

THE JECH GALLERY

Oysters and enteric fever aetiology in 1900 England

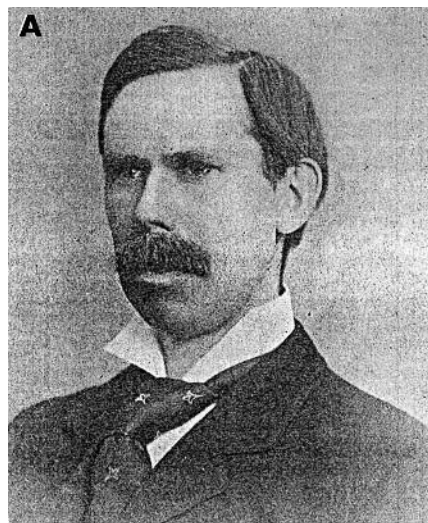
All these pictures are related to one of the first reported experiences of using a menu questionnaire to investigate the causes of a disease outbreak. In 1902, H Timbrell Bulstrode, a British Local Government Board inspector, investigated the origin of gastrointestinal disorders following banquets given at Winchester and Southampton. His work helped to confirm the role of oysters as an agent of transmission of typhoid fever. This episode of the history of epidemiology is described in detail in this issue of the journal.¹

(A) Portrait of Herbert Timbrell Bulstrode (1862–1911), a British doctor and Local Government Board inspector. In November 1902, he was instructed by the Local Government Board to identify the aetiology of an outbreak of enteric fever in Winchester. The outbreak followed a banquet at the city's Guildhall.¹ Ten cases of enteric fever, of which four died, occurred among 134 guests and one waiter.

(B) Guildhall of the cathedral City of Winchester, in the south of England where the outbreak investigated by Dr Bulstrode (picture (B) courtesy of George Roger Brown, Winchester Museums Service).

(C) Banquet given in 1901, in the year preceding the outbreak, showing the room where it started. It was customary in Britain at this period to hold banquets to celebrate the ending of the local mayor's term of office (courtesy of Winchester Museums Service).

(D) Illustration of the "The Walrus and the Carpenter" by Bernard Partridge, following John Tenniel's illustration of the Lewis Carroll text. The original poem said: "O Oysters," said the Carpenter/You've had a pleasant run!/Shall we be trotting home again?/But answer came there none-- /And this was scarcely odd, because/They'd eaten every one." Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and what Alice Found There* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1872:72–9). This cartoon, showing the Walrus and the Carpenter suffering from oyster trouble was published by Punch 11 February 1903, as direct result of the hooah after the banquets. The text says "AVENGED! O Carpenter, the Walrus said, I sympathise with you. You say that your feel rather odd, I doubt not that you do, for curious as it may appear, I feel peculiar too"



Photograph by

[Magell and Co., London.]



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Picture C was supplied courtesy of the Winchester Museums Service, picture B, courtesy of George Roger Brown (photographer), Winchester Museums Service. We thank Sharon Messenger for picture research.

Alfredo Morabia

Division of Clinical Epidemiology, Geneva University Hospitals, Geneva, Switzerland

Anne Hardy

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at University College London, UK

Correspondence to: Professor A Morabia, Division of Clinical Epidemiology, Geneva University Hospitals, 25 rue Micheli-du-Crest, 1211 Geneva 14, Switzerland; A.Morabia@hcuge.ch

REFERENCE

- 1 Morabia A, Hardy A. The pioneering use of a questionnaire to investigate a food borne disease outbreak in early 20th century Britain. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2005;59:94–9.