

## Topic 9: Improvements in public health

### 9.1 Public health problems in industrial Britain

#### Research & Record

##### Why was public health so poor in industrial Britain?

- 1 Use the case studies on pages 64 and 65 to record public health problems. You should come up with a long list. Aim to identify at least ten problems.
- 2 Identify three similarities between the cholera epidemics of the nineteenth century and the Great Plague of London in 1665.

#### Case Study 1: The Great Stink of 1858

By the 1850s, over 2.5 million people lived in London. It was the largest and wealthiest city in the world, but it was also very unhealthy.

Many Londoners got their drinking water from the River Thames, even though the river was also where they dumped their rubbish – including dead animals and chemicals from factories based by the river. There was no sewage system so human waste ended up in the river as well.

The summer of 1858 was very hot. A thick layer of sewage lay on the water. As temperatures topped 30°C, the smell of the river became unbearable. It became known as the 'Great Stink'. In the Houses of Parliament, MPs found it impossible to use the rooms overlooking the river.

At that time, many people still believed that bad air (miasma) caused disease, so they treated the curtains with chloride of lime. It had little impact and the awful smell remained.

▼ **SOURCE 1** This cartoon was published in *Punch* magazine in June 1858, during the Great Stink. The River Thames is shown as a filthy old man with diseased and deformed offspring



FATHER THAMES INTRODUCING HIS OFFSPRING TO THE FAIR CITY OF LONDON.

(A Design for a Fresco in the New Houses of Parliament.)