

Poverty - How the Poor Lived

Source 4a

'Glimpses of Old Worthing'

Edward Snewin was born in 1813 and died in 1900, and lived most of his life in Worthing. In 1898 he wrote a description of life in Worthing in the 19th Century. His writings were published by Worthing historian Henfrey Smail in 1945. Here is Snewin's account of the living conditions of the poor in Worthing in the 1850s.

The inquiry revealed an appalling state of affairs. We read of whole streets totally undrained, where all the houses were occupied by unhealthy families; of other houses seldom free from fever; of open sewers and cesspools left standing for years; and, in spite of the Commissioners' protestations as to the health of the town, a rapid increase in the number of cases of fever and infectious diseases reported by the Parish Surgeon. The houses of the working classes were particularly condemned as being badly designed, often undrained, and built of the poorest material.

For a contemporary description of such conditions we can turn ... to [Charles] Dickens, to the description of Tom-all-Alone in *Bleak House*, which was written soon after the Worthing inquiry ... and in the slum scenes of *Bleak House* Dickens put into dramatic form a subject which was then occupying the minds of thinking people all over the country.

[From Smail E300065035 pp45-6]