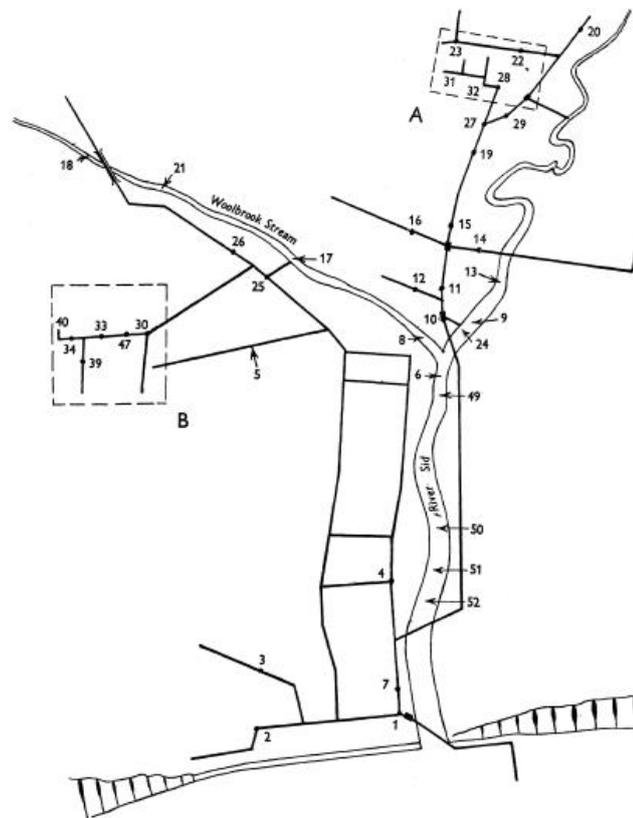


## Endemic enteric disease in Sidmouth

In 1952 a paper was published in the Journal of Hygiene by Moore (Exeter Public Health Lab), Perry (Sidmouth Medical Officer of Health) and Chard (Sidmouth Public Health Dep) presenting the results of a long running study to identify the source of sporadic enteric disease (including typhoid and paratyphoid) cases in Sidmouth. An average of more than one case per year had been recorded since 1930, many affecting visitors to hotels in the town. This was far worse than any comparable town in Devon (e.g. Exmouth had no cases in this period). The study used exposure of gauze swabs in the sewage pipes to collect samples.



Sidmouth rivers and main sewers in about 1950  
(reproduced from J. Hygiene, 1952)

After several false attempts, a satisfactory methodology for sampling paratyphoid bacilli was developed and almost immediately came up with a positive result from a swab exposed in the River Sid. The source of this was traced to a storage tank with a storm water overflow into the river, just north of the confluence with the Wool Brook. This source was then traced north to Sidford where a carrier was identified.

Meanwhile another positive sample was found in the Wool Brook itself and then another, of a different strain, in a sewer draining Alexandria Road. The latter led to the identification of a carrier, but also to an unidentified source at the gas works adjacent to the station. Neither of the identified carriers had ever suffered symptoms though a third carrier had been infected during war service but had been discharged as clear.

Further investigation using a different sampling method also came up with a positive for typhoid bacilli in the River Sid. This was traced to a carrier who had spent time in Brazil in his youth, though had never shown symptoms. His excreta were apparently leaking into the river from an old sewer running alongside the river.

Although the sources of the sporadic infections could not be definitively identified it seemed highly likely that the common link was contamination of the river water through leaky sewers and storm overflows, and that the infection was occurring through fishing, bathing or use of the river water for watering allotments.