

# Industrial Illness in Social Context: *La maladie de Bradford* in Local, National & Global Spheres (1878-1919)



# Multiple Identities

Murrain  
Maladie de Bradford  
Splenic Fever  
Malignant Pustule  
Milzbrand  
Siberian Fever  
Carbuncle  
Rinderpest  
Woolsorters' Disease  
Ragpickers' Disease  
Charbon  
Quarter-evil  
Black Leg  
...  
[Anthrax]

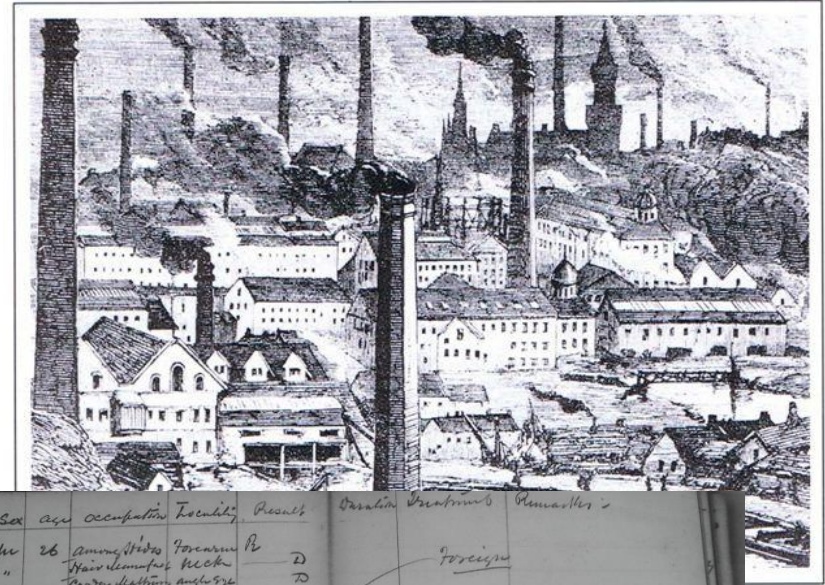
rare; plus fréquente est l'infection par les voies respiratoires à la faveur de poussières chargées de spores charbonneuses (maladie des trieurs de laine, maladie de Bradford).

(Besson, 1898)



# “Woolsorters’ Disease”

- Emerges during C19
- Initial ‘folk’ understandings of the condition
- Strongly associated with “dirty foreign wools” and fallen fleeces
- Bound up with micro- and macro-economic concerns
- (semi-) Systematic research in Bradford from c.1878
- Disagreement (specific nature of the disease’s cause)
- Causative organism demonstrated to be *Bacillus anthracis*
- Thereafter, identity shifts from “woolsorters’ disease” to “anthrax”



No	Sex	Age	Occupation	Treatment	Result	Parasite	Remarks
1	M	26	Amalgamator	Forcible	D		
2	"	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
3	"	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
4	M	18	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
5	M	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
6	M	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
7	M	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
8	M	30	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
9	M	17	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
10	M	30	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
11	M	18	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
12	M	40	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
13	M	19	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
14	M	19	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
15	M	19	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
16	M	34	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
17	M	19	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
18	M	47	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
19	M	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
20	M	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
21	M	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
22	M	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		
23	M	"	Wool sorter	Forcible	D		



# Cultural Constructions

Mr Butterfield's learnedly said  
In our job there is little to dread,  
For though one or two may go suddenly dead,  
    It doesn't mean quite  
    We should all be in a fright  
And give way to terror and go off our head

...

But doubtless there's much might be done,  
If masters and men could be only at one,  
If wool were but blown before sorting begun,  
    And rooms were pure,  
    Not like a sewer,  
And let in the air with the light of the sun.

(from 'The Woolsorters' Lay', *The Yorkshireman*, 16 March 1878)

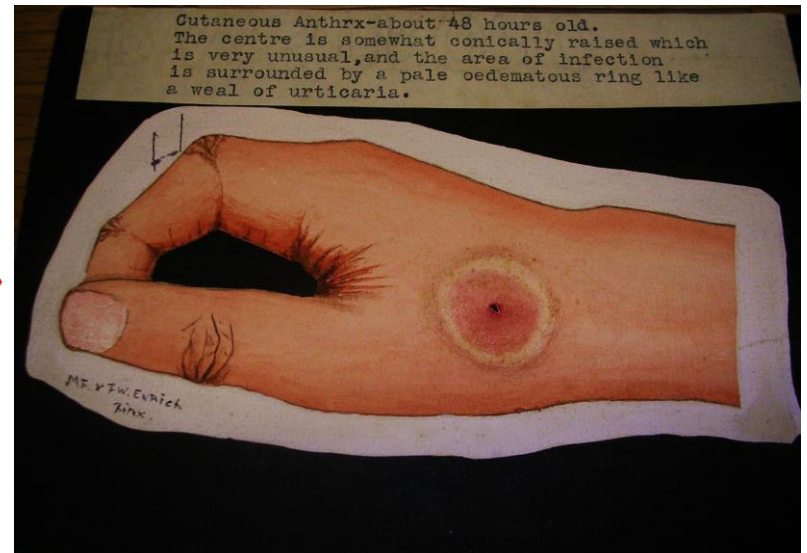
I should, were I of hasty turn,  
With indignation boil,  
To think of those who fortunes earn  
By letting workmen toil  
Amid the deadly Van mohair,  
When at a little cost and care,  
Their lives might shielded be...

([Letter], *Bradford Observer*, 3 June 1880)



# Representations & Research

- General shift from “field” to “laboratory” medicine
- Mirrored in the case of anthrax in Bradford...
- ...but engagement with sufferers continues:
  - Compensation
  - Demonstrations
- Assumptions challenged:
  - Foreign wools responsible ✓
  - Fallen fleeces more dangerous ✗
  - Removal of dust sufficient ✗



# National/Global Constructions

- Dependent upon social context:
  - Wool Industry (Bradford)
  - Agriculture (Norfolk/Hampshire)
  - Shipping and Trade (Glasgow/Liverpool)
- Cultural construction of countries of origin: dirty and disease-ridden
- Research communities (or lack thereof) reflected these differences
- Interaction between nodes of knowledge production (Jim Secord: *Knowledge in Transit*)
- Pluralistic understanding of germ theories (Mick Worboys: *Spreading Germs*)





# 'Anthrax Girl' (c.1908)

