



Plan of the Muck Garths [enclosed yards in] Witham, Hull  
in  
General Board of Health, *Report on the Epidemic Cholera of 1848 & 1849*  
(London: HMSO, 1850), facing 46.

Original from the University of Minnesota

“On the east side of the town of Hull lies a suburb called Witham in which there is a triangular space of ground bounded by the street called Witham, Great Union Street, and Church Street. This triangle is surrounded by houses, so as to leave an open space in the centre of nearly three acres in extent, about two acres of which is used as a place of deposit for part of the night soil of the town and other manure, which is interspersed in heaps among the houses and close to the doors of the dwellings. These noxious matters are collected by a number of persons who make a trade of accumulating and selling them for agricultural purposes, and they have become so accustomed to live amongst this horrible garbage, that they not only heap it up against the walls and immediately under the windows of their houses, but it is stated that they have come to consider the atmosphere of the locality ‘rather wholesome and agreeable than otherwise.’

In the month of July 1849 I went over the neighbourhood, and certainly few places have presented more elements of disease and mortality. The surface appeared to be one mass of heaped-up filth. An offensive open ditch ran through the ground, and the whole atmosphere was sensibly polluted to some distance. Mr. Chatham, clerk to the Guardians of Sculcoates Union, in which Witham is situated, states ‘that although the average age of all persons who die in other parts of [Hull] is 23 years, the average age of all persons dying in Witham and Drypool is only 18.’ . . . I deemed it to be my duty to address a written protest to the Board of Guardians against a state of matters which ought not to have been permitted to exist after the issuing of the regulations of the General Board of Health nine months before. There is every reason to believe that had these nuisances been summarily dealt with when the first warning was given to the town in September 1848, a great part, if not the whole of the appalling catastrophe which took place might have been averted. . . . The epidemic at last touched the district and committed the most fearful ravages among the people. . . .

A plan of the neighbourhood will be found in plate 1 [above], showing the localities of *ninety-one* deaths from cholera, the actual number of persons who were swept away by the pestilence on the outskirts of a triangular space measuring little more than 200 yards on the side. I have never known an open neighbourhood of this size yield so large a number of deaths. . . .” (General Board of Health, *Report on the Epidemic Cholera of 1848 and 1849, Appendix A* [by John Sutherland], 16–17, a portion of which is quoted in the main *Report* as an accompaniment to the illustration).