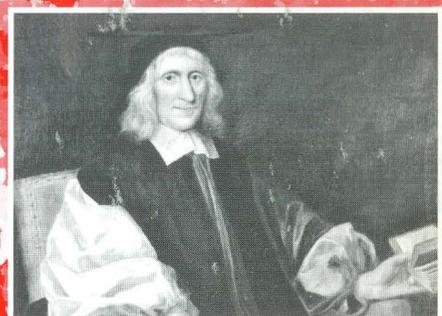
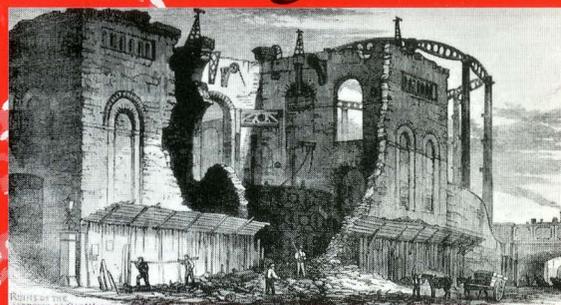


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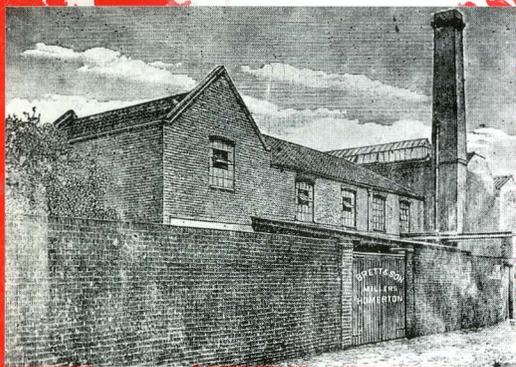
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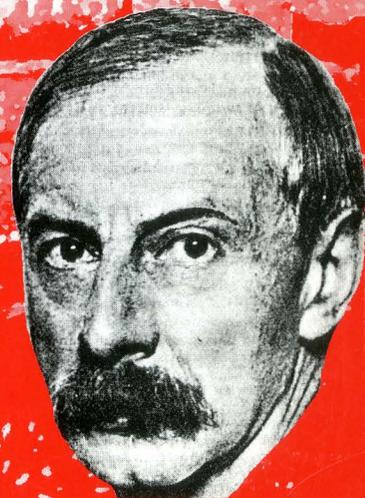
gasworks



Bishop Wood



Homerton



Dr Jelley

Hackney *History*

In this issue -

- Thomas Wood, founder of almshouses and absentee Bishop
- An early London gasworks at Shoreditch
- The early days of professional athletics
- A family of Homerton millers
- Henry Jelley, "threepenny doctor"

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

HAD	Hackney Archives Department
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
PRO	Public Record Office
VCH	Victoria County History of Middlesex, vol X (ed. T. F. T. Baker) (1995)

Unless otherwise indicated, all publications cited in this volume are published in London.

THE ABSENTEE BISHOP: THOMAS WOOD OF HACKNEY AND LICHFIELD

Denis Gibbs

Introduction

Bishop Wood's almshouses in Lower Clapton Road, at the corner of Newick Street and opposite Clapton Pond, date from the late 17th century. If a passer-by of 1690 could return to the former village of Clapton, after more than 300 years, he or she would have no difficulty in recognising the six modest almshouses built on three sides of a shallow courtyard. The appearance of the tiny chapel set among the residential buildings would look less familiar, as it was altered in the 19th century. Bishop Wood's almshouses have the distinction of being the oldest surviving domestic buildings in continuous occupation in Hackney. When he wrote of the almshouses in 1893, the Hackney doctor and historian, Benjamin Clarke, had nothing but praise for their founder and benefactor. He referred to the Right Reverend Dr Thomas Wood, Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry and Chaplain to King Charles I and II, as

the good old man, Hackney born and bred, [who] could not be severed from his native village even by a bishopric. Here he lived, here he died, and left in these interesting old almshouses a memorial for all time. We would feel assured his anchor during his life's voyage was cast within the veil.

Here, at any rate, he has on earth laid as sure and good foundation as any mortal man could effect.¹

Benjamin Clarke also commented briefly on the historical background of Bishop Wood's life.

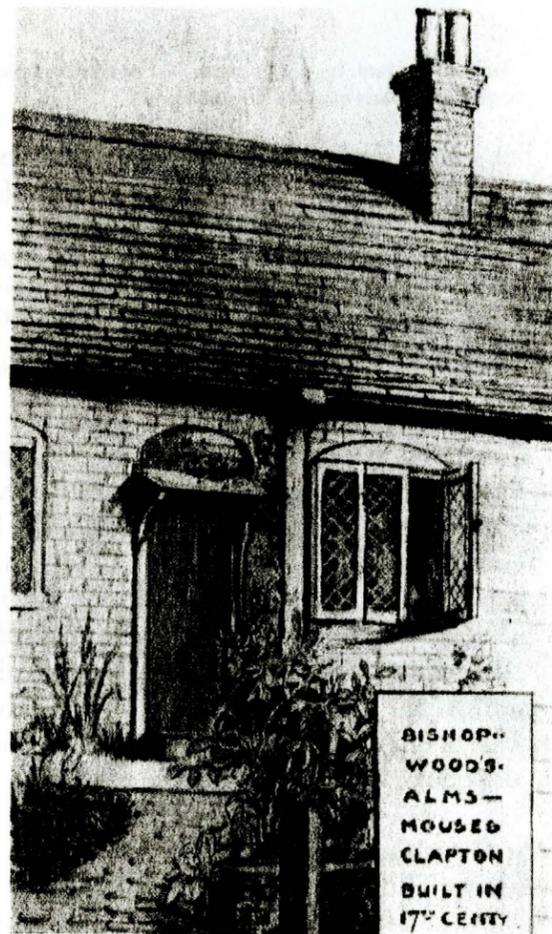
He seems to have passed unscathed through the exciting times of the Commonwealth, and despite his appointment as bishop, clung to Hackney - his birth-place - as his home. Nothing would persuade him to go into the residence at Lichfield. In the parish of Hackney he was born, here he always lived, and, although a bishop, here he died.²

Wood lived his life close to the Stuart court, in the climate of the political and moral behaviour prevalent in the court circles of Charles II after the Restoration. The intention of this article is to consider aspects of his life not only in Hackney, where he chose to live most of his life in the family property which he unexpectedly inherited, but also from the perspective of the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry where he was an unpopular and largely absentee bishop.

The Wood family

Bishop Thomas Wood (1607-1692) was a member of a family of wealthy courtiers, originally from Lancashire.³ His father, also Thomas

Wood, held appointments in the royal households of James I and Charles I as Serjeant of the Pantry and Clerk of the Spicery. Thomas Wood (senior) and his family lived in Clapton, conveniently close to London, in a large house set in a considerable estate. More than a century later the property was known as Clapton House. When the elder Thomas Wood died in 1649, the property was inherited by his eldest son, the baronet Sir Henry Wood. Like his father, Sir Henry Wood held official positions in the royal household; he was Clerk of the Green Cloth in the court of Charles II, and Treasurer to Queen Henrietta Maria. Sir Henry and Lady Wood had a daughter, Mary, who became even more closely and personally linked with royalty when, a few months after her father's death, she was married to Charles Fitz-Roy, Duke of Southampton, natural son of King Charles II by Barbara Palmer (née Villiers), Duchess of Castlemaine. Remarkably, judged by the customs of today, the bride



A sketch by Florence Bagust, c. 1930

was aged about 7 and the groom, about 9. The marriage ceremony was repeated at the age of legal consent. Mary died from smallpox when she was 17; she was buried, the Duchess of Southampton, in Westminster Abbey.⁴

When Sir Henry Wood died in 1671 the family property in Clapton passed to his younger brother, a clergyman, Thomas Wood, who was then Dean of Lichfield. In the same year Thomas Wood gained preferment, being appointed Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry. The ancient diocese of Lichfield, of which St Chad was the first bishop in the 7th century, occupied much of the former kingdom of Mercia. In due course it became the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry until, much later, a separate diocese of Coventry was created. The father of Sir Henry Wood and of Bishop Thomas Wood died in 1649; their mother, Susan Wood, died the following year. They were both in their eighties. Their children arranged for a memorial to be placed in the Hackney parish church of St Augustine. When at the end of the 18th century the church of St John-at-Hackney replaced St Augustine's as the parish church of Hackney, the memorial was among those transferred, to its present site in the vestibule. The memorial has been described as 'an interesting very progressive modification of the old kneelers epitaph. Here the two main figures stand and look at each other across the prayer desk. The others still kneel, but style and expressions [are] quite freed from Jacobean stiffness'.⁵ The four sons and four daughters of Sir Thomas and Susan Wood are shown kneeling. The accompanying inscription gives details of the family. On the monument Bishop Thomas Wood himself must have arranged for a sculpted mitre to be added to the memorial beside one of the kneeling sons, sometime after his appointment as Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry in 1671. He was, clearly, keen to be identified.

Education and early life

Thomas Wood was educated at Westminster School and Christ Church College, Oxford. He graduated Bachelor of Arts in 1631 and, ten years later, Bachelor of Divinity. A year later, in 1642, he became Doctor of Divinity.

He spent ten years in Oxford. At the age of



Bishop Wood's almshouses in 2001

28, in 1635, he was Chaplain-in-ordinary to Charles I, and, in the same year, he became Rector of Wickham, a village in County Durham. During the Commonwealth he was ejected from the benefice, and, presumably, then came back to Hackney, to live in the family home. During the interregnum he also travelled to Italy.⁶ After the Restoration he returned to his living at Wickham, where his career began to blossom again in other ways. In 1660 he became a canon of Durham Cathedral and in the same year was also appointed Chaplain-in-ordinary to King Charles II. In 1663, he left Durham and its environs to take up his new appointment as Dean of Lichfield.

At some time during the interregnum, when he was living in Hackney, Thomas Wood became acquainted with Barbara Villiers (1641-1709), who was destined to become the mother-in-law of his niece, Mary. Barbara Villiers, later Countess of Castlemaine and Duchess of Cleveland, married Roger Palmer on 14 April 1659, when she was 18. As early as 1656, it is recorded that she had become 'the object of divers young gentlemen's affections.' By May 1660, a little over a year after her marriage, she had become intimate with Charles II, immediately after his return from exile to Whitehall. Andrew Marvell

referred to her as the 'Royal Whore' and she was described, by a near contemporary historian of the Stuarts, as 'the lewdest as well as the fairest of all King Charles's concubines.'⁷ As far as Thomas Wood is concerned, the extent of his involvement with Barbara Villiers is uncertain; but later there was apparently no doubt that it was as a result of her influence with King Charles II that he was appointed Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry in 1671.

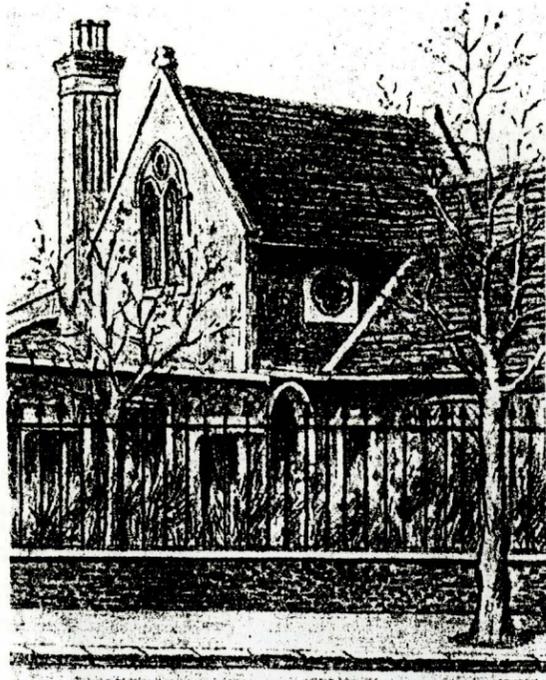
'The best of bishops': John Hacket

During the time that Thomas Wood was Dean of Lichfield, John Hacket (1592-1670) was the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry. He took up his duties very soon after the Restoration, after King Charles II had recommended 'that most ruined cathedral, city and diocese to his prudent circumspection and government'.

At the time of his appointment, John Hacket was nearly 70, and we are told that

he thought that now in his old age the change was too great for him, but because Caesar had commanded, he would resign himself to his Majesty's commands ...⁸

Lichfield cathedral had sustained great damage during the civil war, perhaps the most extensive of any cathedral in the land; the cathe-



The almshouse chapel, by Florence Bagust, c. 1930

dral and the close had been besieged on three separate occasions. John Hacket courageously accepted the challenge presented to him. His biographer wrote about the damage to Lichfield cathedral and how he set about righting it.

The roof of stone, the timber, lead, and iron, glass, stalls, organs, utensils of rich value, were all embezzled; the central spire was battered down, and much of the fabric lying in the dust. On the morning after his arrival, he roused his servants, and with his own coach-horses, with teams, and hired labourers, he began to remove the rubbish, and laid the first hand to the pious work. He solicited subscriptions from the inhabitants of every village of the diocese, and received contributions from the nobility, the ministers of state, and from the wealthy in all parts of the kingdom.⁹

Thomas Wood, when Dean of Lichfield, was among those who contributed handsomely to the restoration fund. Bishop Hacket personally supervised the fund-raising and repairs over the next seven years. With the task nearly done, on Christmas Eve, 1669, 'the good bishop reconsecrated the church with much pomp and solemnity.'¹⁰ We are told that

his last care was for the bells. ... he had contracted with eminent founders for six bells, becoming a cathedral ... although only three of them were cast before his death, and the tenor only was hung up. The first time it was rung, the Bishop was very weak, yet he went out of his bedchamber into the next room to hear it. He seemed well pleased with the sound, and blessed God who had favoured him with life

to hear it; but at the same time observed that it would be his own passing bell; and retiring into his chamber, he never left it until he was carried to his grave.¹¹

No wonder Bishop Hacket was so highly regarded, as

one of the most illustrious bishops [of his age]. To his diocese his name is a rich legacy, and his life a noble lesson. Every fact recorded of him redounds to his honour. Learning, simplicity, zeal and perseverance were the attributes of his character. He was and is an honour to the Church of England; long may his virtues find imitators within her pale.¹¹

'The worst of deans'

Concerning his personal attributes and achievements, few could have matched the heroic figure of Bishop John Hacket in the aftermath of the Civil War. By 1663, when Thomas Wood arrived in Lichfield, John Hacket's two great personal campaigns, to restore the fabric of the cathedral and to renew discipline, morale and confidence within the diocese, were well under way. Wood and Hacket had very different personalities and priorities, and there was enmity between them from the start. Nevertheless, even allowing for the extent of Wood's shortcomings, it is no surprise that there was a tendency in Lichfield, both at the time and in later historical appraisals, to exaggerate some of his deficiencies and occasionally to convey gos-



Bishop Thomas Wood, by Sir Peter Lely

sip as fact. The following account of Thomas Wood's time as dean (1663-1671) and then as bishop (1671-1692) is taken from a diocesan history of Lichfield published in the late 19th century.

Whilst Lichfield had thus the best of bishops, it had the worst of deans. In 1663, Thomas Wood, son of a court official, had paid £100 to Charles II and got the deanery. 'A pretty story', says Pepys 'was current about him. Hacket excommunicated him, and caused the sentence to be read in the cathedral whilst Wood was in church. The culprit not only refused to withdraw, but made the service to be gone through with, though himself, an excommunicate, was present (which is contrary to the canon), and said he would justify the quire therein against the bishop, and so they are at law'. The whole chapter hated Wood, and sent a letter to the archbishop complaining that their stalls under such a dean were intolerable. The archbishop thought Wood 'puritan, covetous, sordid'; yet court influence made him bishop at Hacket's death. And then it was seen that he hated Lichfield as Lichfield hated him. He took money which had been provided for a palace, and retired to Hackney, where, though very rich, he lived in a mean house of his own, 'sawing and cleaving of wood for exercise to save firing'. In July, 1681, he was ordered to return to his diocese. He promised to do so 'when the weather was somewhat cooler', but he was back in Hackney again next year. The king and the archbishop now both pressed him - the former to devise his fortune to a royal nominee, the latter to do his duty. He refused both, and in 1684 was suspended; but in 1686 he had influence enough at court to recover his revenues. Soon afterwards he placed £2,600 in the hands of Dean Addison for the building of a palace at Lichfield, but after it was built, refused the keys of it as long as possible.¹²

William Sancroft (1617-1693), archbishop of Canterbury, whose nature was described by a friend as 'pure, deep, poetical and religious'¹³ suspended Wood from his post in 1684. The scandal surrounding Wood, both concerning the means by which he gained his appointment and the reasons for his suspension, was described in the life of one of his contemporaries, Francis North, Baron Guilford, who held the office of Lord Keeper of the Great Seal under King Charles II and King James II.

He was suspended by Sancroft from his episcopal dignity. The means by which he obtained his see were equally disgraceful to him and to the court. Having procured the marriage of a niece, a wealthy heiress, with the Duke of Southampton, the son of the Duchess of Cleveland, he was rewarded with the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield. His refusal to reside upon his diocese, and his gross neglect of all his duties, and, amongst others, the repair of the episcopal palace, for which he had received money from the heirs of his predecessor, ultimately led to his suspension.¹⁴



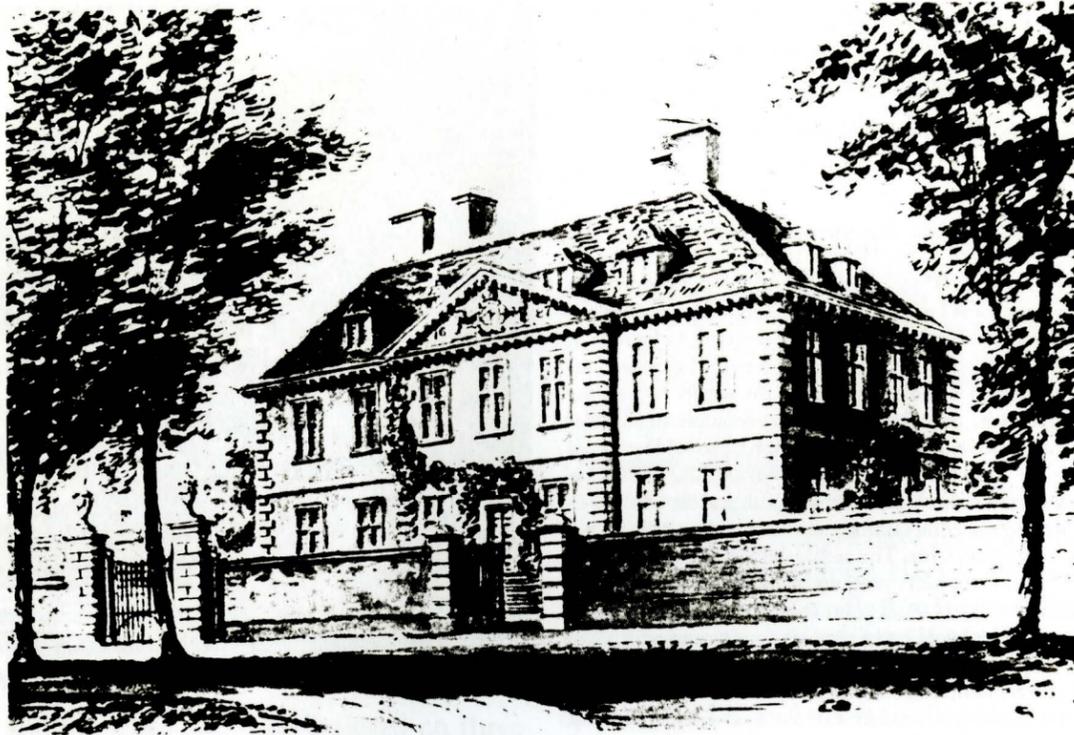
Clapton House, c. 1860

A house in Hackney, a palace at Lichfield

The 'manor' house in Clapton, or bishop's house as it was known for over a century, to which Thomas Wood 'retired', could hardly be described as a 'mean house', being assessed in 1672 at 14 hearths. The name of the mansion was changed more than once and, by 1799, it was called Clapton House. It stood on the east side of Lower Clapton Road until, in 1885, it was demolished, to make way for the construction of Thistlewaite Road. Benjamin Clarke, who was brought up in Clapton, had childhood memories of the house.

Twenty years ago Clapton House, with its beautiful grounds and wooded avenue at the back, extending half way down to the river Lea, and extensive stabling on the northern side, were interesting mementos of Clapton and its lordly parishioners in the olden time. This house was for some years the residence of Mr James Powell ... Subsequently it became the first home of St John's Foundation School for the sons of poor clergy ...¹⁵

Clarke was referring to a short period only of the house's history. On the death of Bishop Thomas Wood in 1692, subject to provision for his almshouses, the house and lands were left to a nephew, Henry Webb, who died in 1713. The estate was then divided among younger relatives, one of whom acquired the shares of the others,



The Bishop's Palace, Lichfield, rebuilt in 1687

but was soon obliged to sell the property after losses he sustained in the failure of the South Sea Company. The house then passed successively into the possession of a Huguenot silk merchant, a gem merchant and his descendants, and then, in 1799, to James Powell, a wine merchant, who leased it. At the time the house was demolished nearly a century later, it was still

an imposing building of three storeys and attics; the road front, behind ornate iron gates, was of seven bays, separated by pilasters and with rustication at the corners, beneath a bold cornice.

However impressive the bishop's mansion in Clapton may have been, by comparison the bishop's palace in the cathedral close in Lichfield was not only much more ancient, but of much greater historical significance. Early in the 13th century an already ancient house was reconstructed to include a medieval hall, which was one of the largest in England; its walls were painted with scenes of the coronation, marriages, wars and funeral of Edward I. The building did not however survive the 17th century in a habitable state. In need of major repairs at the beginning of the century, it was very severely damaged during the Civil War.

A report in 1671 noted that all the timber work of the hall and of the chambers at its north end had been destroyed and that only the stone vault remained; the long range of chambers in the inner courtyard also lacked its roof. What remained of the fabric had been used as a quarry when Bishop Hacket ... renovated a house on the south side of the Close as his residence.

Disputes concerning the responsibility for rebuilding the bishop's palace seem to have been at the centre of Thomas Wood's difficulties and of his unpopularity in Lichfield.

By 1672 Bishop Wood was suing Hacket's son and executor, Sir Andrew Hacket, for compensation for Hacket's additional damage to the palace, and in 1684 Wood was ordered to pay £2,600 and Hacket £1,400 towards the cost of rebuilding. Wood was suspended from office in the same year, and the responsibility fell to Archbishop Sancroft, who delegated the task to Dean Addison.¹⁶

As a result, the site was cleared, work was started in May 1686 and the building was completed during the next 18 months. The handsome house was built by one of Christopher Wren's best masons. Bishop Wood decided never to live there himself.

Thomas Wood's will

In his will¹⁷ Bishop Wood made adequate provision for his wife. As well as an annuity, he

bequeathed her 'the furniture of her chamber in Hackney in which she usually lodgeth, and a fourth part of my linen and a fourth part of all my plate ...' He also left her 'my best coach I shall die possessed of with two of my best coach horses of her own selection.' Some two years before he died Bishop Wood had 'erected two hospital houses for ancient and indigent men and women, the one in the town of Ufford in the county of Suffolk and the other in the town of Clapton in the parish of Hackney'. He left the income from certain lands to the 'ten poor ancient widows' of Hackney chosen to live in his almshouses, and each would also have 'a gown every second year with the initials 'T.W.' upon their shoulders'. He also considered their spiritual needs: 'I give and bequeath five pounds per annum to a Minister to read prayers twice every week unto the said poor ancient widows ...' In addition to the family estate in Clapton which he inherited from his brother, he had

other properties in different parts of the country to assign. Among the beneficiaries were Christ Church Oxford, as well as the city of Durham, where 'the sum of £20 pounds yearly (was) to be employed and disposed of towards the relief of the poor prisoners of debt ...'

Remarkably, Bishop Wood's relatives by marriage continued to exercise the right of appointing the almswomen until 1798, when the responsibility was eventually transferred to the minister and vestry of the parish. In 1842, William Robinson gave details of the provision of the deed, following the transfer.

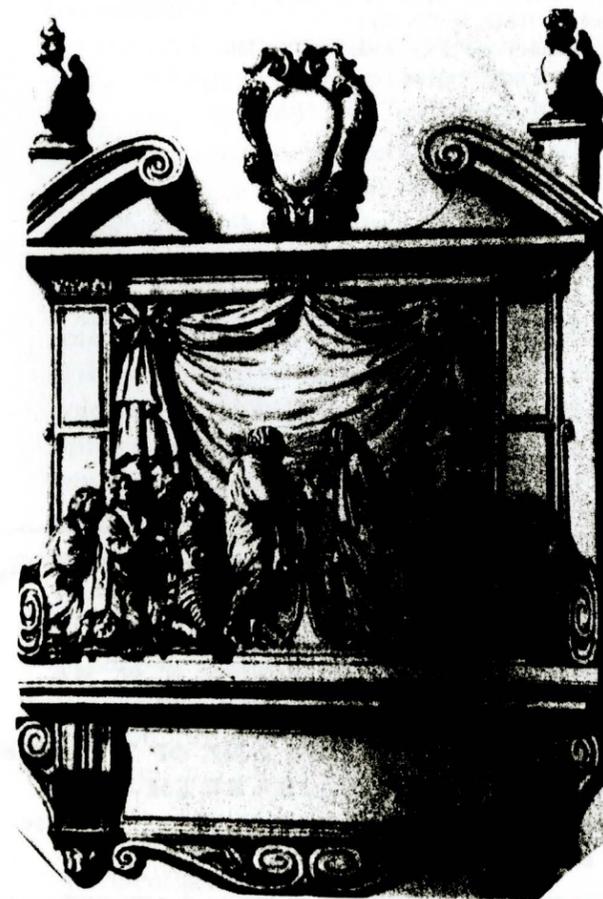
Upon a vacancy taking place, notice is given in the church on two successive Sundays, and the candidates, who must be poor widows, parishioners of Hackney, above the age of sixty, send their names, and a statement of their qualifications, to the Vestry Clerk. Two out of them are nominated by the vestry, of whom the minister selects one. They are ten in number, and inhabit an old almshouse, containing ten apartments ...¹⁸

Conclusion

When Bishop Wood wrote his will in 1690, he acknowledged his good fortune in being born into such comfortable circumstances which then continued throughout his life.

Whereas I am bound to the most excellent Majesty of God for all his blessings and goodness to me, I do in most humble manner make my return to him of a small provision and relief for his own poor ...

For more than three centuries successive generations of parishioners in Hackney have been able to benefit from his 'small provision' and, in the words of Benjamin Clarke, the interesting and quaint looking old almshouses are his memorial for all time. Whereas historians of Hackney have referred to Thomas Wood in adulatory terms, he should also be remembered as a man of his time, who had serious imperfections and shortcomings, often manifesting themselves in ways peculiar to the age in which he lived. He lived in an age when there was obvious laxity in high places. It has been suggested that differences in behaviour and morality from one period to another, may sometimes be more apparent than real. For instance, concerning the time of the Restoration, a biographer of Charles II has written:



The family monument in St John-at-Hackney

If it is accepted that the level of 'sin' remains roughly constant in human behaviour, then the difference between the age of Charles II and that preceding it - the so called Puritan age of Cromwell - was this: after 1660 it was not considered necessary to hide these things.¹⁹

Bishop Thomas Wood's conduct in Lichfield cannot easily be excused or condoned, for he not only used his personal wealth and contacts at court to gain preferment, but then seriously neglected the duties of his high office. A contemporary who contrasted the characters of Bishop Hacket and Bishop Wood commented on the vast 'difference in the moral characters of men under the same call and obligation.'²⁰ Perhaps, however, the judgments of history are, at times, too harsh, particularly when the evidence on which they are made is incomplete. In Hackney, Bishop Thomas Wood's birthplace and home, the contributions he made to the welfare of his fellow citizens were considerable and continue to be appreciated.

Notes

1. 'F.R.C.S.' (Benjamin Clarke), *Glimpses of ancient Hackney and Stoke Newington* (1894) 197.
2. *ib.*, 93.
3. VCH, 85.
4. G.E.Cockayne, *Complete Peerage* (ed. Gibbs) (1913), III, 135.
5. Nikolaus Pevsner, *The buildings of England: London except the cities of London and Westminster* (1952), 165.
6. Information kindly provided by the archivist, Christ Church, Oxford.
7. *Dictionary of National Biography*.
8. Thomas Plume, *An account of the life and death of ... John Hacket, late Lord Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry*. Published by Thomas Plume, D.D., 1675, and edited, with large additions and copious notes, by Mackenzie E.C. Walcot (1865), 75.
9. Quotation from Dr Plume's *Life of Bishop Hacket* in Thomas Harwood, *The history and antiquities of the church and city of Lichfield* (1806), 56-7.
10. *ib.* p. 67.
11. See Plume (note 8), preface, xi.
12. William Beresford, *Diocesan histories: Lichfield* (c. 1890), 250-1.
13. *Dictionary of National Biography*.
14. The Hon. Roger North, *The lives of the Right Honourable Francis North, Baron Guilford ...*, (1826), I, 296.
15. VCH, 86.
16. *Victoria History of the Counties of England: Stafford*, XIV (ed. Greenslade) (1990), 61.
17. A copy is at HAD D/F/TYS 47/8.
18. William Robinson, *History and antiquities of the parish of Hackney...* (1842), II, 379-380.
19. Antonia Fraser, *King Charles II* (1979), 283.
20. North, note 14 above.

CURTAIN ROAD: AN EARLY LONDON GASWORKS

Paul Chadwick

Introduction

A site on Hearn Street alongside the railway viaduct (which served Broad Street Station until its closure in 1968) and, until recently, used as a depot for parking and servicing taxis, seems an unlikely place to look for evidence of the early gas industry in Britain. However, when the site came forward for development, a number of studies were undertaken to clarify its archaeological potential, and it soon became apparent that parts of the site played an important role in the technological development of the gas industry in Britain, and formed one of the first gasworks to provide public street lighting in London. This article is drawn from the results of those studies, and serves to illustrate the untapped wealth of information concerning early industrial development available in local history libraries and record offices and, despite a wealth of early map and documentary evidence for the area, the shortcomings in sources used most frequently by historians and archaeologists to trace site histories!

Archaeology

Archaeological interest in the site was first shown in 1996, when the Museum of London

Archaeology Service undertook a desk study that considered the prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post-medieval potential of the site.¹ The study concluded that the site was sufficiently distant from the Roman city, and the Roman road along Bishopsgate and its associated cemetery, for the survival of remains of this date to be unlikely; and, since the site lay in fields during the medieval period, archaeological evidence of this period was also unlikely. However, in

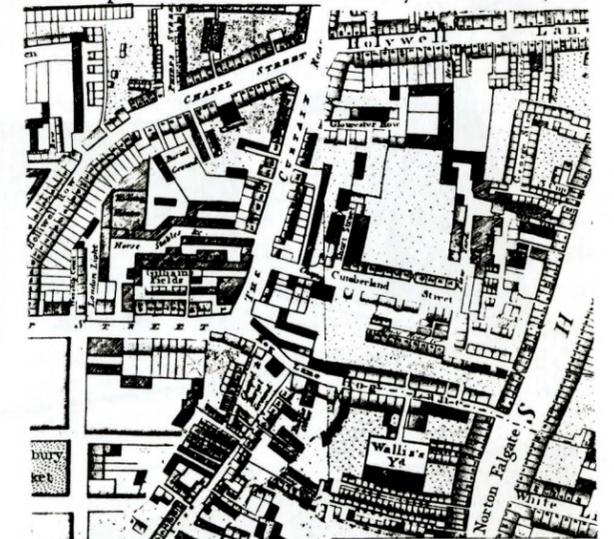


Figure 1: Horwood's map, 1819, showing the vacant site south of Cumberland Street (now Hearn Street)

IN Y VAVLT NEERE TO THIS PLACE LYES Y BODYES OF THOMAS WOOD ESQ.
& SVJANN HIS WIFE, HE WAS BVRVED Y 18TH OF MAY 1649 } AGED } 84 YEARES
& SHEE BVRVED Y 17TH OF OCTOBER 1650 } } 80
THEY HAD IASVE FOVRE SONNS & FOVRE DAUGHTERS: S^r HENRY K. & BA.^r
JOHN CIT OF LONDON THOMAS D. IN DIVIN^y & CHAPLAIN IN ORDENAR^y
TO KING CHARLES Y 1. & KING CHARLES Y 2. WILLIAM ONE OF Y CLARKS
OF HIS MAJ^{ty} SPICERY: IONE DORETHY MARY & ELIZABETH.
ALL GOE VNTO ONE PLACE: ALL ARE OF Y DVST } }
AND ALL TVRNE TO DVST AGAINE. ECCLETES } } 3. CHAPT: V: 20.

The monumental inscription on the Wood family tomb in St-John-at-Hackney

passing, the desk study noted that a gasworks had existed on the site in the early 1800s and that, if well-preserved remains survived, these could be of some interest. The recent studies have therefore sought to provide further evidence for the origins, date, extent and nature of the gasworks.

The early gas industry

The origins of the gas industry can be seen in the coming together of two strands, one technological and one economic: an increasing understanding of chemistry, and a demand for artificial lighting. So that, by the end of the 1790s, a reasonable grasp had been attained of carbon chemistry at a time when there was a new, but rapidly increasing, demand for safe, reliable lighting for factories and the increasing number of urban streets. At first the industry developed in two directions, as private gas plants within factories, and central stations supplying customers through mains.² Private plants, mainly for factories in northern England, were manufactured, over the period from 1805 to 1814, by Boulton and Watt, Samuel Clegg and Josiah Pemberton.

The central station system, supplying customers via street mains, appears to have originated with the flamboyant German entrepreneur, Friederich Winzer (later Frederick Winsor), and it is the latter system and Frederick Winsor that are closely connected with the Curtain Street gasworks. Winzer, as he then was, having observed the production of gas from sawdust in Paris during the late 1790s, came to London in 1803 as the self-appointed champion and inventor of gas. In spite of opposition from Boulton & Watt and others, Winsor, as he became, was instrumental in the formation, in 1812, of the Gas Light and Coke Company, for the supply of gas in London and Westminster. However, his relationship with the other directors was strained, and, following an acrimonious dispute lasting many months, he returned to Paris in 1815.³ Indeed, such were the technical problems of the early industry, and so great the public suspicion and prejudice, that for several years the very future of the GLCC hung in the balance. Its financial performance was little better, and no dividend was paid to shareholders until 1817.⁴

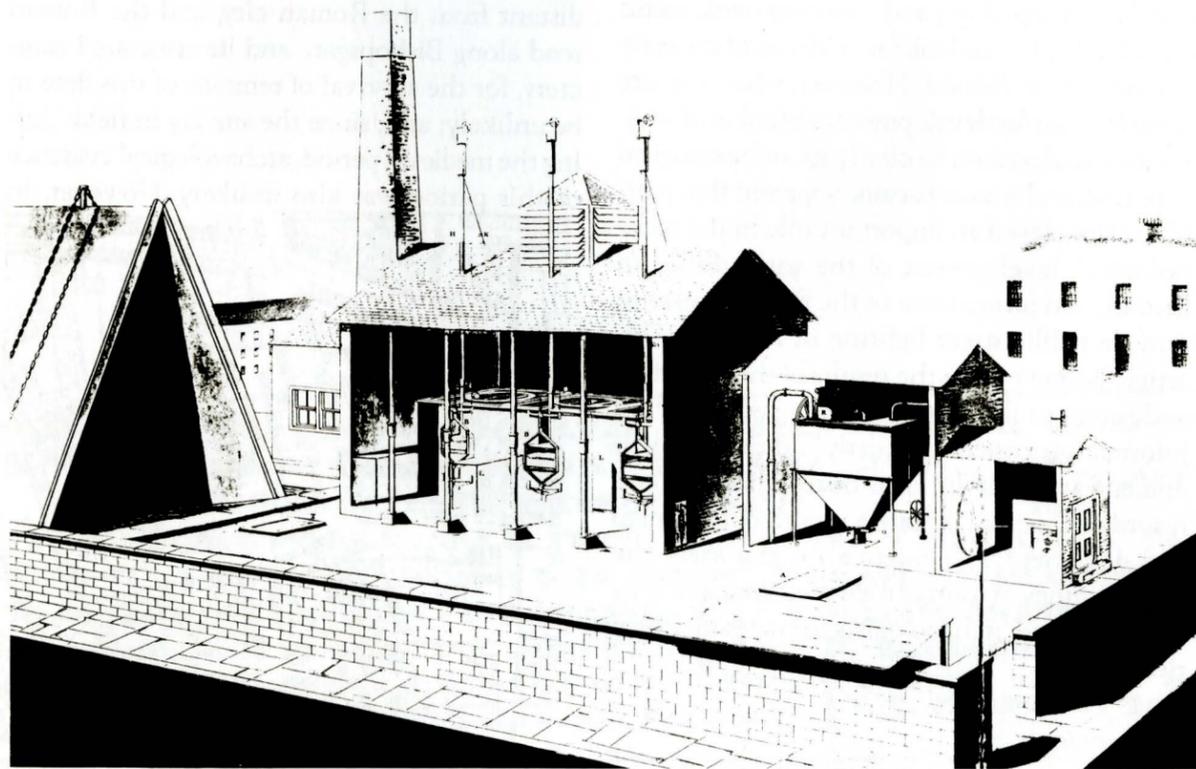


Figure 2: Frederick Accum's illustration of a gasworks, 1820; possibly Curtain Road

Construction at Curtain Road

The Gas Light and Coke Company's first project, commenced in 1812, was the construction of a gasworks, at Great Peter Street/Horseferry Road, to supply gas in Westminster. In the same year a contract for the public lighting of Norton Folgate (now part of Bishopsgate) followed, and the construction of plant and chemical processes on the two projects developed in parallel. With a contract signed, to supply gas to light Norton Folgate, two directors, Fredrick Accum and Joseph Cooper, were entrusted to find a site. However, in the crowded urban area of Shoreditch there were clearly problems finding a suitable location, and the Company appears to have had little choice other than a yard off Curtain Road. From the start, the GLCC appears to have been aware that the site was cramped, and badly placed to receive the coal supplies essential to the whole gas-making process. However, with the site acquired, Accum took charge of the technical plans, and a 'Norton Folgate Committee' was set up within the Company to superintend the works. Accum, an experimental chemist rather than an engineer, appears to have been unsuited for his task, and his supervision, or lack of it, resulted in a catalogue of delays and accidents. For instance, an adjacent property was undermined, and further delays resulted in a surprise inspection. In July 1813, a fellow-director wrote "I beg to suggest whether you had not best cease from digging deeper - it is to be feared the springs rise through the bed of gravel you are now come to - the lower you go, the worse your foundation. It will be like a quick sand".

Teething troubles

Technical problems occurred both at Westminster and at Curtain Road, and in November 1813, with the Curtain Road works still incomplete, the Company were unable to meet their contract to supply gas. Penalty costs were incurred, and in November 1813 Accum resigned. To address these problems, the Company had appointed Samuel Clegg as its chief engineer in December 1812, and following Accum's resignation Clegg took the Curtain Road works in

hand. Although plans and illustrations of contemporary gasworks at the Strand (1812), the Royal Mint (1817) and Westminster (1859) have been located, the original layout of the Curtain Road gasworks is unknown. However, Figure 2 (taken from a book by Fredrick Accum, who seven years prior to its publication had designed the Curtain Road site) shows the elements of a gas works in 1820, and may give a good general idea of the scale, layout and workings of the site. The basic plant and structures required to produce gas included a coal store, coke store, lime shed and a refused lime heap. Production occurred in furnace-heated single-ended horizontal cast iron retorts within a retort house incorporating a chimney. The gas produced rose into a hydraulic main, where hot tar and ammonia was drawn off through a tar-tower into a tar-pit. The gas was then purified through a wet liming plant and cooled by means of a 'worm' in the gas holder water.⁵

Gas production, 1814 -1871

Curtain Road (also known as Norton Folgate) was the smallest of the Gas Light and Coke Company's three gasworks. Figure 1 on page 11 shows the site in 1819. The gasworks and individual structures are not identified, suggesting that this area of Horwood's map was not revised from the 1794-9 edition. Because of their size and location, the works proved expensive to run.⁶ In 1826, and again in 1829, consideration was given to their closure. From 1853 to 1863 they were used in winter only.⁷ Despite this, in a rapidly-changing industry, investment in new technology took place. For instance, in 1831 the wrought-iron retorts were replaced by cast-iron ones. Although the source⁸ is ambiguous, it appears that in 1835 the original single-lift holders (within brick-built gasometer houses) were abandoned, and telescopic holders, with greater capacity, built. At an unknown date during the 1800s,⁹ 155 single-end retorts, nine feet in length, were in use. However, gas production is a noisy, smelly business. As a result of numerous complaints about the works, and a lack of action by the Company, in 1836 the Home Office insisted on considerable alterations to the plant

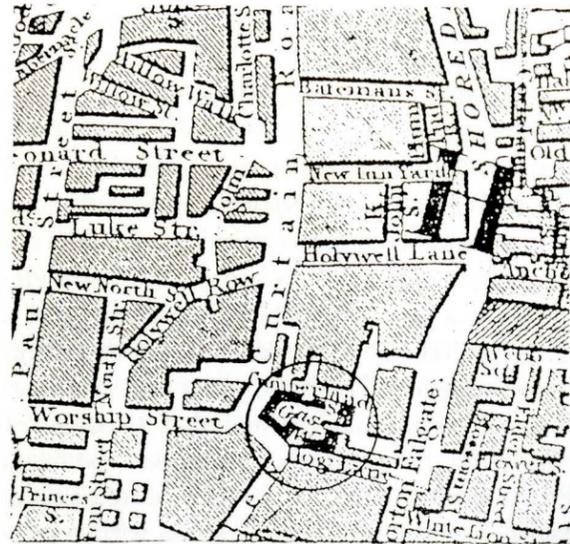


Figure 3: Wylde's map, 1848

and to the operation of the site. The Company's minutes, however, do not reveal details.¹⁰ There were many other advances in gas production technology, for instance, from the 1840s dry lime purification was widely adopted. But many were not adopted at Curtain Road (where the original wet lime technique was employed up to 1862). Figure 3 shows the site in 1848. In 1862 the North London Railway was constructed at high level alongside the works, and rail access was provided. With the problems of coal supply resolved, the works were brought back into full year-round production. Additionally, coal for the Company's gasworks at Brick Lane was unloaded

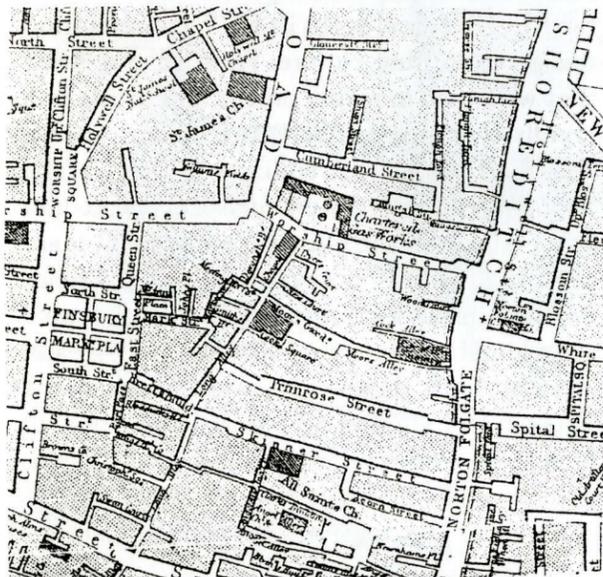


Figure 4: Cassell's Weekly Despatch map, 1862

here and sent on by road.¹¹ Figures 4 and 5 show the site in 1862 (shortly before the construction of the railway viaduct), though cartographic differences suggest that figure 4 was surveyed before that date. Although it is possible to identify six gasholders (figure 5), the use of other structures on the site is unclear.

Closure

The start of production at the GLCC's Beckton works in 1871 led to the immediate closure of the Curtain Road gasworks.¹¹ Figure 6 (taken from the Illustrated London News of October 1871) shows the demolition of the works, and provides a good guide to the scale of buildings on the site by that date. The Curtain Street site was divided into five lots, and sold by auction in May 1872. By then the majority of the site had been cleared, although the sale catalogue¹³ describes a three-storey building at the corner of Curtain Road and Worship Street, along with an engine-house, a shaft (?chimney) 115 feet high, and a well 315 feet deep. The Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25 inch-scale map of 1873¹⁴ shows the site cleared of gaswork buildings, although the corner of Curtain Road and Cumberland Street (now Hearn Street) is occupied by a row of buildings. The site remained unchanged through the 1880s and '90s, when it was in use as a coal depot. The existing buildings on the Worship Street frontage date from

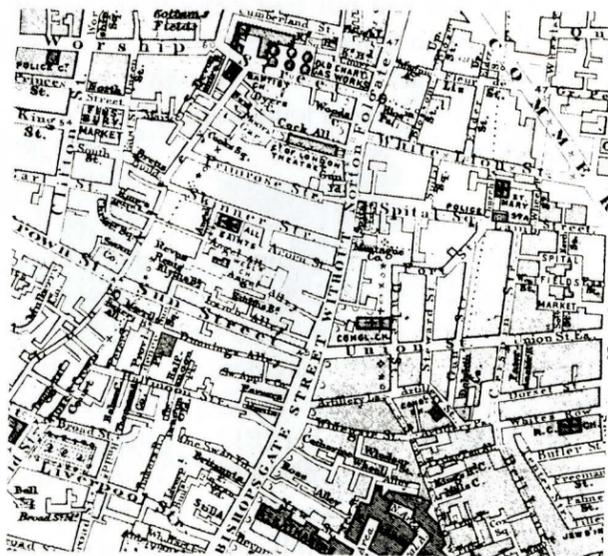


Figure 5: Stanford's Library map, 1862



Figure 6: Demolition of the gasworks in 1871, from the Illustrated London News

this period, and the tracks from the coal depot remain evident to the present day.

Next steps

Cartographic and other sources therefore indicate that the site has considerable potential to reveal the footings of various gaswork buildings and structures, assuming these were not grubbed out in the 1880s site clearance. Currently a site investigation is under way to clarify the extent of ground contamination, in order to establish whether it would be safe for archaeologists to examine and record any surviving features on the site. If ground conditions permit such investigations, it is hoped that a future article will report on their discoveries, and disseminate what other light may as a result be shed on this important, but poorly-understood industry.

Notes

1. Museum of London Archaeology Service: *Hearn Street/Worship Street, London EC2: an Archaeological Assessment* (1996).
2. Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU), Report, 1997, for English Heritage.
3. S. Everard, *The History of the Gas Light and Coke Company 1812-1949* (1949).
4. B. Bracegirdle, *The Archaeology of the Industrial Revolution* (1974).

5. LUAU, above.
6. Everard, above.
7. E. G. Stewart, *Historic Index of Gasworks Past and Present in the area now served by the North Thames Gas Board 1806-1957* (1957).
8. Everard, above.
9. M. Millichip, *Gas Light and Steam: The Gas Works Railways of the North Thames Gas Board* (1994).
10. LMA B/GLCC/15/1, 2.
11. Stewart above.
12. Stewart, above.
13. HAD L/V/C/31.
14. In the Godfrey edition this is found on London sheet 63 (Whitechapel etc.). Other maps consulted can be found at HAD, Guildhall and the LMA.

Other sources

- F. Accum, *Gas Works in London and Other Towns: a description of the process of manufacturing coal gas with elevations, sections and plans of the most improved sorts of the apparatus* (1820).
- Anon., *Gas Light and Coke Company: An Account 1812-1912* (1912)
- D. Chandler, and A. D. Lacey, *The Rise of the Gas Industry in Britain* (1949)
- Z. Colburn, *The Gasworks of London* (1868)
- M. E. Falkus, *The Early Development of the British Gas Industry, 1790-1815* (1997)
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- E. G. Stewart, *Samuel Clegg 1781-1861: his life work and family* (1962); *Supplement to Historic Index of Gasworks* (1970); *Town Gas: Its manufacture and distribution* (1988).
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THE ATHLETICS CAPITAL OF ENGLAND: THE WHITE LION, HACKNEY WICK, 1857-1875

Warren Roe

'Pedestrianism'

In the early Victorian period, beyond the few universities and public schools, athletics was an entirely professional sport. The runners and walkers who participated in professional matches were known as pedestrians, and the sport as pedestrianism.

It was a sport organised predominantly from public houses, the most famous in London including the Spotted Dog in the Strand, managed by Thomas Wilson, and the Proud Peacock in Covent Garden, managed by Jesse Smith. Matches were generally made between two men as a result of a challenge for a monetary stake. 'Articles of agreement' would be signed, and the publican would frequently act as stakeholder and referee.

Events were held mainly on the turnpike roads, where reasonably accurate measurement was available between the milestones. The police, however, eventually prevented use of public highways, where pedestrian matches frequently attracted large and disorderly crowds. During the late 1840s and the 1850s, in the metropolis and major industrial cities, dozens of running paths (= tracks) were established, attached to public houses, pleasure gardens and cricket grounds.

Unfortunately many of these were short-lived, closing for a variety of reasons. By 1857 virtually the only track remaining in London was Robert Sadler's New Surrey Pedestrian Ground, opened in 1853, adjoining the Wellington inn in Garratt Lane, Wandsworth.

The Baums of Hackney Wick

Fortunately the decline began to reverse when in December 1857 James Baum, the proprietor of the White Lion public house in Wick Lane, created a new venue at Hackney Wick in his one acre of grounds. His father John Baum, previously landlord of the King's Head in Fetter Lane, had been proprietor of the White Lion from around 1825 until his death in 1854, and had already developed a reputation for managing a sporting establishment, promoting (among other things) pugilist contests and horse-racing. He set up a boxing ring on land adjacent to the pub, and organised the unpretentious 'Victoria Park Races' in the nearby Park in the 1840s, with his son James acting as steward.

The gravel running path constructed by James in the gardens of the White Lion was dictated by the shape and features of the ground. It was a pear-shaped oval of 260 yards (6.75 laps to the

mile). The path did not provide an ideal view for spectators, as much of the course was lined on both sides by trees, and the crowds at the early meetings tended to congregate in the middle of the ground, or on the railway embankment bordering the slightly uphill first straight. At the top of the course there was the awkward 'pavilion turn', which local pedestrians soon learnt to negotiate to their advantage before returning to the start; and the much tighter turn where the White Lion itself was situated.

Mondays and holidays at Hackney Wick

At this time the area surrounding Hackney Wick was still fairly rural, with Hackney marshes to the north, and market gardens and Victoria Park, first used in 1846, to the south. Hackney Wick station, as it was then known, on the North London Railway, opened in 1856, overlooking the running grounds. It gave easy access from Fenchurch Street and Camden Town for just sixpence return.¹

The opening meeting at the White Lion was announced, without much fanfare, to take place on 28 December 1857. It attracted 37 pedestrians, competing in four heats and final of a quarter-mile handicap, for a silver cup valued at 14 guineas. The winner, Bill Price from Mile End, who was soon to take over as manager of the ground, elected to take the monetary value of the cup, which was competed for again two weeks later.

As with all major events at the ground, the meeting was held on a Monday, starting at half-past two in the afternoon, with the inevitable result that the final race was run in the dark! Mondays were traditionally the most popular day for pedestrianism in England, with Saturday being a working day for the majority and Sunday a 'day of rest'.

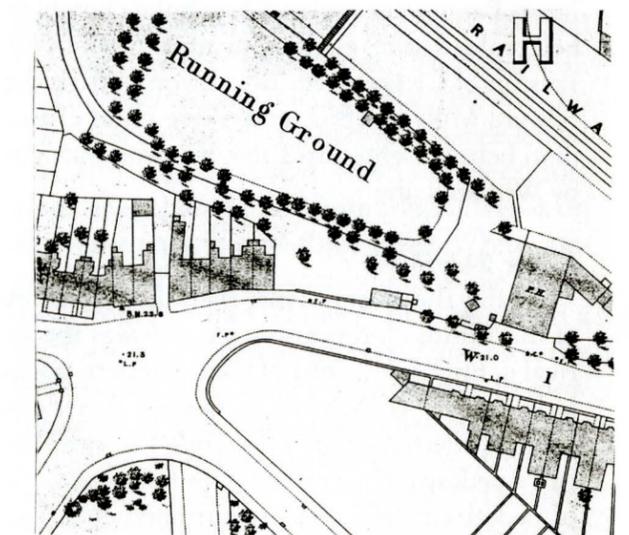
From this tentative start, virtually every top, middle and long distance pedestrian in the UK would run at Hackney Wick in the decade that followed, in a series of races which produced a number of world records. From the very early days James Baum made his Bank Holiday meetings special, providing wrestling and sometimes boxing alongside the pedestrian events, with the evenings ending with music and fireworks.

The main event for the first such meeting at Easter 1858 was announced as 'The Great All England 500 yards Handicap' with a first prize of £10, and 40 athletes accepting their handicaps. The running programme was augmented by Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling.² At Whitsuntide, wrestling again supplemented the running on both days, this time Devon and Cornwall style.³ The prize money on offer attracted many of the 'crack' wrestlers from the south. The Eastern Counties Railway Company Band provided musical entertainment, and several hundred couples made use of the wooden dance platform. This meeting attracted the biggest crowd so far: around 3,000 persons.

The year ended with what was to become a traditional, and very successful, Christmas meeting, held over two days commencing on Boxing Day.

Competition for the Baum cup and belts

During the latter part of 1858 and the first half of 1859, James Baum was successful in attracting many of the top long distance men in the metropolis to Hackney for matches, and it was decided that it was time to introduce a champions' challenge cup, to be competed for on the grounds. James Baum commissioned J. Street to manufacture the cup. It was engraved 'The Ten Mile Champion Cup, given by J. C. Baum, Metropolitan Running Grounds, Victoria Park, Hackney, 11th July 1859' and valued at 30 guin-



Wick Lane, the running ground and White Lion, 1870

eas. The main conditions applying to the championship cup were -

The winner of the cup to hold himself in readiness to run any one who may challenge him through the columns of *Bell's Life*, at six weeks notice, for £25 a side. In case of a match being made, the holder of the cup to hand it over to Baum by 12 o'clock on the day of the race. The winner of the cup not to be allowed to take it away until he has deposited the sum of £15, and given a guarantee for its production in the event of a match being made before the expiration of eighteen months.

These conditions were the basis for other challenge trophies introduced throughout the country in the years that followed. Charles Cooke of Marylebone won the first race for the cup, competition for which was to last ten years before anyone became the outright holder. Holders of the cup, with their popular nicknames, included Edward Mills ('Young England' of Bethnal Green) who in 1864 held the world record for one mile; James Pudney from Mile End, the English ten mile champion in the 1850s, and William Lang ('The Crowcatcher' from Middlesbrough) who broke the world one mile record in 1865 with a time of 4 minutes 17¹/₄ seconds.

The most famous holder, however was John White ('The Gateshead Clipper'), who broke the world record for six miles at Hackney Wick in 1863 with a time of 29 minutes 50 seconds. This record was to last nearly 60 years, until broken by the famous Finnish runner, Paavo Nurmi, in 1921. White is probably one of the least known of history's great long distance runners.

Among other champion trophies donated by James Baum were a splendid six miles champion belt, valued at 50 guineas, manufactured by W. Preston of Clerkenwell. It was won outright by Edward Mills in 1862, and a five miles champion belt, presented in 1863, was won outright by William Lang.

Enter 'Deerfoot'

Possibly the most notable event in the history of the White Lion running grounds was the arrival in England in 1861 of Louis Bennett, popularly known as Deerfoot, a famous American Indian pedestrian from New York. George Martin, a pedestrian friend of James Baum and one of pedestrianism's greatest entrepreneurs, had visited America earlier in the year with a small



Deerfoot, pictured in 1862

group of his runners, including John White. It was financially a very rewarding trip, and though Deerfoot had lost to White, George Martin saw the possibilities of using the American for some grand promotions in England, and arranged for his passage across the Atlantic. A short letter in *Sporting Life* announced his imminent arrival.

Sir, - Red Jacket, better known as Deerfoot, the Seneca Indian, of Cattaraugus, who intends to visit England for the purpose of testing his ability for speed and endurance against the English pedestrians, will sail for England on the 27th instant, by the steamship City of Washington, and will call at your office as soon as convenient after his arrival. He has recommendations to J. McDonald, the trainer of Heenan. It is his intention to run for the champions' belts from one mile to ten, and will be prepared to make the races about the 15th August.

I remain, yours respectfully,

Wm. Miller, for RED JACKET
New York, July 19th, 1861.⁴

The local pedestrian Edward Mills was the first to take up the challenge.

Sir, - Seeing a letter in your last Wednesday's edition from Red Jacket, alias Deerfoot, the Seneca Indian, who intends visiting England to compete with our pedestrians, I beg to inform him I will make a match for £25 or £50 a side, to run him from

one mile to five; or if he wishes to contend for the champion's belt, I will run him for his own sum and the six miles belt, which Rowan has forfeited to me; and as his first visit will be to your office, if he will leave a deposit at the same time, I will cover it, and send articles as soon as possible, so that he can ensure a match as soon as he wishes.

I remain yours respectfully,

Edward Mills,
Hackney Wick.
August 9th.

This same day, Deerfoot called at the offices of *Sporting Life* with the information that he had left a deposit in the hands of *Bell's Life*, in accordance with the conditions of the articles, to run the holder of the six miles' champion belt, and also for the ten miles' champion cup. He was described as -

a fine specimen of the sons of the forest, standing 5' 11¹/₂" in height, and to all appearance weighing about 11 stone'. (This compared with the average English pedestrian's height of under 5 feet 6 inches and weight of only 7 or 8 stone.) His countenance is definitely Indian, of a deep copper colour, sharp ... features, straight black hair, piercing black eyes, and walks with an easy gliding step and looks altogether like going [*pedestrians were often described in terms more suited to a race horse*]. He, when he called upon us, was dressed in full Indian costume - buffalo robe, etc. We should advise our clippers to look well to their laurels, as he means business and nothing else.

Deerfoot's first race in England was in answer to Mills's offer to contend for the six miles champion belt for £25 a side and a share of the gate money. Deerfoot took his first look at Hackney Wick one week before the big race, on the occasion of a ten mile handicap between John Brighton, John Levett and Sam Barker, and expressed his astonishment at the smallness of the track: in America he was used to tracks up to a mile round.

The big races

Jack MacDonald became Deerfoot's business manager. He arranged as much publicity as possible, with personal appearances and the circulation of unsubstantiated stories about Deerfoot's life style, to create as much interest as possible before the big race to be held on September 9th at 6 o'clock.

As early as 3 o'clock, however, large crowds thronged Fenchurch Street Station, where the arrangements at the booking office were quite inadequate for the occasion. The crowd, esti-

mated at some 4,000, was still arriving after the start, and the police had their work cut out keeping a path for the runners. MacDonald paraded Deerfoot, wearing a wolfskin cape, around the ground before dropping the garment from his shoulders to reveal an imposing figure 'stripped to the buff' with a slight red apron round his waist and a band round his head with one eagle feather. Mills, by contrast, was dressed in long-sleeved vest, tights and scarlet shorts.

The race was run in a way not normally seen on English tracks as Deerfoot, urged on by Harry Reed, continually made surges that disturbed Mills's rhythm. Mills, however, was not to be denied, and although because of injury his preparation had not been as good as he would have wished, he still came home 20 yards ahead, to retain his title. The crowd were delighted with the performance of the American, and it was obvious to the pedestrian connoisseur that with a little more training and loss of weight he was going to be a contender to be reckoned with.

Deerfoot's next race at Hackney was to be two weeks later, for the ten miles champion cup surrendered by the holder James Pudney, who did not wish to compete against the younger, up-and-coming stars. For this race Deerfoot was matched against three of the England's top pedestrians, Edward Mills, John Brighton ('The Norwich Milkboy,' holder of the four miles belt), and John White. The three runners added £10 each in a sweepstake in addition to the £20 offered by Baum, the winner to receive £50 and the cup. Another large crowd was anticipated, and in order to keep it to a manageable size, the price of entry was increased to an unprecedented one shilling. A crowd of 4,000 spectators watched spellbound as White and Mills took on the American, but at three miles White succumbed. Mills tried everything possible to get away from Deerfoot, but each time he gained a few yards his opponent recovered and took the lead. At six miles Mills was beginning to show the strain of these continual surges, and at eight and a half miles had run himself out, having to be helped off the track by his friends. Deerfoot went on to finish, and there was no doubt that Deerfoot was something special.

A seedy environment

The popularity of Deerfoot brought many to Hackney who had not previously witnessed pedestrianism, and the following letter in *Sporting Life* under the heading 'Revival of Pedestrianism' is interesting for its description of Hackney Wick by someone not used to the relatively seedy environment of professional running.

Sir, - Referring to some remarks recently made by you upon the subject of one of the most manly of our pastimes, and what should be one of our leading national sports - viz., foot racing, I am led to address you to uphold not only that which you so ably advance, but if possible, to pave the way to a regulation of this truly noble recreation. The other day I attended for the first time in my life, a pedestrian race - the late one between Deerfoot, White and Mills for the so called ten mile championship, at a place known as the White Lion, Hackney Wick. In my simplicity I expected to see something after the model of a public race-course on a reduced scale. Judge of my surprise then, upon reaching this much talked-of place, to find the remains of what was once, I presume, a public tea garden, in the last state of decay. A ragged, uneven, dingy grass plot in the centre (which was permitted knock 'em-downs, to the annoyance and danger of the major portion of the public), encompassed by a wretched dirty walk (about five feet wide), bordered on either side by faded willow trees, here and there a frowsy shrub, broken posts and rails, and tumble-down tables, forming altogether the debris, or rather, I should say, the wreck of a place, as uninviting to the eye, as inconvenient to the person, and about the last, I should say, in which a race of the kind I saw should have been held. Round, and round, and round went the pedestrians - it takes six times round to make a mile, I believe - until it made me giddy to look at them, added to which, the public were allowed to congregate on the said path (course I cannot call it), so that the competitors had the appearance of forcing their way through a disorderly mob, while dodging between broken posts, decayed willow stumps, and other obstructions. Racing indeed; call it scrambling and scuffling along amid interruption, if you will. It is the first foot race to which I and my companions ever went; and if this be the best racecourse that London affords for this manly sport, it will be the last. Now, Editor, having had my grumble, let us see if this state of things can be remedied. Since this child of the prairie - this Deerfoot is exciting so much attention, and causing thousands to attend foot races who never saw a man run before, cannot something be done towards establishing a metropolitan racecourse where these manly and healthy exercises can be encouraged and take place to advantage? I suggest the ground be secured...

Yours very truly,
'FORM'.

The editor commented:

Baum is certainly labouring under the disadvantage of a small ground, and, from the fact of the great sewer having turned the old brook which ran through them,⁵ they naturally look in an unfinished state; but we know that Baum has, at great expense, secured land to enlarge the race-ground, and he promises that next spring it shall be second to none; nevertheless, however small the ground and bad the accommodation maybe pedestri-

ans will run where the advertised money is given, and where straightforward hands on the part of the management has always been the order of the day. This conduct accounts for the extraordinary number of entries for the different handicaps as well as the overflowing crowds to witness them. - Ed. S.L.

These comments spurred Baum into action. He set about improving matters at the Hackney Wick running grounds under the supervision of Bill Price, knowing full well that when Deerfoot next appeared they would very likely have to cater for up to 10,000 spectators. The fence round the ground was set back some yards, and the entire course railed in. The railway embankment was enclosed to form an immense grandstand, and all the boxes on which spectators stood on the left-hand side of the ground were removed. The centre ground was also railed in, to keep the spectators out, thus enabling everyone to have a view of the whole race from start to finish. Many ladies had expressed a wish to attend, so the pedestrians were to run in guernseys and long drawers; and reserved seats were made available in a comfortable, enclosed area, for an extra charge.

Deerfoot defends his title

Deerfoot returned to Hackney to defend his ten miles championship on November 25th, against Sam Barker, 'The Billingsgate Boy'.

The *Sporting Life* described the scene.

It is thought some 10,000 people attended the ground notwithstanding the cold cheerless weather. The fence around the ground had been thrown back some yards, and the entire course was railed-in. The railway embankment, which forms a portion of the grounds, had been turned to rare account, and formed an immense grand stand, which was so densely occupied that it could be likened unto nothing during the race but the Grand Stand at Epsom on the Derby Day. Although the main bulk of the visitors came by the totally inadequate, for such numbers, 'iron road,' the 'macadamised way' had also been enormously patronised and in front of the house was a great nest of vehicles of every description, but chiefly 'hansoms' and 'showfuls.'⁶ For hours the rush for admission was terrific, and it required a strong body of ticket takers and police to prevent the intrusion of the crowds en masse. Even after the men had been started thousands continued to arrive, and many hundreds of people returned to town rather than brave a battle with the roughs. Every nook and crevice from which a glimpse of the contest could be obtained was occupied, and no little merriment was caused by the repeated break downs of lottery platforms, which people had contrived to enable them to see over the heads of those in front of them. The double rows of trees around the course were soon stormed, and men and boys clung to the branches and boughs, which looked anything but calculated to bear the weight.

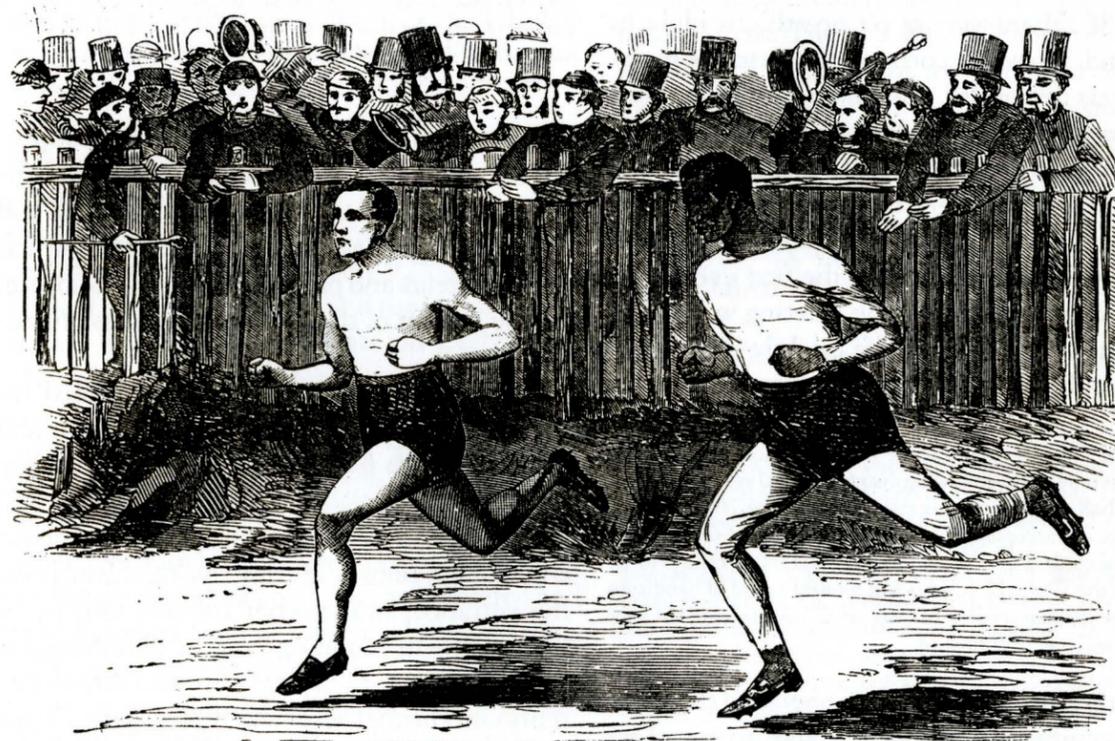
As to the race itself, as each contestant tried to assert himself, the lead changed hands continuously until seven miles. At this point Barker staggered from the exertions he had made, looking deathly pale, but battled on and was still in the lead at nine miles. Shortly after, however, he fell exhausted to the ground, and was assisted off by several friends.

Deerfoot ran the remaining distance through a thin track made for him by the crowd, and on concluding his task, leapt in the air with a wild shriek of victory. He was surrounded by the mob; grasping him by the hand, and patting him on the back 'with all that generous enthusiasm which Englishmen bestow upon those who have distinguished themselves in our national sports'. Before the great body of spectators dispersed there was a great roar for Deerfoot. He appeared at the window of the White Lion, where the massive silver cup had stood for inspection throughout the afternoon, and, grasping the prize, flourished it victoriously above his head with a shrill war-whoop. There was a loud cheer raised for Barker, whose display of gameness had never been excelled, but the brave fellow was

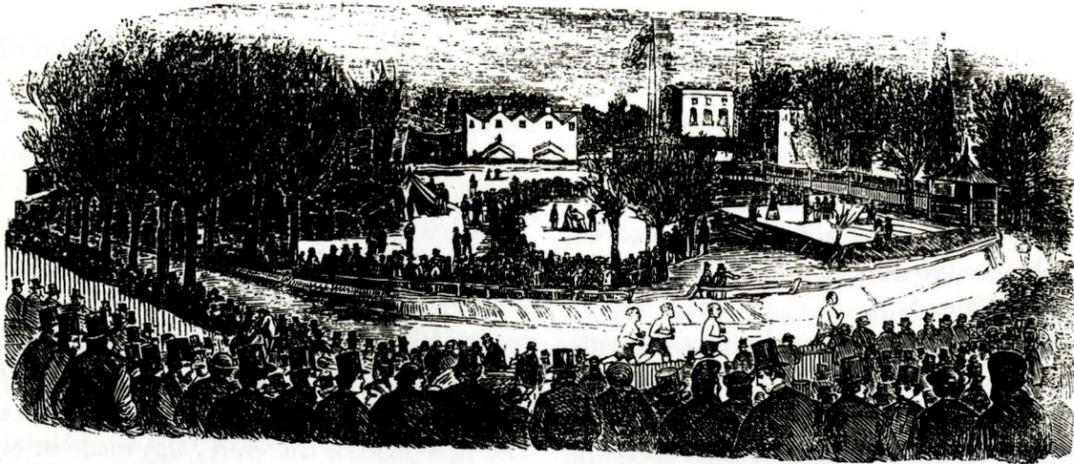
unable to leave his sofa, and indeed it was some time before he was sufficiently recovered to stand the fatigue of dressing.

The eight-mile contest

There was one last great race to be run at Hackney Wick before the end of 1861, and that was to take place on 26th December. The rivalry between Mills and Deerfoot was enormous, and in their two most important encounters Mills had been victorious at six miles and Deerfoot at ten. The new match, therefore, was made at eight miles, for the high stakes of £100 a side. The probable closeness of the outcome in a fairly-run race led to more betting than usual, and in the London clubs wagers as high as £4,000 were rumoured. For this race Mills, attended by Barker, was dressed in a white tunic with black short drawers over the top, while Deerfoot, attended by Lang, wore the same English costume but with crimson drawers. Mills adopted different tactics for this race, allowing Deerfoot to do most of the leading but making sure he put him under pressure the whole time. The first time Deerfoot got away was around five miles, when



The 8-mile race between Deerfoot and Mills, Boxing Day 1862



The White Lion grounds on Good Friday, 1862

Mills's shoe burst open, compelling him to run on his heel to keep the shoe from slipping off. Eventually he discarded the shoe, and continued the battle as if nothing had happened. The race was not settled until the last straight as each shouldered into the lead at turns to cross the line together. Much to Mills's dismay a dead heat was declared. Mills, who thought he had won, immediately challenged Deerfoot to race again on the same terms.

'Gentlemen amateurs'

In 1862 there were as yet no athletic clubs in England. However, correspondents to the sporting press demanded that there should be competition made available for amateurs not involved with universities and public schools. Bill Price, manager of the Hackney Wick running ground, was the first to answer this need, and can lay claim to promoting the first ever 'open meeting' for amateurs. The meeting was advertised in the *Sporting Life* on July 9th, when William Price

offered four silver cups to be contended for by gentlemen amateurs only, at the following distances: - 100 yards, quarter of a mile, half a mile, and one mile to take place 26th July. Entrance 5s. and acceptance, 2s. 6d., gentlemen to be fairly handicapped according to their previous performances. Entries to W. Price at the White Lion, who will forward a card of handicaps to any gentleman sending his address, as the names of the gentlemen will not be published.

In athletic circles the view prevailed that gentlemen amateurs would not like to see their names associated with such an event, particu-

larly as betting was in evidence. Many amateurs used pseudonyms.

The races took place on Saturday, July 26th with 19 entries, a reasonable turnout for such a daring venture. Among the entries was Walter Chinnery, a founder member of the first amateur athletic club (called the Mincing Lane Athletic Club), who described Hackney Wick in *The 'House' on Sport* (1898):

a small ground about 260 yards round with awkward turns. The whole place had a decayed and melancholy appearance, and was practically like an untidy tea garden with a running path (as it were by chance) in the midst. In spite of the disadvantages of the ground and its turns some splendid performances were done upon it.

James Baum was also a bit of a philanthropist, always keen to promote events that would benefit the poor and under-privileged. At the end of January 1863 he organised a meeting in which both amateurs and professionals could compete, for the benefit of the distressed workers of Lancashire.

In the same year James Baum expanded his activities with the purchase of the Crown and Anchor booths from the estate of the late Sam Alger. These included a refreshment tent 120 feet long by 50 feet wide with a bar, tables, chairs and illuminations, and attractive signboards over the entrance; and another 160 feet long by 50 feet wide with dancing boards, illuminations, counters, flags, etc.⁷ There were also three other tents with further seats and tables. James Baum took the booths to both the Barnet and Croydon Fairs that year, and they were used for many

years at race meetings, pleasure and other fairs. At Barnet he advertised refreshment of the best quality at moderate prices with hot joints from 11 a.m. and at Croydon as providing unheard-of-before amusements and accommodation. The splendid dancing-saloon was open until dusk,

to allow the lovers of Terpsichore of all classes to enjoy the 'merry and joyous dance' and 'music's soft measure.' Hackney Wick will be jubilant at Croydon, and the noble White Lion will wag his tail in hearty welcome to all at the renowned Crown and Anchor.⁸

Another attraction to appear at Hackney Wick for the first time in 1863 was pole-vaulting, when Robert Musgrave from Keswick, the British record holder at 10 feet 8 inches, competed at James Baum's Whitsuntide meeting. Musgrave won easily, clearing a height of 9 feet 8 inches, the maximum height at which the posts could be set!

Deerfoot's farewell

Deerfoot's last appearance in England was to be at Hackney Wick on May 11 1863, when James Baum commissioned a special ten miles champion belt, valued at 50 guineas, for a match against the English champions. The belt was given to decide the moot point as to whether Deerfoot was the best ten miles runner.

The area around the ground was buzzing from early in the day, with spectators anxious for a glimpse of the competitors before placing their wagers. It was a day of very heavy betting. The crowd eventually numbered 9,000, and the White Lion, Victoria Park and the surroundings looked like 'Kennington Gate on Derby Day.' The odds, as the competitors lined up, were evens on Lang, 7 to 4 against White, 5 to 2 against Deerfoot, and 8 to 1 against Barker, Richards and Andrews. Mills, who had run Deerfoot close at Hackney Wick in January (when Deerfoot broke the world record and Mills the British record for one hour), was entered and on the ground, but not sufficiently well to start.

The race was fast and at three miles, reached in an unprecedented 14 minutes 36 seconds, John White broke his own British record by 14 seconds. Deerfoot could not stand the pace, and pulled out while White forged ahead, four miles

in 19 minutes 35 seconds, five miles in 24 minutes 40 seconds (all new best recorded times) then at six miles a truly great time of 29 minutes 50 seconds, fourteen seconds inside the British record. White's winning time, easing down in the last couple of miles, was 52 minutes 14 seconds: he had proved himself that day to be 'the greatest performer ever known'. There is little doubt that he could have run ten miles in 50 minutes if he had wished. The race was one of the greatest ever; the three mile record held until 1880, and the six mile record until 1936!

Decay and decline

As the 1860s progressed, James Baum's interest in maintaining the pre-eminence of Hackney Wick as a pedestrian centre seemed to wane. In the early part of 1864 he was pre-occupied with attending the various proceedings to have his victualler's license re-instated. It was not until the end of March that the objections of local residents (to the crowds, and very likely to the betting) were over-turned.

The public's attention was attracted by records being set at shorter distance of one mile on tracks in Manchester - much more suitable for running record times. The top men still appeared occasionally to challenge for the ten miles cup, and matters revived when two further American Indians, Steeprock in 1864, then Daillebout in 1870, attracted crowds in their thousands. By the beginning of 1866 the running grounds at Hackney Wick were at a low ebb. The *Sporting Life* commented

Hackney Wick - alas! what a falling off! Time was when the announcement of a race between two good men would draw thousands of spectators and speculators to the above rendezvous; but now how changed! W. Richards (the Welshman) and W. Lang, who some short time back ran a mile (a dead-heat) at Manchester in the shortest time on record (4 min. 17¹/₄ sec.), had on Monday last to contend for, it was said, £25 aside, in a race, distance one mile. The energetic M. C., W. Price, had done all that lay in his power to make such arrangements that would give satisfaction to all who attended to witness the contest, but from the supineness of the proprietor the place has been allowed to fall into such a state of decay that it is enough to give one the horrors to look at it. The once vaunted monster dancing platform is a mere mass of rotten wood; the pagoda, whose turn has oft been mentioned as having been a 'turning point' in many a spin, seems now to be only waiting some friendly blast to lay it low; the very rails even, that separate the so-called reserved seats from the running track, are humbly bowing their

heads at such an acute angle that the slightest pressure must inevitably bring them down; so that, altogether, the whole wears such a woebegone aspect as to plainly betoken that the once famed Hackney Wick must soon be numbered among the things that have been.⁹

December 30 1868 brought one of the final blows to the ambitions of Hackney Wick, when James Baum died quite suddenly, at the age of 47.

Baum's funeral was attended by 400-500 spectators consisting of friends and neighbours, and those who had benefited by his bounty. The presence of the upper classes was conspicuous by their absence, but working men and women who were benefited and poor neighbours who he had served, and made the 'tablesmoke' often, came to pay respects in his memory. James Collins Baum supported the various charities with no niggard hand in his own parish and those adjoining; the rector of Hackney and vicar of Homerton will testify; while his support for the Licensed Victuallers Schools, the Asylum, and other charities are well known. These things should be remembered but are not; the good deeds will be forgotten, his faults will only be remembered, except by those who knew him as a kind friend and good neighbour. Baum was interred in the family vault where lay his father, mother and others. He was borne to his grave from the little church by eight men, the massive coffin being of immense size, for he was a man large in stature. There were two mourning coaches containing his surviving brother, Joseph Baum and Bernard his brother-in-law (married to his sister Elizabeth) W. Price, with whom Baum was associated with many years, was on the ground, having come especially from Manchester;



James Baum

but as no time or place of sepulchre had been mentioned many were absent who would otherwise have been present, including sportsmen of every degree. There were those there who knew his worth.¹⁰

James's eldest brother John was not at the funeral; 1869 was the year he took over management of the famous (and later infamous) Cremorne pleasure gardens in Chelsea, where he remained as the impresario until the grounds closure in 1877.

The management of the Hackney grounds was taken over first by John Cole, and then by Dick Lewis, a noted pedestrian entrepreneur who lived in Park Street, a few yards from the White Lion. James Baum's property was put up for auction. As well as the White Lion Public House, stables and running grounds, his assets included the Alger booths and a wealth of other property and land held for rental and investment. There were 9 houses in Park Street; 11 cottages in Wick Lane (6 known as Baum's Cottages and 5 as Deerfoot Cottages); 13 houses in Cowdry Street of which 7 were still being built; and building land in Park Street, Cowdry Street and Wick Lane. At the auction there were no bids for the White Lion and grounds, but the other properties, valued in excess of the not inconsiderable sum of £2,500, were nearly all sold on the day.

The White Lion and running grounds were sold shortly afterwards by private treaty to W. Parnell, proprietor of the Fish and Ring public house in White Horse Lane, Stepney. Parnell wasted no time in re-employing Bill Price as landlord of the White Lion and as manager of the grounds, which were officially re-opened in time for the Whitsuntide sports. The announcement of the opening appeared in flourishing terms:

As well as pedestrianism there will be all the other old English sports, for which the White Lion, Hackney Wick has been so celebrated. Brass and quadrille bands will be in attendance. Alger's grand Crown and Anchor booth will be erected. There will be dancing on the large platform. The grounds will be illuminated with thousands of variegated lamps. The trees are in full bloom; so old Hackney Wick will again appear in real holiday attire. Trains every seven minutes from Fenchurch Street, Broad Street, and all stations on the North London Railway. Parnell has great pleasure in announcing that the valuable services of the old and respected manager have been secured, so the whole sports will be under the superintendance of William Price. Admission, 6d.

A final record

In November 1869, 3,000 spectators watched as George Hazael, originally from Whitechapel, won the ten miles cup in a championship record time. The last time a British record was set at Hackney Wick was in December 1869. This time it was for walking, always an important part of events at the track. It was announced that George Davison from Hoxton, considered the British walking champion, would attempt to walk 21 miles in three hours, in an effort to erase Charles Westhall's long-standing record.

Davison could not have picked a more difficult venue at which to undertake such a feat, having to walk 142 laps and 40 yards over a very uneven surface. Davison came to the line confident and in fine fettle, accompanied by Bill Price and J. Gregory, his trainer, who was to run the whole distance with the champion and whose judicious guidance made a great contribution to the success of his principal. Davison stopped only once during the walk, for tea and dry toast at 14 miles, and the great feat was accomplished with a new record time of 2 hours 53 minutes 34 seconds, breaking the British record for seven miles on the way in 54 minutes 10 seconds. One might venture to say that Hackney Wick was once again the middle- and long-distance capital of England.

No accomplishments elsewhere in the country in 1869 stood up to the performances of George Hazael and George Davison at the White Lion grounds. Unfortunately, however, the crowds diminished during 1870 and 1871, and the last meeting, a benefit for William Price in February 1872, attracted only 500 spectators. The following month William Parnell, the proprietor, acquired the Prince of Wales ground in Bow, and transferred all his attentions to this new venue.

The White Lion had another short lease of life in 1875 when the then owner, J. Elves, installed Edward Golder as manager of the grounds in an endeavour to revive pedestrianism. The venture was short lived, however, and the land was sold for the development of Bartripp Street.

Notes

1. The station was moved about 300 yards to the east in the late 1860s.
2. In Cumberland and Westmorland the combatants wore long-sleeved guernseys and stockings but no shoes. The object was to wrestle the opponent to thre ground using various holds. (*Cassell's Book of Sports and Pastimes*, 1896)
3. In Devon and Cornwall the contest was rougher, as boots were worn and used. A short strong jacket would be worn. (ib.)
4. 7 August 1861.
5. A reference to the high level sewer constructed by the Metropolitan Board of Works, into which the Hackney Brook was incorporated c. 1860. See F. Sheppard, *London 1808-70: the Infernal Wen* (1971), 283.
6. 'Showful': a cab similar to that patented by J. A. Hansom in 1834, but infringing his patent. 'Shoful' was slang for counterfeit (OED).
7. HAD M3552.
8. *Sporting Life* reported: 'Alger's was this year in its old spot, and under the superintendance of Mr. J. C. Baum, the enterprising proprietor of Hackney Wick pedestrian grounds, dancing on peculiar principles was carried forward with unflagging spirit, and light fantastic toe (by the way, we think the generality of the toes belonged to poor feet anything but 'light') swept in the mazy waltz. Alger's was, however, the promenade or lounge of the young Croydoners, or the Surrey men, who amused themselves with chaffing their companions, and 'guying' the alcoholic incapables'.
9. 17 January 1866.
10. 9 January 1869.

Principal sources

- Sporting Life* 1859-1875
Bell's Life in London 1844, 1857-1859
Illustrated Sporting News 1862-1869

BRETTS OF HOMERTON: A CASE STUDY IN DETECTION

Donald Brett
David Mander

The archivists' tale

It is sometimes the case that the detective work of a dedicated family historian can unearth local topographical treasures, or that the research of the local historian can bring to light lost family details. In both cases the sense of being part of a detective story grows on the researchers, and this is certainly so in the case of the Brett family and their long association with Homerton. Here we attempt to provide the different perspectives of the two elements of research in a single article. The role of the researcher/archivist in the tale was taken by staff at Hackney Archives Department. In his book *Hackney Homerton and Dalston in Old Photographs* (1996), David Mander included a photograph (opposite) of a painting of part of the range of buildings including the Plough public house - the group of late medieval timber-framed buildings on the north side of Homerton High Street, opposite the junction with Ponsford Street. The copy had been made in the early 1960s, and donated to the local collection at Mare Street library.¹ The back of the photograph indicated the owner of the original, Betty Brett, of Buntingford in Hertfordshire.

Fortuitously, Philip Plumb, a long standing friend of HAD, and contributor to Hackney

History, is a Buntingford resident. A 'phone call established that the lady in question was still alive, but that the location of the picture was not certain. In the event permission to use the existing copy was established, and there the matter rested for a while. Philip Plumb is a patient and dedicated local historian, and eventually he was able to establish the whereabouts of the painting - and gave the first inkling that there was more material, including a picture of a mysterious mill at Homerton. Betty Brett had become Betty Fiddaman, and the picture and other source material were with her son in another part of Hertfordshire.

Yes, he was willing to help, and let the archives staff see the family material, but as he was a farmer, we were to wait until the harvest was done before getting in touch. In the event it was not until the late autumn of 2000 that David Mander and Martin Taylor were able to make the trip out to a farm near Hemel Hempstead, where Bob Fiddaman was most hospitable, taking time out from a busy day to lay out a fine range of family photographs together with the original painting, and a glass negative copy of an engraving of the Homerton steam mill (page 28). Both archivists were puzzled, as neither

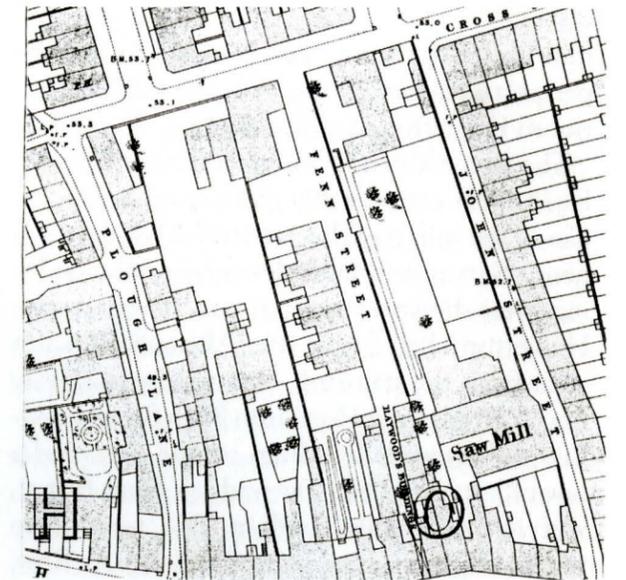
could immediately place the building, and Bob Fiddaman himself had no idea of where it might have been. A loan of the photographs and negatives was agreed, and the cache taken back to Hackney for digital copying and further research.

In the interval another Brett, Donald, contacted the Archives Department. It had been Donald who had copied the original painting in 1964, together with two other items. He and Bob Fiddaman were cousins, but had not been in contact in recent years. David and Martin now got to work on the loaned items, and in particular the mysterious steam mill.

Where was the steam mill?

This proved a hard nut to crack. Other than the rate book references detailed below, the earliest documentary source is a lease of 1810, which established Benjamin Brett senior in the property that subsequently became 43 Homerton High Street - the one with the bow fronted window which appears on the left hand side of the painting. The Brett family never bought this house, but continued to lease it.

However, as their corn and meal business prospered, Benjamin was able to buy land behind the Homerton High Street house. The census



The Fenn Street area in 1870

returns of 1821 and 1831 show that Benjamin Brett had moved to a house on Aldermans Walk (now Homerton Row), which he still occupied in 1843. Could this property have been converted to industrial use after the death of Benjamin senior in 1846?

It was not possible to establish usage from other sources, but while there had been changes to the property by 1870 - as can be seen on the Ordnance Survey map of that year (above), still the



Homerton High Street c. 1840. The two Brett shops are on the left.

mill illustration could not be made to fit. The perspectives were wrong. Was the mill perhaps not in Homerton at all?

The Bretts also had a shop on Lower Clapton Road, with considerably more space behind it. Could the mill have been there? Alas, the Ordnance Survey was quite clear - no similar buildings were shown. Attention turned again to the Homerton High Street site. Although it is not clear from the painting, a covered passageway ran up through the Homerton High Street buildings to Haywards Buildings on the right and a sawmill at their rear. Beyond lay Fenn Street, with its row of houses built in 1868, running up to Cross Street (once part of Alderman's Row, and later part of Homerton Row). The property that had once belonged to Benjamin Brett senior was on the east side of the Fenn Street junction. Could there have been a mill somewhere in the vicinity? If so, how could this be proved? Valuation records suggested that there was a mill, somewhere in the block of land behind the old houses in Homerton High Street - just where it ought to be. But no closer location could be es-

tablished from those records.

Just when it seemed that all sources had been exhausted, the proof came from a most unexpected direction. Among the engineering records transferred to Hackney Archives are a series of sewer and paving plans. These are little used, especially the paving plans, which are thought to show little that is not on Ordnance Survey maps. It was almost as an afterthought that David checked the index, found a reference to a paving plan for Fenn Street, and got the plan out.²

The surveyor had most usefully identified the owners of property alongside Fenn Street. There on the west side was Horner's sausage factory. A large and empty plot on that side, bisected by a fence also had the name 'Horner' pencilled across both portions. But to the south of these plots, and directly behind the saw mill, was another double plot and a building abutting directly on to the sawmill works. Most helpfully, in a faded pencil, the surveyor had written 'Brett' across both portions.

Paving plans also show gates and walls. Sud-



The steam mill at Homerton

denly the view dropped into place. The engraving shows the mill looking south along Fenn Street - and the imposing buildings with their chimneys behind are not part of the corn mill at all. They form the rear of the larger sawmill! The 1870 Ordnance Survey shows that the mill and the High Street house were linked by the back gate of what had once been the garden. There, tucked into a back street in Homerton, was the lost mill.

Donald Brett can now take up the story of the Brett family.

The family historian's tale

Although I was aware from childhood of my Brett family's Hackney connections I had no real knowledge of the extent of the family or its early history. We lived in Walthamstow, not far from Hackney, so I sometimes accompanied my father on a Sunday morning to visit his widowed mother at the gas-lit house in Dunlace Road that had been his childhood home.

My grandfather, Frederick John Brett, had died in 1931, the year I was born. He had had a great interest in photography, and bought a photographic business at 60 Clarence Road in 1886 (I have the receipt from H. Lawes for £40 'for Plant and Business of Photography'). The venture was not a success, however, and he later sold the business to Ridsdale Cleare; but he maintained his interest in photography throughout his life. He was described as 'corn dealer's assistant' by the time of the birth of my father, Stephen John Brett, in 1899, and just prior to his death worked for the Venus Pencil Company.

Stephen attended Rushmore Road School, under the headship of Frank Cory, until his thirteenth year. He joined the 'Young Peoples War' with the Clapton Corps of the Salvation Army, and tried his hand with the euphonium. At the age of 16 or 17 he enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps as a mechanic and afterwards worked as a sewing machine mechanic with Willcox & Gibbs Sewing Machine Co., until his retirement.

From him I learned of the Bretts' millers' and corn chandlers' shops, the last of which was at 40 Lower Clapton Road, where his uncle and aunt, Benjamin Robert and 'Nellie' Brett, lived.

Millers and chandlers

We had photographs of the original shop at 43 High Street Homerton, and the sign above the shop told us that the business of Benjamin Brett & Son was founded in 1805. My father was also able to tell me a little about the 'cousins' who lived next-door at 45 High Street, and about some of his uncles, but very little else about these families. Being the youngest child of an almost-youngest child obviously did not help!

My great-grandfather married rather late; only three generations separate me from the founder of the Homerton business. When the 1851 census became available I was able to confirm the existence of our Hackney connections, but it was to be a further ten years before I really started on the family history trail.

A visit to Chingford Mount Cemetery where my Brett grandparents are buried (simply, with numbered stones) led to the discovery of the 'family grave of B. R. and E. E. Brett of Homerton'. The headstone revealed, however, that B. R. was interred at Throcking. This was a place I had never heard of, so clearly it had to be visited (it turned out to be near Buntingford). Through several twists and turns, that visit in 1964 led to my learning of the family's connection with Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire.

Barking and Sawbridgeworth

Beside the path in front of St Mary's church in Sawbridgeworth is the chest tomb of Benjamin Brett of Barking, who died in 1808, and his wife Ann. It appeared that some members of the family believed this Benjamin was the first of five Benjamins in the direct line in our family. My researches have shown that this is not the case.

Nevertheless there are reasons to conclude that the Homerton Bretts are related to Benjamin Brett of St Swithins Farm in Barkingside. I have traced this Brett family in Sawbridgeworth through several generations from 1622, when Stephen Brett and Ann Dowsett, who were married in the same year, rented land on the manor of Pishiobury and Sayesbury. Records of land tenure of this family are traceable in the land tax records and manor court rolls, and we have some relevant wills.

The main holdings of this family appear to have been centred around Wisemans, which today is identified by Wisemans Gardens, to the south of Sawbridgeworth. From 1722 the family are recorded as being at the 'Hand' (now the 'Hand and Crown', opposite Wisemans Gardens).

In 1754 Stephen Brett, a baker of Edmonton, Middlesex, eldest son and heir of the Stephen Brett who had died the previous year in Sawbridgeworth, attended the manor court to be admitted customary tenant. A generation later Stephen Brett, farmer, of Edmonton left property in his 1780 will to his brother Benjamin Brett of Barking. These two children of Stephen and Rebecca were baptised in Sawbridgeworth in 1730 and 1737 respectively. There are no indications that this Benjamin had any children, and in his will he leaves most of his property after his wife's decease to his nephew Benjamin Brett Hatton; other bequests are to the children of his brother Stephen.

From Hertfordshire to Hackney

Benjamin Brett, the elder, was born in Sawbridgeworth in 1770, one of the fifteen or so children of John Brett and Sarah Patmore who had married there in 1754. I have not found a baptism that can be attributed to our John but 'at the Hand' is noted at the baptism of two of his children and 'in Town' for another, and in an Edmonton poll book for 1761 John Brett occupied a house and land in Sawbridgeworth owned by Stephen Brett.

There is, then, some convincing evidence that the Homerton millers and corn chandlers can be traced back to these early Hertfordshire farmers. For some years our Benjamin evidently settled in Loughton, Essex, where he married Susanna Pilgram in 1805. The only record we have so far of his life there is in two parish documents, from which it appears he was chosen by lot, in January 1799, to serve in the supplementary militia. Having found a fit substitute in the person of William Vines, to serve for him, the churchwardens and overseers were ordered to pay Benjamin five guineas.

Benjamin first appears in the Hackney church rate books in 1808, being absent from the pre-

ceding volume, for 1805. He was assessed for a tenement and stable in Homerton. It seems clear, then, that he came to Homerton around the time of his marriage, and we know from the shop sign and later business letterheads that he founded the business in that year.

The redevelopment that wasn't

The Brett link with Homerton could have ended precipitately. In 1808 the owner of the block of property between the High Street, Plough Lane, Cross Street and the later John Street was Vice Admiral Eliab Harvey, then of the Rolls, Chigwell. On 28th July 1808 Harvey had a redevelopment proposal prepared for him, which would have seen the demolition of the entire Plough range except the pub itself, and the construction of four substantial terraces - one on the site of the range itself, one along the north east side of Plough Lane, one on the south side of Cross Street and the last down the west side of a newly proposed road, roughly on the site of the later John Street. All would have long gardens and there would have been no space for industry of any kind. Only the plan survives at Hackney Archives.³ Perhaps Harvey was deterred by the cost: the scheme did not proceed, and two years later he leased the house (described as being in the occupation of Mr Lorkin) that would become 43 Homerton High Street to John Kerr and Benjamin Brett, corn dealers of Homerton, for ten and a half years from 25 March 1810. It is likely that Benjamin Brett then moved there from the Homerton tenement and stable.

The Homerton family

Benjamin and Susanna had, at least, one daughter, Priscilla (b. 1808), and four sons, Benjamin (1810-1878), Thomas (1812-1884), William (b. 1817) and John (b. 1820). It is most likely that they were Baptists: some of the later marriages took place at Baptist chapels and we understand that either Benjamin senior or Benjamin junior caused a 'Strict and Particular Chapel' to be built in Homerton. Benjamin joined his father as a miller and corn-dealer at 43 High Street. Thomas set up in business as a carpenter and builder in the premises next door



Frances Christie Brett and her children⁵ in the back garden at 43 Homerton High Street, 1884

(45 High Street); William settled in Kingsland High Road as a butcher, and John became a butcher at 49 High Street, Homerton. Priscilla married a local Scottish baker, John Glennie. They were at 6 De Beauvoir Place in 1851 and had named their 3rd and 4th children in the Scottish tradition, Susanna and Benjamin. Their eldest son, John Glennie, also became a baker/confectioner, and resided in Bentley Crescent⁴ with his Scottish wife Elizabeth.

John and Thomas married cousin sisters Mary and Sarah Brett, daughters of Charles Brett, a carpenter and builder resident in Castleton, Dorset. John and Mary were married at the Old Gravel Pit Meeting House in 1846. Mary was soon to die in childbirth, and John then married a young milliner, Margaret Austin, who was living next door with her aunt at the time of the 1851 census.

William married Ruth Emmerton, the daughter of a local carman, in 1837. Thomas's marriage to Sarah produced 12 children but sadly only four, all sons, survived into adulthood, and Sarah herself died of consumption at the age of 45. The eldest son, Thomas, did not stay at 45

High St with his father but became a corn merchant at 35 Clarence Road, appearing there with wife Mary and five children in the 1881 census. John was apprenticed to a butcher, but appears to have given that up, as he is described as a pianoforte maker in the 1872 *Hackney Directory*; he had three children but refused to send them to school, and educated them himself.

The third son, Benjamin, also trained in carpentry, but had rather mixed fortunes: he emigrated to Australia but came back again. William Charles Brett, the youngest of Thomas's sons, was apprenticed to engineering, becoming a brass finisher, later a gas hot-water fitter, and was also known to our family as an inventor. He and his children constituted the only other Homerton Bretts known to my father, since they remained at 45 High Street. Thomas senior died in 1884. Several other properties are mentioned in his will, including three houses in New Tyssen St, Bethnal Green, and 47 and 51 High Street, Homerton, but it appears that there were mortgages still to be paid off. The family finally left Homerton in 1917, when William Charles died.

The Homerton business

Our main subject is the family and business of Benjamin Brett, millers and corn-chandlers. Benjamin senior died in 1846, leaving Benjamin junior with his mother Susanna at 43 High Street. Already by this time there appear to have been other premises associated with the business: *Pigot's Directory* for 1839 has an entry 'Brett Benjn, baker and flour dealer' in Hampstead Road, but I have no family information to say when the Homerton steam mills began operation.

From directory entries we find there was also a shop at 40 Lower Clapton Road (opposite) by the 1880s, and by 1929 the business had become Brett's Ltd., with additional premises at 30 Dalston Lane.

Benjamin junior, not yet the confirmed bachelor at 41, married 22-year-old Frances Christie Bennett, whom he had known since she was a baby, at the Maberley Chapel in Islington. Frances was a daughter of Robert Bennett (1800-1849) and Sarah Ann Collins (1799-1887). Robert Bennett was a wine merchant, later an insurance broker, resident in Ball's Pond Road through the 1820s, removing to Tonbridge, Kent, to become a storekeeper. Benjamin and Frances had eight children who survived to adulthood and marriage.

Benjamin Robert, the eldest son, naturally carried on the business at 43 High Street, living there for many years with his family, but eventually removing to the premises at Lower Clapton Road, which was his residence at the time of his death in 1918.

His widow Ellen (Nellie) remained for some



40 Lower Clapton Road

years at the shop, probably not leaving until the early 1930s; both ended their days at their son Edgar's smallholding at Throcking. None of Benjamin Robert's children went into the family business, and although I recall seeing a shop with the name of Brett's Ltd. when I was a child, it would not then have been in the family.

A glimpse of the shop

As I have said, my father remembered little about the Homerton premises - apart from the stables behind the shop, which would I suppose have appealed to a small boy. But I was very fortunate, when starting out on the family quest, to discover one of my father's cousins who had acquired and inherited many family photographs, Helen Packham (1894-96), daughter of Benjamin junior's daughter Jessie. A glimpse of the Homerton shop, and some indication of the layout of the mill premises, comes from notes written by her (Jessie talked very little about her father, who was 'eccentric and very difficult'.) Helen writes of a time, the early 1900s, when the business was carried on by Benjamin Robert.

In its heyday, [the business] was a thriving one, grinding corn into flour in the barns, which was packed into paper bags in the shop, combined with the living premises. These consisted of shop and glass-topped flour-packing corridor leading from the shop alongside the house and yard; dining-room, kitchen on ground floor - one large room for living running the full width of house - behind little room called the counting-room where business was transacted - a bathroom - a bedroom - next floor had 2 bedrooms - There were some lovely pieces of furniture... I had a lovely time when staying with Uncle Robert and Aunt Nellie and their 3 sons, 2 daughters...

Marjorie and Ralph were my two playmates, we had great times in the barns swinging on the chains for working the machinery... feeding the horse who was used to take a van out delivering flour and other commodities to farms and households. The machinery was worked by steam generated by a huge boiler & engine which stood in the yard - it was very frightening when alight and hissing - so hot we ran full out when passing it - we did not play in the barns when the machinery was working. Uncle Robert gave us pennies which we spent on games - we were very naughty, we seemed to be near the counting-room when Uncle Robert appeared - never failed!

Notes

1. HAD M 797.
2. HAD H/ES 2/213.
3. HAD V 310.
4. In the neighbourhood of Bentley Road, near Ball's Pond Road.
5. The occasion was the wedding of Benjamin Robert Brett and Ellen Eastill, in July 1884. From left to right: Grace Maria, Alice Mary, Herbert, Jessie, Frances Christie, Caleb, Frances Helen, Frederick John.

THE THREEPENNY DOCTOR REVISITED

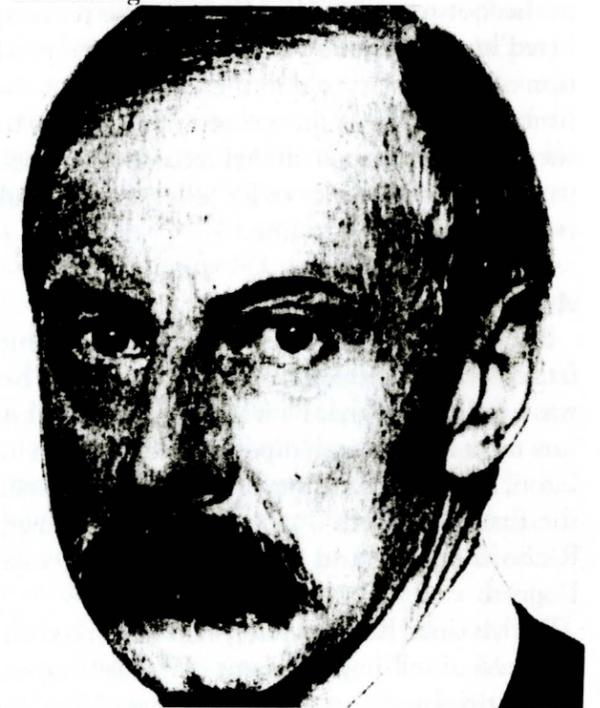
Andrea Tanner

Finding Dr Jelley

While working on a project on health in Hackney from 1860 to 1920, I had to read the Hackney Gazette for mention of outbreaks of infectious diseases, the progress of the construction of drains in the area, the amount of money spent on rubbish collection, the proportion of infants dying before their first birthdays, and other savoury topics. While searching the columns in 1912 for reports on returning Hackney day-trippers developing typhoid fever from shellfish and watercress, I came across mention of 'the three-penny doctor', a.k.a. Henry Percy Jelley, a local practitioner. Far from being represented in the local press in the guise of a sober and competent physician, it appeared that Dr Jelley's temper caused him to be a regular attender at the local magistrates' court (both as defendant and prosecutor), and that his inattention to his patients occasioned his equally-frequent appearances at the local coroner's court. Reading through local newspapers for the days before cheap photography is rather tedious, and I began to look out for the banner headlines on Dr Jelley's latest exploits, all of which seemed to cause the reporters and their readers much amusement.

However, in 1916, the tone of the reporting changed dramatically, when Henry Percy Jelley was charged with the murder of one of his pa-

tients, on whom he had performed a botched abortion, and with procuring abortions on other local women. He was finally found guilty of manslaughter, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. On his release from prison, he set himself up in shop which, in the front part, sold meat and did trouser alterations, and which had his 'consulting room' in the back.



Henry Percy Jelley

The curiosity I felt in the 'threepenny doctor' was not unique; for it appeared that he had held a fascination for local Hackney residents. In the mid-1960s, a letter to the local newspaper seeking information on the 'threepenny doctor' elicited many replies. His extraordinary appearance, and his penny-farthing bicycle and tricycle were recalled, as well as the spectacle of his son driving a phaeton and a charabanc, dressed in a full chauffeur's uniform.

The staff at Hackney Archives directed me towards two publications, produced by Centreprise in 1974 and 1980, based on the reminiscences and research of a local history group¹. Stories abounded here about his temper, his beautiful young wife, his hapless son Harold (known to one and all as 'Harold Lloyd'), and the charabanc trips he organised for local women in his unreliable vehicle. His post-war career as a shopkeeper was recalled with amusement, and there is ample testimony in the book as to his continued eccentricity, and his constant relocation within the borough of Hackney. Dr Anna Davin, who worked with the first group, also recalled that there was a great deal of correspondence about Dr Jelley in the 'Old Codgers' column of the *Daily Mirror* in 1978. The desire to find out more about him was compelling, and I had to follow in the footsteps of the local people who remembered him. The following will not be a repetition of the story as told in the Centreprise publications, but rather an account of my efforts to substantiate, through official records and newspapers, the many tales of Dr Jelley, and to find out what happened to him.

Antecedents

Henry Percy Jelley sometimes claimed that his father was a doctor, and at other times that he was a miller, and that he was violent, giving his son 'more kicks than halfpence'. He was born in Elton, Northamptonshire, on 28th January 1866, the first known child of a 30-year-old farmer, Richard Jelley, and his wife Harriett, *née* Doggett.

By this time, Richard Jelley had embarked on a process of self-improvement. After serving an apprenticeship to an apothecary from 1854, in

1859 he attended lectures at University College Hospital Medical School. Within three years he had passed all his examinations there at first sitting, as well as those for the licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries.² Richard Jelley was appointed Medical Officer of Health and Public Vaccinator in the Totnes Poor Law Union, and local medical referee for the Life Association of Scotland and several assurance companies, including the Emperor and the Colonial companies. He was also surgeon to the Oddfellows, the Phoenix and other friendly societies and clubs.

Richard Jelley's marriage had broken up by 1881, and he earned additional income by boarding patients, one of whom also acted as private tutor to the Jelley children. The family was expected to play its part, and Henry Percy acted as medical student and assistant to his father.³ In 1889 Richard Jelley moved to Reading, and remained there until his death in 1907.

Early career

Henry Percy Jelley did not move to Berkshire with his father, but decided to capitalise on his experience, registering as a medical student at the University of Edinburgh in 1884. He did not remain there long, and may have spent some time working in hospitals in London, Glasgow, Belfast and New York, although I have not been able to prove this.⁴ He claimed to have been a medical officer in Sierra Leone, and to have served in the British Army during the Boer War, but there are no official records to support this, and it was from America that he landed in Glasgow in 1904, 'with a shilling and three people to keep'.⁵

By the time he came back to Britain, Henry Jelley was married with a family. He found work in Glasgow hospitals, and was living on the south side of the city by the time he sat the examination for the Society of Apothecaries in early 1910, being granted permission to sit the Primary and the Finals together, which he had requested 'on account of my age'. He passed in surgery, and medicine, but failed in midwifery, which was a strict requirement of the qualification. He re-sat the examination in mid-April

and scraped a pass. Nearly 30 years after he had first registered as a medical student, he was entitled to use the letters LMSSA after his name and to practise medicine.

The death of his first wife may have prompted him to move to London in 1911, when he first appears in Hackney. Once settled there, his low charges soon earned him the nickname 'the threepenny doctor', as well as an enormous medical practice. Within twelve months, he claimed to be treating over 18,000 patients a year, and to have the 'greatest practice in the world'.⁶

Dr Jelley quickly became a recognisable sight. In appearance, he was the image of Neville Chamberlain; he always wore a high hat and a frock coat, but had no black bag. Instead, he preferred to stuff his instruments into his pockets.

His temper quickly became as legendary as his singular appearance, and he soon became a regular at the local magistrates' court. In late 1911, and throughout 1912, he spent almost as much time in the witness box as he did on tending his patients. In January 1912 he was fined five shillings for striking a child, who, he claimed, had been throwing mud at his surgery window.⁷ In October of that year he was bound over to keep the peace after being taken to court for non-payment of his wheelwright's bills, and for using abusive language towards the tradesman.⁸

A new wife and a new practice

He managed to capture the heart of a local beauty, Florrie Glenham, aged 17, whom he married in August 1911, at St. Barnabas's Church in Homerton, amid scenes of wild excitement. The streets were thronged with spectators, mostly women with small children, many of whom, uninvited, poured into the church to witness the ceremony. The commotion was such that the police had to be called in to control the crowd. When they emerged from the church, the couple were pelted with confetti by 'the ever increasing and hilarious crowd'.

Florrie became his assistant, making up the tonic medicines he prescribed, and also accompanying him on house calls. In 1912, he opened a second surgery in Bethnal Green, but two practices and a new wife did not keep him out of

trouble. His eccentricity became famed beyond Hackney, and he was awarded the dubious honour of being the subject of a music hall song, 'Doctor Shelley', sung by no less a figure than Harry Champion. For the next two years he appeared in court on numerous occasions, often to answer charges of neglect of his horses, or driving too fast through the crowded streets, or for attacking pedestrians with his horsewhip.⁹ On at least one occasion Florrie joined him in the dock; she was fined half a guinea for throwing water over a group of young girls who were flinging mud at the surgery windows.¹⁰ Her husband added to his growing legend by paying one fine of seven shillings and sixpence in as many farthings as were legal tender.

He brooked no criticism of his working methods, being determined to conduct his business as he saw fit.

You have to remember that it is not a question whether the public will have me, but whether I choose to go...I do not pretend to be at the beck and call of everybody. I distinctly give the people of Homerton and the East of London to understand that I am master of my own practice.¹¹

'On the panel'

January 1913 saw the implementation of the National Insurance Act 1911, which had profound implications for both doctors and patients. The local newspaper announced that on 'Insurance Day' (15th January), the 74,000 insured inhabitants of Hackney had the choice of no fewer than 52 medical men to whom they could go for treatment. However, most of these doctors operated either on the fringes of Hackney or outside the district; the majority of well-respected doctors in Hackney had declined to go on the panel.

Henry Percy Jelley became a panel doctor in January 1913, immediately resigned, put his name back on the list, then resigned for a second time - all in the space of one year. His behaviour attracted the attention of Parliament, where it was interpreted as the result of severe over-strain and under-payment under the new Act, particularly in poor areas. In February 1913, using Henry Jelley as an example, the Member of Parliament for Sevenoaks quizzed the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George:

No one could contend the medical treatment now being given was the best possible, because the doctors working the Act were much overworked and had far too many patients allotted to them. A Dr Jelley, giving evidence a few days ago in a coroner's court, said on the previous Thursday he had had 433 patients to attend. That was an unsatisfactory state of things. What sort of treatment could each patient get?¹²

Lloyd George denied that the Insurance Act had created overworked panel doctors and sub-standard treatment for poor patients:

Dr Jelley was in existence as a doctor before the Act ever came into operation. They were not responsible for him or for his methods...the very methods which were associated with Dr Jelley were the very methods which the Act would bring to an end. He was... either a threepenny or a sixpenny doctor who cured wholesale in the district of Hackney. What had happened since the Act came into operation? All the people who used to go to him in troops had gone to him again...They had faith in him.¹³

Libel and bankruptcy

Having flirted with the National Insurance panel, Henry Jelley returned to his old way of life,¹⁴ and soon found himself once more in the dock. In 1914 he was summonsed before the magistrates for striking a child, and was censured by the local coroner for his attitude to critically-ill patients. An inquest into the death of a baby from broncho-pneumonia decreed that he had not attended the infant until eight hours after first being asked to visit.¹⁵ The jury questioned this great delay, but he was unrepentant:

I have told the people of London and the world, over and over again, that I will not attend urgent messages, and that they must send for the police surgeon. I am going to conduct my practice as I like, and not as you like. I have put up a notice that I will not attend inquests or post mortem examinations, and I attend such cases as I choose, I will not tolerate any interference with my practice, as I am perfectly independent.¹⁶

In June 1915 he was taken to court for libel by the schoolmaster who had broken his whip in 1912. After being censured by the magistrate, he placed a placard in his surgery window:

A open letter to the Hackney jury and all whom it may concern. On looking at my banking account I find I have put in one-and-one half times as much this year as last; notwithstanding that I had five days' holiday this year instead of one last year. On counting my receipts for Tuesday last, I find that over 100 patients came to see me in the morning. If you go to any of the good schoolmasters (not the Daubeney-road thief who stole

my whip), and ask him to do a small multiplication sum you will soon go how independent I am of inquests. As I told you at the time, your votes of censure and all your anathemas are absolutely useless. No-one cares 2d. about them; my patients laugh at them, and once more I tell you I carry out the practice how I like and you and anyone else will be taken no notice of. The increase of fees owing to your impertinence has brought in over £4. Try again, you ignorant puppies.¹⁷

The schoolmaster took exception to this, and the threepenny doctor found himself in the defendant's box in the Court of King's Bench. Naturally he did not engage counsel, and stoutly defended himself. Mr Justice Bailhache was unimpressed by the Hackney medic, and ordered him to pay £25 to the plaintiff, plus costs. On hearing the judgment, Henry Jelley beckoned to his wife, who came forward bearing a large roll of banknotes, and he paid the sum on the spot. However, in spite of the show he made of paying the court official in cash in the libel case, the costs of £111 remained unpaid, and he was declared bankrupt in June 1915.¹⁸

A charge of murder

Insolvency was not the least of his problems, for the 'threepenny doctor' had made an enemy of the local constabulary. After months of watching him, the police received a tip-off, following the coroner's inquest into the death of Mrs Caroline Elizabeth Marsh, on whom he had operated in his hospital. In June 1916 he was arrested and formally charged with wilful murder, and remanded in custody.¹⁹

In addition to this charge, he was accused of using an instrument or some other unknown means with the intent to procure the miscarriage of Mary Ann Watson, Florence Emily Staples, Winifred Emily Allen, and Caroline Marsh, who had been interviewed by the police on her death-bed.²⁰

He appeared at the Old Bailey the following month, by which time the indictments relating to the three other patients had been dropped. He pleaded not guilty, and also elected to defend himself. During the trial the three named female patients were brought forward as prosecution witnesses, and they all attested to his having performed abortions upon them.

N^o 1343. SIXPENNY POPULAR EDITION. (NO DISCOUNT ALLOWED)

DOCTOR SHELLEY!

WRITTEN AND COMPOSED BY
Edgar Bateman
AND
Huntley Trevor.

Sung by
HARRY CHAMPION.

I'm Shelley! good old Doctor Shelley!
No matter what complaint you've got,
I can cure you on the spot.
If you've got a nasty pain in your Darby Kelly,
Trot your tummy round to me -
Good old Doctor Shelley!

You see in me the doctor
Who has won a great renown,
I only charge a tanner cash
Instead of half-a-crown,
I cure the rats, the whooping cough,
The measles or the "flue",
You can pay me by instalments
If you give an I. O. U.

I'm Shelley! Good old Doctor Shelley!
No matter what complaint you've got,
I can cure you on the spot.
If you've got a nast pain
In your Darby Kelly,
Trot your tummy round to me -
Good old Doctor Shelley!

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The trial lasted two days, the evidence from witnesses for the prosecution taking up most of that time. The medical officer of the Hackney Poor Law Infirmary reported that Caroline Marsh had been admitted to his establishment

suffering from shock, high fever, inflammation and blood-poisoning. The pathologist from St. Mary's hospital in Paddington gave the cause of her death as heart failure, following acute peritonitis and blood poisoning.

Two days in court

The prisoner put himself forward as his first defence witness, denying absolutely that he had done anything illegal in the course of treating Caroline Marsh, but claimed that the sheer size of his practice meant that he had to act quickly. His patients 'came to him with their complaints, and he gave them medicine and held out his hand for the fourpence - all in the space of one minute and a half, or less than that sometimes'.

His arrangements with regard to pregnant patients came to light under close cross-examination from the judge. Henry Jelley took a one guinea (£1.05) registration and confinement fee from each woman when the pregnancy was confirmed, in return for which he issued a card, promising to attend her at the birth. Those who entered his hospital in order to have their babies received no qualified female nursing attendance, although Florrie Jelley occasionally assisted her husband during deliveries. With an average of 435 patients each day, the doctor declared that he could neither afford to employ proper nurses, nor did he have the time to devote to each patient that such auxiliaries would have necessitated.

His one professional defence witness probably did him more harm than good. Having no friends within his profession, Henry Jelley had to rely upon the testimony of Dr McKeith, from Kennington, in south London, whom he had never met prior to the trial, and who admitted that he had only come to court to help a fellow medical man, as there was no-one else to do so. Having listened to all the prosecution's evidence, he was confirmed in his pre-conceived view that Henry Jelley had done nothing medically wrong.

Similarly, Jelley's loyal wife's testimony, during which she claimed never to have seen any medical instruments in her husband's hospital, even when he was performing operations, was unlikely to have been believed by the jury. He did not call one of his thousands of patients to his defence.

The threepenny doctor behaved in a decorous manner during his most public and important trial. Anxious to spare the court any delay, Henry Jelley asked to make his brief closing address to



Dr Jelley's former residence and practice, 172-4 Homerton High Street c. 1930

the jury late in the afternoon of the second day. He appealed to them to put themselves in his place, and not to make up their minds before he had spoken. He criticised the evidence of the prosecution witnesses, and pointed to the fact that Caroline Marsh had said that she had not been hurt during the operation to remove the already-dead foetus. Extraordinarily, he reminded the jury that they had it within their power to find him guilty of manslaughter, and then proceeded to give them the grounds on which they might do so. The doctor practically admitted that he had used more energy than usual in performing the surgical procedure, as he was anxious to complete it as quickly as possible. He again alluded to the fact that he ran a 'colossal' practice, that he was worshipped in the East of London, and to the enormous number of letters of sympathy he had received from his patients during his incarceration.

The jury retires

The all-male jury retired to consider their verdict late in the afternoon of the second day.

Undecided, foreman Charles Andrew Grigg wrote a note to the judge:

If the jury think that a woman's death was caused by the culpable negligence of the prisoner in removing the placenta and in not taking proper steps after the injury are they correct in bringing in a verdict of manslaughter?

Mr Justice Lawrence scribbled his unequivocal answer, 'Yes', on the same scrap of paper, and thus the jury reached its verdict, having spent a total of only 20 minutes on their deliberations.²¹

Before sentencing, the judge heard a submission from Detective Inspector Haigh, who described how rumours of Dr Jelley's illegal activities had been circulating in Hackney for two and a half years before the police had sufficient evidence to prosecute him, and that the hospital run by the doctor was 'one of the filthiest spots he had ever been in', with no gas or proper lighting.²² Laughter was again heard in the courtroom as he described finding a live rabbit and a chicken running around one of the wards.

Mr Justice Lawrence offered Henry Jelley the opportunity to speak before sentencing, but, for once, he decided to remain silent. The judge stated that he believed the accused had been conducting illegal operations for a number of years, and he was shocked that someone who called himself a doctor should have treated the dead woman in such a manner. In order to protect the community, he sentenced Henry Jelley to prison for three years, his time to be served at Parkhurst on the Isle of Wight, far from his family.²³ The court reporter of the *Hackney and Kingsland Gazette* remarked that Henry Jelley received the sentence 'with a half-smile, and with the same jaunty demeanour that he had maintained throughout both his trials'.

Struck off

Jelley's conviction was notified immediately to the General Medical Council, the British Medical Association, and the Society of Apothecaries, all of whom struck him off their registers. The conviction and sentencing of the threepenny doctor was the catalyst for his patients to voice their own opinion, and it was decidedly not that of the court. Within days, a petition with thousands of signatures had been drawn up,

in addition to the nearly three thousand letters of support sent to him in prison. The local newspaper, which had used him as a source of comic copy for five years, and had turned against him in 1914, printed a letter in support of Dr Jelley from 'One of the workers', in which the author pledged to petition the government for the swift release of their doctor.²⁴

Legend has it that, during his incarceration, his wife petitioned the Home Secretary, and managed to have him released in 1918, so that he could tend to local people during the influenza pandemic. This story lived on locally for half a century, but the facts are more pedestrian, as there is no record of any official appeal against his conviction, and the threepenny doctor was granted his early freedom on licence on 30th September 1918, along with many other male prisoners who had been given similar sentences at the same time.²⁵

Henry Jelley had been in prison before, having spent 21 days in gaol for overworking his horse while in an unfit state, so he might have been prepared for incarceration.²⁶ His time at Parkhurst lasted only two years, but the harshness of the prison regime, and the bitterness he felt against the medical establishment, left him more than a little unbalanced, and ill-prepared for freedom. Having been struck off the medical register with no hope of reinstatement, and still being a registered bankrupt (he was not discharged until December 1931), Henry Jelley had to make a living in post-war London. His wife may have gained the repute of having him released early to tend to the poor, but he was in no position, legally or financially, to pick up where he had left off.

Having no surgery, he opened up a shop in Bridge St, Homerton. One half of the front shop was piled up with meat for sale, while in the other Henry Jelley sold men's clothing. His time in Parkhurst had not been completely wasted, as he had learned tailoring in prison, and used his new skill to make and alter trousers for the poor of Hackney. Even more suspicious of authority since his imprisonment, he refused to allow any representatives of the gas, water, or electricity services onto the premises.

Henry Jelley remained in Hackney for the rest



The shop in Homerton High Street is visible to the right of this photograph of 1923

of his life, moving frequently from one dilapidated premises to the next, and in each he plied his extraordinary mixture of trades. He continued to show his own peculiar compassion for Hackney women. After his release, he bought an old charabanc, which was used to take local women on day trips to the seaside. With his son Harold at the wheel, and overfilled with high-spirited and often slightly tipsy passengers, the vehicle itself became one of the sights of Hackney, attracting the attention of the local authorities, who insisted that it be weighed on the coal lorry scales before each trip.

More days in court

Henry Jelley remained one of the mainstays of the local magistrates' court. In October 1921 he appeared as defendant at the North London Police Court, being accused of throwing stones at his neighbours' chickens.²⁷ The case was dis-

missed, as was another just a few days later, when he was said to have used a firearm against the trespassing poultry.²⁸

The following month the authorities took him to court, claiming that he had failed to pay the unemployment contributions for a girl employed by him as a baster. This case was dismissed for lack of evidence.²⁹

His temper, and ability to attract hordes of locals, were not diminished; a year later he was summonsed at Old Street Police Court for 'wilfully obstructing the footway by causing a crowd to assemble'.³⁰ In January 1923 he appeared in court once more, and was found guilty of selling margarine containing an excess of water and for exposing margarine for sale without a label. He appeared late for the hearing, and was duly fined by the magistrate.³¹

There is little official evidence that he carried on as an unlicensed medical practitioner, al-

though a 1923 photograph (see page 39) of his premises shows that the window describes him as 'Dr Jelley'; and his name was mentioned during the inquest into the death of 4-year old Richard Francis, who died of diphtheria in November 1922, and whose mother had gone to Henry Jelley for medicine for her sick child. He was not called as a witness, and was not blamed for the child's death, although his name merited a headline in the local newspaper.³²

His hapless son Harold also appeared in the local courts; in March 1923 he was fined £5 for 'an act of indecency intended to insult a female of Welshpool Street Hackney'. His father paid the fine, and no more was heard of Harold.

The long-suffering Florrie seems to have left her husband after his release from prison to take up residence in west London, where she gave birth to a son who tragically took his own life on his wedding day.³³

Remembering Dr Jelley

Although his place and date of death are elusive (there is no death registered for him between 1923 and 1970), he was not forgotten by the people of Hackney. His conviction and the effect that it had on his personality were remembered with sympathy, and several testified to the esteem in which he was held by the local poor:

...what he didn't know about the medico's business could be written on the back of a postage stamp...if there really is a heaven above, Dr. Jelley should be there... the medical profession lost a good member when he was 'eradicated'.³⁴

Not one of them suggested that Henry Jelley was an unworthy servant to Hackney. While he was not exactly respected by his patients (his behaviour was too hilarious for that), they had confidence in his approach, and valued his accessibility.

Notes

1. *The Threepenny Doctor* (1974), *Doctor Jelley of Hackney* (1983).
2. Guildhall MSS 8241/23 (folio 177) & 8242/26 (no. 48).
3. PRO RG11/2176/81
4. He had listed these on his Society of Apothecaries application form for the Primary Examination. HAD, letter from Hackney archivist 1965.
5. Henry Jelley hinted that he went to Glasgow from America, but there is no record of his arrival in Scotland by sea in 1904. PRO BT26/222 & 223.
6. *Hackney Gazette*, 1 January 1912.
7. *Times*, 13 January 1912.
8. 'The Threepenny Doctor summoned for abuse, an amusing case', *Hackney Gazette*, 30 Oct. 1912.
9. Most of those he attacked with the horsewhip were children who had been taunting him. *Hackney Gazette*, 15 January 1912.
10. *ib.*, 22 April 1912.
11. *ib.*, 1 January 1912.
12. *Times*, 8 February 1913.
13. *ib.*, 8 February 1913.
14. It would seem that he found difficulty staving off competition after leaving the panel, as evidenced by his financial problems in 1915 (see below).
15. It was not the first time he had been questioned on his methods after the death of a baby from chest disease. *Times*, 27 April 1914.
16. *Daily Express*, 24 December 1914
17. *Times*, 11 June 1915.
18. PRO B12/15/18 (petitions for bankruptcy) verso. At the time of his bankruptcy, his liabilities were over £136, and his assets totalled only £6. He offered to pay the debt at £10 per month, but agreed that, although his practice was large, each patient brought in only three or four pence. The libel action had plunged him into difficulties; he had earned £1,000 a year until 1913, but, since then, his practice had fallen off. *Times* 14 July & 11 August 1915.
19. PRO Crim 9/62, 27 June, 18 July 1916. The warrant was issued on 17 June, following the request of the coroner, W. Westcott, who had undertaken the inquest into Caroline Marsh's death.
20. PRO Crim 5/10.
21. PRO Crim 6/24.
22. This was no doubt caused by Henry Jelley's pathological hatred of all officials, and his refusal to allow utility company employees to enter the premises.
23. The official record of the trial is closed until 2117. The preceding account has been taken from the *Hackney & Kingsland Gazette*, 24 July 1916, *Daily Mail* 7 June, 22 July 1916.
24. *Hackney Gazette* 28 July 1916.
25. PRO J81/5 and PCOM6/23. There is no record of the petition, or of Florrie Jelley's letter to the Home Secretary: PRO HO 146/18 & HO 57/22.
26. *Hackney Gazette* 10 September 1913.
27. *ib.* 7 October 1921.
28. *ib.* 12 October 1921.
29. *ib.* 16 November 1921.
30. *ib.* 1 December 1922.
31. *ib.* 22 January 1923.
32. *ib.* 1 November 1922.
33. I am grateful to Mr. Michael Glenham Green (a member of the family) for this information.
34. *Hackney Gazette and North London Advertiser*, 13 July 1965. Letter from Charles Stock, former patient. There are similar recollections in the same newspaper for 20 July 1965.

Contributors to this volume

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