

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE FAVORITE "WEST END"

Why is the "west end" of a town so commonly preferred for residence? H.V. Lanchester, a British authority on town-planning, has suggested that in the evening, when work is over, one's steps naturally turn to the region of the setting sun, and that hence this quarter is unconsciously chosen as the place of home and relaxation.

Andrew Steinmetz offered a different explanation in his "Manual of Weathercasts," published in London in 1866. He wrote:

"Westerly winds mostly prevail in England -- i.e., southwest, west and northwest winds -- and it seems that this fact accounts for the tendency of the wealthier population to move westward or towards the 'west end,' because the air there is freer from smoke, etc., the prevalent westerly winds not only driving back the smoke of the city or 'east end,' but carrying to it the smoke of the 'west end.'"

He notes that "exhalations" (probably meaning especially the mythical "miasmata" that were a subject of solicitude at the time Steinmetz wrote) are similarly carried by the winds away from the western quarter of a town and that this conduces to healthful conditions in the latter. He tells us that the same preference for the western quarter not only prevails in most modern cities in Europe but also prevailed in Pompeii and other ancient cities.

If his explanation is correct, it applies also to most cities of the United States and Canada, lying, as they do, in the region of the "prevailing westerlies."

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