

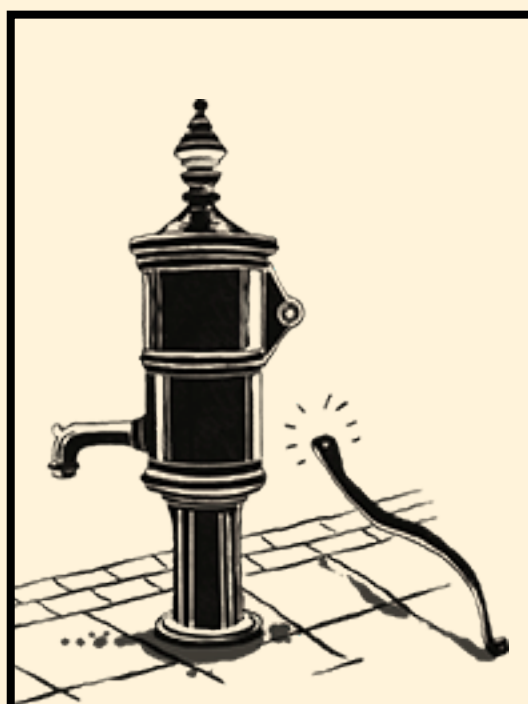


# HEALTH IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA



The Health of Towns Association in Britain, established in 1844 and composed of health professionals and politicians, is an early example of a public health pressure group. It focused primarily on the campaign to promote sanitary reform in the rapidly growing cities of industrial Britain. It arranged public meetings and lectures; published the *Journal of Public Health*; organized regional groups to further its cause and lobby members of parliament, doctors, and religious leaders.

The campaign is credited with mobilizing political action on sanitary reform to rally middle class support for the milestone legislation of the first Public Health Act in 1848. Cholera was one of the deadliest diseases to affect Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For a long time it was believed that cholera was transmitted and spread by 'bad air' or 'bad smells' from rotting organic matter. But physician John Snow's evidence-based work and pioneering studies established a link between cholera and contaminated drinking water.



By talking to the residents in the area with help from a local priest and mapping the deaths from cholera, Dr Snow noted that they were mostly people whose nearest water source was the Broad Street pump. He persuaded the local council to disable the well pump by removing its handle. This action contributed significantly to the containment of the disease in the area. It was later discovered that the water for the pump was contaminated by sewage carrying the cholera bacteria from a nearby cesspit.

Even though Dr Snow's findings were met with resistance initially, they eventually influenced changes in public health and the construction of improved sanitation facilities.