



London Fog as Food: From Pabulum to Poison

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London has always had a fog problem. The city lies in a natural basin surrounded by hills, with a major river running through it, and various waterways and marshlands all around. But these fogs are white or grey in their natural state. It was with the growth of London as the nation's industrial capital that they began to be polluted by sulphur emissions from domestic coal fires and steam-driven industries. Thick yellow fogs occurred with growing frequency in the winter months when warm air above the river basin trapped cold air in the city below in a phenomenon known to meteorologists as temperature inversion. Unable to escape, London's natural winter fogs became suffused with large sulphur particles, sometimes so intense that they turned from yellow to brown. As early as 1791, the composer Joseph Haydn, during his first triumphant musical visit to England, wrote on 5th November that 'there was a fog so thick that one might have spread it on bread. In order to write I had to light a candle as early as eleven o'clock' (Plate 16.1).¹

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Plate 16.1 ‘A Fog in the streets of London’ (*Illustrated London News*, 12 January 1867. Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library)

The fog experienced by Haydn might of course have been made worse by the bonfires and fireworks of Guy Fawkes’ Night. But fogs continued to increase in frequency and intensity with the rapid growth of the city. By the mid-nineteenth century fogs occurred more often and lasted longer, often going on for several days; they reached their greatest density and frequency in the 1880s, when many literary representations of London fog are set, even if written later, as with Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, set in 1886 but published in 1907. Although they began to decline from then on, an effect even prompting an article on the decline of the Edwardian fog, they were still common in the twentieth century.² Occasionally a really major fog, as in 1952, would still cover the city in a thick yellow blanket for days on end. The Clean Air Act of 1956, passed in response, combined with the growing use of gas and electricity as replacements for coal in domestic heating and industrial plants to bring them finally to an end. That is not to say that air pollution disappeared entirely: a major fog lasted several days in 1962. But it was the last. As time went on,

however, exhaust fumes from motor vehicles have created a much more dangerous problem as the particulates created are small—small enough to enter the bloodstream. This creates a less visible haze than the traditional sulphurous fog, although it poses no less a threat to health; but it does not capture the imagination as the traditional London fog did, and is certainly not seen as a form of nourishment.

It is difficult nowadays to convey the sheer intensity of the classic yellow London fog, so dense in places that people were unable to see their hands when they stretched out their arms in front of them. E. F. Benson described one such fog in his *The Book of Months*: ‘January: Thick yellow fog, and in consequence electric light to dress by and breakfast by ... The denseness ... We blindly grope on the threshold of the future feeling here for a bell-handle, here for a knocker, while the door stood shut ... From sick dead yellow the colour changed to grey’.³ It was thick and viscous, it smelt of sulphur and soot, and it made it difficult to breathe. Charles Dickens’s son, in his *Dictionary of London*, published in 1879, wrote that ‘Nothing could be more deleterious to the lungs and the air-passages than the wholesale inhalation of the foul air and floating carbon, which, combined, form a London fog. In this connection it may be taken as an axiom that the nose is nature’s respirator’.⁴ Much earlier the *Illustrated London News* in 1847 quoted an unnamed Scottish physician who posed the question: ‘If a person require half a gallon of pure air per minute, how many gallons of this foul atmosphere must he, as it were, have filtered by his lungs in the course of a day?’⁵

During the winter months, fog affected every area of life and all of the five senses, including taste. In 1874 the *Illustrated London News* described walking through a dense London fog:

around, a thick, substantial, clammy atmosphere, that weighs one down and clings and hangs to one ... All that one eats or drinks has mingled with it the flavour and the odour of the dun atmosphere; it ‘burrs’ one’s throat and clings round teeth and palate, making even more miserable that most depressing of all things, a breakfast by lamplight—coffee, toast, eggs, everything, might, as far as taste goes, be red herrings or Indian soy.⁶

London fog not only changed the taste of all foods: from early on, people even referred to it as if it were a kind of food, above all, famously of course, pea soup. The artist John Sartain recounted in 1830 how he

would ‘slink home through a fog as thick and as yellow as the pea-soup of the eating house’ (indeed, he soon emigrated to the cleaner air of America).⁷ In 1833 Thomas Carlyle complained bitterly about ‘that horrid flood of Spartan black-broth one has to inhale in London’.⁸ In his novel *Maxwell* (1834), Theodore Edward Hook described ‘the pea-soup atmosphere of London, which chilled every living thing, while a sort of smoky, misty, foggy vapour, hovering over the ground, made “darkness visible”’.⁹ Five years later, Rosina Bulwer Lytton, in her novel *Cheveley*, noted that ‘London in December’ presented ‘a pea-soup fog, which renders the necessary and natural process of respiration almost what Dr. Johnson’s idea of fine music ough’t to be, impossible!’.¹⁰ The London satirical journal *Punch* (1860) fantasised that

a scheme has been devised for procuring the extraction of pea-soup from London fog. When the foreigner remembers that our fogs are now so frequent that the clear blue sky in England is never clearly seen, he may form a faint conception of the work which is cut out for this new Company of Soup-makers. The fog will daily furnish a lot of raw material, which English ingenuity will soon cook into soup.¹¹

The American novelist Herman Melville wrote in 1860 in his *Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent*: ‘Upon sallying out this morning encountered the oldfashioned pea soup London fog—of a gamboge color’.¹² Henry Vollam Morton in his book *In Search of London*, first published in 1951, recalled being caught in a ‘thick pea-souper which tastes like iron filings at the back of your throat’.¹³ Thomas Cook, the travel agent, used the term to promote winter cruises abroad as late as 1937, urging people to go abroad ‘when London is groping its way home through a typical “pea-souper”’.¹⁴

Melville’s description of the colour of the fog as ‘gamboge’ highlights its yellowness (gamboge was a deep yellow pigment derived from the resin of the gamboge tree and commonly used as a dye). We usually think of pea soup as green, not yellow like the colour of fogs; but the pea soup that lent its name to London fog was not the same as the pea soup we know today. It was indeed yellow, rather than green, made from dried split peas, and was traditionally a staple food of the urban poor, high in protein but inexpensive to purchase. In an era before household refrigeration, fresh ‘garden peas’ could not be kept for more than a few days; split-peas, turned yellow by the drying process, would last far longer, although they

were much less palatable. The association with poverty is made clear in Thackeray's story 'A Little Dinner at Timmins's', first published in *Punch* in 1848, towards the end of the 'hungry forties': Mr. Timmins suggests to his wife that they should invite a friend to dinner, but she replies with 'a look of ineffable scorn', that 'the last time we went there, there was pea-soup for dinner!'.¹⁵ The densest London fogs were often described, like pea soup, as a form of sustenance fit only for the poor, avoided by anyone who had the means to do so. *Punch* in 1850 observed that 'March is said to come in like a lion, and go out like a lamb: but of November, on account of its fogs, it may generally be said, that it comes in like a basin of pea soup and goes out like a plate of peas pudding'.¹⁶

This was another dish made of yellow split peas and consumed mainly by the poor. Known as pease-pottage, peas-pudding or peas-porridge, it was given to convicts on their way to Australia. Poor people kept a cauldron of it warming over the open fire, enriching it by throwing in all kinds of vegetables and cheap meat products day after day—as the nursery rhyme, *ca.* 1760, had it: 'Pease porridge hot, Pease porridge cold, Pease porridge in the pot, Nine days old'.¹⁷ In 1852 Thomas Miller wrote of being in a London fog: 'It is something like being imbedded in a dilution of yellow peas-pudding, just thick enough to get through it without being wholly choked or completely suffocated. You can see through the yard of it which, at the next stride, you are doomed to swallow, and that is all'.¹⁸ The Canadian writer Sara Jeannette Duncan emphasised these aspects in even more positive terms in her novel *An American Girl in London* (1891): 'It was no special odour ... that could be distinguished—it was rather an abstract smell—and yet it gave a kind of solidity and nutriment to the air, and made you feel as if your lungs digested it. There was comfort and support and satisfaction in that smell'.¹⁹ The American feminist Inez Haynes Irwin, who lived mainly in Boston, writing in her travel book *The Californiacs* (1916), described the white fogs found in San Francisco and the Bay Area as 'Not distilled from pea soup like the London fogs'.²⁰ The British detective novelist Margery Allingham published a story in 1952—the year of the great smog—entitled *The Tiger in the Smoke*, in which a serial killer commits his deadly acts within a foggy London. She used the traditional pea-soup imagery to describe it, but gave it her own singular twist: in the appropriately named Crumb Street, she wrote, 'The fog slopped over its low houses like a bucketful of cold soup over a row of dirty stoves'.²¹ Here the soup is thoroughly unpalatable ('pease porridge cold'), as chilling as the fog

it describes, and through the image of the chimneys pumping out dirty smoke from its 'dirty stoves', the novelist makes it clear that Crumb Street is an abode of the poorest part of London's population. Even Bob Hope, the famous London-born American comedian, could make it the basis of one of his numerous gags that Californian fog was 'fog with the vitamins removed'.²² Fog could thus appear as a kind of food, ingested or inhaled: not air or vapour but something stronger and more solid, nourishing and filling, if not food of the grandest or most pretentious kind.

So frequent were London fogs between the 1830s and the 1960s that Londoners coined quite a variety of phrases to denote them. 'London Particular' was another term for fog, pregnant with meaning. It conveyed a familiar intimacy—the writers of *Slang and Its Analogues*, published in seven volumes between 1890 and 1904, noted that it meant 'a thick or black fog, the product of certain atmospheric conditions and carbon: formerly peculiar to London'. 'Particular', they added, however, was another name for a mistress, perhaps hinting that Londoners felt as ambivalent about fog as some married men may have felt about their extramarital affairs.²³ More importantly, a 'London particular' was a special quality of fortified brown Madeira wine produced solely for the London market, referred to, for example, in Thomas Love Peacock's comic novel *Melincourt* (1817), where the Reverend Mr Portpipe, 'a man of exquisite taste', invites his guests to enjoy a 'good ale and a few bottles of London Particular'.²⁴ 'London Particular', widely used as a term for the combination of fog and smoke, came during the second half of the nineteenth century to be employed with a degree of nostalgia. As early as 1855 the *New York Times*, describing a home-grown American fog, wrote that it had 'nothing of the characteristics of our old London particular except density'.²⁵

The terms London Particular and pea-souper were brought together in the twentieth century by a recipe called 'London Particular' which was in fact, not surprisingly, a traditional pea-soup, brought up to date and dissociated from poverty by being described as 'low-fat and low-cholesterol'.²⁶ This particular recipe is illustrated with a scene of the character Krook's demise from 'Spontaneous Combustion' in Charles Dickens's novel *Bleak House*. As J. Hillis Miller writes: 'Krook is transformed into the basic elements of the world of the novel, fog and mud. The heavy odor in the air, as if bad pork chops were frying, and the "thick yellow liquor" which forms on the window sill as Krook burns into the circumambient atmosphere, are particularly horrible versions of these elements'.²⁷ In this



“OLD KING COAL” AND THE FOG DEMON.

Plate 16.2 “‘Old King Coal’ and the Fog Demon’ (John Tenniel, *Punch*, 13 November 1880. Courtesy of the President and Fellows of Wolfson College, Cambridge)

central passage in the book, one of the main characters is dissolved back into the elements described in the famous opening passage: flesh turns into fog (Plate 16.2).

An attempt was made to rid London fog of its ‘nourishing’ qualities through a suggestion in 1904 to rename it. The scientist Henry Antoine Des Voeux, honorary treasurer of the Coal Smoke Abatement League, suggested that it should be named “smog,” to show that it consists much more of smoke than true fog’.²⁸ ‘Smog’, a portmanteau word combining the basic elements of smoke and fog, was designed to indicate that London fog was in fact a combination of the natural phenomenon of fog with the man-made smoke exuding from the many industrial and domestic chimneys in the capital, suggesting strongly that it was the latter that constituted the evil to be eliminated. But ‘smog’ was not popularly accepted until the 1950s, when it was used to refer to photochemical air pollution from motor vehicles, rather than the sulphurous mixtures of coal and smoke. Most people continued to prefer using ‘pea-souper’ or

‘London particular’ when yellowish fogs settled on London in the winter months.

For some, London fogs became part of the city’s identity, signifiers of what George Gershwin’s song called ‘A foggy day in London town, had me low, had me down’.²⁹ For many Londoners it was an aspect of London Pride, the ‘grey city.... smokily enchanted’, as Noel Coward’s patriotic Second World War song called it.³⁰ After all London is still referred to as ‘The Big Smoke’. The emissions pouring out into the atmosphere from the factories of the capital city showed that the economy was thriving. Industry provided jobs, and the sight of a smoking chimney standing out tall and proud from a factory meant that there was employment, while smoke from humbler domestic chimneys meant that people could afford coal to light and heat their homes, as well as to cook their food. Writers could see the positive side of air pollution. M. H. Dziewicki wrote ‘In Praise of London Fog’, its beauty and mysterious charm, in *The Nineteenth Century* magazine in 1889.³¹ Artists such as James McNeill Whistler, Claude Monet, and Yoshio Markino, fascinated by the shifting effects of light shining through the fog, also saw the beauty of foggy days and tried to capture them on canvas.³²

Yet people were early on aware of the dangers that London fog posed to their health, through consuming this thick yellow mixture. A tombstone in Kensal Green Cemetery in north-west London provides an early testimony to this perception with its inscription: ‘L. R. / Who died of suffocation in the Great Fog of London /1814’.³³ In the revised edition of his book, *The Climate of London*, published in 1833, the meteorologist Luke Howard reported on a fog that occurred on November 11 and 12, 1828: ‘The effect was most distressing, making eyes smart and almost suffocating those who were in the street, particularly asthmatic persons’.³⁴ Fog, as Charles Manby Smith, author of *Curiosities of London Life*, pointed out in 1853, created ‘a misty atmosphere fraught with catarrh and influenza’.³⁵ The growing frequency and intensity of the yellow London fogs in the 1830s paralleled the rise of miasmatic theories of disease, which reached their height in the 1850s: these ascribed infections such as cholera to harmful vapours (caused by putrefaction) rising from the ground, and people tried to protect themselves from inhaling the fog by covering their mouths with handkerchiefs.

Animals suffered as well—birds flew around unable to find a spot to land and would fall down exhausted, unable to breathe. The animals at London Zoo were noted to have ‘very dirty coats ... Polar bears and birds

with soft white plumage, such as Spoonbills and White Peafowl, become extremely dirty... many Felines in the Lion house die from chronic bronchitis, fibrosis and gangrene to the lungs associated with blackening of the lungs by dust deposit'.³⁶ The Smithfield Cattle Show, moved to the Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington in 1863, was held annually in December, a month noted for its fogs. During December 1873 one of the first fogs of the season enveloped London and lasted for five to six days, coinciding with the annual Cattle Show. Animals began to be distressed as early as the first day of the fog and 'exhibited symptoms as if they had been inhaling a noxious gas'.³⁷ The organisers tried to create more ventilation by leaving the doors and windows open but, of course, this meant only that more of the dirty fog came in. The American writer Mark Twain, who was in England performing some readings (which were also heavily affected by the fog), commented that 'the cattle are choking & dying in the great annual Cattle Show, & today they had to take some of the poor things out & haul them around on trucks to let them breathe the outside air & save their lives. I do wish it would let up'.³⁸ The *Daily News* reported on the distress of the animals: 'By daybreak two had died where they lay in the Hall, and by nine o'clock the reception yard was full of the great suffering animals, panting piteously in a state closely akin to suffocation; while in the interior of the hall sobbed and panted others nearly, if not quite, in as bad a state'.³⁹ By the end of the week, ninety-one cattle had been removed at the request of their owners and 'of these, 50 were slaughtered, some died in the vans in which they were taken away'.⁴⁰ Contemporaries coined the phrase 'fog fever' to describe the epidemic of respiratory ailments and deaths among the cattle. The *Daily News* had no doubt as to the cause: 'the sole ailment is suffocation ... proved by an examination of the animals that have died or been slaughtered, their lungs being found gorged with black blood'.⁴¹ The same thing occurred to the Smithfield Cattle Show of 1952; fewer cattle died but some ingenious masks were applied including one that was soaked in whisky to act as a disinfectant.

But it was not only animals that suffered. The *Medical Times and Gazette* of that week in 1873 raised the issue under the title 'Killed by the Fog'. The title distinguished between those people who were killed by accidents caused by poor visibility in the fog and those killed because of the fog's direct impact on their health and above all their respiratory system. It cautioned people against following the age-old advice of ensuring good ventilation because this would simply let the fog into the

house. Most people who could not afford to sit inside and just shut their windows to wait it out, resorted to homemade masks using a scarf or a handkerchief over the nose and mouth to protect themselves from the dirty particulates in the air.⁴² Fog had an impact even on healthy people, who suffered bodily discomfort and smarting eyes, frequently accompanied by severe headaches; but for those already suffering from lung complaints, or the vulnerable, such as the very old or the very young, ‘the combination of cold and smoky air’ caused ‘violent coughing; and whilst the patient coughs he cannot breathe, and cough materially interferes, moreover, with circulation’.⁴³ The publication of the weekly statistics on deaths quantified in human terms the deadly impact of the fog and sparked an ironic outburst from *The Times*: ‘We are very glad indeed to hear that 780 Londoners above the average died the week before last of the fog. We do not want them to die, of course, but if they were to die, it is better that they should die of the fog, and so get rid at once of the superstition that the most disagreeable, inconvenient, dangerous, and spirit depressing visitation which falls on Londoners is somehow “good for us”. It is not good for us, any more than for cattle, but bad, as the Registrar’s return shows’.⁴⁴ In fact, this figure of 780 was too low—the death toll is now estimated well above 1,000: during the smog of 1952, 4,000 extra deaths were acknowledged at the time, although it is now thought that probably as many as 12,000 extra deaths occurred.

Plants also were in a way suffocated by the fog. A plant’s stomata were likely to be clogged with soot, and the intensity of the light reaching the chlorophyll was also likely to be reduced. During the winter months, when fogs were most common, plants growing outdoors are usually in a dormant phase: ‘Evergreens were, however, coated with a thick greasy deposit of soot ... not likely to be washed off very readily with rain’.⁴⁵ Winter flower gardens at Kew were completely destroyed in the smog of 1952.⁴⁶ One answer was to find fog-resistant plants and trees. The most successful was the ubiquitous London plane tree—its leaves are shiny, which means any soot from the air can easily be washed off, while its bark very picturesquely peels off almost continuously, thus allowing it to breathe and renew itself.

Since the late eighteenth century and Lavoisier’s discovery of oxygen, scientists had been investigating the constituents of the air, but it was not until a century later that they succeeded in liquefying oxygen, hydrogen, and other gases. As Alain Corbin showed in his *The Foul and the Fragrant*

(1986), the growth of the respectable middle classes stimulated the emergence of the perfume industry, replacing musky scents that enhanced natural body odours with perfumes that disguised them. This highlighted the poor even more through the sense of smell. The poor became distinguished by what the middle classes considered their repulsive smell, and, along with this, their exposure to noxious miasmas of the kind that were thought to cause the spread of cholera, explaining, it seemed, the higher death rates from the disease in the poorer districts of the city. Judges at the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court in London, carried nosegays of highly scented cut flowers to protect their olfactory systems from the unpleasant and supposedly disease-ridden vapours wafted towards them by the criminals who were brought up from the damp and unhealthy cells below. In addition, the prevailing westerly winds tended to concentrate London fog and smoke in the poorer districts of the East End, where much of London's industry was also located. Increasingly, however, as fog became more prevalent across London, including its wealthier West End, the distinction in air quality became less noticeable. Many who could afford to do so just moved further out of London. As *The Times* complained in 1853, industrialists 'have a vested interest in compelling us to consume their smoke'.⁴⁷ Living in the clean air of the suburbs, they come into town once a week by rail 'to see how the chimney draws and how the till fills', then go back home, leaving the inhabitants of 'modern Babylon' to suffer as 'smoke penetrates the pores of our skin and the air vessels of our lungs, converting the human larynx into an ill-swept chimney'.⁴⁸

John Timbs, writing in 1855, noted: 'Suppose the wind to change suddenly to the east, the great body of smoke will be brought back in an accumulated mass; and as this repasses the town, augmented by the clouds of smoke from every fire therein, it causes the murky darkness'.⁴⁹ When fog spread westward during the dockers' strike of 1889, gangs of striking workers stormed into the fashionable districts of the West End, smashing shop windows and terrorising respectable passers-by. The fog and the strikers appeared combined as a threat of disorder to the placid lives of the middle classes, turning day into night in a social and political sense as well as an atmospheric one. And often fog and crime appeared in people's mind as one. London fogs might be a means of concealing crime and disorder, as Sherlock Holmes noted in 'The Bruce-Partington Plans' (1908) when he gazed from his first-floor window in Baker Street at the fog-bound streetscape below (Plate 16.3):



Plate 16.3 William Luker, ‘November Mourning’ (From W. J. Loftie, *London City* [1891]. Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library)

The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow ... Look out of this window, Watson. See how the figures loom up, are dimly seen, and then blend once more into the cloud-bank. The thief or the murderer could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim.⁵⁰

The image was taken up again by Margery Allingham, in whose novel *The Tiger in the Smoke* the murderer is actually known by the nickname ‘the tiger’, stalking the gloomy and fog-shrouded streets of the city with evil intent. But London fog also suggested an antidote to the crime and disorder seemingly veiled under a cloak of mist: a warm fire in an open hearth, perhaps especially in the poorest homes, providing security and stability for the family—after all, a smoking chimney meant that people could afford a coal fire. The domestic coal fire was sacrosanct, and politicians disturbed it at their peril, while factory owners lobbied successfully

against effective smoke abatement for decade after decade, arguing that economic progress and prosperity were the best guarantees of social order.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, unease about the atmosphere of London and the medical consequences of these urban fogs took on a figurative form in a series of popular novellas and short stories. Depictions of fog were now beginning to enter the realm of popular fiction. One such novella published in 1880 by William Delisle Hay purported to recall events which the author imagined taking place in February 1882. *The Doom of the Great City; Being the Narrative of a Survivor, Written A.D. 1942* describes a dense smoke-fog that had lasted since Christmas and destroyed all life in the capital on the fateful day of the narrator's birthday. The story was written as a warning of an impending ecological disaster brought about by the dirty atmosphere and constituted a hyperbolically imaginative response to the medical and scientific literature of the time, which had begun to warn against the smoky atmosphere. It also reflected a widespread feeling that cities such as London were growing too rapidly at the expense of a supposedly more idyllic lifestyle in the countryside, and expressed the threat of degeneracy posed by excessive urbanisation. The narrator's highly critical description of London centres on its 'murky atmosphere, the dingy gloom'.⁵¹ The fog is both a symbol of the corruption of the city and a veil through which the narrator sees 'the odious colours of the evil that lies hidden behind the awful pall ... Among the higher ranks of society immorality was so common as to excite but small attention ... while up from the lowest depths there constantly arose a stream of grosser, fouler moral putrescence, which it would be libel on the brutes to term merely bestiality'.⁵² London is cut off by a wall of fog with the few people escaping London relaying horror stories of death. The narrator, desperate to know the fate of his mother and sister, whom he has left behind at their home, makes his way through the foggy barrier. He finds all of London dead; and death seems instantaneous. A sentry on guard outside Buckingham Palace still stands upright, as he has died at his post, and further down the social scale 'two miserable little bodies in the gutter, two poor little ragged urchins ... their meagre limbs cuddled round each other in a last embrace'.⁵³ No one is spared: even the narrator's mother and sister, innocent of the general corruption of the city, are seated next to each other, with a cat on the chair, but all are dead (Plate 16.4).

Thus London fog, with its sooty particles and its sulphurous constituents, could be a form of poison as well as a kind of nutrition in the

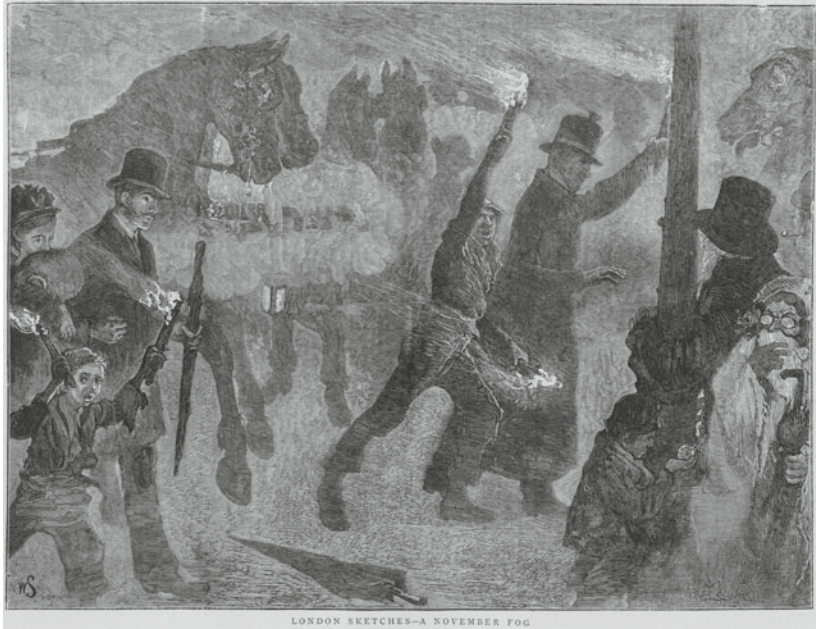


Plate 16.4 'London Sketches—a November Fog' (*Graphic*, 9 November 1872. Courtesy of Syndics of Cambridge University Library)

popular and literary imagination. Medical opinion only gradually gained a decisive influence on attitudes towards London fog, helped by the rise of epidemiology and medical statistics, modern communications and news media. In the great killer fog of 1952, daily bulletins issued over the radio charted the rapid rise in deaths from bronchitis and other pulmonary conditions, eventually totalling an excess mortality of 12,000 over the normal number of deaths during the short period in which it lasted. The founding of the National Health Service after World War II created a widespread expectation that government would act to protect people's health, and the Clean Air Acts were the result, bringing the history of London fog to a close. At the time of writing this essay, however, scientists have announced that air pollution is one of the major causes of death in our rapidly urbanising world today, having overtaken cancer and tobacco smoking.⁵⁴ So there is still much more to do.

Nowadays, we only need to see a scene on television or in a movie of a foggy street dimly illuminated by a gas lamp to know we are in London in the 1880s or 1890s, and a crime or outrage is about to be committed. Modern dramatisations of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories or films and dramas featuring Jack the Ripper almost invariably shroud the action in a thick London fog, though the technology does not seem to be available to give it the proper yellow colour. Yet in fact only one of the Sherlock Holmes stories, 'The Bruce-Partington Plans', uses fog as a central part of the drama. And although Jack the Ripper is inevitably shown shrouded in fog from his first fictional outing in Marie Belloc Lowndes' 1911 novel *The Lodger*, via an episode of *The Avengers* in which a Ripper-like figure is called the 'gas ghoul', to an episode in the original *Star Trek* featuring a 'Jack the Ripper' figure hailing from the foggy side of a planet and butchering women, in fact all of the Ripper murders took place on clear nights.

From being the breath of life, a symbol of Victorian progress and well-being, through figuring as the breath of death, a vector of moral judgment on the evils of the big city, London fog has become a kind of free-floating signifier of Victorian crime, as artificial as the machines that produce it in the film studio or as the cans of 'London Fog' sold to tourists in the 1970s.

NOTES

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10. Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *Cheveley: or The Man of Honour* (London: Charles H. Clarke, 1860), 280.
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14. *The Times*, 12 August 1937 and 19 August 1937. After these two appearances the advertisement was dropped.
15. William Makepeace Thackeray, *A Little Dinner at Timmins's*, in *The Works of Thackeray*, 12 vols (London: Smith, Elder, 1878), 12:142.
16. *Punch's Almanack for 1851*, included with *Punch* 19 (1850) in unnumbered pages at the beginning.
17. The origin of this rhyme is not known but the earliest reference is found *ca.* 1765 in John Newbery's *Mother Goose's Melody*, according to Iona Opie and Peter Opie, eds, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 345.
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23. *Slang and Its Analogues, Past and Present: A Dictionary Historical and Comparative of the Heterodox Speech of All Classes of Society for More than Three Hundred Years*, ed. by John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, vol. 5 of 7 (London, 1902), s.v. 'London Particular (or London Ivy)'.
24. Thomas Love Peacock, *Melincourt or Sir Oran Haut-Ton*, 2 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1891), vol. 2, 122.
25. *New York Times*, 2 April 1855, 1.
26. *Farmhouse Cookery: Recipes from the Country Kitchen* (London: Reader's Digest, 1980), 21.
27. J. Hillis Miller, 'Bleak House and the Moral Life', in *Dickens: Bleak House: A Casebook*, ed. by A. E. Dyson (London: Macmillan, 1969), 167.
28. *The Times*, 27 December 1904, 510.
29. George Gershwin and Ira Gershwin, 'A Foggy Day in London Town'.
30. Noel Coward, 'London Pride'. Written in 1941 at the height of the Blitz.
31. M. H. Dziewicki, 'In Praise of London Fog', in *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, ed. by James Knowles, vol. 26, July–December 1889, 1047–55.

32. For example Whistler painted *Nocturne in Grey and Gold—Piccadilly*, now in the National Gallery of Ireland, between 1881 and 1883. Monet made a series of paintings of London Fog in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For more detail see Christine L. Corton, *London Fog: The Biography* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), especially ch. 5.
33. *Magazine of the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery*, April 1997.
34. Luke Howard, *Climate of London Deduced from Meteorological Observations, Made in the Metropolis, and at Various Places around It*, 3 vols (London: Harvey and Darton, 1833), vol. 3, 303.
35. Charles Manby Smith, *Curiosities of London Life; or, Phases, Physiological and Social, of the Great Metropolis* (London: William and Frederick, 1853), 80.
36. 'Smoke and the Zoo: How the Animals Are Affected', *Journal of the National Smoke Abatement Society* 25/7 (1936), 9.
37. Georg Hartwig, *The Aerial World: A Popular Account of the Phenomena and Life of the Atmosphere* (London: Longmans, Green, 1874), 139.
38. Mark Twain to Olivia L. Clemens, 11 December 1873, in *Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 5, 1872–1873*, ed. by Lin Salamo and Harriet Elinor Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 508.
39. *Daily News*, 11 December 1873, 2, col. C.
40. E. J. Powell, *History of the Smithfield Club, 1798 to 1900* (London: Smithfield Club, 1902), 54.
41. *Daily News*, 11 December 1873, 2, col. D.
42. Dissections in the historical respiratory collections of medical museums (for example, in the teaching collection of the Gordon Museum of Pathology, King's College London), commonly show nineteenth-century examples of the effects of the inhalation of atmospheric particulates (including from fog), understood in the period as contributing to morbidity. For a recent study relating fogs to death statistics in the nineteenth century see Jonathan H. Widdicombe, 'A Brief History of Bronchitis in England and Wales', *Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases: the Journal of the COPD Foundation*, 7/4 (2020), 303–14, especially the section 'Mortality ... 1838 to 1920': <http://doi.org/10.15326/jcopdf.7.4.2020.0135>.
43. 'Killed by the Fog,' *Medical Times and Gazette: A Journey of Medical Science, Literature, Criticism and News*, 13 December 1873, 668, col. B. Cf. 'Fog in relation to the health of the Metropolis', *The Medical Times and Gazette*, 2 October 1880 (p. 410, col. A), the facts and conclusions of which are substantially repeated in the 'Annus Medicus 1880' report in the *Gazette*, 25 December 1880 (723–24). In a similar vein, the Medical Officer of Health for Marylebone reported an unusually high death rate from bronchitis and pneumonia for December 1873, which he attributed

partly to fog (*Gazette*, 24 January 1874, 116, col. B); and the same district officer reported high mortality rates resulting from ‘diseases of the breathing organs’ exacerbated by dense fog in February 1880 (*Gazette*, 3 April 1880, 378, col. A). In the issue of 14 February 1880 (183, col. A) a high death rate among *poitrinaires* (consumptives) in London is attributed to dense fog, which is compared to that of the Cattle Show week of 1873 (on which see above), the death rate for which it exceeded. A similar high death rate from pulmonary diseases in Glasgow (referred to as a ‘semi-asphyxiated city’) attributed to fogs is discussed in the issue of 23 January 1875 (92, col. A).

44. *The Times*, 29 December 1873, issue 27,885, 4.
45. ‘Plant Life’, *Smokeless Air*, issue 85 (1953), 108.
46. *Hansard*, House of Lords debate, 18 November 1953, vol. 184, cc364–74 on fog in Britain generally (Kew Gardens, cc366).
47. *The Times*, 10 August 1852, issue 21,190, 7.
48. *Ibid.*
49. John Timbs, *Curiosities of London: Exhibiting the Most Rare and Remarkable Objects of Interest in the Metropolis with Nearly Fifty Years’ Personal Recollections* (London: D. Bogue, 1855), 310.
50. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans,’ in *His Last Bow: Some Reminiscences of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1997), 83–84. First published in the *Strand Magazine* in December 1908 and in *Collier’s Weekly* on 12 December 1908.
51. William Delisle Hay, *The Doom of the Great City; Being the Narrative of a Survivor, Written A.D. 1942* (1880), in *British Future Fiction: The End of the World*, ed. by I. F. Clarke (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), 23.
52. *Ibid.*, 30–32.
53. *Ibid.*, 59.
54. See *The Independent*, 12 March 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/air-pollution-smoking-deaths-compare-a8818851.html>.

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