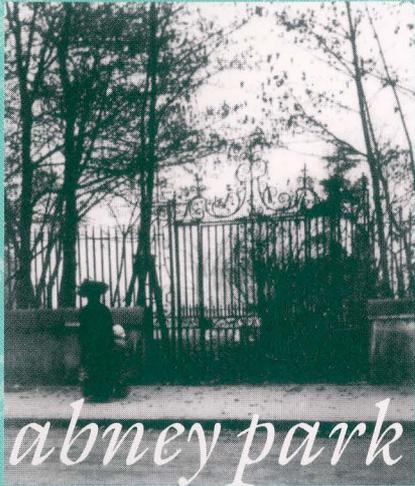
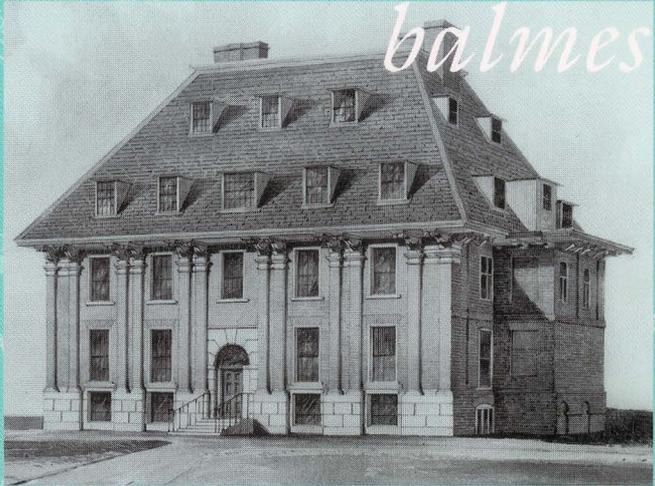


# Hackney History

VOLUME TWO



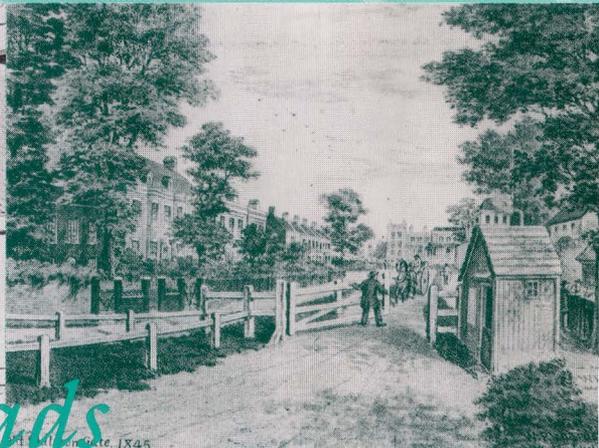
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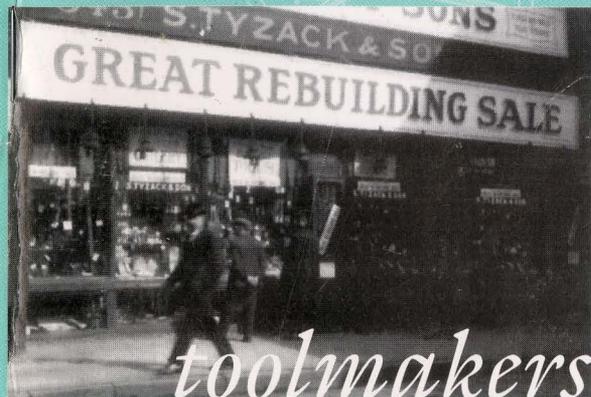
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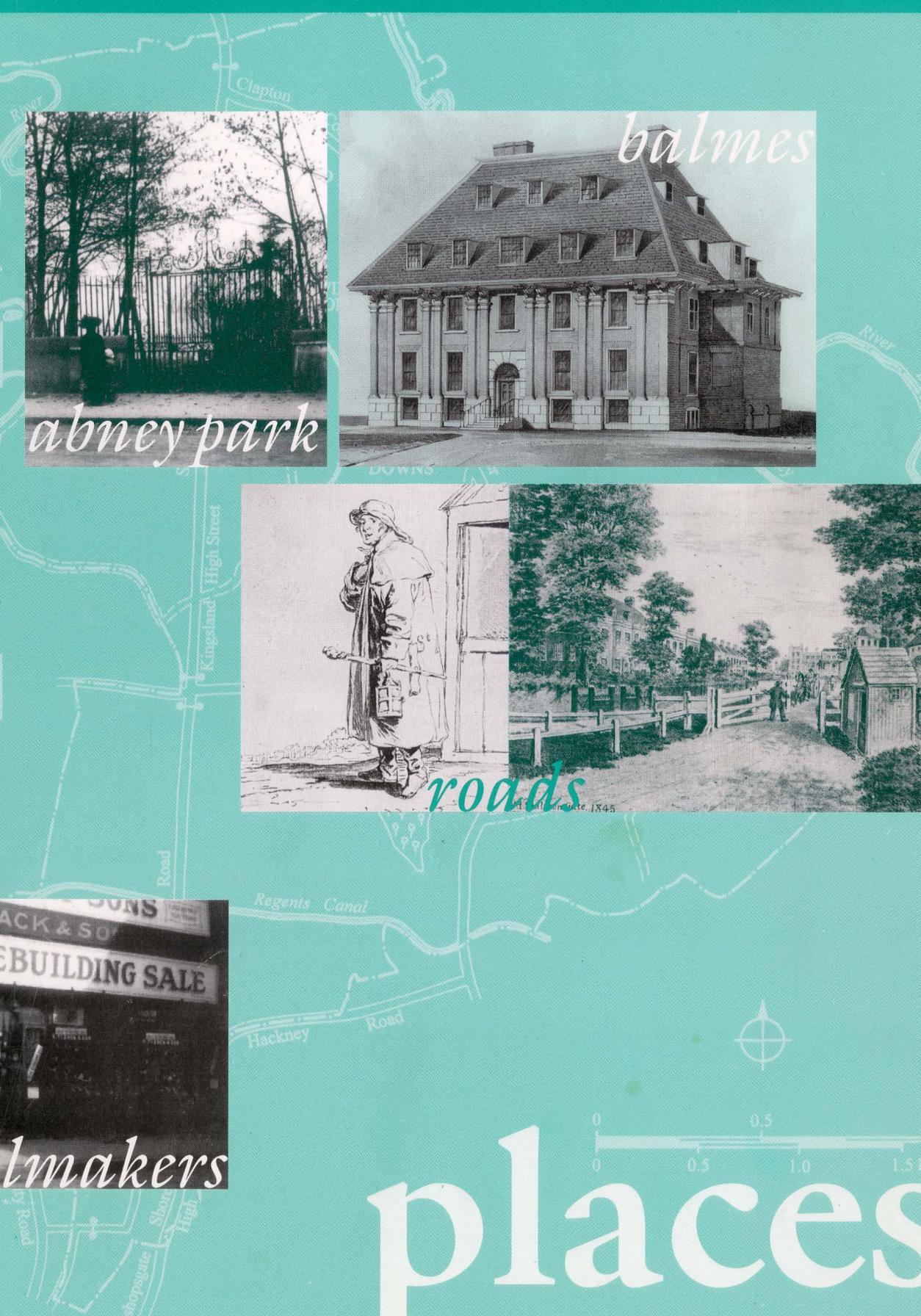
1845



*toolmakers*

places

PEOPLE



# HackneyHistory

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- **Balmes House** – European influence and English design
- **travel by road** – when there was no alternative
- **a Hackney curate** – a homesick young clergyman's insight into early 19th century Hackney society
- **the Shoreditch furniture trade** – with Buckinghamshire connections
- and unseemly goings-on at **cemeteries** connected with **Abney Park**.

**Hackney History** is the annual volume of the Friends of Hackney Archives, founded in 1985 to act as a focus for local history in Hackney, and to support the work of Hackney Archives Department. Friends receive the annual volume, and the Department's regular newsletter, the *Hackney Terrier*. Subscriptions are £6.00 (sterling) for a calendar year.

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# HACKNEY *History*

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used -

HAD	Hackney Archives Department
GLRO	Greater London Record Office
VCH	<i>Victoria County History of Middlesex</i>

All publications cited are published in London unless otherwise indicated.

## BALMES HOUSE

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*Priscilla Metcalf*

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Balmes House is seldom now remembered, yet in its last days artists recorded its appearance in at least two sets of watercolour drawings, and several earlier drawings and engravings survive from the 18th century. But architectural historians seem to have overlooked it. More people may know of its last role, as lunatic asylum that may have sheltered Mary Lamb, than the chance that its front elevation was unique in the England of its time.

Luckily, in 1852, a few people thought it interesting enough to record before it went. The Tyssen Collection of books and prints now in Hackney Archives Department includes a set of views (five exteriors and two ceilings) signed 'G.W. Toussaint' and dated 1852. Others, by J.W. Archer, are in the British Museum.

*The Illustrated London News* for 5th June 1852 carried a prominent article on 'this interesting specimen of olden domestic architecture better known as Sir George Whitmore's House ... which will very shortly be taken down, so that our readers may be glad to have their attention directed to this archaeological relic of the northeastern suburbs ... one of our earliest specimens of brickwork and of the Italian school of architecture.' Its site lies at the south end of De Beauvoir Road, London N1, near Kingsland Road and the Regent's Canal.

Indentures of sale now preserved at the Public Record Office establish that the Whitmore family owned the house from 1634

to 1687. It appears from the document of 1634 that Sir George Whitmore had been living there as a tenant, leasing the house without most of the surrounding lands, for eight years previously (1625 had been a bad plague year, and Balmes was almost two miles from the Royal Exchange). In 1634 his three trustees seem to have acquired vacant possession of the rest of the property, turning out all the other copyholders and tenants on the fairly extensive estate, and acquiring Sir George, as it were, along with the house.

Whitmore, well connected and no shopkeeper, was a Royalist. He was Lord Mayor in 1631-32 and had been Master at the Haberdashers' Company, where his portrait shows a rather majestic presence in three-quarter length - one might guess at a painter such as Cornelius Johnson. The Whitmore family came from Shropshire, and Sir George owned manors in Somerset and in Essex. He was a member of the Virginia Company from 1609. He is said to have given a large sum to the reconstruction of the medieval fabric of St Paul's during his term of office. This donation came the year before Inigo Jones received the commission to recase the cathedral in a classical skin. Whitmore contributed money to the King's cause - voluntarily, that is - and the Parliament imprisoned him when war began in 1642. He died during the Commonwealth.

William Whitmore, his son, I think we can assume, was not the building type: during

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*This article, which first appeared in the Architectural Review, June 1957, has been revised and extended by Keith Sugden.*

the 1670s he was characterised in the conversation of Lord Keeper North in *The Lives of the Norths*, who were relatives of his, as 'one Mr. Whitmore of Balms near London, a humoursome old gentleman but very famous for the mere eating and drinking part of house-keeping'. He had been living at Ramsay Hall in Essex, up near Harwich, before his father died. After living for 24 years at Balms and marrying one of his servant maids in his old age, he had himself buried in Essex. His one son died under age and in 1687 three family trustees sold the estate of Balms to a gentleman from Guernsey named Richard de Beauvoir.

*English classical architecture*

At this point we must digress to explain the state of English architecture in the decades before the Civil War. It was a period dominated, but only in retrospect, by the influence of one man: Inigo Jones. Renaissance designers had been filtering into England ever since Henry VIII employed the sculptor Torrigiani - he made Henry VII's tomb in Westminster Abbey, for example. But mostly the artistic ideas of the Italian Renaissance reached England at third hand via the Netherlands, already heavily distorted by the traditional practices of north European artisans. This is clear when we look at a typical Elizabethan or Jacobean house: misunderstood classical details and motives are grafted onto familiar medieval types of buildings. Inigo Jones was the first designer in England to react against this northern 'barbarism.' He travelled with the connoisseur, the Earl of Arundel, to Italy to study art in its purity at source. In the case of architecture this meant reading the treatise of the ancient Roman author Vitruvius and the famous book written by his 16th century Venetian disciple Andrea Palladio, *I quattro libri d'architettura*. When Jones applied what he had learnt for his patrons at the English Court he encountered incredulity from his fellow countrymen. For example, a contemporary referred to the splendid new Banqueting Hall towering over the medieval Whitehall Palace as 'some curious device of Inigo Jones.'

People in England had simply not encountered the strict theory that demanded use of a closely defined vocabulary of classical ornaments within a rigid and 'correct' system of proportions, all carefully calculated according to specific mathematical rules. Uneducated artisans could simply not understand this intellectual approach. Nevertheless, patrons demanded the latest thing of their bricklayers. The craftsmen turned to pattern books, espe-

cially to the famous treatise, *Regole generali d'architettura*, by the otherwise obscure Italian architect Sebastiano Serlio, first translated into English in 1611. English artisans manipulated his designs in a free way: in fact, in their ill-tutored hands Serlio's 'correct' classical designs often became hopelessly corrupted. They would design houses with the plans and shapes they had learnt in their youth and then 'paste on' details from Serlio or engravings they had bought - doorcases, fancy windows, classical statuary and so on. To a trained Italian eye the proportions which resulted were truly barbarous. More educated craftsmen could work out the simple maths and produce genuinely handsome and well proportioned designs. Balms House was one of these: its style is often called 'artisan mannerism.'

*The building of Balms*

The constructive character of Sir George Whitmore and the unconstructive character of his son are relevant because someone may think the colossal classical order applied to Balms was more likely after the Restoration, and because the names of two of these trustees, together with the architectural oddity of the house, may bring to mind an architect who, one can be quite sure, had nothing to do with it: Captain Winde or Wynn. One trustee was the Earl of Craven whose mother had been a sister of Sir George Whitmore's and whose collection of houses included the Dutchly vertical Ashdown. The second trustee was Lord Powis, whose mother was a sister of Lord Craven's - Lord Powis had been recently released from the Tower on the uncovering of Titus Oates and a year later was to follow James II out of the country. Winde was building for both Craven and Powis, but I do not think he was reviving artisan classicism of the 1630s for William Whitmore. (As for Lord Craven's house in Drury Lane, it was an even less sophisticated mixture than Balms.) The third trustee was Lord North and Grey, one of Whitmore's relatives in the North family. Neither is there any suggestion in *The Lives of the Norths* - or indeed in the appearance of the house - that Roger North of the Middle Temple gateway put up the front of Balms.

Architecturally, Balms was an unusual example of bricklayer's classicism, one of a group of houses built during the time of Inigo Jones, but largely independent of him. Mr Summerson's convenient term 'artisan mannerism' does not altogether apply to the front elevation, because the principal 'mannerist' motives listed by him were not present: no

'Holborn' gables, no architraves breaking into scrolls and half-pilasters. But the interrupted entablature and the extra spacing at the corners can be called artisan mannerist.

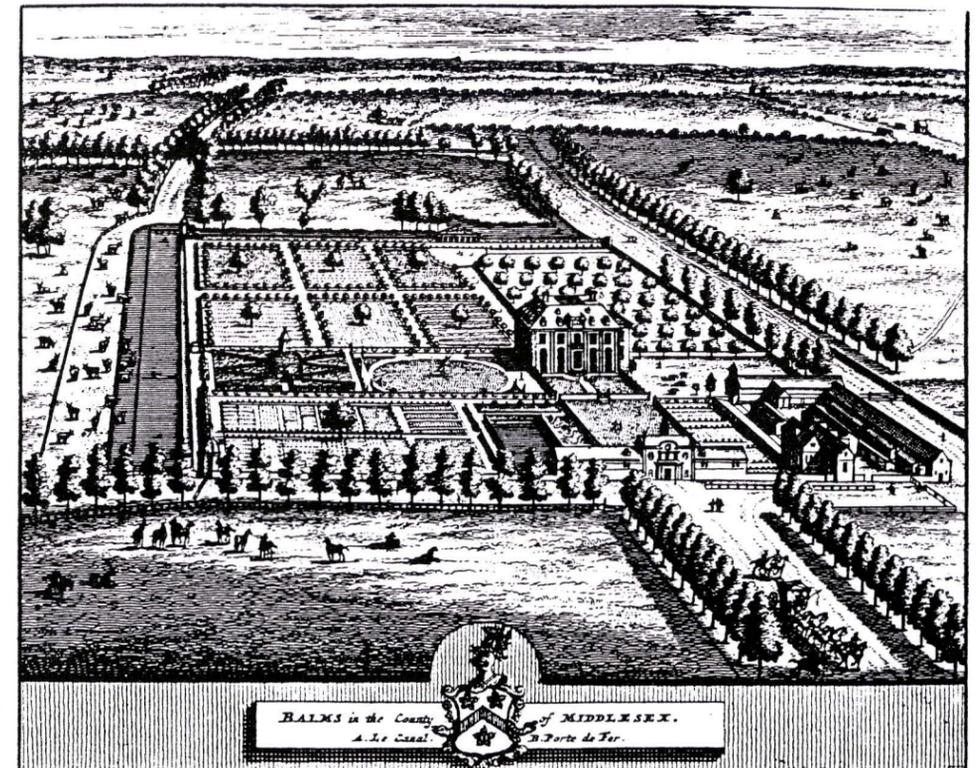
It is odd to find a merchant's mansion of this period inclining more towards the severe than the busy, but a rather grandiose ungainliness betrays it as craftsman's classicism - not the more mature 'Dutch' classicism employed later on by Hugh May or Captain Winde, or indeed by the scientist turned architect, Robert Hooke, now more famous for his law of elasticity.

A document preserved at Dulwich College shows that English bricklayers had already been familiar with the use of the giant order for two or three decades. This is important: reliable dates for the beginning of 'artisan classicism' are so few. It is a contract for Edward Alleyn's first building there, dated 17 May 1613 between Alleyn and John Benson of Westminster, bricklayer, for 'a certain buildinge of brick ... according to a plott thereof made and drawn by the saide John Benson,' and specifying that the forefront ... shal be bewtified with sixe Dorick pillasters with petty-stalls, bases, capitalls and cornishe to reach from the lowest part of the foundation within the grounde unto the raysinge peece' (a height previously given as thirty feet). Inigo Jones himself is well out of the frame: at this time he

had just left for Italy.

The doubling of the giant order on Balms, however, may have been unique in the England of its day. Artisans like Benson had been brought up on Serlio. The more sophisticated, irregularly spaced flat order on Broome Park, Kent, of 1635-38, may echo a design in Serlio (VII, 41). Architects of the 1630s were adapting the giant order to town houses and usually raised it on a ground floor base in imitation of Inigo Jones' Covent Garden houses: the row in Great Queen Street by Peter Mills comes to mind. Thanet House (later Shaftesbury House) in Aldersgate Street, of about 1642 was another example of town artisan mannerism; perhaps it was also by Mills.

Although there is no dated view of Balms earlier than 1707, it seems highly unlikely that the front elevation was added at the end of the 17th century by De Beauvoir. For one thing, even though unique in a way, when seen in the context of other brick architecture of the 1630s, it seems to fit. If such a change had been made around 1700, the inordinately high roof would probably have been lowered or disguised at the same time. Someone may well wonder why the whole could not have been done before Whitmore's time, with 'Sir George's house' merely taking its name from his more resounding personality - only parts of that argument are excellent, for it does seem that



The 1707 view of Balms

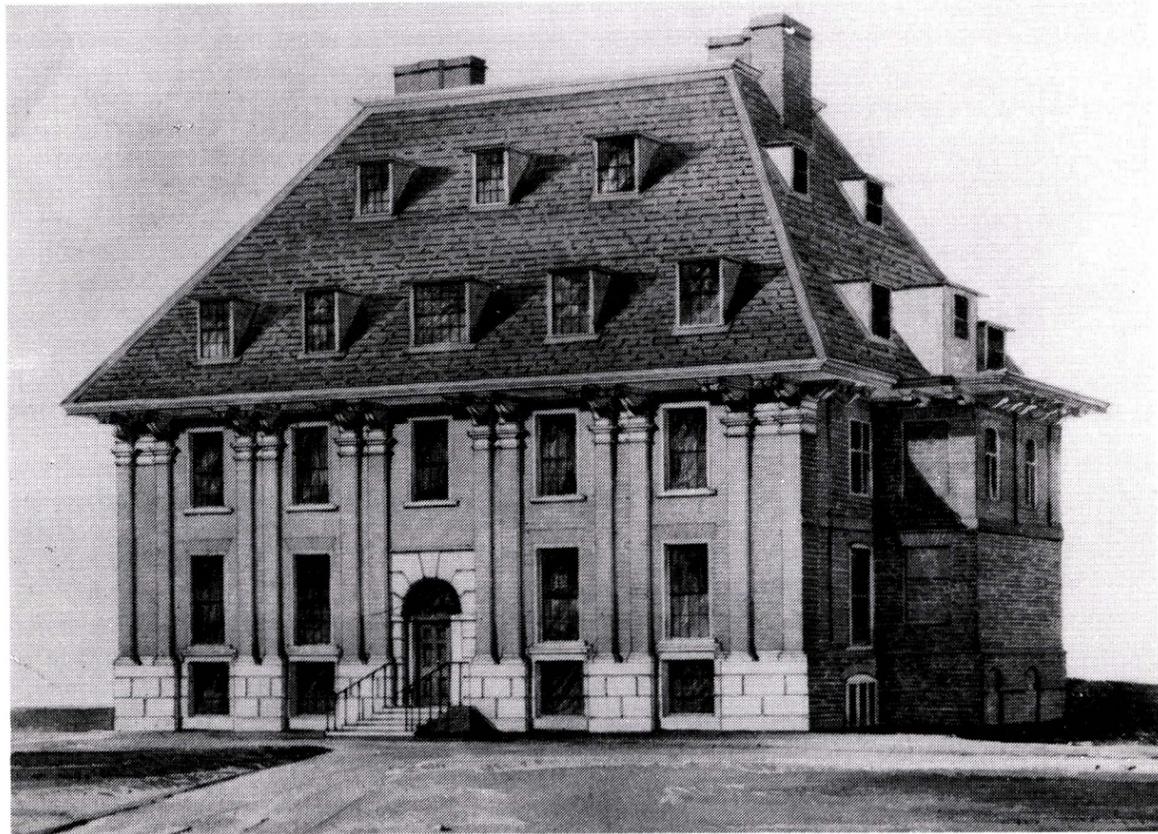
the *tout ensemble* could only have happened around 1635.

The gateway, visible in the view of 1707, was torn down about 1794, when it was noted by Sir Henry Ellis for his *History of Shoreditch*. If he was right in saying it bore the date 1623, the gatehouse was built before Whitmore's time. Ellis included the interesting item that Balmes was once 'ornamented with the busts of the twelve Caesars upon brackets.' De Beauvoir could have added these. The north front of Ham House was decorated with such busts about 1675, but so of course had been Hampton Court, Wollaton and others. No marks of such brackets seem to be left on the brickwork.

The rather overweening roof had two rows of dormers - as if doubling the garrets were a fitting climax to the paired pilasters and modillion brackets below. One of the few remaining English houses with two rows of dormers is at 19 St George's Square in Stamford, a smaller and somewhat later house, but the dormers have the casements and little hipped roofs that Balmes will originally have had (the side view in Lyson's shows these). Both houses have the same moulding at the top of the roof, also a feature of Thorpe Hall (1653-56) and once the basis of a balustrade at Wisbech Cas-

tle (1655-57). The double row of dormers was common enough in northern Europe. Furnival's Inn of about 1640, which looked rather like a Netherlandish town hall, had a vast roof, although, if 18th century views can be believed, with nothing like the steep pitch of the roof at Balmes. If Chevening in Kent was the first of the 'regular' houses to have a hipped roof, it did not attempt such height. The Balmes roof was in its way just as 'unclassical' as the 'Dutch' gables on Swakeleys or Broom Park.

It would appear possible that there is more than two English generations' digestion of Serlio here, that an engraving of some steep-roofed French building, perhaps of part of the Tuileries, was used. Mathieu Mérian's view of Paris in 1615 shows Bullant's pavilion (between De l'Orme's and Du Cerceau's work) with its *paired* colossal pilasters (later duplicated by Le Vau at the Pavillon de Mersan end). This combination of high roof and more than one row of dormers with a mannerist use of the classical orders, began in France anyway. Whether Whitmore's nephew, Lord Craven, who came back from the wars in 1633, might have engaged in some correspondence for him or obtained engravings from, say, Sir Balthazar Gerbier, who was in Brussels, may be immoderate guessing. The surveyor or brick-



Elevation from the south-east: one of a series of watercolours by Toussaint, 1852

layer in charge may simply have owned some French engravings. There is certainly not here any of that *new* French influence of the Court circles nearest the Queen, noticeable in Jones's work at Somerset House and later at Wilton.

#### The earlier house

Balmes House is no simple problem for the architectural historian: besides this puzzling old-fashioned French quality, with the clearly English brickwork of the 1630s, there were also apparent remnants of the earlier house. The two-storey piece jutting out on the east side looks like making the best of something already there - perhaps part of the line of an early Jacobean house corresponding once to another extension on the west side - or perhaps even part of a very much earlier tower. Whether it contained the stairs is hard to tell from the one view of a staircase that we have. The woodwork of one of the main rooms looks early Jacobean too, so the work of 1635 may have been merely a recasing and a new roof outside and much redecoration inside.

What do we actually know of Balmes before the reign of Charles I? The house lies just to the northeast of the medieval village of Hoxton, recorded in the Domesday Book (1086) as Hochestone, then as Hocston in 1221 and Hoxtone in 1254. The place name is Old English and means Hoc's Tun or 'Hoc's farm'. William the Conqueror's surveyors wrote that: 'In HOXTON the Canons of St Paul's have 1 hide. Land for 1 plough; it is there now. 3 villagers hold this land under the Canons. Pasture for the livestock. The value of this land was and is 20s. It lay and lies in the lordship of St Paul's Church.' The shape of the settlement has been well known from early maps - it stretches along Hoxton Street - but solid archaeological evidence was lacking. Then in 1993 the Museum of London discovered remains of medieval Hoxton for the first time in a dig on the site of St Leonard's Hospital. The team found occupation debris containing pottery from the late 12th and 13th centuries, as well as evidence that the village expanded as a fashionable suburb in Tudor times.

Such then is the context for our large house nearby. 'Bammes House' was very likely the manor house of Hoxton. We may picture a substantial if unspectacular house, perhaps built around a small courtyard, but surely possessing a hall and screens passage. The name may derive from the tenancy of Adam Bamme, Lord Mayor of London, in 1390. At some stage a rectangular moat surrounded the house, but who dug it remains uncertain.

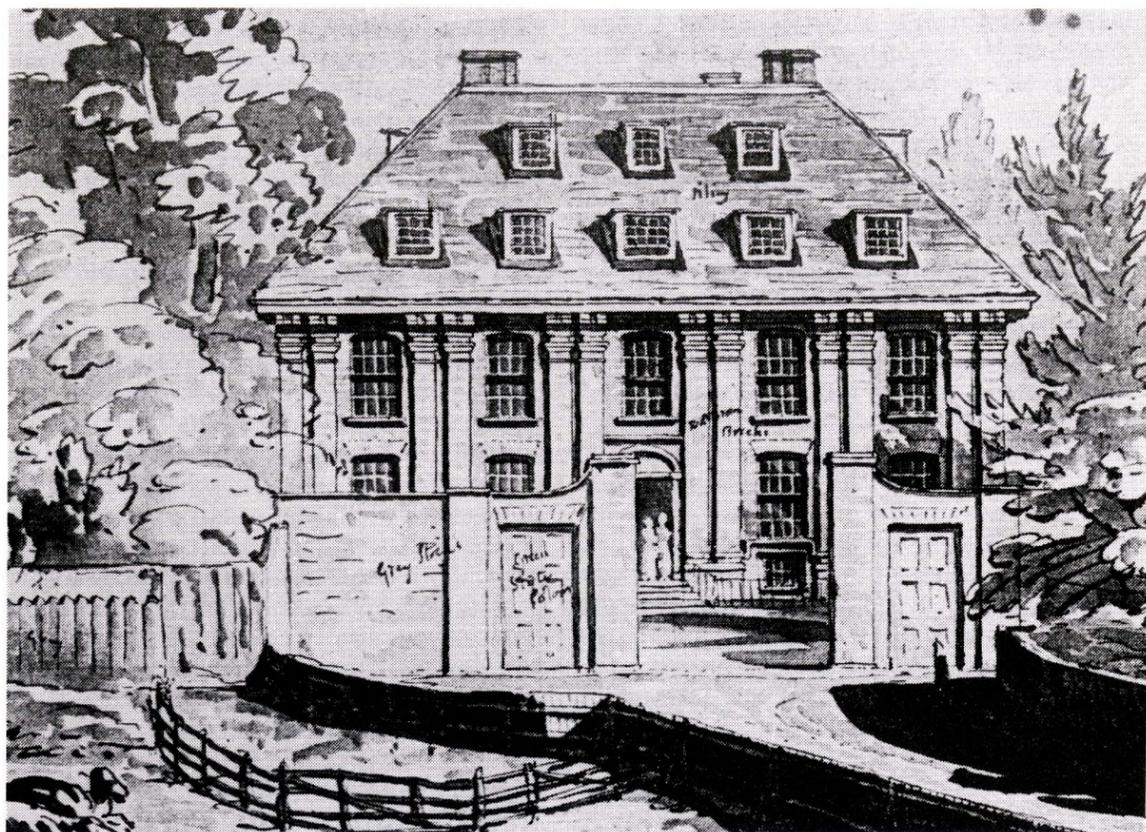
#### Who was the classical designer?

The career of Sir John Harrison of Balls Park (Hertfordshire) and the Customs House, one of the royalist financiers imprisoned in 1642, must have been similar to that of Whitmore. The exterior of Balls Park, presumably going up between 1638 and 1640 or so, is fussier, more naive than that of Balmes, but some of the same craftsmen might have been employed. Oddly enough, there are the same relieving arches of brick voussoirs in the wall over the windows as on the rear elevation of the Hackney house, perhaps habitual with one bricklayer's yard and so more revealing than applied ornament required by the patron. The stricter controlling hand of a more knowledgeable bricklayer-designer is apparent on the front elevation at Balmes, but on the sides and back there was the same rather clumsy spacing of eaves brackets as at Balls Park. Panelling in the room illustrated in the *Illustrated London News* resembled some at Balls Park.

Richard Sprignell, a man of City family who was made a baronet in 1641, was building a house, now called Cromwell House, at Highgate in 1637-39. He had become Captain of the Trained Bands in 1634. Sprignell's was a more modest house, but with a fine staircase: the stair at Balmes (Archer view, British Museum) was so like it that the same woodcarvers may have been employed. Other staircases of the same time and type can be seen in Nash's *Views*, at Aston Hall and Aldermaston, with the same awkward scrolls that were more akin to earlier strapwork than to the heraldic ease of the almost exactly contemporary staircase at Ham House. Ham had more courtly connections.

Swakeleys in Middlesex, of 1638, whose owner was Lord Mayor in 1640, shared with Balmes great conservatism in the plan. We have no plan of Balmes, but apparently the old entry into the hall from a screens passage was preserved and the hall was still the main ground floor room, probably with a great chamber over it. Behind the new regularity of the facade, one probably entered what was really one end of the hall - the ceiling extending over the screen in the Archer view (British Museum) shows this. No doubt the screens passage was extended as a corridor along the short axis of the house. Mills, even in the 1650s, kept this arrangement at Thorpe Hall.

The windows seem to have been revised at various dates - probably those on the left hand side of the rear elevation represent the style of the 1630s. The round headed windows remind us of Balls Park, and, indeed, of the so-



A sketch by R. B. Schnebbelie, dated 16th September 1816. Among the artist's notes it is recorded that the front wall was of grey stocks, and the gates in it painted the colour of green slate.

called Dutch House at Kew, of 1631. The shape of the front entrance was not changed (one can see this on engravings of Thanet House) but a fanlight was no doubt inserted later. Over it was once a balcony - there is one in the 1707 view - the 'pergula' of Smythson's drawings of new London houses.

The ceilings - we have evidence for three - were craftsmen's adaptations of the Whitehall court style. They seem to come in between those at Ham House (hall and stair-hall) and those at Balls Park in elaboration of similar motives. Neither Whitmore, nor Harrison, we must remember, was in a position to finance interior decoration after 1642, and by the time Coleshill was built around 1650, a fruitier ceiling style was the thing.

So Balmes, as rebuilt in the time of Charles I, had several unique characteristics: a colossal double order of pilasters on its main front; a roof so steep and high as to be quite over the top and even able to host two rows of dormer windows; and a general air of grandiose un-gainliness. Balmes could hardly be called one

of architecture's lost glories, but as a rather fascinating stylistic curiosity, and for its historical connections, surely it deserves to be remembered.

#### Further reading

The early history of Balmes is outlined in VCH, X, 82-4, and its career as a lunatic asylum at p.111.

## ONE FOR THE ROADS: HIGHWAYS IN HACKNEY BEFORE 1872

*David Mander*

#### Introduction

This article examines the division in responsibility for roads, and the associated lighting and watching functions, in Hackney before 1872, when the last of the turnpikes was abolished and all roads reverted to the principal local authorities in each area - the Hackney District Board of Works for Hackney and Stoke Newington, Shoreditch Vestry and South Hornsey Local Board. The article concentrates on the area of Hackney civil parish.

Hackney had two historic main roads running through it. The Roman Ermine Street ran through Shoreditch and formed the border between Hackney and Stoke Newington. It was met at Shoreditch Church by Old Street. In medieval times there was some recognition that maintaining roads that carried national traffic required help, and there were triennial grants of pavage made by the Crown for road repair on the Hackney to Tottenham stretch between 1365 and 1373.<sup>1</sup> Local roads and bridges were the responsibility of local people. A jury in 1512 found that Temple Mills Bridge was in a bad state of repair, and that William Beye or Tey of Colchester, who owned the piece of Hackney land that had been charged with its upkeep, ought to take appropriate action.<sup>2</sup> This left the majority of roads without a framework for maintenance, and an act of 1555 laid down that each parish should be responsible for roads within its boundaries. All parishioners were required to provide four days of labour on local roads, under the super-

vision of surveyors of the highways. In 1563 the number of days was increased to six and in 1587, after further amendments, the principle was established as permanent.<sup>3</sup>

#### Surveyors and statute labour

Under the acts, the surveyor, who served as an unpaid officer, usually for a year, had to ensure that the statute labour was done - or paid substitutes provided - and that the roads were kept free of obstructions. Parishes that failed to carry out their duties could be presented at county quarter sessions and fined. During the Commonwealth period statute labour was abolished and replaced by levied rates, and though this lapsed after 1660, the principle of substituting a highway rate to supplement statute labour was introduced, though it did not become a permanent power until 1693. Bridges, especially those that crossed rivers or streams on parish boundaries, were usually a county responsibility, or at least liable in principle to county support. In 1839 Hackney's Highways Board, having discovered, through the good offices of antiquarian and Board member George Offor, the presentation on the state of Temple Mills Bridge in 1512, wrote to the Essex Justices of the Peace in an attempt to get them to fund repairs, but received a dusty answer. There was also some manorial involvement, and overflowing ditches and middens blocking lanes could be referred to the homage jury. But the frequency

with which the same complaint recurred at successive courts in the 17th century suggests that by that stage the manorial court had little practical power.<sup>4</sup>

Parochial maintenance had many pitfalls. Surveyors were anxious to serve for a year only, so there was no continuity or accumulation of expertise. Local people would evade the period of statute labour if possible, and local benefactions could only be, at best, a partial solution. For example: in 1633, David Doulsen, former vicar of Hackney and bishop of Bangor, left £30 in his will to repair the footpath from Clapton to Shoreditch (part of which forms the 'market porters' route).<sup>5</sup> But local measures could not keep pace with the increase in wagon traffic on the major roads from the late 17th century onwards. Dust in summer and deep mud in winter, together with flooding, led to accidents and loss of goods, as well as delays to travellers by horse and carriage.

*Disputes and differences*

In 1697, the burden of maintaining a main road cropped up in a boundary dispute between Hackney and Shoreditch over a seven acre field to the west of the Stone Bridge on Kingsland Road. The two parishes referred the matter to the arbitration of Francis Tyssen of Hackney, Alexander Pitfield of Shoreditch and William Withers of St Giles without Cripplegate. Hackney got the field, but had to maintain half the road from the King's Gate into a lane leading to Balmes House, though not the watch house by the bridge. Both parishes would contribute to the necessary gravel laying to keep it in good repair.<sup>6</sup>

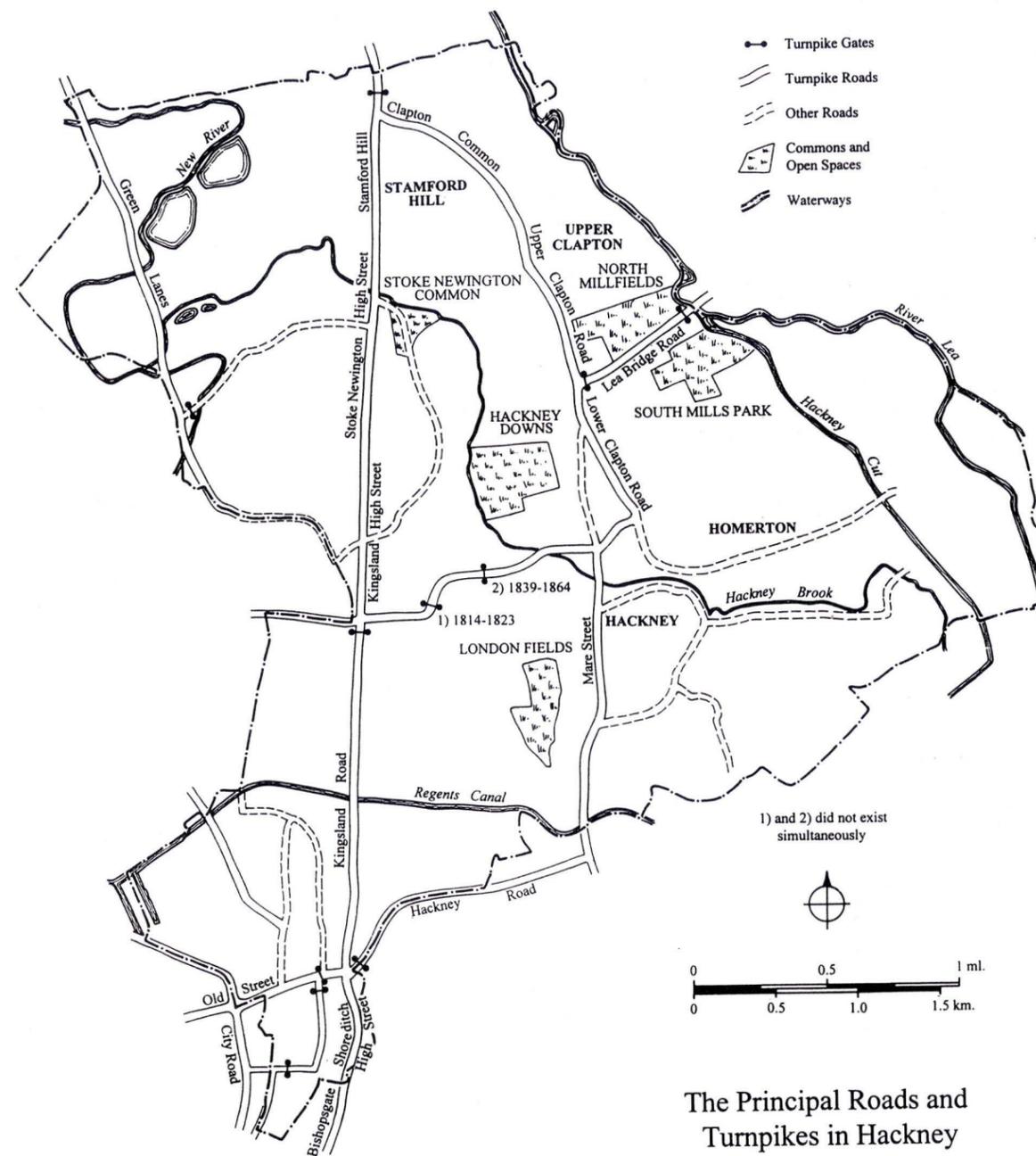
In 1713 the state of Ermine Street between Shoreditch and Enfield led to a petition to Parliament, by inhabitants of the seven parishes through which the road passed, claiming it was "so worn out by frequent travelling therein, that it is very dangerous in the winter season", while a second petition from farmers, waggoners, pack carriers, stagecoachmen, carters, higglers and others who travelled the route claimed that "the petitioners are often damaged by their goods being overturned in the said road, occasioned by the badness thereof". The Committee to which the matter was referred took evidence from other witnesses, including William Dawson, who had served as Hackney's Surveyor of the Highways in 1699-1700. He described the quicksands at Kingsland and at Stamford Hill, where better drainage and bridges were required, while at Hackney there were several springs "which

cannot be secured without new foundations made upon the road." In many places the road was lower than the surrounding land, so that surface water could not be drained away. Dawson had spent nineteen days of his own time on a survey of Hackney's roads and had had a 6d rate levied as a supplement to the statute labour, but the costs of repair resulted in a rate of tenpence halfpenny in the pound. This was at a time when there were 28 statute teams in the parish, but by 1713 the smaller farmers had turned to growing potatoes, which they could carry to market in panniers slung on a horse, rather than using a cart. This allowed them to evade contributing carts to the statute labour, and diminished the statute teams to fourteen. Other evidence suggests that the road through Hackney would need 21,000 loads of gravel if it were to be put into a state in which two carriages could pass each other, and this would cost £3,150, considerably more than Hackney could raise.<sup>7</sup>

*The first turnpike trusts*

The solution was to seek the sanction of Parliament to create a trust to maintain roads that were beyond the means of a single parish. The first such Act, of 1663, had come about through the petition of the parishioners of Standon in Hertfordshire for a section of the Great North Road, which allowed justices of the peace to erect gates, collect tolls, appoint officials and supervise repairs. There were no other turnpike acts for the next thirty years, but with increasing road traffic at the end of the century, five further bodies were established between 1695 and 1705. Then in 1706 the first trust was established, trustees taking on the role previously performed by the justices. This then became the standard model, and it was this pattern that was adopted for the establishment of the Stamford Hill Turnpike Trust in 1713.<sup>8</sup>

Under the provisions of the Act, forty six trustees were empowered to appoint surveyors and collectors, dig drains, extract gravel from private land, and collect tolls. The Trust was envisaged as a temporary measure, but the £3,500 spent in the first year exceeded the income from tolls and the initial thirteen year term would be inadequate to repay the resultant loan. A further act was required a year later, and the turnpike trust had its term extended still further by later legislation. Statute labour was still required, though two parishes on its route, Hackney and Shoreditch, agreed to levy highway rates to commute their shares. The additional legislation was also required to



The Principal Roads and Turnpikes in Hackney

put toll gates on side roads, and to prevent farmers whose land adjoined the turnpike allowing travellers to pass over it and evade the toll gates. A curious clause in an Act of 1728 allowed trustees to flood low parts of the road in winter, based on a theory that mud could be washed off the roads, leaving only the gravel. There seems to have been little need to flood the roads artificially, for in 1763 a Select Com-

mittee on Metropolitan Turnpikes heard that "the waters are frequently out in the said road so as to prevent passengers from travelling and have continued so for some hours; that the mail has been stopped several times ...[and] that no money has ever been laid out or method taken by the Trust to carry off the said waters." Even after fifty years of the Trust, much remained to be done.<sup>9</sup>

The Stamford Hill Trust was extended to take in Green Lanes in 1789. This had been "a shifting track or common lane" in the mid eighteenth century, and the Trustees had it widened at the Newington Green end in 1791. By then there were five other turnpike trusts covering roads in Hackney. Old Street to Goswell Road, formed in 1753, included Curtain Road and Worship Street. Hackney Turnpike Trust was established in 1738 for Hackney Road, Cambridge Heath Road, and northwards, covering Mare Street, and Lower and Upper Clapton Roads. The Hackney Trust took over Dalston Lane after 1799. To the east the Lea Bridge and Road Trust, established in 1757, built a new bridge to replace Jeremy's Ferry, and a new road to Leyton to the north of the course of the old one to the ferry. City Road was constructed by the trust formed for the



An early 19th century watchman from the Shoreditch area - from his overcoat, probably St Matthew, Bethnal Green.

purpose in 1761, and New North Road, projected in an Act of 1813, was completed by 1823.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Public works and private profits*

Although the trusts were not supposed to be profitable, trustees were well placed to pick up contract work if they chose. The principal contractors to the Hackney Turnpike Trustees in the 1820s were Leny Smith, William Rhodes (both trustees) and William Hurst Ashpital, landowner, surveyor and developer. After the General Turnpike Act of 1822 made it illegal for trustees to hold places of profit, Smith resigned rather than lose his contract.<sup>11</sup>

The Trusts funded their capital works, which included bridge construction and road widening, from loans. Income came from the toll gates, and by the end of the 18th century there were six of these. The Stamford Hill trustees had gates at the top of Kingsland Road and at Stamford Hill (where there was also a weighing machine, which worked like a giant pair of scales enabling additional charges to be levied for overweight carts). The Hackney Trustees had gates at the Clapton junction with Lea Bridge Road (from 1758), at Shoreditch (at the beginning of Hackney Road), Cambridge Heath (at the other end of Hackney Road), and Dalston Lane (from 1770). There was one gate and toll house only on Lea Bridge Road, on the Hackney side of the River Lea just before the bridge. The charges and the wait caused at each gate were a problem with turnpikes right from the start. Evasion of income by using neighbouring fields was also a problem, and so were the new roads that were beginning to be constructed from the early 19th century onwards.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Watchmen and highwaymen*

If the burden of road maintenance had been shifted from the parochial purse, there still remained the question of road safety. Turnpikes were unlit and subject to highwaymen, and there are several reports of robberies on Kingsland Road like the one in 1728 of a Hackney stage coach near Shoreditch Church, which later resulted in the capture of the robber, an upholsterer.<sup>13</sup> There was a need for lights and for watchmen. The Hackney Turnpike Trustees acquired powers for both lighting and watching in 1755, and the Stamford Hill Trustees followed suit in 1774, but the acquisition of powers did not necessarily mean their execution. In March 1767 Hackney's Lighting and Watching Trustees appointed a Committee of their members to represent to the Turn-

pike Trustees "the hardship to the inhabitants of this parish to light the turnpike through the Town of Hackney at the expense of the parish" and to seek financial support. Watch huts were provided along the routes of turnpikes, and watchmen carried guns (Daniel Lee was sacked by the Hackney Trustees for losing his gun in 1780).<sup>14</sup>

The parish also maintained responsibility for the remaining roads and footpaths, and these continued to be under the supervision of the elected surveyor of the highways. The surveyor was under the general direction of the parish meetings. In Hackney a select vestry of wealthier inhabitants was created in 1613, but an open meeting of parish officers and other inhabitants, concerned with a wide range of parochial affairs, continued to meet. Incidents recorded include a yard in Clapton claimed by its owner as private, being blocked with a gate and two large dogs in 1765, and the use of Back Road (now Clarence Road) as a kind of early rat run in 1771. This prompted the meeting to declare that Back Lane was not a public way from Clapton to Church Street, but a private one for occupants of the Downs and Shacklewell. It was not wide enough for two coaches to pass, and the parish had no intention of having to spend money to maintain it, so posts were placed at the Downs end, settling the problem for the next seventy years.<sup>15</sup>

The meeting even established a committee to inspect footpaths in 1771, and it reported on the major problems four years later. Obstacles included new houses, and the efforts of the calico printers and 'whitsters' by High Bridge. Here a footbridge by Coney Hole had gone, and a dog kennel, complete with a very large chained dog, had been substituted by the calico printers. Trenches had been cut across the path by the whitsters, and a Mr Webb had built a dock for his tile kiln and omitted to provide any means of crossing it. Bridges, including the Temple Mills bridge, a vexed issue, were a regular concern. In 1802 (like the later Highways Board), the Vestry Clerk stated he believed that this bridge was a county responsibility: indeed a search nineteen years later could find no record of the parish having repaired it in the previous hundred years.

#### *No through Rhodes*

Diversion or disruption to footpaths became even more of an issue in fields being worked for brick earth. There was more than one disagreement between the brickmaker-developer William Rhodes and the parish. In 1812 the Surveyors demolished a wall across a

footpath from Dalston to Kingsland across Lamb Farm. Rhodes threatened legal proceedings, but the parish stood firm, informing him that if he blocked one path, then he should provide another. In 1821 Rhodes was digging out a field near Dalston Lane and blocked the path from Masons Row in Dalston to London Fields. An inspecting Committee consulted the oldest inhabitants, inspected the path and insisted on its reinstatement. The same issue resurfaced in 1828 when Rhodes wished to divert part of the path to run close to the sewer on the north side of Ozier Field (Pigwell Brook). This was held to be potentially objectionable, but in the end a compromise was arrived at and the path shifted thirty yards further south. Similar problems were experienced with a Mr Hobson whose brick earth excavations disrupted the course of Love Lane (which occupied roughly the course of the southern half of Cecilia Road and the western part of Downs Park Road to Shacklewell) in 1824. Hobson had still not repaired the lane - to the disruption of the romantic? - a year later.<sup>16</sup>

The trouble with brick earth diggers was symptomatic of a change of emphasis from footpaths to new roads. In principle the parish would not accept responsibility to maintain newly built roads unless all work had been completed. In 1825 they agreed to adopt John Street, south of Regents Canal, but refused to take on North Street (later Northiam Street) until "all the buildings are complete and the heavy traffic of drawing materials for brickmaking through the same is put a stop to". The following year the area was the subject of an agreement with Bethnal Green parish, since developments in Martha Street on one side of Cambridge Heath Road and Crescent Cottages on the other straddled the parish border and the householders would not have relished paying two sets of rates.<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes the principle of refusing to agree to adopt a new road could be counter-productive. In September 1828 the Rector of West Hackney, Mr Birch, had written to the Lord of the Manor and local landowner, W.G.D. Tyssen, complaining of the conditions on the lane from West Hackney Church to Shacklewell Lane (now Rectory Road). In response Tyssen wrote to the Surveyor, indicating that he was willing to bear the cost of making a new road (Church Road, later the western part of Evering Road and Manse Road) if the parish would adopt it. The matter was raised in October 1828, but it was March 1829 before the parish came to a decision. They 'regretted that they did not believe they had

the powers to give an undertaking in advance of construction of a road', and at that stage Tyssen withdrew his offer. Perhaps Mr Birch was not going to take no for an answer, for in September 1831 Church Road was put up for adoption and accepted.<sup>18</sup>

*Crime and change*

Changes to road administration and law and order took place in the 1820s. Individual turnpike trusts in the Hackney area had considerably improved the roads, though pipe laying by the Imperial Gas Company and the East London Water Works Company prior to 1824 had caused disruption. However the multiplicity of gates, and varying rates of charges, combined with increasing traffic, led to ill feeling and complaints. After a Parliamentary inquiry, thirteen turnpike trusts, including the Stamford Hill, Hackney and Old Street trusts, were combined to form the Metropolis Road Commission in 1827. In 1829, Hackney parish opposed the Metropolitan Police Bill of that year, since it felt that its own local watch force had successfully tackled the problem of local crime. Six months later it was claimed that the Metropolitan Police had proved wholly unsatisfactory to the inhabitants of the parish "as there had been more offences against property in six months than in the preceding two years", and the 150 men who comprised the winter night watch, who had helped keep the streets safe, were now likely to become a charge on the parish poor rates.

Just how efficient Hackney's watch really was may be open to question: in April 1828 two watchmen were sacked for standing by while a horse and cart had passed by them one Sunday morning, laden with lead stolen from a local house. The theft was only discovered when, later in the afternoon, another patrol found the robbers openly cutting up the lead in Ashpital's brickfield.<sup>19</sup>

*The Highways Board*

Hackney's own management of roads was to change in the following decade. The select vestry and the parish meetings had merged in 1833, and two years later Hackney adopted the Highways Act of 1835, and created a Highways Board, to which the Surveyor now reported. This had eighteen members and first met in April 1836. It appointed a clerk, solicitor, rate collectors and an assistant surveyor. In 1837 the Board created four district committees - for Clapton, Hackney, South Hackney and West Hackney - to provide closer supervision of each area. It took up the old

issues of footpaths, Temple Mills bridge, and even the issue of Back Lane. In 1839 the eager Assistant Surveyor removed the posts put up in 1771, and carriages promptly resumed using it in preference to Lower Clapton Road. This produced noise and dust that "make the back parts of the houses scarcely habitable", claimed the outraged inhabitants of the west side of that part of Lower Clapton Road, adding that "the exposure of the gardens to the men riding in the different vehicles make it scarcely fit for the female part of families to walk in them". Faced with the pressure of the well to do, the Board reinstated the posts; but by that time it was too late. In June 1840 they were summonsed to Worship Street Magistrates' Court, where they lost their case, and were ordered to remove the posts for good.<sup>20</sup>

The new Board was vigorous in pursuing its intention to replace old wooden curbs with good York stone ones, and also to clear roads of obstructions. Then as now, water companies were a perennial problem. In January 1838, the Board complained of "the slovenly manner in which water has been supplied to the inhabitants of Hackney during the present frost, to the great injury of the highways ... by the quantity of water injudiciously suffered to run to waste upon the roads."<sup>1</sup>

While clearing blocked drains and ensuring that the Imperial Gas Company properly bury its pipes were all very well, making local worthies lop their trees and remove posts and rails from the footpaths outside their houses were very different matters. Some could afford to ignore an approach. The Revd. Henry Handley Norris, squire and parson for South Hackney, and treasurer of his district committee, was one did not answer a letter about lopping: perhaps the Board did not pursue the matter. However in October 1836 a Committee of the Board had surveyed various roads, including Well Street, and made recommendations on lopping and post removal. Among the householders affected was Dr Algernon Frampton, who lived in a house on the north side of Well Street, whose posts were obstructing the footpath and whose trees needed lopping on both sides.<sup>21</sup>

Most of the householders would appear to have accepted the decision of the Board. In Dr Frampton's case a plan of the proposed changes was made and two Board members visited him to discuss the matter, though the Board intended to take out a summons if he declined to agree to the proposals. This was followed by direct action of the Assistant Surveyor in removing the posts, but Dr Frampton

*Urbanisation*

From the 1840s onwards, adoption of new streets increased, and there are regular appearances in the records by men like John Lake, managing the development of de Beauvoir Town, and George Wales, surveyor to the Sir John Cass Charity. In 1848 Wales had occasion to complain of an excess bill from the Assistant Surveyor, Mr Woodward. On investigation, the Board found that Woodward had been taking fees for private work. Wales had complained when he had been billed for work over and above these payments. Woodward was reprimanded by the Board and narrowly escaped the sack.

The Board was still concerned with the routine matters of obstruction and other offences - in August 1848 these included mounds of earth dumped by the Tyssen estate in Cold Bath Lane (Kenmure Road); George Wales leaving a grating off in Water Lane (Morning Lane) for three weeks, causing flooding, and the problem of Mr Booth, a butcher of Kingsland, who was boiling the "awfull of meat in Mr Hunt's yard, which is quite an annoyance to the neighbourhood". There were

did not lie down under what he obviously regarded as provocation, especially as the Frampton family claimed they had always maintained the footpath outside their house themselves, and his solicitors served a notice of an injunction for a Chancery action against the Board. Faced with this, the Board tried to temporise, suggesting that a legal opinion be obtained, which would be binding on both parties and the costs of which would be met jointly. Frampton's solicitors refused and the matter went to a full vestry, where both sides put their case. The Board felt it had to stick to its principles, and printed five hundred copies of the justification of its actions (none of which would appear to survive). Action at Worship Street Magistrates' Court failed, when the bench refused to grant the board the right to lop the trees, recommending that they needed to make out a case for obstruction first on the grounds "that the Sun and Wind may not be excluded from the road". When next the Board and Dr Frampton crossed swords, this time over curbstones marking the boundary of the Frampton property, the Board appears to have acted with greater circumspection.



Dalston Gate, 1845

The toll gate in Dalston Lane about 1845, drawn from memory by W. Richardson

signs that members recognised that their responsibilities could extend beyond the roads to the adjoining properties. In October 1839 Board members went to inspect Jerusalem Gardens, taking with them a medical officer working for the Hackney Union. This seems to have been justified, for while the road had been made up to a reasonable standard, the houses on the north side were low and damp, and their cesspools were likely to be a health hazard if left unremedied. The owner, Bradshaw, was to be threatened with a fine if improvements were not undertaken.<sup>22</sup>

Responsibility for lighting the parish had been undertaken by Lighting and Watching Trustees, established in 1764.<sup>23</sup> However, the age of the parish trust was coming to an end, for from 1856 Hackney was included in the area of the Metropolitan Board of Works. The work of both the lighting and the highway trustees was taken over by a new district board of works, covering both Hackney and Stoke Newington, and concerned with the regulation of what was built alongside the roads, as well as the maintenance and lighting of the roads themselves. The extensive new street developments had made the old principles of turnpike gates unworkable, and with traveller and business complaints of delays at the gates rising, firstly Clapton Gate was removed in 1856. All the Commissioners' roads in Hackney and Stoke Newington were transferred to the district board in 1863, and all the gates abolished, with the exception of the Lea Bridge one, for that trust survived until 1872. Some private roads remained gated. The last toll-gate, at Temple Mills, was removed in 1911.

For the time being, at least, it would be just the one authority for the roads in Hackney.

#### Notes

1. VCH X, 4-5. See also VCH VIII (Stoke Newington); W.G.S.Tonkin, *The Lea Bridge Turnpike and The Wragg Stage Coaches* (Walthamstow Antiquarian Society, 1974). Records of the St John at Hackney Turnpike Trust 1748-1826 are divided between HAD (P/J/T) and GLRO (P79/JN1 179-181, microfilm XP565-6 at HAD, P79/JN1 462). Records of the Lea Bridge and Road Trust are at Vestry House Museum, LB Waltham Forest. Records of the Old Street Turnpike Trust 1753-1826 and the City Road trust from 1786-1827 are at Finsbury Library.
2. *Ib.*, 7; HAD P/J/HB/1.
3. W. Albert, *The Turnpike Road System in England 1663-1840*, 14-23; D. O. Pam, *The Stamford Hill-Green Lanes Turnpike Trust Part 1* (Edmonton Historical Society, 1963), 1.
4. Albert, *op. cit.*, HAD P/J/HB/1.
5. VCH X, 169.
6. HAD M.1549.
7. Pam, *op. cit.*, Part 1, 1-3.
8. Albert, *op. cit.*
9. Pam, *ib.*
10. Albert, *op. cit.*, Appx B; VCH X, 5-7; VCH VIII, 5.
11. I. Beckett, *An account of St John at Hackney Turnpike Trust* (c. 1973), 27-9.
12. J. L. Dailey, *Turnpikes and turnpike roads in Hackney*, compiled 1981.
13. Newspaper cutting, HAD.
14. GLRO P79/JN1/158 (HAD XP563).
15. GLRO P79/JN1/157 (HAD XP563).
16. *Ib.*
17. HAD P/J/3.
18. *Ib.*
19. VCH 6; HAD P/J/3, P/J/L/84.
20. HAD P/J/HB/1.
21. *Ib.*, for the Frampton dispute; also *The Hackney Magazine and Parish Reformer*, vol 3 (1837), no. 37, 168-171.
22. HAD P/J/HB/ 3& 1.
23. VCH X, 113; Dailey, *op. cit.*

## LETTERS FROM A HACKNEY CURATE, 1828

Richard J. Smith

John May was born in Richmond, Surrey, in 1802, the only son of a respectable merchant, also named John. In the 18th century the Mays had been prominent members of the 'British Factory' in Lisbon,<sup>1</sup> but with the onset of the French wars the extensive family had retreated to England. They had homes in London and Hampshire - besides Richmond, where John May, his wife Susan and their four children lived for some years on the fashionable top of Richmond Hill.

The family's fortunes were in further decline when John junior opted for the Church. After a boisterous career at Eton, followed by a period of penitent cramming, he gained a creditable degree at Oxford; he was ordained in 1826 and took up a curacy at Bures St Mary, Suffolk. He spent two years there, having sole charge of a large but poor country parish. But he was restless. He had the idealism of youth and wanted to serve humanity in a practical way; he also wanted to be vicar of a comfortable parish, where he could marry and settle down with a good income.

In 1827 his father moved to Bristol, where he took charge of the Bank of England's new branch. Although not wealthy, the family had a house in the pleasant suburb of Clifton, and there young John met and became engaged to a girl called Ellen; the need to find a suitably well-paid benefice became the more urgent, and some of his father's influential friends were asked to help. Meanwhile he accepted the offer of a curacy in Hackney - it was a stop-

gap, and he had no intention of staying longer than six months.

Thus in the summer of 1828 John May arrived in Hackney, and on the 9th July wrote to his father the first of a series of five letters which have survived in the family archive.<sup>2</sup> He was attached to the Chapel of St John of Jerusalem on the north side of Well Street, which served the recently-established parish of South Hackney. Built around 1809 as a 'chapel of ease',<sup>3</sup> its rector was the influential churchman Henry Handley Norris, who lived in a grand house on his own private estate on Grove Street. There were also close links with the 'Great Church' of St. John-at-Hackney and the separate parish church of West Hackney.

The new curate's initial feelings were of disappointment -

Mr Norris is very kind to me in every respect and certainly strives... to make everything as pleasant to me as possible. From all that I can learn from him, my duty here will be any thing but laborious, for altho' the district assigned to his superintendence is large, the demand... upon the services of the curate is but small: as a proof of which, there is no one at this moment in need of being visited, or in any way requiring the assistance of the clergyman. He himself says that he knows but few of his parishioners, for it happens not here, as it happened to me at Bures, that either the incumbent or his curate, becomes intimately acquainted with his flock individually, but is only in readiness, whenever he hears of sickness, to offer his services, which are mostly declined.

Hackney was a very different kind of parish from Bures. It had lost its village character, and although there were fields and open commons, the ribbon development extending from the north of London was rapidly turning it into a suburb. Many of the City merchants had fine houses in Hackney and Clapton. South Hackney - with the more industrial area of the Wick - was in many ways the poorer end, although there was a handful of prominent citizens who had money or land. Norris had both. There was also a strong element of non-conformism, which rendered the Anglican clergy's job more difficult.

The suggestion that Norris did not do much visiting of his parishioners seems at odds with the stress he laid elsewhere on its importance for good parish priests.<sup>4</sup> But John May had only just arrived in the parish, and may have misunderstood his rector.

There was an abundance of private schools in Hackney, in addition to well-organised parochial schools, and this was a further source of disappointment -

I likewise enquired of Mr Norris concerning the children, how they are educated, and what he wished I should do as far as they are concerned, to which he replied that there was little or nothing that would require my attention. All this I am exceedingly sorry for, both because I shall not have the exercise in my profession, ... as well as because it will leave me to meditate the more upon my lonely situation.

The congregation at South Hackney likewise fell short of his expectations -

The congregation that I have regularly to preach to, is of a considerably, for the most part, lower grade than... at Clifton, as the higher orders, what there be of them, are regular attendants at the Great Church, which is, I understand, and see (for the Chapel could not hold them all) frequented in a great measure by my own parishioners, if they go to Divine Service at all. Notwithstanding this I have a large congregation, but then, it is of the lower grade, with a few exceptions. I must own I wish it were otherwise. - The only introductions I have had have been to the Powels for whom I cannot say much, being, as I conceive them to be, as little conversant with the manners of the world as it is possible to imagine.

He was probably referring here to James Powell, one of the chapel trustees, a wine merchant and later owner of the Whitefriars Glassworks, who lived in Shore Place, to the south of Well Street. On the other hand -

Mr Rennel and Irish, the two curates of Hackney, appear very pleasant mannered men.

He was further disappointed in Norris's attitude -

I do not suffer myself to anticipate much from Mr Norris's interest. [He] informs me that I shall have plenty of time to dedicate to my books, and he appears to me to dwell much more upon the necessity of deep theology in a clergyman, as well as Holiness, than upon his performance as a useful, and conscientious parish priest. I am sorry for this as I am much more likely to shine in the one than the other - and in the one, that appears to me to be the most useful, altho' the other has very great advantages. Perhaps they are not often found together.

Norris's influence as a theologian and in church politics was very far-reaching. With Archdeacon Watson, the rector of Hackney, and his brother Joshua Watson, he was one of the 'Hackney Phalanx', and was regarded as the head of the high-church party. He was close to the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, and was reputed to have considerable influence over senior appointments in the Church. His outspoken views, both from the pulpit and in print, could invite accusations of 'rancorous bigotry' and 'sedition', and contrast quite strongly with John May's more practical pastoral leanings.

John wrote that first letter from 'Grove House', probably Norris's residence. There was also a vicarage in Tryons Place, but it was already let to another clergyman, the Rev. Townley; so John had arranged some lodgings in West Street (the modern Elsdale Street), and was to move in the following Monday.

I have secured some Lodgings for which I am to pay forty guineas for the year, and should I only retain them for six months (which God grant may be the case) twenty five guineas, which sum is to include washing, cooking and crockery - knives and forks etc. - The rooms are pretty comfortable - quite dry - and are accompanied with some gardens before and behind - and are at but a short distance from the Chapel. I think they will answer my purpose very well, and I shall not go to the least expense about them. ...The bed that I shall occupy is a large four posted one...

As for his surroundings, and local society-

There is not such a thing as a nice walk in or about Hackney so that I shall always confine myself to

Mr Norris's garden, which is a delightful one... All the high life of Hackney, what there is, seems to be going off to different watering places and thus Hackney will be quite desolate.

He was a young man in a new job and a strange environment; but despite his low spirits he looked forward to better days, and kept up regular correspondence with his 'dearest Ellen' ("She is a dear girl, and I am sure that she will always contribute to my happiness...").

By the next letter to his father, written from West Street on 15 August, John's social life was improving, and he had become friendly with a Mr Wilson - probably Thomas Wilson, a wealthy London merchant and former M.P., and sometime churchwarden of South Hackney, who lived in Mare Street.<sup>5</sup>

Mr Wilson's is a very nice family, and I dine there again on Monday, and am going to an evening party at Mr Hunt's on Tuesday.

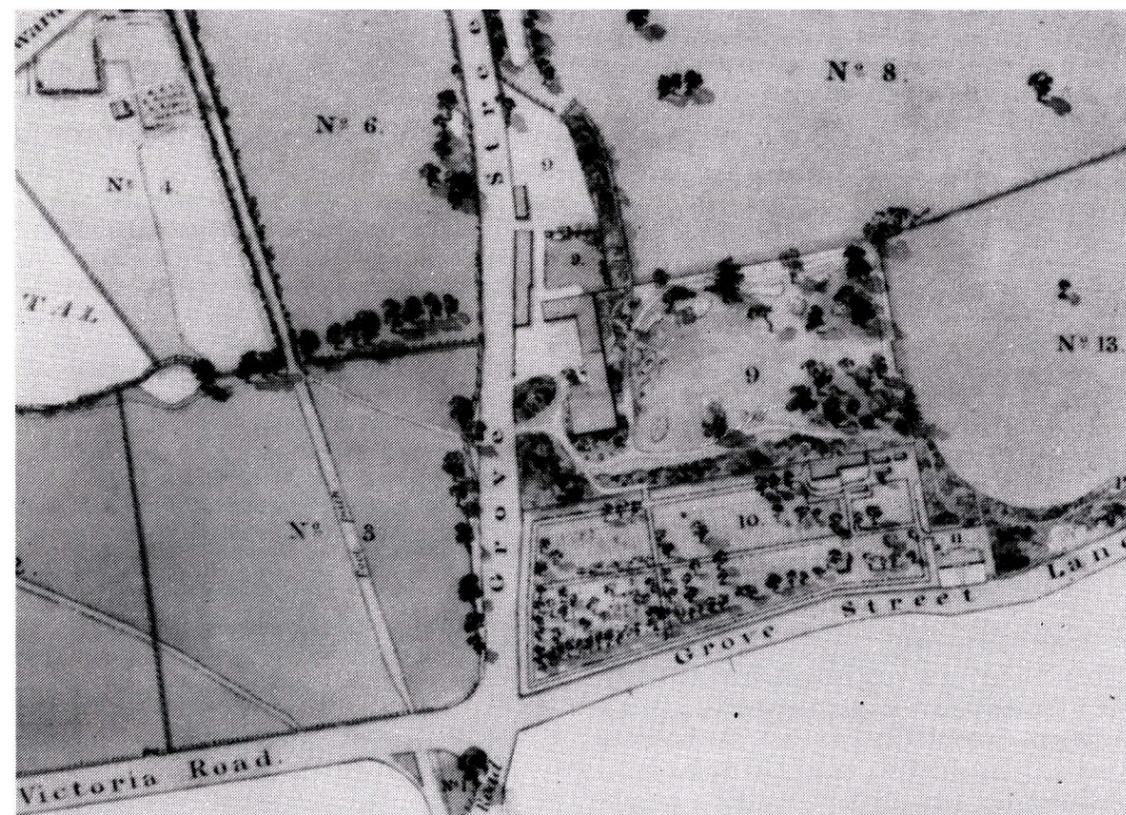
His parochial calls were still not very demanding -

I have only one person in my district, who is anxious of availing herself of any assistance or advice I may be enabled to afford. I am daily making enquiries whether there are any others

who would wish me to attend upon them, but, as yet, I have found none. I have however now to take a walk of two miles and a half out and back daily in attending upon a sick person of Mr Irish's flock, to whom, in the absence of his own minister, I was hastily summoned. He is at the point of Death and is only just sensible. He says that he is quite delighted with me, and never derived so much comfort from any body else's attendance as he does from mine. Mr Irish has given him up into my care.

The heavy workload of the other curates impressed John, and he was keen to 'join in the arduous undertaking'; but being the curate of a chapel had its drawbacks -

Mr Rennel has requested me to become secretary for the Clerical Book Club, which consists of twelve members, one of which I am to be. It is proposed that I should conduct its arrangements, because I have the least work in the shape of Parish Duty - whereas Mr Irish and Mr Rennel, the curates of the Great Hackney Church & Mr Heathcote the curate of West Hackney Church, have their hand so full that they cannot attend to the distribution of the Books. They intimate to me that if mine was a Church instead of a Chapel I should have the same work as themselves. I wish I had. I hope, however, they will not have long to retain me as the secretary of their Book Club...



H. H. Norris's house and garden as laid out during his lifetime, north east of the roundabout on the present Victoria Park Road. From an estate plan made around the time of Norris's death, in 1850.

This theme recurs in a later letter, in a different context -

When I dine out, I seem to be looked upon as inferior to other clergymen, because I am only the curate of a chapel. Even in my own district when Rennel and myself meet at a dinner party, he is requested to say Grace, tho' only ordained a year and a half ago, because he is the curate of the Mother Church. When I do make a change, I should like to go to a Church, and not a Chapel.

Despite his more active life, he was still anxiously awaiting news of a better preferment, hopefully through his friend, the lawyer John Coleridge.

Several weeks later, John May's letter of 27 October shows how much more socially integrated he had become -

I have only time to write a line. I am extremely anxious [if you] can manage it for me to procure a Haunch of Venison for a present to Mr Norris, who on Wednesday is going to send out invitations for a large dinner party. He is promised a Swan from one friend....

I dine with a Mr Willis,... a young rich barrister, with a good house at Clapton....

I preached yesterday afternoon at the Church, and finished the evening with Norris,... In the course of the evening a note was delivered to my host in which especial mention was made of a capital sermon having been delivered by me in the Church. I think Mr Norris likes me very much. I preach again next Sunday at the Church.

John May senior's replies to his son's letters have not survived, but he was meticulous in answering them. However, before he could reply to this last letter, young John was faced with a terrible dilemma. On Tuesday night, November 4th, he wrote at length to his father -

Mr Norris this day has asked me whether I should like to have the Duty of St. Thomas's Hospital over London Bridge, which is about to be disposed of. He says it is about £300 a year - a good house - coals and candles found; and that I could hold at the same time a Lectureship, which he would endeavour to procure for me: he added that I could give it up whenever I pleased.

John had immediately sought the advice of John Coleridge, who recommended him trying for the post. His impression was that it was worth five hundred a year - 'the house is a very comfortable one, as he has dined in it.' But Coleridge was probably under a misapprehension. The post on offer was that of

Hospitaller, equivalent to a hospital chaplain, as distinct from the more senior Minister of the Hospital, who had responsibility for St Thomas's Church (within the hospital precinct) and its surrounding parish. The Hospitaller since July 1827 was the Rev. Challis Paroissien, who had previously been curate of both South and West Hackney, so was well-known to Norris. St Thomas's Hospital also owned land in Hackney, immediately adjacent to Norris's own estate.<sup>6</sup>

John May's concern, however, arose from other considerations -

Now, my dear Father, there is a monstrous deal pro-and-con. In the first place, the Duty is of the most disagreeable and, I may say, dangerous nature.... No one but those who have attended at a hospital have any idea of what a man has to undergo in attendance upon the different wards, - the melancholy cases exhibited to his view - and sometimes human nature in the most deformed and horrid state both of body and mind. The present clergyman of the St. Thomas Hospital, who is about to give up the Duty, said that he had the other day to attend upon a man whose bowels were only resting, almost apart from his body, on the bed. He was so sick he could scarcely get through his first prayer, and was obliged to leave the poor suffering patient. Do you think I should have more nerve. I begin to feel sick at the thought of such a sight. But still I am to get money as I can.

His other great concern was the possible effect on his proposed marriage, and his doubt whether Ellen would agree to live inside the hospital.

...And therefore I could undertake such a duty only with the impression of its leading to some thing better.... I am placed in a very delicate situation - if I accept the Duty, five hundred a year [Norris] may very fairly feel, that he has done a good deal for me - if I do not accept it - query? will he offer me any thing else... I should feel very sorry in giving up his curacy for any thing, that would not contribute to hasten my union with dear Ellen... Altho' I do not like Hackney, I would never leave such a kind Rector as I at present have, merely because I disliked the place where he lived.

John asked his father to write to Norris to explain the situation and confirm his feelings over this dilemma. Perhaps his father could even pay a visit to Hackney?

I am sure Mr Norris will be most happy in seeing you, altho' I believe he cannot give you a bed, as the Bishop of Barbadoes and his wife will be with him... He gives a dinner party for the Bishop on Saturday, to which I am going ...

John's father replied on the Friday, the 7th November. He probably did not visit Hackney, but he must have written to Norris on the lines his son suggested. John's next letter of 17th November reflects his steadier mind, but also the continuing problem - should he apply for the Hospital job and risk getting it, when he truly did not want it; or should he decline it and risk not being offered anything else? He might thus be stuck in Hackney for years.

With Norris's connections and influence in Church appointments, John would have been well aware by now of the folly of incurring his disfavour. Even so, by the late 1820s the influence of the 'Hackney Phalanx' had begun to decline.

...I perused Mr Norris's letter to you... One thing has gratified me exceedingly in it, I mean the manner in which he is pleased to speak of my humble, but sincere, endeavours to do my Duty, as his curate.... I set a value upon his praise, because I believe him to be a man who would not, for the sake of flattery, or any other feeling, say what he did not conceive in justice ought to be said.... He last week wrote to the Ld. Chancellor, to request a Living for Paroissien, the present clergyman of St. Thomas's Hospital. I hope and trust that he will succeed in doing something for me.

By this time it is clear that John May had a more realistic value of the hospital post - considerably less than the £500 mentioned earlier - and he had to compare it with the £140 which he received as curate of South Hackney.

My own feelings... are decidedly, as the salary is only £180 per annum, against my offering myself as a candidate. It is true that I may give up the Duty when ever I pleased, but would it be fair upon the Electors....to signify my intention of retiring, when perhaps I only performed the Duties at the Hospital two or three months. I am sure that I should be perfectly miserable. God knows my present situation, saving the being under so kind and worthy a Rector, is uncomfortable enough. Days and evenings pass away without my having a being to communicate an idea to...

If then such are my feelings at present, what would they be when I was pinned down, on the other side of London Bridge? I suppose that my next piece of Preferment would be the appointment of Chaplain to the Prison of Newgate - where I might figure away with Jack Latch. But joking apart - I do not see the use of my moving from Mr Norris's curacy till I can get something that will enable me to marry... But I will say no more. I will endeavour patiently to await my fate.



South Hackney chapel at the foot of St Thomas's Place: view adapted from a sketch by George Hawkins about 1843, when plans for a new church (St John of Jerusalem) were being made.

He finishes with a tart reference to his salary -

My Landlady has requested me to advance her £15 - and I hope therefore [it] will not be inconvenient for me to draw upon you for £20 as I want £5 myself tomorrow. Of course, directly I receive a farthing, which I have not yet, from Mr Norris I will refund without delay.

At this point, the series of letters ends. Did he take the Hospital job? Did he decline, and languish as a curate in Hackney for the rest of his life? Did his 'dear Ellen' come and join him in wedded bliss?

Other sources supply the answers. He did not offer himself for the hospital post, and Paroissien finally resigned in the summer of 1829. John May's anticipated maximum six months in South Hackney became six years. Ellen must have given up hope. On 17th May 1834, in the 'Great Church' of Hackney, he married Maria Jennings Frampton, with whom he had four children. Maria was the daughter of William Frampton of Leadenhall Street, one of the heirs of John Dekewer, who had originally given the land for the South Hackney Chapel, and a member of the prominent family which gave its name to the Frampton Park Estate. John May had been appointed Vicar of Holmpton in Yorkshire, and so at last achieved his ambition. Eleven years later he moved to be Vicar of Ugborough in South Devon, retiring in 1869, and died aged 77 at Earley, Berkshire.

#### Notes

1. R.J. Smith, 'The May Family of Richmond and the Lisbon Factory', *Richmond History*, (Journal of the Richmond Local History Society), No.16, 1995.
2. May family letters: Hampshire CRO, Winchester, 2M69/73-77. (A full transcript of the letters is deposited at HAD.)
3. HAD D/E/211; JOH/J/1,2.
4. H. H. Norris, *A Manual for the Parish Priest, being a few hints on the Pastoral Care, to the Younger Clergy of the Church of England from an Elder Brother* (2nd edition, 1822). See also HAD H/LD 7/3; Robinson, *History...of the Parish of Hackney*. 1842-3.
5. Now no. 195 Mare Street (the 'New Lansdowne Club').
6. GLRO H1/ST/A1/8.

## TYZACKS OF OLD STREET

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### Don Tyzack

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#### *A nose for sawdust*

Sheffield-born Henry Tyzack, the sawmaker, was thirty years old in 1839. He was at that age when the ambition of youth blends with the confidence of maturity. At thirty, unable to resist the lure of a good market for saws, he moved his family to Shoreditch. They settled in Curtain Road.

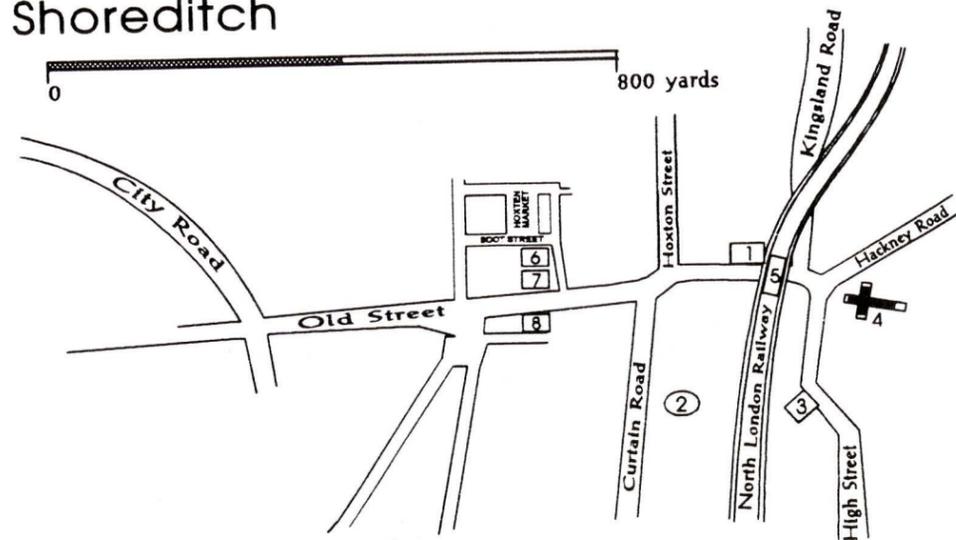
Curtain Road, in the 1840s, was the home of the furniture industry. Furniture uses wood and wood cutting demands saws. Henry had a nose for sawdust. Until the mid-19th century the quality firms of the West End and City produced most of the furniture made in London. From about 1840 there arose a demand for lower-priced furniture. The East End trade developed to meet the need. It started mainly with chairs but soon grew to cover most articles. The mainstays of the East End trade were the small workshops where long hours produced cheap furniture. Most furniture workshops, even those of the West End, were accessible to a lively saw merchant from Curtain Road.

The Napoleonic wars caused a dock-building boom. It attracted thousands of labourers and their families to the East End. The area developed an industrial character but overcrowding from the City brought a threat of disease. By the year 1799 a large vinegar works, built on the north-east corner of the City Road and Old Street, added to the malodour of the area. Housing conditions rapidly worsened in the 1830s. Smoke from

the brickyards cast a pall. There were many timber yards but the largest was the City Sawmills in the New North Road. Cabinet makers, chair makers, carpenters and houses used as furniture making shops operated all over the locality. Chair work was broken into stages with a single item passing through several workers. Each would perform a few operations. Workers often worked with their families in the one or two rooms of their home. They crowded into the courts and alleys of the area. South of the parish was the centre for the furniture trade but impoverished poor in increasing numbers were packed into thousands of identical dwellings. They were victims of the population explosion. In 1821 Shoreditch had 53,000 inhabitants. By 1841 there were 83,000 and this number reached its peak in 1861 at 129,000. In 1839 the second Commons Select Committee on Metropolitan Improvements published ideas to stop the growth of filthy and unhealthy slums, including Shoreditch.<sup>1</sup> Maps with the report showed demolition and new roads just south of Old Street, but high costs prevented the scheme going ahead.

Henry's move corresponded with the opening of the Sheffield to Rotherham Railway line and the line from Masbrough to London. Masbrough is within a mile of Rotherham's centre. Before the Masbrough station had opened in 1840, the only way to London was by coach. Journey time from the Tontine Inn was little short of twenty-six hours. (The Tontine

Shoreditch



- 1 No. 8 (later 345) Old Street
- 2 No. 16 Norfolk Gdns. Curtain Rd.
- 3 No. 153 Shoreditch High Street
- 4 St Leonard's Parish Church
- 5 Shoreditch Station
- 6 No. 11 Boot Street
- 7 No. 36 Old Street
- 8 No. 53 Old Street

Inn was about a mile north of the present site of Sheffield Railway Station. It was built roughly where Exchange Street is now.) Thirteen coaches a day left the Inn. It had the hectic scene of bustle of any transport terminus. With Sheffield's growing links with the outside world of commerce, came an increase in traffic. The inn's courtyard rang to the clip of hooves, the rattle of wheels on the cobbles and the commands of the ostlers.<sup>2</sup>

*From Sheffield to Shoreditch*

Then one day in May 1840 all fell quiet. From that day the North Midland Railway pulled into Wicker station, Sheffield, and made the journey to London possible in about nine and a half hours.<sup>3</sup> Henry moved to Shoreditch around the time of the first trains.

We don't know whether Henry went to Shoreditch to sell saws made by his relatives in Sheffield, or whether he was striking out on his own. A saw did not need much for its manufacture, just a fly-press, a vice for setting and sharpening and a small furnace. But Henry's younger brother Joseph had just started up a business at 160 Fitzwilliam Street, Sheffield, and his father Samuel was also a sawmaker. Perhaps the move may have been to act as London merchant for these or for the saw business of Henry's uncle, Thomas Tyzack. He also had uncle William who set up his Sheffield tool business as early as 1812. Much Sheffield

output was exported. In spite of that, most of the exporting during the eighteenth century was done through London merchants.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that Henry came to London originally, as the marketing arm of the family businesses.

Henry Tyzack and his wife Sarah Story had seven children. We know the time of their move because daughter Louisa was born in Ecclesall in 1838. Her sister Elizabeth Harriett, was born in London in 1841. After Elizabeth, all of Sarah's children were London born.

Henry's first shop, no. 53, was located just east of Tabernacle Square and just before the exit of Crown Street but on the opposite side. Behind the premises were the alleyways of Bath Place. Just behind where the shops alongside no. 53, were later built, a natural spring had been used, from the seventeenth century, to cure rheumatic pain. The baths there were large, twenty feet by thirty feet.<sup>5</sup> Henry's shop was just three hundred yards from the large notorious vinegar factory built by 1799, on the corner of Old Street and City Road. On the opposite corner was the City of London Lying-in Hospital, St. Luke's, a purely charitable institution. Sarah produced three of her children in its beds, Elizabeth, Maria and Frederick. Matron Mary Widgen reported the births. She must have been a stickler for promptitude. Henry and Sarah had not even decided on a name for poor Maria when her birth was re-

ported. Just Female Tyzack, it says in the index.

Although Henry went to Shoreditch in 1839 his address there does not show until 1846, in the birth certificate of son Ebenezer. Then, by 1848, nine years after he came to Shoreditch, he took the shop at no. 53 Old Street. His neighbours were as shown below.

47	Thomas Mundy	Butcher
48	William Morgan	P. Surgeon
49	Thomas Robson	Fixture Dealer
49	Henry Chas. Simpson	Hairdresser
50	Frederick Cordaroy	Hatmaker
51	Samuel Andrew William	Hairdresser
53	Henry Tyzack	Saw and Toolmaker
61	Jas. Peak	Fixture Dealer
62	Owen Owen	Turkey & Whetstone Mnfr

There were some others between nos. 62 and 68, and then came the Tabernacle. Henry took over the shop from John Taylor a whitesmith. Today we would call John Taylor a tinsmith, a worker in tinned or white iron.

This was a good centre for the furniture trade. There were many small businesses ranged around, down to home workers making one component. There are still some, even today. Furniture ruled. Take Hoxton Market, just off Boot Street, where later we find Henry, of seven listed addresses, apart from the George & Dragon, the remainder were furniture makers:

J. Goddard	french polisher
A. Keer	cabinet manufacturer
J. Burgess	easy chair and couch manufacturer
W. Wilkins	cabinet manufacturer
T. Crawley	chairmaker
C. Hughes	cabinet manufacturer

Close by in Curtain Road, there were two timber yards. Another large one lay behind what was later to become the site of son Samuel's shop at no. 8 Old Street.

Sarah died on 18th April 1848 at no. 53 Old Street. The family lived over the shop. She was only thirty-nine and died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Clearly the living conditions of the area did not help Sarah at all. Henry was a fast worker; just eighty-five days later, on 13th July 1848 he felt he'd left enough time for appearances and married his second wife, Louisa Wheeler. Then he again recorded his trade as a sawmaker.

Henry's 1851 census return shows he was employing one man. In 1855 Henry and family left the house to which he had grown accus-

tomed. He had first occupied no. 53 in 1848. His wife Sarah had died there and several of his Shoreditch children, including Louisa's, were born there. Now, suddenly, he abandoned no. 53. He went across the road and took up residence in no. 36 Old Street. His business went too. Why is not clear.

The previous occupant of no. 36 had been another Henry, Henry Wilson. Wilson was a leather-seller, another supplier to the furniture trade. Next door was Jacob West at no. 37. Jacob was an ironmonger. That was more in keeping with Henry's trade. On the other side, James Sheath had his gutta percha factory. Modern plastics of course have washed out even the memory of gutta percha. It was probably used then for some function in upholstery. Later it found favour in golf balls and then in submarine cables.

*From builder to bankrupt*

On 31st March 1856, Thomas George Corbett of Elsham, near Brigg, Lincolnshire, made a contract with a builder, Arthur Wilson. In view of the expenses borne by Wilson, Corbett would grant him the lease of a piece of land in Tower Street Hackney. During the building Corbett arranged that Henry Tyzack should build an additional house on the London Lane front of the site.

Henry Tyzack signed the documents himself. This document is the first evidence that Henry could write. The Sheffield schooling system was very hit and miss. His was not a flowing hand. There are at least two hesitations in the signature. One can imagine a tongue firmly held in cheek while the procedure was in process. Henry signed this part of the deal but with his poor literacy may not have fully understood all the risks. Corbett, his adversary, was an educated man, with a master's degree from Oxford.<sup>6</sup> Should Henry fail to make due payments, Corbett could terminate

*Henry Tyzack*

*From the 1858 bankruptcy indenture*

by applying for a declaration of Henry's bankruptcy!

Part way through the construction, with building materials all round, Henry stopped making further payments and did not proceed with the planned work.

Corbett gave notice to end the building agreement and Henry was duly declared bankrupt.<sup>7</sup> At that date Henry was running his business of tool-manufacturing at no. 36 Old Street and at no. 11 Boot Street. At the time of the settlement there was a large stock in trade and other articles and materials in and about these houses and buildings.

To avoid further strife and litigation Corbett's solicitors, Bartle John Laurie Frere of Lincoln's Inn, made a proposal. They suggested that the creditors' assignees, Robert Marsden, a toolmaker of Sheffield, and James Miles, a lead and glass merchant of Shoreditch, should buy the rights and interests of all building, and other materials about the premises. Marsden and Miles should also buy all stock in trade and goodwill articles of Henry Tyzack. Marsden and Miles offered six hundred pounds. Robert Marsden and James Miles gave their opinion that it would be to the benefit of the creditors to accept the offer!

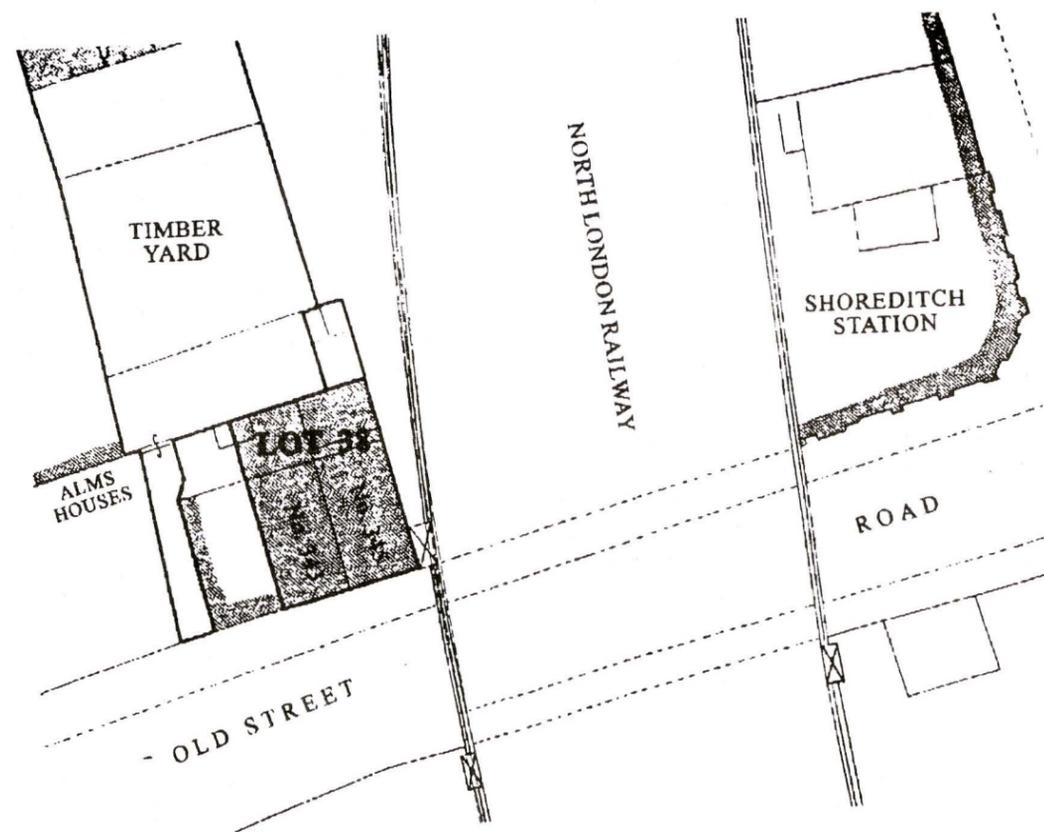
Of the six hundred pounds, five hundred

was considered payment for the stock etc. The balance was the money for the rights under the said building agreements. This valuation gives some idea of Henry's scale of operations at this time, 1858. A bradawl cost about two and a half old pence, a jack plane say five shillings. Therefore this amount represented maybe about four thousand pieces.

With the bankruptcy order in his pocket, Corbett arranged to sell all Henry's chattels and used five hundred pounds to pay for the seized goods. With the remaining one hundred pounds, he bought out Henry's rights under the Corbett agreement. Henry thus finished one hundred pounds worse off, plus all the disruption of his business and with the loss of any interest under the building agreement. How much he had left, if any, after clearing his other creditors is not clear.

Marsden and Miles were given the right to enter the premises of no. 36 Old Street and no. 11 Boot Street. There they could take possession of the stock etc. and all the books of business relating to it. That bit must have caused some irritation! Just imagine a competitor toolmaker with the right to take your list of customers' names and addresses.

Henry's tough break, perhaps from lack of reading skill, did not deter him. He seemed



The site of Samuel Tyzack's business, 343-5 Old Street

to push on with his business, because work at no. 36 Old Street continued until 1861, when Henry was fifty-three years old. He appeared there in the 1861 census when he was employing two men. Nineteen years old Elizabeth, his daughter, was also a sawmaker there. Soon after all this the business was transferred to his son.

#### From father to sons

Henry had been a man of adventure. Samuel, the eldest son, did not seek his fortune elsewhere, like his roving father. He simply settled for a smoky old shop next to the railway station.

In 1860, Samuel acquired the lease of no. 8 Old Street, probably with dad's help. No. 8 was the plot right up against the North London Railway line, next to what became Shoreditch Station. No. 8 did not appear as an address in 1853, only no. 9. By the end of 1850 the railway had linked Camden town with the Docks. The North London Railway line from Kingsland to Broad Street Station was built and opened in the year 1865. Broad Street Station was opened in 1866. An Act of Parliament dated 26th August 1846<sup>8</sup> enabled the North London Railway. There must have been great railway building works alongside no. 8. It was right next to the bridge, which is still there, an ugly iron box. In the 1871 census, Samuel reported five employees. That year he signed a twenty-one year lease for £50 per year for the shop. However, on 6th January 1871 there was a renumbering ordinance. Thus, in place of no. 8, we find Samuel now in possession of no. 345.

He left all his business interest, goodwill and use of the freehold in the property to his son Edgar Tyzack, 1877-1959. Edgar's business was also charged to pay £1,000 between his brothers and sister, Horace, Arthur, Emily and Oscar. Edgar found this an enormous burden for the run down state of the business after Samuel's long illness. He challenged the bequest in court but lost. Edgar eventually prospered and rebuilt the enterprise. A catalogue, printed on credit for Edgar about 1910, lists over 3,000 different tools, mostly imported.<sup>9</sup> By now there was another shop. As well as the one at nos. 343 & 345 Old Street, there was one at no. 153 Shoreditch High Street.

Henry and his second wife Louisa had a daughter and a son. Walter Henry, the son, was born in the last quarter of 1853, in Shoreditch. In 1869, when he reached sixteen, his father Henry, aged sixty, sniffed sawdust again. This time Henry took his son, Walter

Henry, and his wife Louisa to High Wycombe, in Buckinghamshire. That was in 1869 when Henry realised that the furniture trade was no longer confined to London and the area around Curtain Road. We find all three of them at no. 29 Oxford Street on the night of the 1871 census. As usual dad was head of the household and a sawmaker but Walter Henry also was already called a sawmaker. A most sizeable furniture industry had become established around High Wycombe. A trade directory published a few years later, *The Directory of High Wycombe, 1875*, records a daily output of four thousand seven hundred chairs. Walter Henry served there in the shop at no. 29 Oxford Street, High Wycombe when he was sixteen. Over the shop it said "Henry Tyzack Saws". Again Henry's nose for the furniture market had found another centre of the furniture industry irresistible. Walter Henry remained at High Wycombe although Henry, his father, returned to live in Hoxton by 1875. Walter Henry had two sons. One became mayor of High Wycombe in 1931. The other became the proprietor of a furniture factory in Slater Street in 1907. There is a Tyzack Road in the town named after the Mayor of High Wycombe, 1931-2.<sup>10</sup>

#### Return to Shoreditch

High Wycombe was too dull for Henry. His son, now set up there in business, could be trusted to look after that shop. Shoreditch, with son Samuel's shops and the business of the other sons, had more action. Whatever the main reason, by 1875, Henry, probably partially retired, was back living at no. 7, Somerset Place, Hoxton. Henry died in 1876 and his second wife Louisa outlived him by twenty years.

Shoreditch covered just one square mile. It had grown faster than any other London parish in the first half of the century. Demolition in the 1860s, for the building of the rail link between Dalston and Broad Street, moved many local people. It came within a few feet of ousting Samuel at no. 8. Sanitary conditions began to improve after the passing of the Metropolis Management Act of 1855. A turning point had come in 1864 when the sewer system for the Metropolis was completed. *The Times* of 18th August 1873 said, "London has been transformed in a comparatively brief period if not into a clean, at least into a healthy city... The Board of Works has done itself credit." The locality had many almshouses, and public houses and theatres galore.

After the eldest son Samuel died in 1903,



Nos. 343-5 Old Street before rebuilding, about 1920

name of Samuel until 1905. From 1905 the directory records that Edgar renamed the shops, by then nos. 343 to 345, as the premises of "Samuel Tyzack and Sons". Edgar had no sons, which was probably the reason he tried, unsuccessfully, to adopt my father. Later he saw another chance to continue the family name. He tried to get Cecil Tyzack, his older step-brother's son, into the business, but they argued and fell out. As a result, about 1936, Cecil started yet another Tyzack tool company, which still exists at nos. 79-81 Kingsland Road. Late in his life Edgar had a daughter, Margaret, and the shop by the station, rebuilt by Edgar about 1920, continued to trade under the family name until about 1987. The site was then sold and the business moved a few doors away to no. 329 Old Street. This had been part of Parry's tool-business until Parry died, when it had been offered to and taken over by Edgar Tyzack. Now a smart green sign says Parry Tyzack. Alas there is no one with the family name there any longer.

Today Edgar's large redbrick building still exists at no. 345. It no longer carries the name Tyzack.

#### Notes

1. HAD, Map SH 912 (1839).
2. Mary Walton, *Sheffield: its Story and Achievements*, (West Yorkshire), 1984.
3. David Joy, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain*, VIII, S.W. Yorkshire.
4. J. Hunter, *History & Topography of the Parish of Sheffield*, ed. Gatty, c. 1875.
5. Cox, *An Account of the Parish of St. Leonard's, Shoreditch*, (1873) HAD M698, 344-5.
6. Thomas George Corbett, b, 29 July 1796; educated Westminster School, Oxford University (BA 1819, MA 1834); M.P. for North Lincolnshire, 1835-7; m. (1836) Lady Mary Beauclerk; d. 1868. (Information from the Corbett Study Group.)
7. HAD M4404/2.
8. 9 & 10 Vic. c. cccxcvi.
9. HAD 331.3, Y7521.
10. *Bucks Free Press*, 13 November 1931.

## TROUBLE AT ABNEY PARK

*Josephine Boyle*

#### *The company and its servant*

On the 2nd June 1840, the Rev. James Mather, nonconformist minister of 2 White Conduit St Pentonville, was buried in grave 1 at Abney Park.

He was not alone for long. North-east Londoners, particularly nonconformists, were at last able to lay their dead in salubrious surroundings, and after ten years the interments numbered 5,355. In 1870 they reached 46,000.

Success can bring problems. By the time the Abney Park Cemetery Company was floated on the Stock Market in March and April 1882, the spectre of a full cemetery with no money coming in from the sale of new plots was already haunting the board. Land was bought across the River Lea on the east side of Chingford Mount, Essex, where a new cemetery opened in 1884, as pleasant and well-planned as its mother organisation had been forty-four years before and with an even better view. By 1886 the cemetery superintendent and his family were living in the Gothic south lodge, known as The Mount.

Arthur Clark was a grocer's son from Clapham who had entered the employment of the Company in July 1871, aged 16. On May 2nd 1874 he married Emily Elizabeth Benning at St John's, Hackney, and his eldest son, Arthur Benning Clark, eventually joined him in the Company in 1890, taking over The Mount in 1898. Clark, now company secretary and registrar, bought a house in Heathcote Grove, a road which the Company had constructed as a

shorter route to Chingford Station.

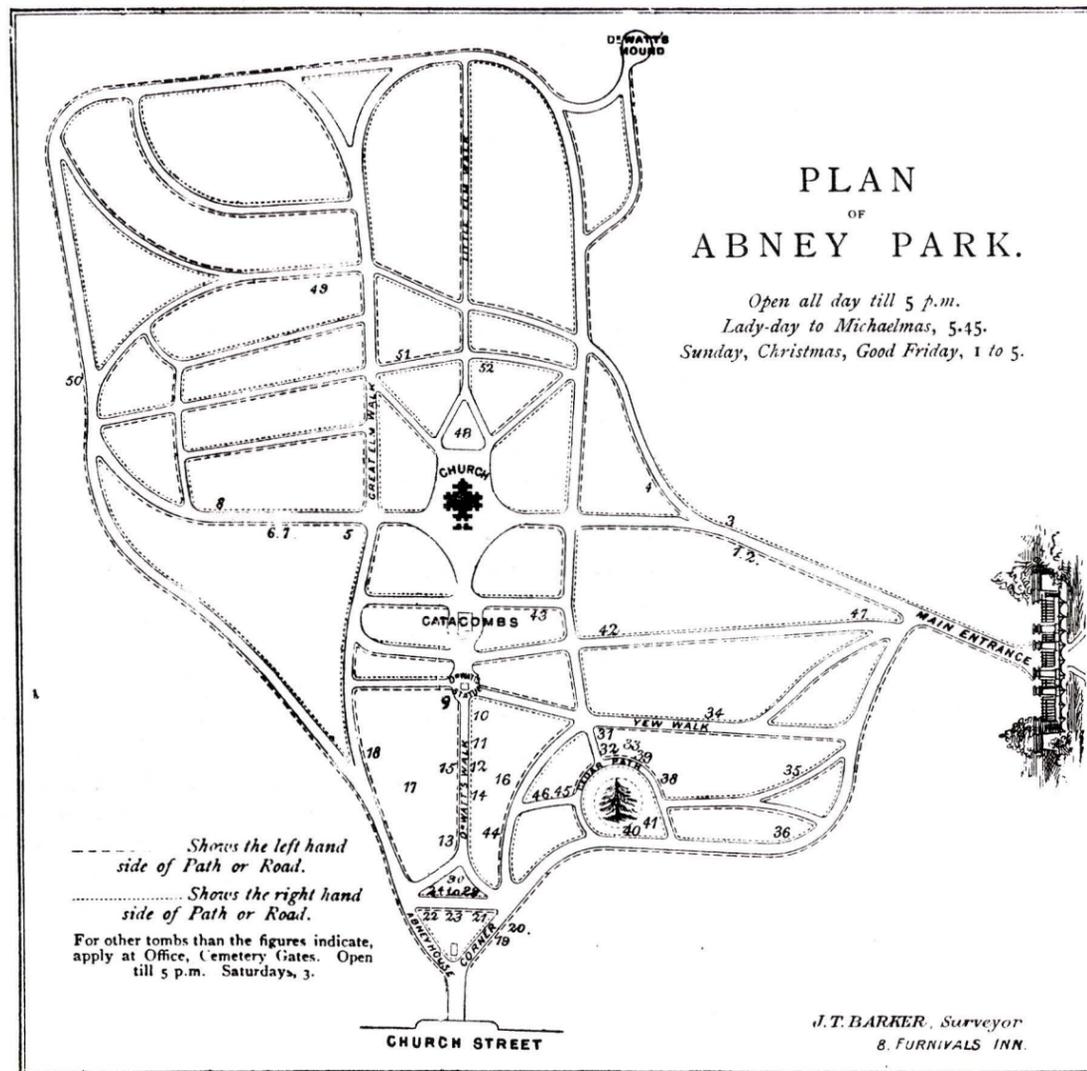
A number of my relatives chose family graves at Stoke Newington, and it was whilst trawling the cemetery archives for an explanation of why my allegedly prosperous great-great-grandparents had no gravestone, that I came across bundles of papers which reveal some of the problems Mr. Clark had to deal with as Abney Park started its long, slow descent into abandonment and vandalism. All quotations from these documents use the original spelling and punctuation.

#### *Enter George Swan*

On the 7th June 1898, Mr. George Swan, undertaker, licensed valuer and monumental mason of The North London Funeral Establishment, 314a Essex Road, Islington, wrote to Clark on black-edged paper.<sup>1</sup>

Dear Sir,

Your reply just received in reference to my communication to you on this matter, re. Memorial Stones. I must say I feel greatly annoyed at your reply, after my explanation to you, that I have got the work ready to fix and your unreasonable demand upon me for the amount viz 32s 6d which item I consider a diabolical fraud upon the public in General, to make a charge of this kind, without a foundation I do not think you have any power to make these bye-laws as to charges... how is it you do not state it in a straightforward way, at the time of purchasing, which should be mentioned by the clerk's or other's selling, and not to make this imposition afterwards. However I mean to make this a special paragraph in some of the local paper's



PLAN OF ABNEY PARK.

Open all day till 5 p.m.  
Lady-day to Michaelmas, 5.45.  
Sunday, Christmas, Good Friday, 1 to 5.

--- Shows the left hand side of Path or Road.  
- - - Shows the right hand side of Path or Road.  
For other tombs than the figures indicate, apply at Office, Cemetery Gates. Open till 5 p.m. Saturdays, 3.

J.T. BARKER, Surveyor  
8. FURNIVALS INN.

Main Entrance.

- 1.—E. MANNERING.
- 2.—DR. FERGUSON
- 3.—H. ALTHANS.
- 4.—W. HONE.

Beyond Chapel

- 5.—J. BLACKBURN
- 6.—J. SHERMAN.
- 7.—J. V. HALL.
- 8.—T. T. LYNCH.

About the Statue.

- 9.—A. WELLS.
- 10.—DR. PYE-SMITH.
- 11.—T. LEWIS.
- 12.—J. YOCKNEY.
- 13.—DR. BURDER.
- 14.—THE CLAYTON.
- 15.—DR. HARRIS.
- 16.—C. GILBERT.
- 17.—DR. BROCK.
- 18.—DR. HALLEY.

Abney House Corner.

- 19.—DR. RALEIGH.
- 20.—T. BINNEY.
- 21.—SIR C. REED.
- 22.—DR. REED.
- 23.—W. ELLIS.
- 24.—DR. A. FLETCHER.
- 25.—N. M. HARRY
- 26.—DR. MORISON.
- 27.—R. PHILIP.
- 28.—DR. CAMPBELL.
- 29.—DR. BOAZ.
- 30.—DR. MEDHURST.

Round Cedar and Yews.

- 31.—THOMAS WILSON.
- 32.—DR. HENDERSON.
- 33.—J. REYNOLDS.
- 34.—S. MARTIN.
- 35.—T. JAMES.
- 36.—JOSIAH CONDER.
- 37.—S. BAGSTER.
- 38.—DR. J. FLETCHER.
- 39.—JOHN WILLIAMS.
- 40.—DR. J. YOUNG.
- 41.—DR. HOBY.
- 42.—DR. G. SMITH.
- 43.—DR. SPENCE.
- 44.—J. R. MILLS.
- 45.—DR. ARCHER.
- 46.—DR. TIDMAN.
- 47.—T. E. THORESBY.
- 48.—T. WILSON, JUN.

Elm Avenues.

- 49.—H. VINCENT.
- 50.—DR. LEIFCHILD.
- 51.—THE MATHERS.
- 52.—DR. BENNETT.

... in future my recommendation to my Customer's will be Cemeteries other than your's ... As I will not have these inconveniences occurring often to my Customer which come to your Cemetery, and for which often I get the blame for I Remain Yours truly, G.Swan  
Please reply at once as requested.

Despite the threat to boycott both cemeteries, Swan seems to have used Chingford rarely at that time, mainly for infant burials; taking batches out together, burying them without a service and receiving a mere 3d or 6d each in commission. This complaint concerned the fixing of kerbs around adjacent graves 34500 and 97998 at Abney Park, belonging to the Cortissos family of De Beauvoir Town. Clark sent a reply to his tirade on the 9th and, the post being better in those days, Swan received and answered it the same day.

I have already told you that I will leave you a space outside the Kerbing if you wish it, and give you your 6 inches of ground in that way but strongly refuse payment ... if a fee is paid you it will be "under protest" and I will at once place the matter in other hands and fight your Company at Law ... Also, as I have said before, about my men lowering bodies in grave's I do not bring my bearer's to act as men for the Company, let there be in any case sufficient number of Gravediggers to do the required work otherwise at anytime I shall leave the body above ground and cause a Scandal [underlined twice]. I remain Yours Truly G.Swan  
Reply at once [underlined twice]  
P.S. I do not wish to be distant with you or your Cemetery ...

On the 14th June he was still unhappy.

Is it a special law or act passed by Parliament that you should, or must have, or be, 6 inches of ground left between each grave, if so you cannot legally sell this please reply to this at once, as I am about laying this Case before the Home Secretary. ... also I want to express my idea about the serious nature of some of the grave that are re-opened, the public living so near around this Cemetery I think it wants looking into. ... I want one or two grave's tested in each of the Company's Cemeteries ...  
P.S. please let me know your next board meeting.

This letter must have caused a knee-jerk reaction in the board, as public health was a sensitive issue. The scandals of Bleak House-type City graveyards reeking of dead citizens, and the horrors of Clement's Lane Chapel<sup>2</sup> and the Spa Fields Burial Ground<sup>3</sup> were still within

living memory, and no doubt the Company knew this complainer of old.

George Swan was born in 1863, the second child and eldest son of William George Swan, undertaker of 105 New North Road, Shoreditch, and by 1891 he had set up on his own in Essex Road. His father had now moved to premises at 150 Stroud Green Road, Finsbury Park, while his brother William later acquired a business at 55 Highgate Hill. The latter was to stand as an independent Municipal Reform Candidate for Upper Holloway in 1913, and to serve on the Board of Guardians from 1922 to 1928.<sup>4</sup> Another brother, Arthur, also entered the profession later, but Thomas became the proprietor of a hosier's shop, still standing derelict on the corner of Stroud Green Road and Tollington Park. One wonders if short fuses ran in the family, and if a Swan funeral always had a touch of danger about it.

The matter probably dragged on for some time, whether Swan was permitted to harangue the board or not, but by 1902 Clark had a personal disaster to cope with when the youngest of his three sons died aged 11 at Kenilworth, Heathcote Grove, Chingford. A large and probably very expensive red granite monument was erected above the child's grave in the adjacent cemetery<sup>5</sup> and this traumatic event may have caused Clark to rent out his house and move, as he seems to have had several addresses in North London during the next twenty or so years.

Abney Park fills up

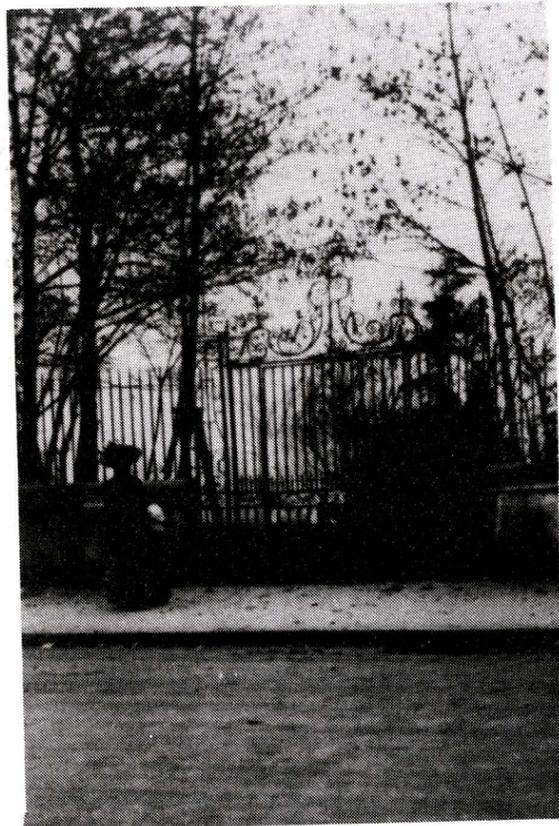
In August 1899, the body-count at Abney Park reached 100,000, and by 1908 the decision had been made to start renumbering, for reasons of convenience and also, perhaps, cosmetic ones. On the 3rd April the last interment was 113802, on the 4th April the first was RN 3803. But though this made the situation look better the problem remained the same, and a local paper reported a rumour that old graves were being desecrated for new burials.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in extensive investigations involving the Home Office, which must have been exceedingly uncomfortable for Clark and the board.

In the same year, George Swan was engaged in litigation with the company,<sup>7</sup> perhaps about the introduction of agents' certificates pursuant to the Prevention of Corruption Act, which had come into force on the 1st January 1907. The custom of paying undertakers commission on trade they brought to cemeteries was well established, but under the strictures of this Act the practice looked doubt-

ful and the arrangement was put on a legal footing. The commission promised was 5% for Abney Park and 7 1/2% for others owned by the company, obviously intended to encourage increased use. It seems inevitable that Swan would have taken it all personally.

In 1913 he refused to collect signatures from relatives to sanction interments, while a letter to Clark from the Cemetery's solicitors, Fraser and Christian of 71 Finsbury Pavement, referred to his "disorderly conduct at the Cemetery" on the 20th June. The conduct is not specified, but the clerk was flustered enough by it to give Swan the chaplain's name in the register. There is a significant reference in the same letter to a "measure of competition which, we understand, exists between the various proprietary Cemeteries and other places of burial in North London," so things were not getting any easier for Abney Park, now up to burial RN11676 (121,676 interments) and filling in between graves and over paths.

On the 24th July 1916, Fraser and Christian informed Clark that another case involving George Swan had been set for Wednesday 9th August at Clerkenwell County Court. Again it involved fees, Swan having taken exception to having to pay £8. 7s 6d for the interment of



The Church Street gate to Abney Park: photograph, about 1900, by Florence Bagust

a Mr. Hewland on Saturday 15th July, and immediately followed up with a summons on another matter. Like many such private actions, it appears petty to the outsider. The Company had terminated Swan's agency for all its cemeteries (now Abney Park, Chingford Mount, Hendon Park and Greenford Park) but promised to issue another under new terms. Swan claimed he had not received the notice of termination, blaming a clerk or the post. He demanded the new one before he gave up the old, and claimed he had continued to receive commission anyway. In fact, he had deducted it himself from payments, and the Company had not complained in an effort to keep him quiet. They finally paid an ex gratia 3s 9d into court, while insisting that they had no legal liability to do so. By 23rd August, Mr. Swan had got his agent's certificate back.

Clark must have had a weary sensation of *déjà vu* when Stanley Evans and Co. of 20-22 Theobalds Road contacted Fraser & Christian in December 1918.

It seems to Mr. Swan that you are again setting up the allegations which were made against him in the Police Court ... so far as Mr. Swan is concerned he has no strained relations with your clients although it would appear by your letter that they have some grievance against him. . . failing [an apology published in the local press and the paying of Swan's expenses] our instructions are to commence proceedings against the Company and Mr. Brooking for damages for malicious prosecution.

We shall be hearing more of Mr. Brooking.

His solicitors advised Clark with a certain resignation that "if he insists there is no way of stopping him" and that "we cannot advise the Company to apologise or to give an indemnity as to costs to Mr. Swan. . . Mr. Brooking prosecuted on his own behalf and at his own instance."

Swan's solicitors then demanded compensation for loss to his business and reputation.

What happened on the 3rd December 1918 is set out in letters of March 1919. Not surprisingly, the two sides see things very differently.

Fraser and Christian (Abney Park) to Stanley Evans and Co. (Swan). (Draft; shorter version sent.)

21st March 1919

Mr Swan by telephone arranged for an interment to take place at the Cemetery on the 2nd December 1918 at 2 o'clock. As Mr Swan had not reached the

Cemetery by 3.45 on that day a telephone inquiry was made from the office of the Company asking whether the funeral cortege would arrive at all that day. The answer received from Mr. Swan's representative was that the interment was arranged for the following day. Of course a change of plan of this kind involves the Company in expense. Men are kept waiting uselessly and have to be paid overtime for the work which they have subsequently to do, and they have to attend again on the subsequent day, and their wages have to be paid. Mr Swan's representative was told that an additional fee of 10/6 would be payable in the circumstances. This does not seem unreasonable.

On the following day Mr Swan attended with the funeral and the clerk in the office of the Company reminded him that this further fee would be payable. Mr Swan seems to have declined to pay and certainly did not pay either the proposed additional fee or any fees. The clerk then went up to the cemetery from the office and there Mr Swan again declined to pay. Mr Swan then left the clerk and went to the part of the cemetery where apparently he thought the grave was situated. Mr Brooking, the clerk, had occasion to show a lady who wished to choose a grave for her son some plots of ground in another part of the cemetery. Mr Swan came to the end of the pathway where Mr Brooking was, and called out something which Mr Brooking did not hear; a few seconds after he came rushing down the path, and just before reaching Mr Brooking took off his overcoat, coat and hat and threw them on the grass, attacked Mr Brooking, and struck him on the shoulder. . . The clerk we think judiciously in these circumstances endeavoured to get away from Mr Swan and went towards the chapel. Mr Swan followed him with the apparent intention of further assaulting him, and two gravediggers seeing what had happened endeavoured to keep him away. Mr Swan seems . . . to have called Mr Brooking by some opprobrious name. He then went to the chapel and commenced to attack the chapel door. . . He seems to have knocked a small piece of beading or moulding from the door and to have broken the handle . . . A police constable was then sent for. On the arrival of the constable Mr Swan paid the ordinary fees which were accepted under protest and the funeral proceeded . . . Mr Brooking appears to have been justified in saying that the funeral could not proceed until payment. But it is very undesirable that such orders should have to be given, and we think Mr Swan should make a point to follow the usual practice in paying the fees before the interment.

Stanley Evans & Co. to Fraser & Christian

25th March 1919

We beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 21st inst which entirely mis-represents the facts.

We are instructed that . . . the Funeral was not arranged for the 2nd December last, but . . . the 3rd - although it appeared that through some mistake of your Clients it was booked for the earlier date. In

consequence of your Clients mistake they charged a fee of 10/6d, which our Client naturally refused to pay. Having regard to these facts our Client is not concerned with the question whether the fee charged is or is not a reasonable one. What our Client does complain of is that the Superintendent of the Cemetery who subsequently stated that he acted upon the express instructions of the Managing Director refused to allow the funeral to proceed until this Fee was paid. Even if a fee had been properly chargeable (which is denied) or even if there was a bona fide dispute as to whether the fee was payable or not, it seems to have been a high-handed and unjustifiable procedure to have kept the Cortage waiting in the Cemetery for the best part of an hour over a matter of this kind, a course which must have been extremely painful to the relatives attending the Funeral and Highly detrimental to our Client's business. . .

Fraser and Christian to Arthur Clark

26th March 1919

We do not think there is any use in prolonging the correspondence.

The victim was left to sue Swan at his own expense.

#### Re-enter Mr Brooking

The assaulted clerk, Mr Victor Edward Brooking, was the eighth child of Francis Lang Brooking from Devon, who in 1876 was an oil and colour man in High Road Stamford Hill. By the time of Victor's birth in 1886 he was a grocer at 4 St Ann's Road, married to a second wife at least eighteen years younger than himself (his census entries are not consistent about his age). By 1910 Victor was a clerk at the cemetery, living with his wife and family at 57 Roslyn Road.

In 1916 he complained<sup>8</sup> of stomach trouble, and the Assistant Secretary of the Company, Henry J. Holloway, sent him to Dr J. Laughton Hewer of 18 York Terrace NW1, who considered him "of poor physique" but found "nothing organically wrong with him". Whatever his state of health, Brooking had large, assertive handwriting, and the 1918 *contretemps* suggests that his handling of people may not have been tactful.

In December 1920, the Inland Revenue were asking Clark for overdue Excess Profits Duty of £407 19s 0d, their final demand arriving on 14th January 1921, and at much the same time another scandal broke for the Secretary and Registrar to deal with. The report he read out to the Board sounds, in some places, tragi-comic.

Last week having received a letter from a Miss

Gardiner that she paid £1. 4. 2 last July for an inscription upon a Common gravestone and in Octr found it had not been attended to she inquired and in Novr received a p.c. saying attention should be given and stating the inscriptn was still not cut pressed for immediate attention. As nothing could be traced of payment or p.c. having been sent and Brooking said he could remember nothing about it I wrote stating I regretted her complaint and requested her to send me the receipt, postcard and copy of inscription so that I might trace the matter promising to at once return receipt and p.c. Miss Gardiner sent these of which I made copies... and returned to her. . . The production of this receipt revealed the fact that "T" receipt book was not in official use at the time of payment in July and when I asked Brooking for the counterfoils he remarked 'Then it's all over!' I said what do you mean? and he said he had used a separate receipt book (the last one of present stock) which I demanded production of and he said 'I can't produce it.' Why not? 'I have burnt it.' I also elicited that he had carried loose receipt forms from this book in his pocket . . . and that he thought he had used 16 or 18 forms. He admitted that the counterfoils had not been filled in and that he had no idea of the amount of cash he had taken because the pressure was on him to pay and he took all he could get. He declares there are none of the loose forms in his possession. I ordered the inscription forthwith.

The next day, Clark received a letter from Mrs. Frost of Poundstock, Bude, Cornwall, and

spoke to Brooking about this because I must tell you the gardening notice was sent out in the usual way and I received a note saying the amount had been paid... Brooking then told me that a member of the Salvation Army had paid him the cash (10/6)... placing the money in his pocket he forgot it. I remonstrated with him about his accepting payment and pointed out how serious it was to transgress the rule. He begged me to overlook it when I said if he promised it should not recur and paid the 10/6 into our account it should end there - this he did. I adopted the same plan and wrote Mrs. Frost asking for the receipt to be sent me (enclosing an envelope) meanwhile holding the receipt book.

This seems extraordinarily lenient of Clark, in fact dangerously so. Brooking cannot have been that invaluable an employee, nor the job of cemetery superintendent unfillable at a time of severe post-war unemployment. Perhaps he felt sorry for a young man whose life story was so similar to his own, but whatever the reason, his generosity only put off the evil day. Mrs. Frost wrote back on the 4th of January.

Dear Sir,

Your letter of the 1st to hand.

On Dec 1st I received your letter with stamped envelope asking for receipt and posted it, by return. By same mail I got a letter from the person that signed the receipt begging me not to send it for the sake of his wife and 6 children! & at once posted this letter to you Also rote the man telling him to be a man and tell you the truth. The nex day but one your stamped envelope containing receipt was returned un-opened with another appealing letter not to let you have it. Then I regestered the receipt - and his letter with an explanation to you, by return of post

And this is my fifth time of writing

Clark kept trying.

After the precautionary measures I had taken with our letterbox having new padlock and forbidding the letters to be taken out before my arrival each morning I felt that the post was being interfered with and charged Brooking with it, stating I had positive evidence before me - when he admitted he had burnt the registered letter sent from Bude to me!"

One can understand his exclamation mark.

On Saturday last Brooking was questioned about three special stones for Common graves and as they could not be traced as having been paid I spoke to him asking for an explanation and he said 'I have had the lot!' As to the amounts received he could only give approximate amounts from £19 to £20 each. Asked when he had the money he said before the other matters were found out and that the people became so persistent that he ordered them from the mason without copying the letters. I pressed him as to whether there was anything besides and he admits he has had the money for a fourth not yet ordered.

On the 10th January 1921, Brooking wrote to the Directors from North Lodge, Abney Park, where he was living.

Dear Sirs, As I am seeking employment elsewhere I hereby beg to tender my resignation of the situation I hold in your Office, such resignation to take effect on 10th February next.

It seems once again a remarkably humane act on Clark's part that he was not sacked and prosecuted. Another letter from Brooking two days later, (his writing is still bold and confident for someone in such a mess), refers to "a weekly payment of £4:6:11 to 10th Feb 1921 and a payment of £62: 10/- . . . on giving up possession of the Lodge." It is not at all clear who is to pay who. If Brooking was going to



The main gates: an early 20th century view

pay back the stolen money, one wonders how he managed it, and if the company was going to pay him, some very big questions are raised.

On the 17th January he wrote from a temporary address at 11 St Ann's Road begging, though only in the formal sense, "to make application for the appointment of Agent to the Abney Park Cemetery Company Limited," and signing it with panache "V. Edward Brooking - trading as Brooking and Co." Presumably Brooking and Co. was to be an undertaking business, and one can only admire his indomitable optimism and nerve.

In fact, he became a builder's labourer in his brother's firm (probably Harold, but he had seven of them), and it was not until October 1922 that the Company had occasion to make a memo. about him. "Mr. V. E. Brooking accompanied by his brother attended and asked for some consideration in view of an alleged accident while in the Company's service," i.e. a fall in 1910 while carrying heavy books, and suggested that the Company should "give him a compassionate grant to help him through". He had made no mention of this accident when consulting Dr Hewer in 1916, and Assistant Secretary Holloway sent him off to the Royal Northern Hospital for an X-ray.

In July 1923 Brooking claimed he had been diagnosed at this examination as having a "slightly dilated valve below the appendix"

making him "no longer able to do laborious work", whereupon the Company went back to the doctors. Mr. Middleton said he'd found nothing abnormal, although he mentions a "dense persistent shadow" "unconnected with the intestinal tract", in other words, perhaps, nothing to do with him. Mr. Sanor said he'd never mentioned a dilated valve below the appendix. Dr Hewer made the suggestive comment that Brooking "appeared to me to be a man who took more alcohol than was good for him," and such a habit would certainly account for both digestive and financial troubles.

It is the putting together of these separate bundles of papers which is interesting. With regard to the events of December 1918, we appear to have an irritable, litigious, slightly paranoid undertaker coming up against an assertive, possibly tactless, dishonest clerk who liked a drink. However difficult Mr. Swan was, and there is no ignoring his track record, one begins to think that a clerk (Brooking?) just might have neglected to send Swan notice of agency termination in 1916, and that Brooking just might have taken the telephoned funeral booking down wrong in 1918, and that he certainly behaved in a disastrously "jobsworth" manner by leaving Elizabeth Gosling's funeral cortege waiting for an hour while he argued with Swan. Also, significantly, the cemetery

register entries for the second and third of December (involving 25 interments in all) are scrawled, blotted and altered. One hopes Brooking and his family received help from his many relatives, and that the "persistent shadow" didn't prove to be sinister, but it seems unlikely that their lives ever became easy.

#### *Swansong and silence*

There must have been plenty more problems for Arthur Clark, as Abney Park inexorably filled up and went down. Swan died on 22nd May 1936 in Durham House nursing home, 102 Crouch Hill. His will, proved by Stanley Evans & Co. and his bank manager on 30th June, is a startling document.

To begin with, he left £32,948 10s 4d. The will is four closely-written pages long and has a two-page codicil witnessed by staff at the nursing home. His affairs are minutely put in order, with an obsessiveness which suggests suspicion. His "sincere wish" is to be cremated at Golders Green, once his heart has been removed in front of an executor to ensure he is dead, and every detail and expense connected with his funeral is specified. W. Miller, undertaker, of 95 Essex Rd must not charge more than 25 guineas, but why was it not to be handled by the family - consideration for their feelings, or distrust? Blood relatives are remembered, and his "dear respected friend Miss Mary Fowler" gets the life interest on £5,000 while she remains single. His personal property and business are to be sold separately at auction.

The remainder of his fortune is left to a seemingly infinite number of hospitals and good causes, on condition that wards are named after him or memorial plaques put up. He seems determined to be remembered, having no children, and the reason for this lack is revealed in the final lines of the main will.

My wife Annie Swan is not interested in this my last will, she having been very cruel and wicked whilst she was living with me as my wife, she being a drunkard, pawned part of my home and effects to procure drink and bad male and female companions, finally she attempted suicide by poison.

He even gives a reference for this last event - proceedings at North London Police Court in 1896 - and complains that he has heard nothing of her for thirty-seven years. If she turns up at the funeral, she is to be excluded. Altogether, the light thrown upon this man, who must have been the terror of more cemeteries than Abney Park, is blinding.

His ashes rest in a marble urn within the East Columbarium, Golders Green - just as he instructed.

In 1926, Arthur Clark moved to Maskee, 8 Harrowdene Road, Wembley (think about it - next door was called Kozié Neuk), his wife dying two years later. By 1931 he was managing director of the company, but by the time he died on the 12th May 1937 (coronation day) his two surviving children were living abroad and his last years must have been lonely. On May 18th he was laid with his wife and son at Chingford, by W. Dyer & Co. of Walthamstow. He left no will, and E. B. V. Christian of the old firm applied for administration, his assets being £6,106 19s 10d gross, £3,633 5s 9d nett.

After all his years of service to the Abney Park Cemetery Company, no-one bothered to have his presence recorded on the red granite monument.

#### Notes

1. HAD D/B/ABN/2/99.
2. Thornbury & Walford, *Old and New London*, vol.3, 31-32. For Spa Fields Burial Ground, see T. Cromwell, *History of Clerkenwell*, 150-1.
3. *Ib.* . vol.2, 305.
4. Index card, Islington Local History Library. Information probably obtained from a local paper.
5. Chingford Mount Cemetery, grave 58703, square B6; on the south side of the road from the top gate.
6. D/B/ABN/2/100.
7. D/B/ABN/2/99.
8. D/B/ABN/2/101.

## BOOK review

Jon Newman

#### *The Victoria County History of the County of Middlesex; Volume X: Hackney Parish*

Edited by T.F.T. Baker. Published for the Institute of Historical Research by Oxford University Press, 1995  
ISBN 019 7227821 Price £60

The publication by the VCH of its most recent Middlesex volume covering the parish of Hackney is not only an achievement in its own right, but also means that definitive well-researched histories are now available for all three of the component parishes of the London Borough of Hackney. The VCH published its companion volume VIII to St. Mary Stoke Newington in 1985 while the LCC Survey of London volume on St. Leonard Shoreditch (starting to show its age in terms of method and subject matter) was published back in 1922. Until now people researching Hackney parish have had to be content with Robinson's parochial history of 1842 or various popular illustrated histories produced by the likes of the Hackney Society.

The largest single component of the volume is the section on settlement and development. This is usefully split into two, the first section comprising two short essays giving an overview of development up to 1800 and from 1800 to today. The second section divides the borough into nine areas that are then considered in greater detail. What is refreshing about

these area studies is the way that the historical process is brought right up to date. There are no qualitative assessments about certain styles of architecture or periods of development being more worthy of attention than others (a failing of the earlier Survey of London and VCH volumes). Instead due recognition is made of the powers of the local authority in the 20th century and the impact this has had on the built environment; the effects of migration to and from the borough, postwar depopulation and gentrification are also considered and each of the area studies concludes with a snapshot of what remains on the ground in 1993.

If there is a criticism of the VCH technique here it is that in covering so much ground in such detail there is no room to pause, to stress or to interpret. The development of Hackney becomes an inevitable but meaningless gallop to the present moment. There is no larger context to this catalogue of local events, little reaction or comment to architectural excellence and social innovation or to cupidity, stupidity and error. Brooke House is pulled down, Powell House is built and demolished in turn, Sutton House is finally acknowledged; public housing disasters like Trowbridge and Clapton Park are but dates on a chart.

The strength of the volume lies in the thorough assembling of information from Hackney Archives, the Greater London Record Office, the Guildhall Library and the Public

Record Office. There are excellent summary chapters on economic history, social and cultural activities and local government as well as previously researched topics like the descent of the manors and the history of the parish church. The editor has clearly read a huge amount of contemporary minutes and other documents from which he has extracted some fascinating detail. My favourite is the report of the lighting and watching trustees who claimed in 1828 that the vigilance of their evening and night watch patrols had driven all criminals from the parish into neighbouring Tottenham. Their quiet confidence about this meant that they were one of only two petitioners to vote against the adoption of the Metropolitan Police Act in the following year.

The chapters on religion and education are fronted by essays giving an outline chronology and followed by detailed directory entries for every church and school. These provide basic information on dates, building history, name and denomination changes and capacity. I can see that these entries would be particularly helpful for family historians in providing quick information on institutions that feature in their family research. The introductory essays to the several religions provide a good overview of catholic recusancy and a detailed unpicking of Hackney's nonconform-

ist congregations whom, I discovered, are only rivalled in their tendency to schism and fragmentation by the synagogues of East London. There is also a short history of Islamic places of worship from 1974.

There are occasions too when this quiet assembling of information can have a peculiar force regardless of interpretation; this is particularly true of some more recent history that, as it is still passing before us we fail to assess as a whole. A good example is the section on Hospitals. There were five of these in 1968 providing 1900 beds; in 1993 all five had ceased functioning as hospitals and one new hospital of 450 beds had been built to replace them.

The final irony is that this volume describing the recent grim decline of public life in Hackney, with its catalogue of closed churches, demolished hospitals and abandoned institutions, should itself be a victim of the culture it chronicles. We learn from the preface that the VCH, previously funded by participating boroughs according to their rateable value, now has to fund-raise from grant-giving bodies to maintain its programme of publications. The shortfall in funding meant that the editor and assistant had to retire in 1992 while this book was being written and be re-employed on a part time basis!

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### Further reading

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Information about the latest books on Hackney, or with a Hackney flavour, is contained in *The Hackney Terrier*, the regular newsletter of Hackney Archives Department, which is published three times a year. It is available by subscription to the Friends of Hackney Archives: for details, see back page.

### Contributors to this issue

**Josephine Boyle** has published five novels, and is now researching and writing a history of her family's building firm, Reader Brothers of Homerton.

**David Mander** has been Borough Archivist for Hackney since 1983. His latest book, *More Light! More Power!* (an illustrated history of Shoreditch) is to be published in autumn 1996.

**Dr. Priscilla Metcalf** (d. 1989) was author, among other works, of *Victorian London* (1972) and definitive studies of Fishmongers' Hall and the Park Town Estate in Battersea.

**Jon Newman** is joint Borough Archivist for the London borough of Lambeth. He was formerly an archivist at Hackney Archives Department.

**Richard J. Smith** is writing a biography of the 19th century portrait painter Margaret Carpenter. He has contributed articles to the Wessex-based *Hatcher Review* as well as *Richmond History*.

**Dr. Keith Sugden** writes on topography, travel and archaeology. He is author of *A History of Highbury* and *Walking the Pilgrim Ways*.

**Don Tyzack** has written about the history of glassmakers and the history of tools in *Glass, Tools and Tyzacks*.

### Acknowledgements

Priscilla Metcalf's work on Balmes House is reproduced by kind permission of the Royal Literary Fund.

The map on page 11 is by Graham Reed. The illustrations on pages 24-6 and 28 are reproduced by permission of Don Tyzack, and those on pages 21 and 30 by permission of Roland House Research. All other illustrations are reproduced by permission of the London borough of Hackney, Archives Department.

The editor gratefully acknowledges, once again, the unfailing help and support of John Finn, Mike Gray, David Mander and Peter Foynes.

### About this publication

*Hackney History* is published by the Friends of Hackney Archives. This is the second in an annual series dedicated to publishing original research into the history of the area comprised in the London borough of Hackney (the former metropolitan boroughs of Hackney, Stoke Newington and Shoreditch).

The Friends of Hackney Archives were formed in 1985 to act as a focus for local history and to support the work of Hackney Borough Council's Archives Department. Membership is open to all.

Members receive the Archives Department's newsletter, *The Hackney Terrier*, three times a year, and *Hackney History* annually. In 1996 the subscription is £6 for the calendar year (£12 for mailing to an overseas address).

Enquiries and correspondence about the Friends should be addressed to the Friends of Hackney Archives, c/o Hackney Archives Department, 43 de Beauvoir Road, London N1 5SQ; telephone (0171) 241 2886, fax (0171) 241 6688, e-mail *archives @ hackney.gov.uk*. Contributions to *Hackney History* are welcome; prospective contributors are invited to get in touch with the editor before putting text into final form.

### *HACKNEY History - volume 1* (1995)

*Pepys and Hackney*

*Two mysterious Hackney gardens*

*The Tyssens - Lords of Hackney*

*Non-conformist church-building*

*The silk-makers' house*

*The rise of the high rise*

is available at £3.00 from the Bookshop at Sutton House, 2 Homerton High Street, E9, or from Hackney Archives Department, 43 de Beauvoir Road, N1 5SQ.

Hackney Archives Department can also supply copies by post: please make the cheque (add 60p per copy to include post and packing) payable to the London borough of Hackney.