of Bow Bells was established. There is lots of debate on how far the sound travels from the Bells and it's suggested that theoretically 5-6 miles maximum. Since then the cockney diaspora to Essex and beyond has widened the geography and led to the development of Estuary English. Cockney has been seen as a working-class language more than Scouse and although distinct and recognisable, the development of rhyming slang is probably its most famous feature - perhaps originating amongst costermongers, seamen and itinerant labourers - perhaps as a secret code to fox their middle class bosses. Like Scouse it has polyglot origins

e.g. Kosher = true & Keep Stumm - a Yiddish variation on German

e.g. Wonga (coal) and Kushty - (comfortable) from Romany

Like Scousers the Cockneys emerged in a diverse and multicultural society going back in their case many centuries to include those displaced by the Huguenot diaspora - their weaving houses can still be seen in Shoreditch and the Jewish Community which was centred on Brick Lane - now relocated to North London - especially around Stoke Newington. At least one part of the Jewish Community is relocating to Canvey Island - following a generation of Cockneys who preceded them. In 1909 at the Conference on the Teaching of English in London Elementary Schools London County Council, stated that "the Cockney mode of speech, with its unpleasant twang, is a modern corruption without legitimate credentials, and is unworthy of being the speech of any person in the capital city of the Empire". Dr Ryan then gave various examples of rhyming slang:

Edge	50 pence
Godiva	Five pounds
Monkey	£500
Carpet	£3 or £300
Pony	£25
Boatrace	Face
Chalfonts	Haemorrhoids
Swanee	Liver

He then went on to contrast dress sense. When it comes to dress the Cockneys got there first by 50 years or so. The practice of wearing clothes decorated with mother-of-pearl buttons was first associated with Henry Croft (1861-1930), an orphan street sweeper who collected money for charity. Costermongers (street traders) often had their trousers decorated at the seams with pearl buttons. Croft adapted this to create a pearly suit to draw attention to aid his fund-raising activities. Croft's funeral in January 1930 was attended by 400 followers and received national media coverage. There

are several Pearly Kings and Queens societies that have followed on, each couple associated with a church and still fundraising to charity. It was not probably until the 1980s that any particular dress was associated with Scousers - the Shellsuit and followed by the Scouse Brow probably in the noughties & the hair curlers and pyjama look which can often be seen on the London-bound Pendolino on a Friday afternoon. Both fashions went on to world-wide fame – which cannot be said of the Pearly Kings and Queens get-up.

Then there was the humour exhibited in both cities. Scousers were able to send themselves up as a picture of the entire cop dressed in Harry Enfield wigs demonstrated! Scouse humour is indeed underpinned by self-deprecation and they can laugh at being mocked themselves. Being from a port city people came to know that humour is a good way of crossing cultures and is a very welcoming approach to newcomers. Scousers are expert at one liners and experts in the area of gentle ribbing. As an example at an event a rather puffed-up reporter stood on the wrong side of a barrier. When politely approached by the security guard and asked to relocate to a more appropriate position, he responded, “Who are you?” The security guard said, “I’m the bloke that’s tellin’ you to get over the other side of that ***** barrier!” He moved.

Cockney humour has its own character and can be typified by:
Being cheeky to authority (and that’s similar to Scouse humour)
Maybe a bit vulgar; with much double entendre.
Faux sophistication (think Del Boy drinking a Crème de Menthe)

A Pan of scouse was shown with its Irish and Scandinavian roots. The Cockney diet is more complex as can be seen be the Salt-beef bagels, which originated in the Jewish Community. Pie and Liquor – the liquor is parsley sauce not mushy peas. And of course to get your omega 3 fatty acid in your jellied eels!

Both cultures have a distinctive musical tradition. It is felt that the multicultural influences of Liverpool – Irish folk music, access to American Blues and beat music through vinyl records brought in by ships’ crew were for responsible the musical explosion that was Merseybeat and obviously the Beatles and all that followed. What about East London? Well it seems that the Cockneys themselves were less ambitious in their musical appetite and it’s fair to say that they have not gone much beyond “Roll out the Barrel” and even avant-garde artists like Chas and Dave with such offerings as “Rabbit, Rabbit, Rabbit” have not engendered a musical reformation. Not for them the classical violins of “Ferry across the Mersey”.

Perhaps he was being unfair. In the land of Cockayne– there was Ian Dury of course whose music was a form of Cockney Humorous Poetry and whose songs exemplified the more vulgar side of lyricism.

So there are some considerable similarities between these two communities:
Both set in River (estuary) cities and both Major Ports
Resulting in diversity and a multicultural melting pot
Thriving working class in the Ports and associated Trades & commerce
Developed a unique humour and also dialect or slang, their own unique regional dishes.

There were also harsher similarities. From before the time of Dickens, life could be hard and life could be short. Ports could be disembarkation points not only for a new dialect or valuable cargo but also for infectious diseases that were a clear and present danger to life. As Dickens wrote at the beginning of a Tale of Two Cities, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” and the burden of poor health and rampant disease took a terrible toll in both London and Liverpool up until the middle of the 19th century.

But in both great municipalities some of the earliest and most important steps in prevention of disease and improvement in public health were taken. In this aspect both the Cockneys and the Scousers can be immensely proud of those amongst them who can now be seen as giants of public health. Enter the heroes and a heroine.

Dr Ryan was fortunate enough the previous December to have attended a meeting of the Duncan Society (established in 1998) at the Athenaeum with a presentation by Professor John Ashton with Maggie Morris. Interestingly it was entitled “A Tale of Two Cities” which covered the history of Public Health endeavour in London and Liverpool, from Victorian times through to the present.

In addressing this aspect of his address Dr Ryan first turned to modern times - starting with knife crime a major current public health issue. In East London he cited the work of previous colleagues based at the Royal London Hospital Major Trauma Centre. This team not only rise daily to the challenge of severe trauma, working with London Air Ambulance, but they started a public health approach to prevention of the harm caused by knife crime way before it became commonplace to use that term.

His former colleague Mr Martin Griffiths, a trauma surgeon, was appointed in June 2019 at the NHS's first clinical director for violence reduction. Working with Queen Mary University London and charities such as Redthread and the St Giles Trust, he will lead a public health programme on Trauma.

In modern Liverpool he highlighted the leadership of Professor John Aston and colleagues who on the back of a very radical philosophy underpinning their care delivery model for drug users developed a needle exchange scheme. This was effective in stemming the rise of HIV and other blood born virus infections. This achievement is celebrated at the Wellcome Collection in its on-line exhibit - Guerilla Public Health. This celebrates the brave and unorthodox approach taken by John and colleagues – to overcome inertia and resistance.

He now turned to his heroes. The first hero of course is Dr William Henry Duncan. He was an Edinburgh educated doctor who became a GP in Liverpool. It was in this role he began campaigning with others for improvements in public health. It was around this time that theories about bad environmental circumstances whether labelled as “Miasma” or poor hygiene gave at least a foothold of understanding where to start. Perhaps effective cleaning, drainage and ventilation? It was in reality sanitation theory but without understanding the role of pathogens. A war needed to be waged on filth. Enlightened activism led to the Liverpool Sanitary Act of 1846 which paved the way for his role as well as those of the Borough Engineer and the Inspector of Nuisances. This was Liverpool's response to the Chadwick report of 1842 on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population. His appointment in 1847 was as the First Medical Officer of Health in England.

Duncan needed to advocate action based on Sanitation Theory as a response to the following:
Accommodation for many families was in cellars at the bottom of 4 story houses with earth floors < 10 to 12 ft. square with no window sometimes with 16 residents per room - referred to as “a human version of a pigeon loft”. They lacked space, a clean water supply, effective sewerage, rubbish disposal (John Hussey)

Liverpool had become the home to 300,000 Irish refugees from the potato famine of whom 60,000 stayed-on, leading to immense overcrowding.

Cholera outbreaks were a constant fear voiced by Dr Duncan and he was proved right in 1848/49 when it resulted in 5,245 deaths.

Life expectancy was of the order of 19 years in the Northern cities of Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool compared to 32 years in Wiltshire.

Duncan worked with the Health of Towns Association, with business folk, church people and civic leaders, to mobilise and to seek resources and give direction to the City Council. He recommended more frequent litter collections, the washing of walls with lime, washing clothes of those infected and he also suggested that the steamship fares between Liverpool and Dublin be raised to reduce immigration!

The Duncan Society, a blue plaque and a pub, celebrate Dr William Henry Duncan's legacy. A blue plaque, a learned society (established in 1992) and a pub celebrate John Snow's achievements. A replica pump has recently been restored to its position in Broad Street. Broad Street can be found just off Carnaby Street in London. Born in 1813 Snow was a childhood prodigy, polymath and exposed to caring for people with cholera as an apprentice apothecary/surgeon in Newcastle. There, he undertook research into it before moving to London in 1847. He was also an innovator in the use of

Ether for anaesthesia including providing chloroform for Queen Victoria when she delivered her 8th child. Snow did not believe the miasma theory as an explanation for cholera epidemics and germ-theory was decades away. None-the-less he used epidemiology – mapping and statistical analysis to present to the Board of Guardians of St James's Parish on 7th September 1854. As a consequence of what he said, the handle of the pump was removed on the following day.

Snow honestly acknowledged that maybe the outbreak was fading before then. There had been wide aversion to his approach but over the next decade the appreciation of the faecal-oral route of causation gained traction and ultimately germ theory closed the loop of understanding. His theory was nearly scuppered save for his detective work regarding a widow from leafy Hampstead and her niece from Islington who had died unexpectedly from Cholera where it wasn't prevalent. It turns out they had drunk water bottled and brought from the Broad Street pump as the Widow liked its taste!

The third hero is Joseph William Bazalgette who oversaw the building of London's first comprehensive and effective sewerage network. The next strides in the war on the faecal-oral transmission of cholera and other enteric infections in London were undertaken following a severe cholera outbreak in 1848/49, which killed 14,137 Londoners. This seems to have been provoked by a decision by London's Metropolitan Commission of Sewers to order all cesspits to be closed and that house drains be connected to sewers and empty into the Thames. By the time of the Great Stink in 1858, Bazalgette had been appointed as Chief Engineer to the Metropolitan Board of Works, meaning he was on watch when an Act of Parliament enabled an appropriate sanitation engineering response – still based on the theory of miasma.

Bazalgette designed and oversaw the construction of a network of 82 miles of enclosed underground brick main sewers to intercept sewage outflows, and 1,100 miles of street-sewers, to intercept the raw sewage, which up until then flowed freely through the streets and thoroughfares of London. Hence the Thames was no longer an open sewer as it ran through the City. Opened by Edward Prince of Wales in 1865 and completed 10 years later the effect was to virtually eliminate cholera and to drastically reduce typhoid and typhus. Bazalgette's amazing sewerage system is only now being updated with the building of the Thames Tideway Tunnel under the bed of the River. You get a sense of the scale of the original engineering when you walk or cycle along the Greenway which runs around 5 miles from Victoria Park Hackney to Beckton Sewage Treatment works in the Royal Docks. This mostly elevated earth bank is arrow straight and has the demeanour of a disused railway line. However contained in the bank is the Northern Outfall Sewer with its 9ft diameter pipes.

As part of the Liverpool Sanitary Act of 1846, 3 posts were created and one of these was for a Municipal Engineer. James Newlands – the third hero - took up the post, around a decade before Bazalgette. In year one he undertook a thorough survey to help the design of the required integrated sewerage system (that would be a world first) as well as outlining what other municipal engineering he felt was needed (e.g. housing). Hence he had in fact described a comprehensive, scientific-based approach to town planning based on public health thinking – the first approach to developing a Healthy City?" The Programme took 21 years & provided 300 miles of sewers. Over this time Liverpool's life expectancy doubled. Key features he engineered in were durability, accessibility for maintenance and the use of egg shaped larger sewers, which maintained high velocities even when flow volumes were smaller, reducing the risk of sedimentation and blockage. That design principle is still in use today. There is a Blue Plaque commemorating him in Abercromby Square.

When he was a neonatologist at Liverpool Maternity Hospital Dr Ryan was struck by the low breast feeding rates in the City which have remained persistently lower than other areas. This is not the case in East London where the incoming Bengal population have brought with them traditionally high breast feeding rates in the order of 98%. He felt his efforts as a middle aged man in suit armed with an evidence base had little impact. However as part of the Darzi review he heard of a project in Bury where a group called Little Angels, a community non-profit organisation, run by mothers for mothers had made way more significant progress. This was his lesson in community activism and social capital. If only I'd known he'd known about Kitty Wilkinson then – he'd have ditched the suit and the strategy papers!

Liverpool had its own such heroine - Kitty Wilkinson also known as the Saint of the Slums.

Predating Duncan and Snow, in 1832 when cholera broke she offered the use of her own boiler, house and yard, to neighbours to wash their clothes, at a charge of 1 penny per week. She also showed them how to use a chloride of lime effectively. Both the District Provident Society, and William Rathbone supported her. She pushed for the establishment of public baths where the poor could bathe and in 1842 the combined public baths and washhouse was opened on Upper Fredrick Street in 1846. Wilkinson was appointed as superintendent of the public baths.

Her statue shows her rolling her sleeves up, something as Director of Infection Prevention and Control in various hospitals, Dr Ryan often did 170 years later! Her life and work is celebrated with a statue in St George's Hall and a stained glass window in the Anglican Cathedral.

In Summary Dr Ryan had been fortunate to live and work in 2 great cities and hoped he'd shown that the 2 places are connected in their history and ethos and tradition of world-class public health. He had started with Scouse humour and couldn't finish without a little story that captured it. England's second city is...not Birmingham or Manchester.... it's London...at least according to a man from Liverpool!