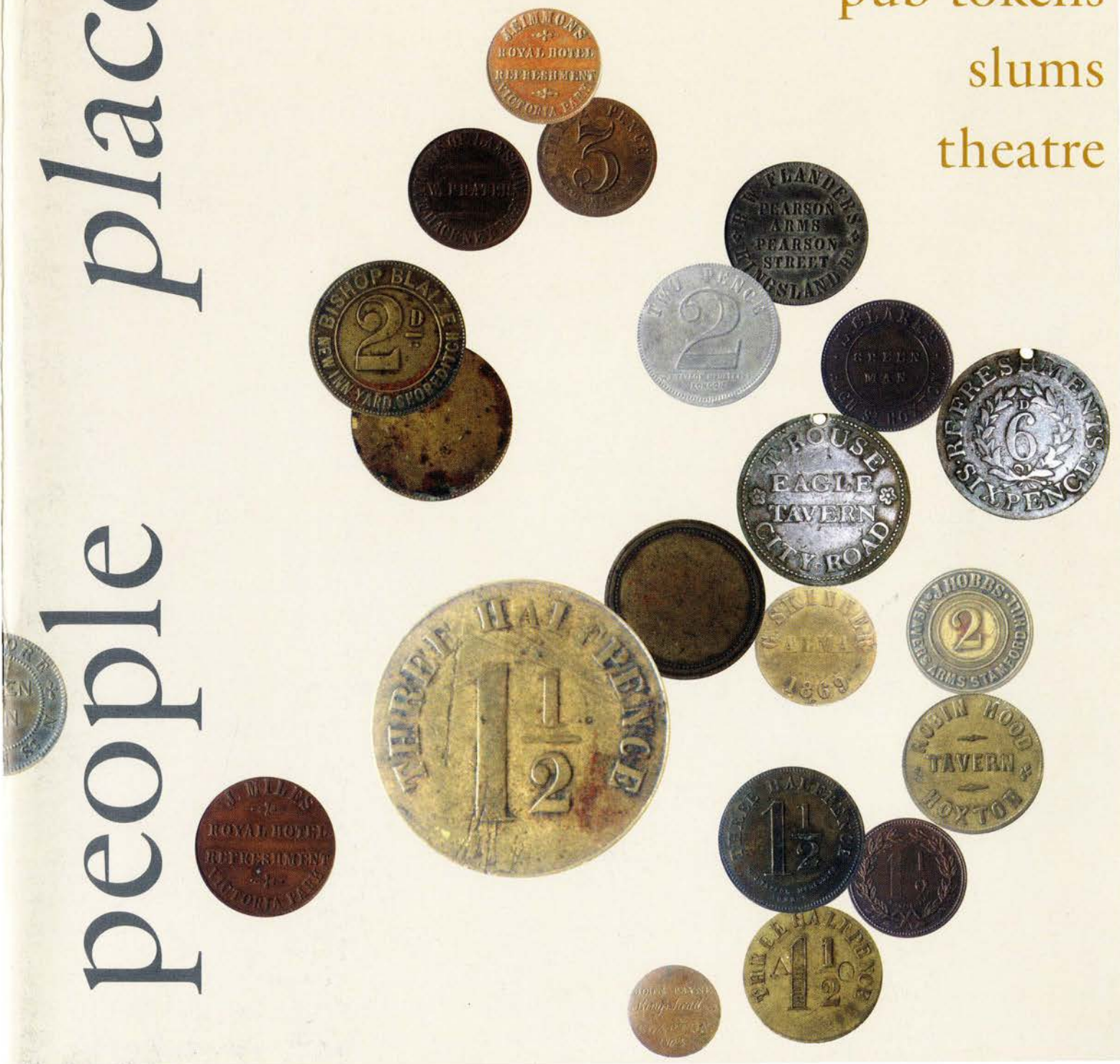
Hackney *History*

VOLUME TWELVE

people places

Mare street pub tokens slums theatre



Hackney History

In this issue

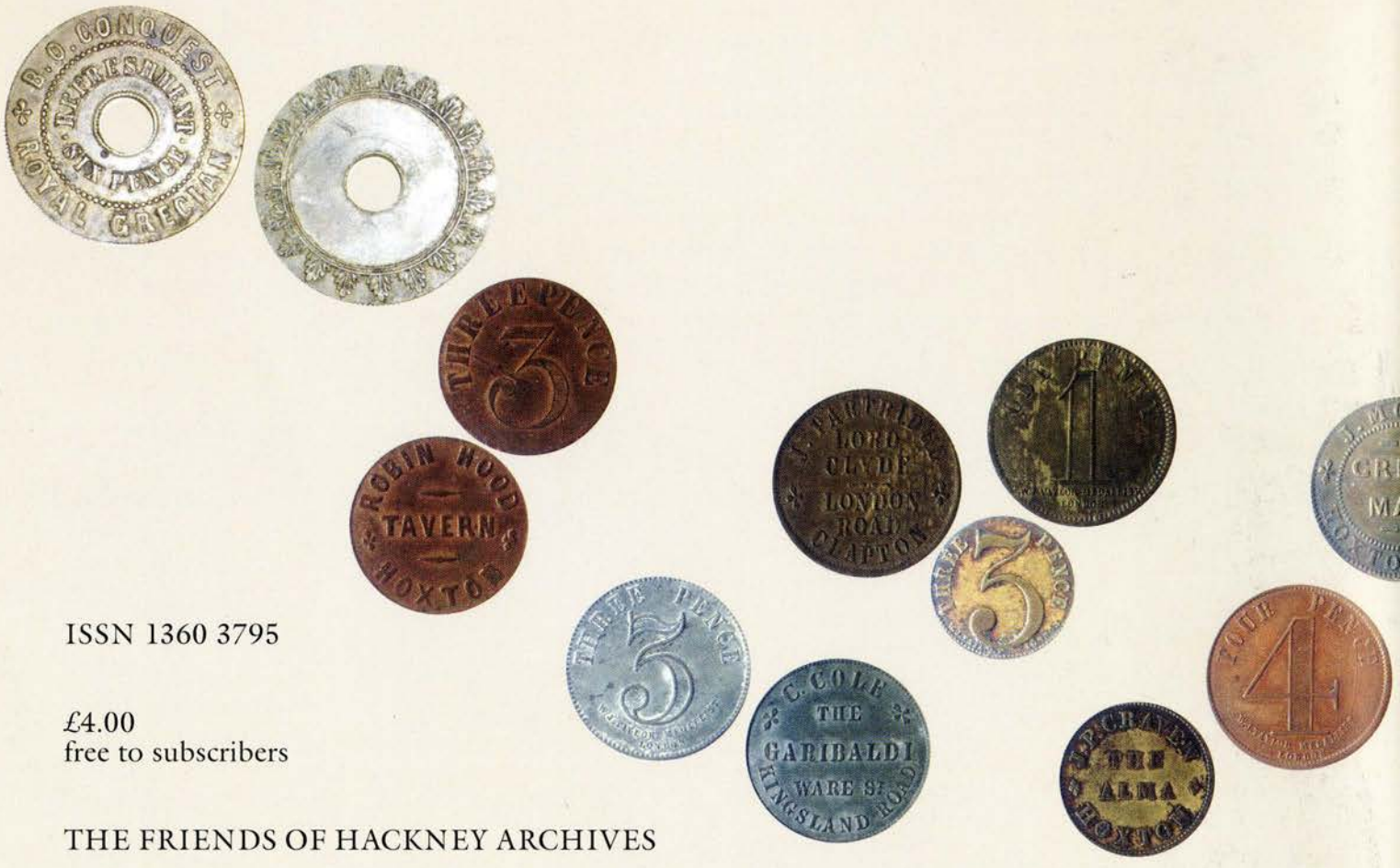
the story of 195 Mare Street – Hackney's most important Georgian house

19th century pub tokens – what they were and who produced them

the Standard theatre in the lively 1870s

a Shoreditch slum and its landlord

the inter-war workers' theatre movement



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THE FRIENDS OF HACKNEY ARCHIVES

Hackney *History*

volume twelve

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THE FRIENDS OF HACKNEY ARCHIVES
2006

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The Friends keep members in touch with developments in the Archives, and with new research. Donations to the Friends have purchased new material and sponsored conservation of books, manuscripts, playscripts, visual material, and two important collections of theatre posters.

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Abbreviations in this issue
(see also page 22)

HAD	Hackney Archives Department
LBH	London Borough of Hackney
LCC	London County Council
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MDR	Middlesex Deeds Register (at LMA)
TNA	The National Archives
VCH	Victoria County History of Middlesex

Publications cited are published in London unless otherwise indicated.

195 Mare Street

1

Jon Bolter

The premises of the New Lansdowne Club

195 Mare Street is the only surviving 'gentleman's residence' of the many which once lined this thoroughfare. It now seems probable that the house was built about 1697 for Abraham Dolins, a wealthy merchant of Dutch origin.

Until the mid 18th century the area referred to as Mare Street straddled the southern half of the present road and was quite distinct from the area to the north, then known as Church Street. Settlement along Mare Street had become well established by the mid 17th century[1] and by 1700 it was lined with substantial houses, built for prominent citizens and wealthy merchants from the City, who were replacing the nobility who had lived in Hackney during the 17th century. Of all the settlements within the parish, Mare Street was home to more of the select vestry – the elite who ran local government - than any other until the mid 18th century, when Clapton took its place.[2]

The houses appear to have had extensive grounds to the rear, but there is little evidence of building away from Mare Street itself. The road itself was rough, with a ditch on both sides for much of its length; the 'scandalous' condition of the road was a matter of concern to the vestry during the first years of the 18th century.[3]

The Dolins family

Recent research indicates that the house now standing at 195 Mare Street was first occupied by Abraham Dolins (1631-1706) a wealthy merchant of Dutch origin, then living in Garlick Hill in the City of London. His father, Abraham Dolins (d. 1663), was a Dutch merchant from Ghent, who had lived in England since about 1604, and who was associated with the project to drain the fenlands at the Isle of Axholme in Lincolnshire, undertaken by Cornelius Vermuyden in 1726-7.[4]

The younger Abraham, like his father before him, became a deacon and then an elder of the Dutch church in Austin Friars.[5] We find traces of him in the sale of Dunkirk in 1663[6] and in the diaries of Robert Hooke in the 1670s. Undoubtedly wealthy, he was a prominent City figure[7] and was able to leave a fortune of more than £15,000 on his death; he was buried in the family vault at St Andrew Undershaft.

He did not marry until the age of about 40 and his children were all born during the 1670s; he took a second wife later in the century. The three children who survived into adulthood were two wayward daughters, clearly a source of considerable distress to the apparently strait-laced Abraham, and a favoured son. Daughters Mary (b. 1672) and Rebecca (b. 1675) married merchants Pheasaunt Crisp (1659-1745) and Richard Edwards respectively. The Edwards incurred disapproval through debt, Mary through association with unsuitable men.[8]

Letters from his estranged daughters were addressed to his house in Garlick Hill until 1697, briefly to 'Bednall Green' and then, from 1698, Hackney. From the dates of these letters, we have the best available clue, such as it is, to the building date of the house.

A late 17th century date ties in with a plan form more characteristic of the late 17th century than the early 18th, with massive, almost square, chimney breasts flanked by closets with windows (see opposite page). Although ownership of the freehold of the house by his heirs is certain,[9] no documentation has been found linking Abraham Dolins to the construction of the house, to the purchase of the land, or of a completed house. There are instances within the manorial records of substantial houses being built speculatively in Mare Street in the last years of the 17th century,[10] but it would not be usual for such a large house to be procured in this way.

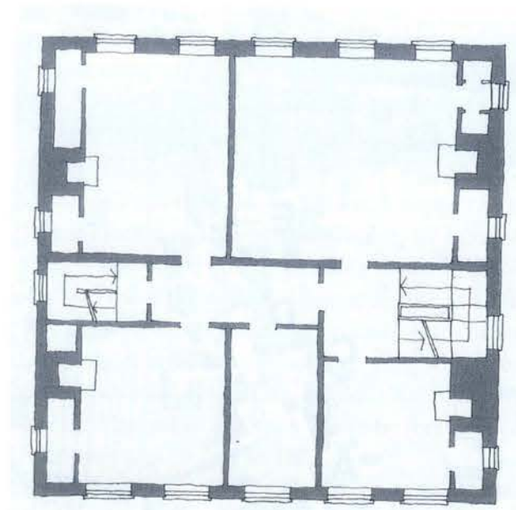
Opposite are reconstructions of the original plan and section of the house based on a detailed analysis of the building fabric. Particular note should be taken of the substantial pitched roof with dormers and overhanging eave, which was later replaced by the present second floor with its 'M' roof behind parapets. The original general arrangement has striking similarities to the surviving house at 37 Stepney Green, and the now demolished house which stood at 179 Lower Clapton Road.

Abraham Dolins II left the house to his only son Daniel Dolins (1678-1728), who appears a safe establishment figure in contrast to his troublesome sisters. He probably studied in Utrecht, as he published philosophical works there 1697 and 1698.[11] In 1700 he married Margaret Cooke, only daughter of Thomas Cooke (d.1694), a wealthy goldsmith who had held the title of lord of the manor of Lordshold from 1675. By 1708, he had been appointed a Justice of the Peace for Middlesex, at which time he became a select vestryman of the parish,[12] an office he held until his death. He was admitted to Lincolns Inn in 1713,[13] to Grays Inn in 1719,[14] and was knighted in 1722.[15] He was treasurer of the Maimed Soldiers Fund for Middlesex 1722-3,[16] chairman of the Justices in 1725, and held the post of Deputy Lieutenant for the Tower Hamlets.[17] He was involved with the work of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and maintained links with dissenters and nonconformists.. He was a trustee of St Thomas's Hospital, corresponded with the diarist Sir Ralph Thoresby,[18] and was appointed one of the Commissioners for the Fifty New Churches in 1727.[19]

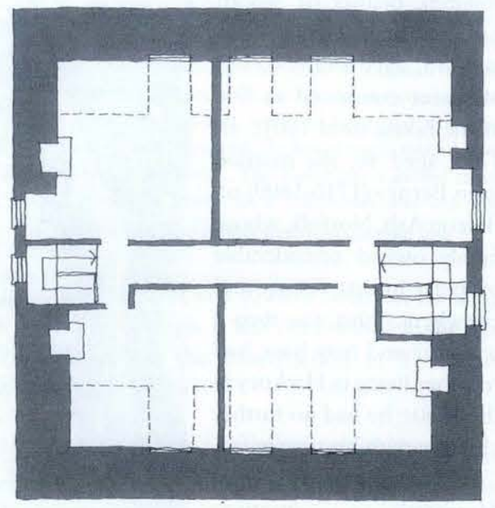
Two of Daniel Dolins' four children survived into adulthood. In his will of 1724 Dolins left the house to his wife for her lifetime; he also bequeathed

> the Bed that was some years since made up and was of the work of the Lady Player deceased.[20]

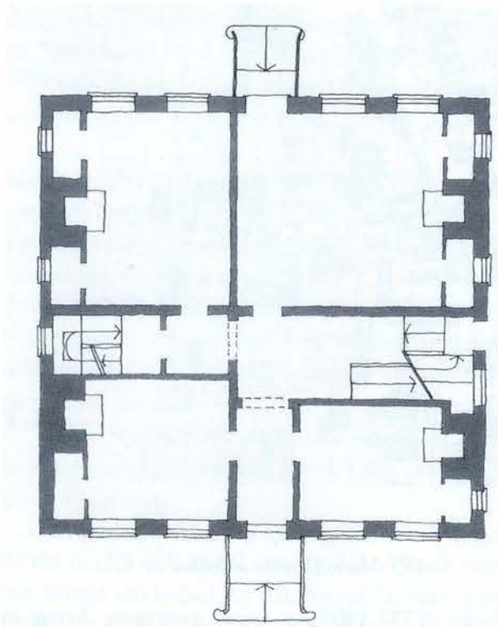
Lady Dolins lived on in the house, presumably with both of the surviving children; and on her death in 1740 the house passed to the two



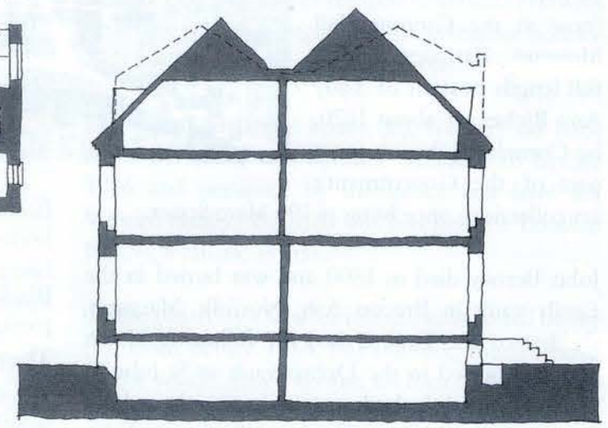
First floor



Second floor



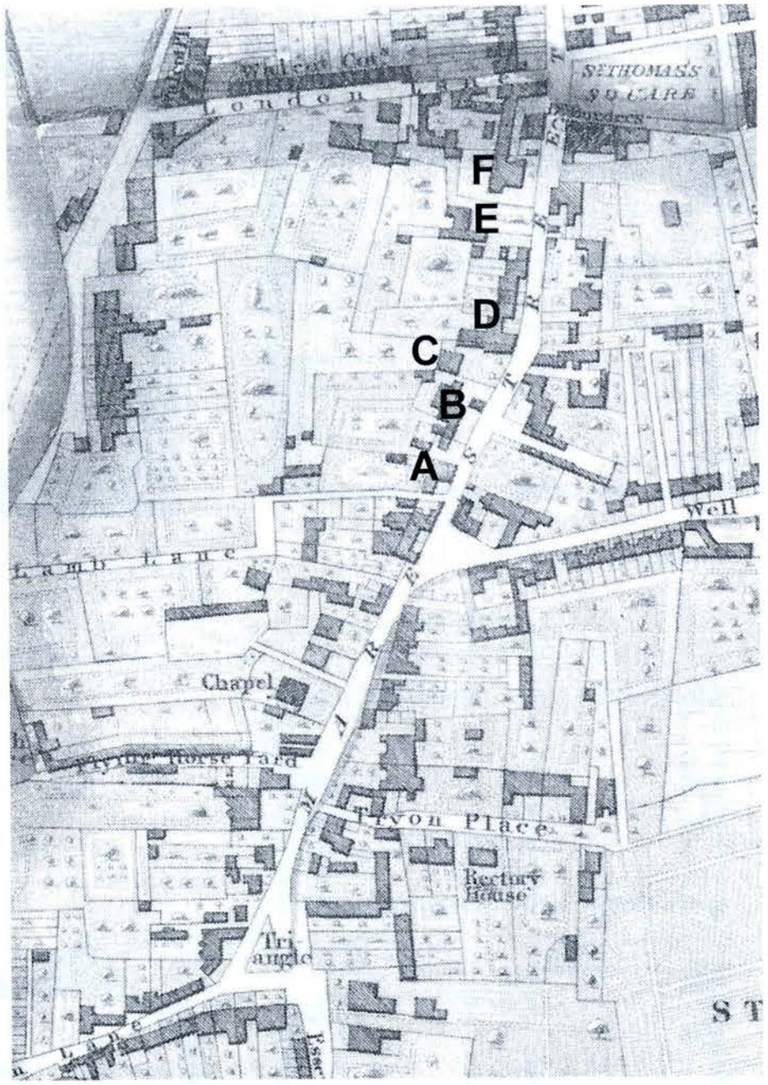
Ground floor



Suggested late 17th century floor plans, and section of 195 Mare Street showing original and present outlines

children, neither of whom had married. Daniel died in 1743, aged only 30, but Margaret continued to live in the house until 1801. In 1755, aged 40, she married John Berney (1716-1800) of Bracon Ash, Norfolk, whose family owned considerable property in that county and elsewhere. John was then a widower and may have had relations living in Hackney in the 1750s; he had no further children with his new wife.

Margaret's marriage settlement[21] provides some information about the house and contents. She was worth £10,200; but perhaps most interesting is her collection of Dutch pictures, which included works by van Dyck, van Mieris and Rembrandt. Although there may be some misattributions, it does seem likely that 'Boy with Bubbles' of 1663 by Frans van Mieris (now in the Cannon Hall Museum, Barnsley) and a full length portrait of Lady Ann Riches, of about 1620, by Cornelius Johnson (now part of the Government's art collection) once hung at 195 Mare Street.



Extract from Starling's map of Hackney parish, 1831. 195 Mare Street is identified as 'C'

John Berney died in 1800 and was buried in the family vault in Bracon Ash, Norfolk. Margaret, the last of the Dolins, died the following March and was buried in the Dolins vault at St John at Hackney. She left the house and grounds to John Berney's grandchildren.[22] Her will also includes bequests to the five servants then living in the house. The house was sold in 1801 to John Francis Blacke (1733-1809), a wine merchant, living in England by the late 1750s but originally of Berne. The sale included the

> Garden Ground Stables and Coach Houses behind and adjoining to or belonging to the said messuage tenement or dwellinghouse.[23]

The Wilson era

On Blacke's death, the house passed to Thomas Wilson (1768-1852) who was a third party in the sale of 1801 and had married Blacke's niece Anne Sabina Chenebie in 1796. Born in Whitechapel, Wilson was a merchant: partner in the firm of Agassiz Wilson by 1796, by 1814 in his own name. He was elected as Tory MP for the City of London in 1818 and 1820, before standing down in 1826; he stood unsuccessfully for the same seat in 1835. He was elected to represent mercantile rather than Corporation interests (before that time aldermen had almost exclusively been the MPs for the City). His contribution to Hackney was to be treasurer of Dr Spurstowe's charity in 1823.[24]

The remodelling of the house to remove the overhanging roof and dormers to create a full second floor, clearly dates from the late 18th or early 19th centuries, and presumably follows one of the changes of ownership in 1801 or 1809, although the present doorcase seems to belong to a slightly earlier date, of c.1780.

Maps and records from the early 19th century onwards begin to provide a more detailed picture of the house. In the census of 1821, Thomas Wilson's household comprised a total of 7 males and 9 females. With Starling's map of 1831 (opposite) it is possible for the first time to link occupiers with specific houses, and to obtain a more detailed picture of this section of Mare Street. A summary of the history of the west side of Mare Street between London Lane and Lamb Lane can now be given as follows.

At the corner of Lamb Lane and Mare Street stood the house described by Clarke as 'a very good residence, built about 1720, it had trees and a small court before it'.(A)[25] The rate books trace this substantial house to before 1716. Separated from this first house by two or three meaner dwellings, was a larger house (B) dated by Clarke to the 16th century, and described thus:

> a still older house standing farther back, with a large (and to my personal knowledge) very productive kitchen garden behind it, occupied for years by a retired wealthy goldsmith ... (it) stood well back from the road and its good sized front garden, with old fashioned flowering trees, and flowers, was, with the house itself, much below the present road level ... The house has a gabled front, with strong oak beams as a framework and lath and plaster between. The rooms were spacious but low.'[26]

Timber framed and said to have been the dwelling of Sir Walter Raleigh, it was demolished in the late 19th century for the construction of Fortescue Avenue.

195 Mare Street (C) lay to the north and slightly behind this older house. The proximity may suggest that it was built on part of the grounds of the house. Starling's map shows a large T-shaped garden extending as far as Lamb Lane.

The adjacent house to the north (D) can also be dated to before 1716. Slightly smaller than 195 and first in the occupation of the Child family, bankers and goldsmiths, it had become a school by 1851 and was later the Tre-Wint Industrial Home.[27]

In the early 18th century there were then two meaner buildings before the next substantial house. This gap was developed in about 1770 with a terrace of three larger and three smaller houses. The smaller houses were later shops.

The next substantial house (E), set very far back from the road, was another traceable to before 1716 and occupied by the Bruce and later the Wowen family. By 1826 this had became London House, a lunatic asylum.

To the north lay a smaller but still substantial house (F), from before 1716, but standing much nearer to the road. Later known as Elm House it was demolished about 1900, after serving for some years as a carmine maker's premises.[28]

The rateable values of the houses can be used to give an indication of their relative size. In the 1806 poor rate, 195 Mare Street and London House were houses of the greatest size (£100 and £106 respectively) followed by the house at the corner of Lamb Lane (£60), Elm House (£54) and the house and terrace to the north of 195 Mare Street (all £40). This places 195 Mare Street as one of the most valuable properties in the parish throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The Elizabeth Fry Refuge

After the death of Thomas Wilson, his unmarried daughter, Hester Johanna (b. 1801), lived on in the house until 1860, when it was purchased by the trustees of the Elizabeth Fry Refuge. This change to institutional use mirrored the changes that had befallen nearly all of the great gentlemen's residences of Hackney. The parish had ceased to be a rural retreat from City life, and the large houses were either demolished or pressed into use for the charitable purposes so strongly linked with the Victorian period.

Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) was a Quaker and had been a leading figure in prison reform of the early C19. After her death a meeting was held at the Mansion House in June 1846, at which it was resolved to raise a subscription to endow a charitable institution in her memory. Premises were taken in Mare Street (on the site of the present St Joseph's Hospice) and the refuge 'for affording temporary food and shelter for destitute females on their discharge from the Metropolitan gaols' was established. On the expiry of the lease for those premises, 195 Mare Street was purchased, including

> also the Garden Ground Greenhouse Stables and Coach house behind and adjoining and belonging to the said messuage tenement or dwellinghouse.[29]

> A spacious and most suitable house with a large garden has been purchased for this purpose in Mare Street, altered and put into complete repair at an expense of about £3000. To this the family has moved in July last and it is found to be admirably adapted for the working of the Institute. In addition to other conveniences it comprises an excellent washhouse and laundry which will make the Institute more self sufficient by taking in laundry as well as plain needlework. [30]

> ... report was made of the freehold residence in Mare Street Hackney, late Thomas Wilson's with almost One Acre of ground, enclosed with lofty brick walls with Iron Railings and Entrance gates, approached with a carriage sweep from the road with considerable frontage to Mare Street, situated between Well Street and St Thomas Square on the west side. The house contains on the second floor five bedrooms, on the first floor six bedrooms. Ground floor Drawing room 28' x 17' Dining room, servants hall, cloak room, water closet and spacious entrance hall. On the basement 2 kitchens, scullery, Larder, Dairy, Wine beer and coal cellars and other domestic offices with washhouse fruit house &c. The stabling comprises a six stall stable and two coach houses with lofts over and adjoining a knife house, bottle house wood house and other conveniences- in the rear is a Lawn - a large Garden beyond with a noble beech tree in the centre, a large Green house - kitchen garden- melon ground &c the whole occupying an area of about 4200 sq yds.[31]

Before the Institute moved to their new premises, alterations were carried out under the direction of their architect William Beck (1823-1907). On his recommendation, the stables lying to the north east of the house were demolished and the land, which had a frontage to Mare Street, was leased for the construction of two shops. The carriage sweep and two sets of gates and ironwork were removed, to be replaced by a pedestrian entrance on the axis of the house. The rooms in the basement were modified to create a girls' dining room, and lavatories for the girls were constructed in the rear garden, placed under the watchful eye of the matron. The land immediately to the north of the house (to the rear of the former stables) was used as a wash-house and laundry.

The Gurney, Fry and Buxton families were inextricably linked with the operation of the charity throughout the time of its occupation. The house provided a home for up to 30 young women at any one time, together with key staff. The rules of the Home were recorded in 1879[32] as follows:

> 1 Cases are received from the Metropolitan Prisons, free of charge
>
> 2 County cases on a payment of 4 shillings per week
>
> 3 No case received unless coming to the Refuge direct from Prison under the care of a warder
>
> 4 The red papers of admission and medical certificates to be fitted up and signed before a case can be admitted, These can be obtained on application to the Matron
>
> 5 No confirmed drunken cases can be admitted
>
> 6 Cases from 16-40 years of age are admissible, such as are suited for domestic service. Young hopeful cases are preferred
>
> 7 Cases remain in the Refuge for 3-12 months according as suitable situations can be found for them
>
> 8 No case can be re-admitted whether leaving of their own accord or not
>
> 9 Those cases who have been in their situation one year and can bring a statement of good conduct from their mistress receive a dress as a reward

The women had generally been detained in metropolitan prisons for a relatively short time (usually no more than a month) for what would now be seen as minor offences. Of the 98 women who had been resident during 1884, 61 had been imprisoned for theft, 2 for breaking glass, 1 as disorderly, 2 for assault, 4 for attempted suicide, 6 for illegal pledging, 3 for uttering bad money, 5 for 'disturbance at Unions' and 14 for miscellaneous offences. They would usually stay for 4 to 5 months; the Refuge seems to have had to buy about half a dozen dresses as rewards every year. Manacles dating from this period of occupation were, apparently, still to be seen within the basement until the rebuilding works of 1984.

In 1875 the size of the rear garden was greatly reduced by the sale of the land forming the cross piece of the T-shaped garden. The sale was subsequently regretted, but the land had been considered of little value and too difficult to supervise adequately.[33]

In 1899 the London County Council embarked on a scheme for widening Mare Street. Under the Act of Parliament obtained for this purpose the LCC compulsorily purchased a strip of land along the front of 195 Mare Street and the whole of the properties known as 197 and 199 Mare Street, which then housed a leather manufacturer and a boot maker respectively. The boundary fence to 195 was relocated and the buildings at 197 and 199 were demolished; the compensation for this and from the purchase of 197 and 199 were paid to Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (1837-1915), one of the original trustees of the Refuge.

The annual report for 1911 notes

> The constant need for repairs in the old premises had become a serious item in the yearly expenditure and when at last the walls threatened to collapse it was felt that delay was no longer possible...A purchaser has been found.[34]

The New Lansdowne Club

The Lansdowne Liberal and Radical Club moved into the house in 1913, becoming by 1928 The New Lansdowne Club.[35] The club had previously been based in Twemlow Terrace on the south side of London Fields. The New Lansdowne Club was a working men's club, affiliated to the Club and Institute Union. The objects of the club were

> to afford to its members the means of social intercourse, mutual helpfulness, mental and moral improvement, and rational recreation.[36]

On purchasing the property the club carried out a substantial amount of building work, including construction of a freestanding concert hall in the rear garden. It seems probable that the opening up of the whole of the first floor as a billiard room and the removal of the secondary staircase was undertaken at the same time, as there were still references to 'the back stairs' during the late 19th century. The concert hall was built by F. & H. F. Higgs to the design of Charles H. Ford, and comprises a brick external wall supporting a series of metal trusses under a slated roof. The stage is high, in the manner of music hall stages of the

The house as club premises in 1942

time, and sits under a brick proscenium arch. Two dressing rooms project from the west end, behind the stage.

In 1938-9 the rear bay of the original house was demolished, a flat-roofed link was built between the club and the concert hall, and a substantial part of the rear wall was opened up at ground floor level. The single storey buildings to the north of the house were replaced by toilet blocks abutting the north wall. These works were carried out under the direction of the Brewery's architect, A. H. Taylor of Crayford. The concert hall remained a separate building, with a small gallery at the east end until building work of 1971 opened up the whole of the interior (as it stands today), and added toilets and bar space to replace those lost from under the concert hall gallery.

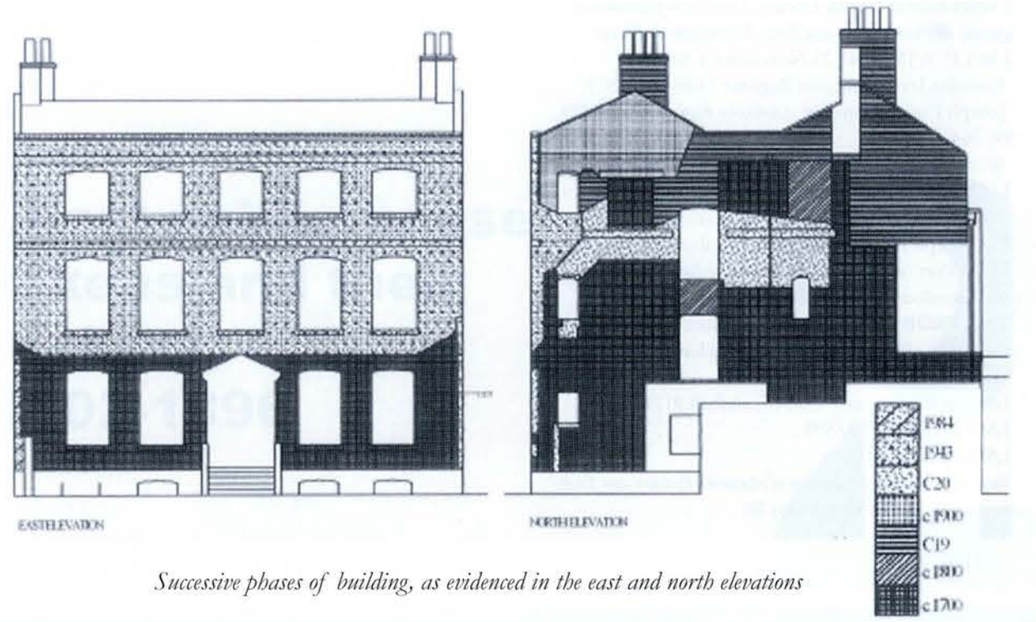
During the war the local division of the Home Guard were based in the Club, using the concert hall and two first floor rooms for their activities. On 16th September 1940 the front wall and top floor were damaged by a delayed action high explosive bomb.[37] The front wall had been the subject of a dangerous structure notice and repair in 1929. The upper parts of the front wall were rebuilt in 1943[38] and the top floor refurbished in 1944[39], at least partly funded as war damage.

The building was listed at Grade II* in 1951.

In 1984 the whole of the south wall was rebuilt; this wall was described as a problem in 1886 and appears to have been repaired on a number of occasions.

The future

After an extended period of decline, the New Lansdowne Club closed in 2004. The building has been purchased, and planning and listed building consent granted, for conversion of the main house to a centre for the Vietnamese community, including demolition of the hall to the rear and construction



Successive phases of building, as evidenced in the east and north elevations

of new buildings to the west of the house.

Although now a unique survival, the house is representative of the contemporary buildings built for wealthy merchants in the late 17th century, which then survived gentle decline in the 18th and early 19th centuries as Hackney became less attractive, and were demolished or turned to institutional use from the mid 19th century onwards. With the general replacement of the work of private or charitable institutions by local authorities in the early 20th century, the remaining contemporary buildings were demolished for redevelopment leaving only 195 Mare Street to represent this building type.

The historic fabric of the building has inevitably been eroded by the changes which were necessary to ensure the survival of the building. Nonetheless there are areas of original timber panelling concealed behind later facings, interesting joinery in and around windows, sections of the canted bay window at basement level, a roof structure which clearly re-uses timbers from the original roof and floor structures and staircases which are relatively complete. It is essential that these remaining fragments should survive the next building campaigns so that future generations will be able to investigate and understand the complex history of this important building.

This article was developed from research undertaken as part of a feasibility study for 195 Mare Street, commissioned in 1997 by English Heritage and the London Borough of Hackney.

Notes

1. VCH X, 25
2. ibid.
3. LMA P79/JN1/141 April 15 1708.
4 .The Stovin manuscript held by Yorkshire Archaeological Society.
5. W. Moens, *The Registers of the Dutch Reformed Church, Austin Friars* (1884), passim .
6. Clyde L Grose, 'The Dunkirk Money', *Journal of Modern History,* March 1933.
7. Gary S De Krey, *London and the Restoration 1659-1682* (2005)
8. TNA PROB 36/9 1706 and 1707.
9. LMA MDR 1801 5/599
10. LMA HI/ST/E65.

11. Copies held at British Library: *Dissertatio philosophica inauguralis de Admiratione and Resp. Exercitatio de Pluvia.*
12. LMA P79/JN1/141 25 November 1708.
13. Lincolns Inn Admission Register 1420-1893, 375.
14. Joseph Foster *Grays Inn Admission Register 1521-1889,* (1889) 364.
15. W. A. Shaw, *Knights of England* (1971) II 282.
16. LMA, Middlesex Sessions Records.
17. Note included on *Boyds Index of Inhabitants of London.*
18. Rev Joseph Hunter The Diary of John Thoresby (1830).
19. M. H. Port (ed.), *The Commissions for building fifty new churches* (London Record Society vol. 23, 1986).
20. TNA PROB 11/622. Lady Player had lived with the Cooke family after the death of her husband, Thomas.
21. Norfolk Record Office 429/69x1.
22. London Commissary Court Guildhall 9171/92.
23. LMA MDR 1801 5/599.
24. LMA Acc. 1845/16.
25. Benjamin Clarke, *Glimpses of Ancient Hackney and Stoke Newington* (ed D. Mander, 1986) 26.
26. ibid.
27. VCH X, 74.
28. David Mander, *Britain in Old Photographs: Hackney Homerton and Dalston* (1996) 47.
29. LMA MDR X73/177 7/338.
30. HAD D/S/58/1 (hereafter 'Fry Refuge') Annual Report, 1860.
31. HAD Fry Refuge committee minutes. 23 March 1860.
32. HAD Fry Refuge Annual Report, 1879.
33. HAD Fry Refuge committee minutes, 1878.
34. HAD Fry Refuge Annual Report for 1911.
35. Although in correspondence of 1913 with the LCC, the club is titled the New Lansdowne Club.
36. *Rules of the New Lansdowne Club.* Printed booklet. Formerly held at the club, location not now known.
37. Jenny Golden, *Hackney at War* (1995) 124.
38. LBH Building Control, District Surveyor's file. This conflicts with the date of 1945 on a National Monuments Record photograph of an unreconstructed front elevation.
39. Lansdowne Club committee minutes 6 April 1944. Formerly held at the club, location not now known. Extracts in author's collection.

Local public-house tokens and their makers, 1802-1896

2

Robert H. Thompson

Introduction

Amongst the large number of tokens produced in Britain from about 1830, many name a public house. They were usually struck in brass, or copper or white metal, and had a diameter of 28 mm. The purpose of these checks (as contemporaries called them) has not been well understood, but in a 1982 paper Andrew Wager and the present writer documented various early uses.[1] Of the 1,532 pub checks described by Neumann as early as 1865 (and so likely to represent their original functions), 285 name not only the pub, and often the publican and a denomination between a halfpenny and sixpence, but also the following pub facilities.

71 per cent refer to games such as bagatelle, bowling and skittles, in which the checks could be used as credit for refreshment on a future occasion, or as prizes. That, however, ran the danger of prosecution as gaming, which was an offence against an alehouse licence. In the 1869 case of *Danford v. Taylor* Miles Danford, beerseller, and three others had played twenty or thirty games at ten-pins for a pint of beer each game, the beer being supplied as it was won or lost, but paid for only by the losers. The Court of Queen's Bench confirmed the opinion of magistrates that it was equally gaming, whether they played for money or for money's worth, Lord Chief Justice Cockburn adding 'they agreed by playing these games to determine who as losers should pay for those who won. This is simply gaming'. In the following years there were several prosecutions of licensees for allowing gambling through the use of checks.[2] Games and gaming are a likely context for the use of checks in Hackney.

17 per cent of the 1,532 checks listed in 1865 referred to other forms of entertainment such as concerts, gardens, and a music saloon. The principal local example is the flourishing Eagle Tavern, Shepherdess Walk, see below, but Diana Howard found licences for music hall also (amongst check-issuing pubs) at the Jolly Anglers, Lea Bridge from 1852; the Earl of Aberdeen, Bridport Place, Hoxton, from 1854;

the Alma tavern, Alma Street (now Crondall Street) Hoxton, from 1856; the Devonshire Arms, Bristow Street (formerly off Cropley Street, Hoxton) and the Royal Hotel (now the Royal Inn on the Park) at the Lauriston Road entrance to Victoria Park, both from 1862.[3]

Three per cent of those checks indicated the meeting-place of a club or friendly society, where purchase of a minimum number of checks was expected as 'wet rent' for the room. Frequently the registered office of a friendly society was a pub, with the publican as treasurer. Many of these pubs issued checks, e.g. 107 out of the 178 in Birmingham listed by the Registrar of Friendly Societies in 1876. In 1860 he had included a letter from someone claiming to have been refused admission to a friendly society because he was unwilling to purchase a 'liquor ticket'. The only specific example locally is a twopence of the White Bear at 96 Kingsland Road, which is inscribed CLUB (Hayes 291). J. Jones was shown as publican in C. W. Brabner's *Borough of Hackney Directory 1872*, which covers the parliamentary borough, and thus helpfully includes the parishes of Hackney and Shoreditch, also Bethnal Green.[4]

The remaining eight per cent include REFRESHMENT checks such as those for four pence at the Royal Hotel, Victoria Park under the licensees John Miles 1865 (above), then James Simmons 1868-96 (Hayes 241-2; left), so it is likely they were used for music hall there.

A trade convenience

We concluded in 1982 that the checks were part of a system to boost consumption of drink and so increase publicans' profits. Sir George Young, one of the assistant commissioners to the 1874 Royal Commission on Friendly Societies, reported that the Great Western Annual Benefit Society in Bristol had become a mere drinking club. The members

> pay 2s. a month, and get 3d. back in beer out of that. The beer is distributed on the "cheque" system; so it is all drunk, and all are enlisted in keeping up the system.[5]

There is, however, little real evidence for the existence of such a system. We now see that our conclusion was unduly influenced by the hostile views of John Tidd Pratt, Registrar of Friendly Societies, and that the tokens were simply a trade convenience, which publicans might use however they chose.[6]

Locations and makers

The date 1802 in the title to this article refers to a one-off production which is best left until the end, for the main series of pub checks extended from c.1830 to c.1920.[7] Arrangement of the tokens below is by the manufacturers, in Birmingham or London, who supplied the checks to publicans in the area of the present London borough of Hackney, though the basic reference, alphabetical by name of pub in each Greater London borough, and illustrating many of the checks from rubbings, is by Ralph Hayes. Excluded, therefore, as all strictly in Islington, are the Lord Raglan, and the Trafalgar (with quoit & pleasure grounds), in Southgate Road, the Downham Arms in Downham Road, and the Rosemary Branch 'Hoxton' (Shepperton Road); likewise the Queen's Arms and the Seabright Arms on the south side of Hackney Road, and the Lea Tavern at Hackney Wick (White Post Lane), all strictly in Tower Hamlets. On the other hand, the checks for William Wright at the former White Hart, 24 Clifton Street (Hayes 301, 301a) put it in Finsbury, though the street was actually in Shoreditch.[8]

An exceptional feature of these manufactured products is that many of them name both their source (the maker) and their destination (the pub). Such customised goods tended to be excluded from Birmingham and Sheffield warehouses (to be

The eagle on top of the Eagle pub in Sheperherdess Walk, believed to be the original from Conquest's tavern

found especially in the London EC postal districts), with their concentration on the mass-produced products of the main hardware manufacturing centres. In consequence the check-makers had to make their own arrangements via agents such as printers and ironmongers. Dr Yolanda Courtney has been able to map the distribution of the output of individual manufacturers, who were based above all in Birmingham, with offshoots in Exeter, London, etc.[9]

Refreshment tickets or checks

The sixpence checks of the Eagle tavern and Royal Grecian saloon, City Road (2 Shepherdess Walk), are the earliest within the London borough of Hackney. As confirmed by handbills for the 'Royal Eagle Coronation Pleasure Grounds and Grecian Saloon' [1838?], a gentleman paid one shilling for admission to the Lower Stall etc., and received a check entitling him to call for whatever refreshment he pleased to the value of sixpence, in that strange combination of 'Rossini and refreshment tickets, Auber and alcohol, Bellini and bottled beer.'[10] The 1854 Select Committee on Public Houses heard that 'you have to pay sixpence for a refreshment ticket; a refreshment ticket gives the privilege of taking a lady in; they wait round the door to be taken in by gentlemen', and 'the most detrimental place…as far as women are concerned, is the Eagle Tavern.' The Committee was also told by Mr James Balfour that 'at the Eagle Tavern a Sunday Refreshment-ticket entitles you to admission and sixpenny-worth of refreshment; if you go upon other days of the week you pay for the amusements and the refreshments also', which suggests that they were used to evade the Sunday Licensing laws.[11] The establishment's reputation was summed up in 1861 by the following.[12]

> Anxious mothers in the country, fearing the contamination of London and the ruin it has brought on other sons, lodge them in remote Islington, or Hoxton, still more remote. It is in vain they do so. The Haymarket may be far off, but the Grecian Saloon is near; and the young hopefuls come in at half-price, for sixpence… And then there are the unfortunates from the City-road, with painted faces, brazen looks, and gorgeous silks; mercenary in every thought and feeling, and with hearts hard as adamant …

One of these checks for REFRESHMENTS | 6D | SIXPENCE (Hayes 101) is illustrated below, with the other side naming T ROUSE | EAGLE | TAVERN | CITY-ROAD, who was there from

1821 to 1851. Thomas 'Bravo' Rouse's check does not name its maker. Neither do the refreshment checks of his successors, Benjamin Oliver known as Conquest, 1851-72 (Hayes 231), and his son George Augustus Conquest, 1872-79 (Hayes 232).[13]

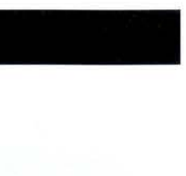
Roy Hawkins discovered an ornamental disc from the same reverse die as Benjamin Conquest's sixpence, below, which on the other side has an inscription naming W. J. Taylor, maker.[14]

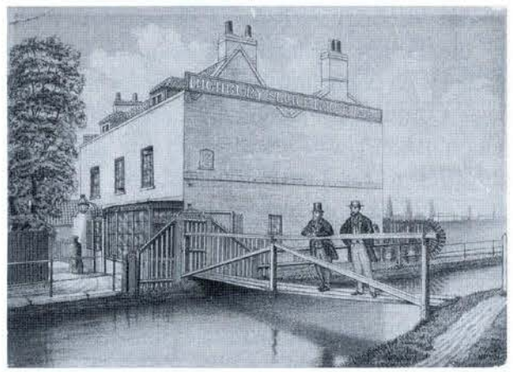
In 1841 Samuel Lane announced his 'Royal Britannia Saloon and Britannia Tavern…Upper Circle, 1*s*., for which a Refreshment ticket is given', but none from the Britannia Theatre in Hoxton Street has been identified (perhaps they were made of cardboard or paper). There exists in Hackney Museum a 6d refreshment ticket for the Sluice House tavern (right), formerly near the Sluice house on the New River (Somerfield Road/ Wilberforce Road N4) c.1858-68 (Hayes 251).[15]

The makers

Henry Smith, Birmingham

Henry Smith (fl. 1852-1904) operated in Birmingham at 17 Hampton Street until 1894, and subsequently at 5 Howard Street and 40 Kenyon Street. In an 1860 directory he described his business as 'Heraldic die sinker, official and desk seal engraver; stamper & piercer; manufacturer of improved copying, embossing, & eyelet presses; metallic address cards, tokens, checks, brass labels, reel & bottle caps, permanent zinc labels for annuals, trees, plants, shrubs, &c'. Perhaps these other lines found him customers in Hoxton. His numismatic output included imitation spade guineas, bagatelle checks, and co-operative society checks, as well as public-house checks.[16] In fact, amongst 44 makers in Birmingham he had 6 per cent of the total. Henry Smith secured only five known orders in southern England, but one was in Hackney.[17] This was a 1½d check datable to 1855-66 or '67 for Levi Clarke at the Green Man, 257 Hoxton Street, (Hayes 141), recently closed. Hayes gives Levi Clarke's dates from directories as 1856-67, moving thereafter to the Prince of Wales, Arbour Street, East Stepney. However, the rate books (Hoxton Town until 1864, then Hoxton Street) list Levi Clark(e) from 22 October 1855 until 23 October 1866, with James





The Sluice House Tavern

Moore rated on 16 July 1867.[18] Checks for the next two licensees at the Green Man, James Moore 1867-73 (Hayes 142), and J. Bellinger (Hayes 143, noting Richard Bellinger in 1874), were supplied by W. J. Taylor.

W. J. Taylor, Holborn

William Joseph Taylor (1802-1885) was born in Birmingham, and trained there under the die-sinker Thomas Halliday. In 1829 he moved to London and set up his own business, at 33 Little Queen Street, Holborn from 1845 to 1867, and from 1868 until his death at 70 Red Lion Street, Holborn, with a medal press at Crystal Palace. A portrait of him is reproduced on plate 32 by Hawkins, who illustrates on page 471 of his work the screw press that Taylor exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851, and transcribes on page 740 his directory description after moving to Red Lion Street:

> Medallist, diesinker, official seal engraver, medals, coins, tradesmen's advertisement tokens, checks for theatres, market salesmen, publicans, &c., metal labels, presses, punches, &c.

Taylor established a dominant position, with 376 types of pub check for London, 61 per cent of the total. Designs vary a little, but characteristically they had a diameter of 28 mm, unvarying with denominations ranging from ½d. to 12 pence.[19] His address also was unvarying as

W.J.TAYLOR MEDALLIST LONDON, with the exception locally of a 23 mm threepence omitting the word MEDALLIST for John Peter Craven at the Alma, Hoxton [Cherbury Street] 1860-63 (Hayes 2a, incorrectly recording '28' mm), and a sixpence giving Taylor's address as 33 LITTLE QUEEN ST.W.C. LONDON for the former Lord Clyde, London Road (now Clapton Way) (Hayes 171a), which probably dates from about 1865. The remaining checks by Taylor can be dated only from the tenancy of the licensee if named, so it is not easy to put them into any order other than alphabetical.

The former Red Lion (now just 'The Lion'), Stoke Newington Church Street

Details of those not already mentioned may be found in Hayes under the names shown on the following page. Of these only the De Beauvoir Arms (renamed), Red Lion (above; name abridged), and the Swan (building 'to let') appear to survive in 2006.

Hackney pub checks produced by W. J. Taylor

(see also page 17)

Alma tavern Alma Street N1 (now Cherbury Street): Solomon Deacon 1857-59

Birch Tree tavern, Great James Street N1 (now Purcell Street):
publican unnamed (but J. Kendall in Brabner 1872, afterwards at the Jolly Anglers?)

Bridge House, 20 Wharf Road N1: Robert Batchelder 1861-75

De Beauvoir Arms, Hertford Road N1 (then 28 Stamford Road):George Dunn 1862
(the pub name survives in ironwork above both entrances of what is now The Trolley Stop)

Duke of Wellington, Shacklewell Road N16: W. J. Cowlin 1865
(the pub is presumably remembered in Wellington Mansions, with 12 flats)

Earl of Aberdeen, 112 Bridport Place N1: William Lenton 1873-4

Foresters Hall, 15 Haggerston Road E8: G. E. Chambers 1872

Garibaldi, 3 Ware Street (formerly north of Nuttall Street) N1:
J. Cole, to whom Charles Cole 1864 can now be added [Hayes 131b]

Ivy House tavern, Hoxton [Pitfield Street] N1: publican unnamed, but Fred Collingwood in the 1859 rate book, HAD L/F/31, f. 371

Jolly Anglers, Lea Bridge E5: Joseph Kendall 1882-4

Lord Clyde, London Road now Clapton Way E5: J. Partridge, untraced

Marquis of Lansdowne, Hackney Road [32 Cremer Street] E2:
W. W. Prater 1864-8

Middleton Arms, 7 Mansfield Street now Whiston Road E2: William Lake 1860-61

Pearson Arms, 1 Pearson Street E2: Robert William Flanders 1866-9

Red Lion, 132 Stoke Newington Church Street N16: John Ayres 1868-72
('The Lion' in 2006)

Swan, 438 Kingsland Road E8: James Plastow 1853-66.[20]

Hayes also includes at ii. 252 a check for Thomas M. Lewis, wine and spirit merchant 1856-60 in Stoke Newington Road N16. Those illustrated represent a range of denominations.

James Johnson, 32 Newington Causeway
James Johnson, stationer, also lithographic and letterpress printer, and manufacturer of metal checks, tickets, and luggage labels, was in the street called Old Bailey 1865-73, then in Skipton Street, Southwark 1874-5, and at 32 Newington Causeway from 1876 until 1898. He is known to have produced tallies for returnable containers at London wholesale markets such as Billingsgate, 'famous for fish and bad language', also 11 checks for pubs in southern England. That for the Horse & Trumpeter, Crutched Friars, has been linked through its reverse die to checks signed by Liverpool and Sheffield makers, which suggests some central source for working dies, probably in Birmingham. Roy Hawkins assumed that Johnson's check for a DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE must belong in London, and that the other London pub of the name, in Balham High Road, was seemingly too remote for checks, so the checks for 1½d. and 2d. are attributed to the Duke of Devonshire lately at 72 Darnley Road E9 (Hayes 81, 81a). Hayes, however, repeats them for Balham in the London Borough of Wandsworth (WAN 11, 11a), and the Hackney attribution remains uncertain.[21]

Kibbs, Bunhill Row
This maker is a complete mystery. The name was first recorded by Forrer from a 1½d. check in a private collection reading G SKINNER | ALMA | 1869 (Hayes 3), with the words KIBBS | BUNHILL ROW in tiny letters above the date, which Hawkins could not see on the specimen he eventually acquired, and which Hayes does not record. At the date of 1869 the pub can only be the Alma tavern in Cherbury Street N1 where, following the two publicans whom W. J. Taylor supplied, George Skinner was licensee in 1867, and in 1870-73, an entertainment licence having been refused in 1868 due to Sunday trading.

No trace, however, has been found of a die-sinker or other metal worker in Bunhill Row, or of any tradesman named Kibbs.[22]

Francis Ponton, 6 Ropemaker Street, EC2
The checks mentioned above for William Wright, White Hart, 24 Clifton Street EC2, 1859-89 (Hayes i. 127, nos. 301 and 301a) read on the reverse FINE ALES & CIGARS around the denomination of 1½d. or 2d., and in an outer circle F. PONTON MAKER | LONDON. Francis Ponton was a maker of door and window furniture, and an engraver and printer to the trade, 1858-60. It is likely that Ponton made these checks for Wright at the nearby White Hart in about 1858, when they were both starting in business. The twopence is illustrated by Hawkins.[23]

Ralph Neal, Percival Street, EC1
Ralph Neal (1842-1922) traded as a die-sinker, medallist, heraldic and official seal engraver, metal stamper, piercer, maker of copying presses and of labels of all descriptions; Hawkins reproduces a photograph of him. He began in 1866 in Percival Street, Clerkenwell, where the business continued under his sons until 1936, then in New Southgate until 1948. He specialised in market checks or tallies, which were marked with the values of returnable containers used by wholesale food markets, especially those in London such as Spitalfields.[24] However, a director of one such company, in Shoreditch Library, Pitfield Street, sometime between 1969 and 1988 (when the present writer was Reference Librarian), remembered the tallies as a nuisance. Ralph Neal hardly intruded on W. J. Taylor's speciality of public-house checks, so the nearest that Neal came to Hackney pubs may be the Lea Tavern, Hackney Wick, already mentioned as being in Tower Hamlets (Hayes TOW 201), but a Neal 2d. from an unlocated BRICKLAYERS | ARMS, illustrated by Courtney, might be attributed to the Bricklayers' Arms at 63 Charlotte Road EC2.[25] There were other London pubs of the name, however.

Unsigned checks

The small number of local pub checks bearing no maker's name may be mentioned in order to complete the picture:

Bishop Blaize, formerly in New Inn Yard EC2: no licensee named; H. Farnham was there by 1872 (Brabner), though a specimen had been acquired by the British Museum in 1870 (Hayes 31, 31a);

Devonshire Arms, formerly in Bristow now Cropley Street N1: William Henry Bedding 1871-4 (Hayes 71), though Howard 214 shows him licensed there from 1870;

Weavers Arms, formerly at 2 Stamford Hill N16: John Hobbs 1863-76 (Hayes 281), the name of the pub being visible still on the building at the corner of Cazenove Road. In 1912 the Weavers Arms became the terminus for a new 76 motor-omnibus route, which probably replaced a horse bus service.[26]

An unsigned Three-halfpence and Threepence for the former **Robin Hood tavern**, Hoxton [140 Pitfield Street] (Hayes 221a-b) are from the same obverse die as a Three-halfpence and Four pence

signed by W. J. Taylor (Hayes 221, 221c), which allowed Roy Hawkins to attribute to him a series of unsigned discs.[27] Some brass Three-halfpences of the Robin Hood have been countermarked A O, doubtless to re-validate them for the publican Alfred Oliver 1874-9 (Hayes 222).

Engraved and enamelled pieces

By the end of the nineteenth century the smallest die-sinking firms were being squeezed out of existence, but there was a continuing phenomenon of customer-led, non-standard pub checks.[28] This was the context for the creation of a piece struck on one side from a die reading THE CROWN | CURTAIN ROAD around ALWAYS | WELCOME above and below a central piercing, but on the other side from a blank die which permitted a local jeweller or similar metal-engraver to engrave on that side *Jim* | *Cawley* | *1896* (Hayes 51). James Charles Cawley was recorded at the former Crown, 54 Curtain Road EC2, in 1897 only. Since several specimens are known they were probably some sort of functional check with an advertising component.

This is unlikely to be true of two other engraved pieces. Hayes 271 is transcribed as follows, except that he used colons to represent line divisions, and another has been assumed before *Unicorn*:

Obverse: *Chas. Warman* | *Unicorn* | *Hoxton*
Reverse: *Born* | *Oct 9* | *1808*

This must be more in the nature of a commemoration, presumably of the son of William Warman who is listed at the Unicorn, Hoxton, in Holden's 1811 directory.

The second piece came to light in 2005. A normal George III 'cartwheel' penny of 1797 retains the King's head but has had the Britannia reverse ground flat and engraved with:
JOHN PAYNE | *King's head* | CLAPTON, | 1802.

This became the Old King's Head, 28 Upper Clapton Road E5 (recently closed), where once was sited the third milestone from Shoreditch Church. It is probably a private 'hatch, match and dispatch'

commemoration of the licensee or his relative, for 'Payne L. the King's Head, Clapton' occurs in Holden's 1811 directory.[29]

Finally, there may be mentioned a colourful piece which could have functioned as a pass or badge of authority, though it has been included with pub checks as Hayes 11, and by Courtney:[30]

Obverse: +ARSENAL TAVERN | BLACKSTOCK ROAD+ around R.RUSBY
Reverse: L.V.B.I. in turquoise enamel | V.C in red enamel, all within a floral circle in turquoise enamel.[31]

Mrs R. M. Rusby is recorded at 175 Blackstock Road N4, 1941-55, and this is still the address of the Arsenal tavern. It is assumed that she (or her husband?) was Vice-chairman of something like a Licensed Victuallers Benevolent Institution.

Conclusion

Insufficient information has been found to integrate the use of local pub checks into such themes as 'rational recreation' or 'the business of pleasure'.[31] However, it may be sufficient to have drawn attention to their existence, with some indication of how they were produced, supplied, and used.

Notes

1. R. H. Thompson and A. J. Wager, 'The purpose and use of public-house checks', *British Numismatic Journal* 52 (1982), 215-33. Pages 215-18 and 230-32 draw on Josef Neumann, *Beschreibung der bekanntesten Kupfermünzen, Vol. IV* (Prague, 1865).
2. *Law Times Reports,* new series, 20 (March-Aug. 1869), 483-4; 'Is it legal to play for cheques at bagatelle?', *Licensed Victuallers' Guardian,* 3 Sep. 1870, 316, see also 298; *Justice of the Peace* 35 (1871), 253; *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette,* 27 Sep. 1873.
3. Diana Howard, *London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950* (1970), nos. 23, 214, 251, 408, and 684, the Eagle tavern being no. 248.
4. Ralph Hayes, *Hotel and Pub Checks of Greater London* (Alton, 1991-93, 2 vols.); Charles W. Brabner, *The Borough of Hackney Directory, 1872.*
5. Royal Commission on Friendly and Benefit Building Societies, *Reports of the Assistant Commissioners: Southern and Eastern Counties of England* (Parl. Papers, 1874 (C.997) XXIII Part II), 63; *ODNB* s.v. Young, Sir George, third baronet (1837-1930).
6. Yolanda C. S. Courtney, *Public House Tokens in England and Wales, c.1830-c.1920* (2004), xii-xiii, 'Preface' by R. H. Thompson; *ODNB* s.v. Pratt, John Tidd (1797-1870).
7. For the principal publications see Courtney, ix-x 'Abbreviations', and 7-11 'Previous research'.
8. Hayes 301 (1½d.) and 301a (2d.) at i. 127; London County Council, *Names of Streets and Places in the Administrative County of London,* 4th edn. (1955), 179.
9. Courtney, pp. 146-7, citing as an example Kelly's *Post Office London Directory* for 1870.
10. R. Mander and J. Mitchenson, *British Music Hall,* rev. edn. (1974), pp. 13-17, citing *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal,* June 1839; Harold Scott, *The Early Doors* (1946), 79 and facing p. 128, the handbill including the 'Royal Victoria Pavilion'.
11. House of Commons. Select Committee on Public Houses and Places of Public Entertainment. *Report from the Select Committee on Public Houses…* (HC 1854, xiv. 231), 71, 280, 282, QQ 1229, 4768, 4800.
12. J. Ewing Ritchie, *The Night Side of London,* 3rd edn. (1861), 240-8.

13. Christopher Brunel, 'Music hall, midgets, & the movies', *Coins*, 8 no. 2, Feb. 1971, 10-12; Bill Manley, *Islington entertained* (1990), 23-28, 125; *ODNB* s.v. Conquest [*formerly* Oliver], George Augustus (1837-1901).
14. R. N. P. Hawkins, *A Dictionary of Makers of British Metallic Tickets, Checks, Medalets, Tallies, and Counters, 1788-1910*; ed. Edward Baldwin (1989), 744.
15. Alfred L. Crauford, *Sam and Sallie: a romance of the stage* (1933), 221; Mary Cosh, *An Historical Walk along the New River* (1982), 24-26; Bill Manley, *Islington Entertained* (1990), 104-5.
16. Hawkins, 454-60.
17. Courtney, 72, 182.
18. HAD, Shoreditch ratebooks: (1855) L/F/27, f.465; (1866) L/F/38, f. 369; (1867) L/F/39, f.354.
19. L. Forrer, *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists* (1904-30, 8 vols.), vi. 41-43, viii. 233; Hawkins, 711-56, pl. 32; Courtney, 182.
20. Hayes, i. 54-70, 126-27, ii. 251-52, 255A, 257; J. Williams, *Hackney Directory*, 4th edn. (1853).
21. Hawkins, 663-6; Courtney, 117-18.
22. Forrer, viii. 367; Hawkins, 830; Howard, no. 23.
23. Hawkins, 695, pl. 25.6.
24. Neil B. Todd et al., 'Research notes on London & provincial market tallies', *British & Irish Tokens Journal* 1 no. 1 (Aug. 1980), 40-50.
25. Hawkins, 673-80, pl. 32; Courtney, 200-4.
26. Omnibus Society, London Historical Research Group, *Motor Omnibus Routes in London* (1990-), ii. 66. I owe this reference to Andrew Ward.
27. Hawkins, 715, type IIC.
28. Courtney, 140.
29. *Holden's Annual London and Country Directory* (1811), Vol. I: London alphabet of professions, trades &c., s.v. Warman, and Payne; Benjamin Clarke, *Glimpses of ancient Hackney and Stoke Newington*; ed. D. Mander (1986), 207
30. Courtney, 105.
31. Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885* (1978); *Music Hall: the business of pleasure*, ed. Peter Bailey (Milton Keynes, 1986).

Abbreviations

Brabner: C. W. Brabner, *The Borough of Hackney Directory, 1872.*
Courtney: Yolanda C. S. Courtney, *Public House Tokens in England and Wales, c.1830-c.1920* (2004).
Forrer: L. Forrer, *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists* (1904-30, 8 vols.).
Hawkins: R. N. P. Hawkins, *A Dictionary of Makers of British Metallic Tickets, Checks, Medalets, Tallies, and Counters, 1788-1910*; ed. Edward Baldwin (1989).
Hayes: Ralph Hayes, *Hotel and Pub Checks of Greater London* (Alton, 1991-93, 2 vols.). The prefix HAC should be understood before the Hackney numbers.
Howard: Diana Howard, *London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950* (1970).
Neumann: Josef Neumann, *Beschreibung der bekanntesten Kupfermünzen, Vol. IV* (Prague, 1865)
ODNB: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, 2004).

3

Snapshots from the Standard: theatre in 1870s Shoreditch

Sally England

Curtain up

On the site opposite the former Bishopsgate Goods Yard in Shoreditch High Street, home now to a sauna and a wine warehouse, once stood the largest theatre in London – the Standard. Originally known as the National Standard, the theatre was built in 1837 with an audience capacity of 3,400. Its heyday came under the management of the Douglass family from 1848-88, when the theatre was especially famous for its spectacular naturalistic productions, and pantomimes rivalling the greatest of the West End.

Destroyed by fire in 1866, the Standard was quickly rebuilt, and reopened in December the following year, when it was reputed to be the largest theatre in London, perhaps even in Europe. It was probably the only one with a stage which, by the removal of the boxes, could be transformed into a horse ring. Eventually, like so many theatres, the Standard became a cinema - the New Olympic Picturedrome - in the 1920s. Following extensive bomb damage in the Second World War, the theatre was demolished in 1940.

The account book for the Standard Theatre from 6 May 1876 to 28 July 1879 has recently been acquired by the Friends of Hackney Archives. Offering a unique insight into the theatre's financial situation at the time, the volume is a most valuable addition to the holdings relating to the Standard, shedding new light on the information from Hackney Archives Department's existing sources. This article will spotlight some of the Standard's actors and anecdotes, dramas and disasters from the late 1870s, and show how information from the new volume informs and expands on what is already known.[1]

The period covered is an especially interesting one in the Standard's history. As the theatre had recently undergone extensive rebuilding, the management was looking to claw back its investment in bricks and mortar. At the same time, the Shoreditch area itself was undergoing considerable social change. New modes of public transport could whisk the local audience away to the bright lights of the West

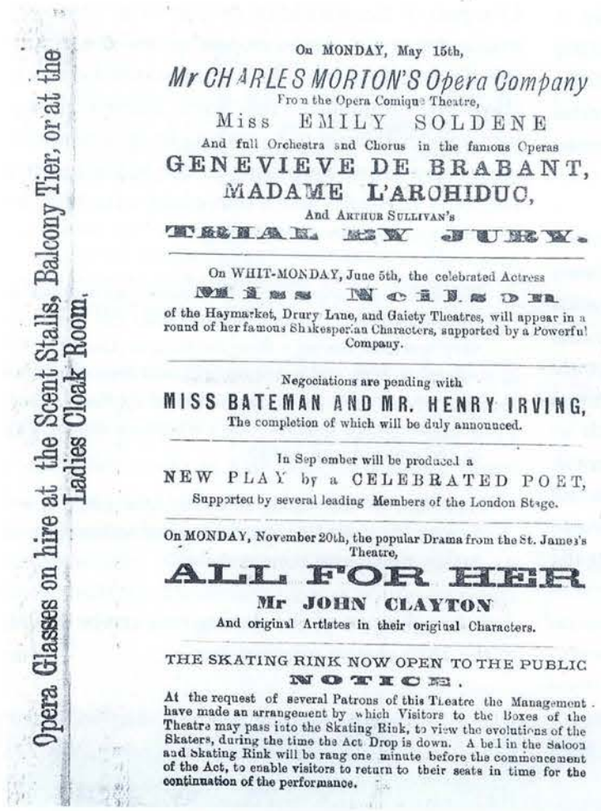
The Standard Theatre (to the left of picture) and adjoining shops in Shoreditch High Street, photographed in 1879

End, while more affluent residents were moving out altogether, leaving increasingly dilapidated housing stock to poorer working class and immigrant arrivals.

The reaction of the Standard was to offer a string of sensational productions to ensure the loyalty of its patrons. These were shows you *had* to see. Special effects and incredible props became the standard at the Standard. Among the spectacles seen on stage were a locomotive running on tracks, a fox hunt with a real fox, the Henley regatta re-enacted with real water, and – as shall be shown – herds of horses.

Attractions of 1876

The main sources relating to the Standard in the Local Studies Library are the books *The Standard Theatre of Victorian London*[2] by Allan Stuart Jackson and *Memories of Mummers and the Old Standard Theatre*[3] by Albert Douglass, grandson of the great John Douglass senior and the main source of informal anecdotes. Unfortunately HAD holds no Standard playbills for the years after 1874, but there are two programmes from the relevant period. The more interesting, that for the season of April to November 1876, offers several months' worth of information which can be compared with that of the account book.



Opera Glasses on hire at the Scent Stalls, Balcony Tier, or at the Ladies Cloak Room.

On MONDAY, May 15th,

Mr CHARLES MORTON'S Opera Company

From the Opera Comique Theatre,

Miss EMILY SOLDENE

And full Orchestra and Chorus in the famous Operas

GENEVIEVE DE BRABANT,

MADAME L'ARCHIDUC,

And ARTHUR SULLIVAN'S

TRIAL BY JURY.

On WHIT-MONDAY, June 5th, the celebrated Actress

MISS NEILSON

of the Haymarket, Drury Lane, and Gaiety Theatres, will appear in a round of her famous Shakespearian Characters, supported by a Powerful Company.

Negociations are pending with

MISS BATEMAN AND MR. HENRY IRVING,

The completion of which will be duly announced.

In September will be produced a

NEW PLAY by a CELEBRATED POET,

Supported by several leading Members of the London Stage.

On MONDAY, November 20th, the popular Drama from the St. James's Theatre,

ALL FOR HER

Mr JOHN CLAYTON

And original Artistes in their original Characters.

THE SKATING RINK NOW OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

NOTICE.

At the request of several Patrons of this Theatre the Management have made an arrangement by which Visitors to the Boxes of the Theatre may pass into the Skating Rink, to view the evolutions of the Skaters, during the time the Act Drop is down. A bell in the Saloon and Skating Rink will be rang one minute before the commencement of the Act, to enable visitors to return to their seats in time for the continuation of the performance.

The main attractions for 1876

The first appearance announced by the 1876 programme is that of Mademoiselle Beatrice and her popular comedy drama company for 19 nights, although which dates these nights covered is not stated. It goes on to detail other forthcoming productions: *Mary Stuart* and *John Jasper's Wife* on 8 May, Charles Morton's opera company opening on 15 May (with *Genevieve de Brabant, Madame l'Archiduc* and *Trial by Jury* starring Miss Emily Soldene), and 'the celebrated Miss Neilson' performing Shakespearian characters from 5 June. Negotiations were being undertaken to secure the talents of Miss Bateman and Mr Henry Irving; a new play by a noted poet was promised for September; and *All For Her* would run from 20 November.

The double page of accounts for the week ending 6 May 1876 notes that a cheque for £41. 12s. 11d was paid to 'Madle Beatrice Company' (also mentioned on the page as 'Madame Beatrice') as a share of receipts. The following week 'Madame Beatrice' received £56 6s 7d as her share, plus £4 15s 7d for what appears to have been an extra night. Did Mme. Beatrice[4] appear for twenty nights in the end? As the week ending 13 May was her last at the Standard, an extra date at popular request seems plausible.

There is no direct mention of *Our Friends*, *Mary Stuart* or *John Jasper's Wife* but in the following week's accounts ending 20 May, a prominent entry notes the presence of *Mr Morton's Opera Bouffe Company with Miss Soldene – Genevieve Brabant - & Trial by Jury* as stated in the programme, though there is no mention of *Madame L'Archiduc*. Morton appears to have done well out of his residency – 'Mr Charles Morton's share of receipts – 5 nights £111 16s', along with '1 night Saturday £41 11s.'

Emily Soldene (1840-1917) was the queen of *opera bouffe* in the 1870s, her greatest success being the role of Drogan in Offenbach's now forgotten *Geneviève de Brabant*. Doubtless the management was hoping that her presence on the bill would ensure a full house. Theatregoers might also have been keen to witness the work of Charles Morton, for he was a local boy made good, born in Hackney in 1819 and today regarded as the founder of the English music-hall. In 1840 he had the idea of adding a saloon for entertainment next to his Pimlico restaurant. The combination of food, drink and fun quickly caught on and soon music-halls were all the rage among the working classes.

Morton again received a share of six nights' profits for the next two weeks, before Miss Bateman's name replaces his in the accounts for three weeks.

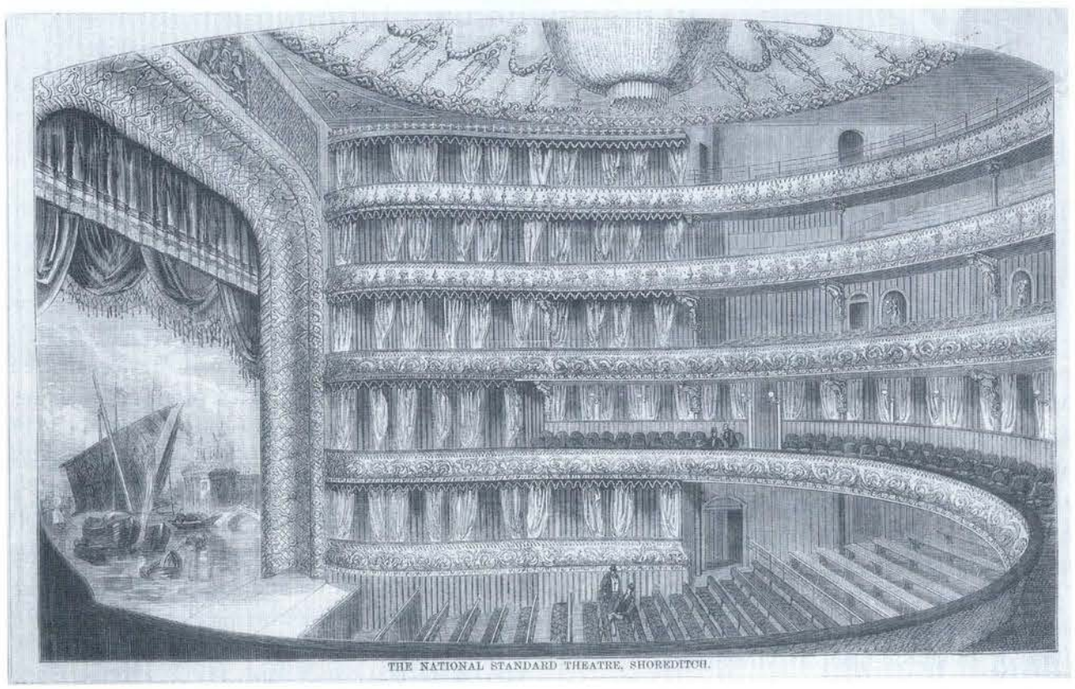
Although billed to appear on Whit Monday, 5 June, there is no mention of Miss Neilson in the accounts for the week ending 10 June, nor of the great Henry Irving, so one wonders whether he did actually appear on that occasion or if negotiations to secure him eventually broke down.

Were things not going well at the Standard in the summer of 1876? In his book *The Standard Theatre of Victorian England*, Allan Stuart Jackson suggests that due to the decline in touring by London hits and stars, the companies who did appear were mainly from the provinces, and that attractions to fill the theatre were hard to find: so much so that in July the theatre was forced to go dark for at least a week.[5] The Standard was no doubt also still feeling the financial after-effects of the extensive renovation work that closed the theatre during the previous year.

One part of the rebuilding project from which the management no doubt hoped to make a return was the conversion of the former wardrobe room, above the Shoreditch High Street entrance lobby, into a roller skating rink, cashing in on a relatively recent new craze. Surprising as this is, the massive size of a wardrobe room that could have been so redeveloped is also astonishing.

> The rink in the upper floor of the newly erected portion of the building…is quite distinct from the theatre, is very spacious, having a floor covering an area of 4,000 superficial feet, and in connection with it are a number of retiring-rooms. No timber is used in the floors, which are constructed with Dennett's fire-proof arches, filled in and covered with asphalt.
>
> The floor of the skating rink rests upon external and party walls of the building, from which spring concrete arches, the flooring being in asphalt.[6]

Another glimpse of the skating rink can be caught in the 1876 season programme:



The auditorium, as illustrated in 'The Builder' in December 1867

> The skating rink is now open to the public
> NOTICE
> At the request of several Patrons of the theatre the Management have made an arrangement by which Visitors to the Boxes of the Theatre may pass into the Skating Rink, to view the evolutions of the Skaters, during the time the Act Drop is down. A bell in the Saloon and Skating Rink will be rang [sic] one minute before the commencement of the Act, to enable visitors to return to their seats in time for the continuation of the performance.

From the account book we learn that a piano was purchased the following year for the new attraction, with three payments of £5 each being made over consecutive weeks in early 1877. Whether music had been previously provided, or this was a case of replacing the instrument, we do not know. Nor, unfortunately, is it clear just how successful an investment the whole venture was, as the accounts do not detail any income made from the skating rink.

'Leave no rubs nor botches in the work'[7]

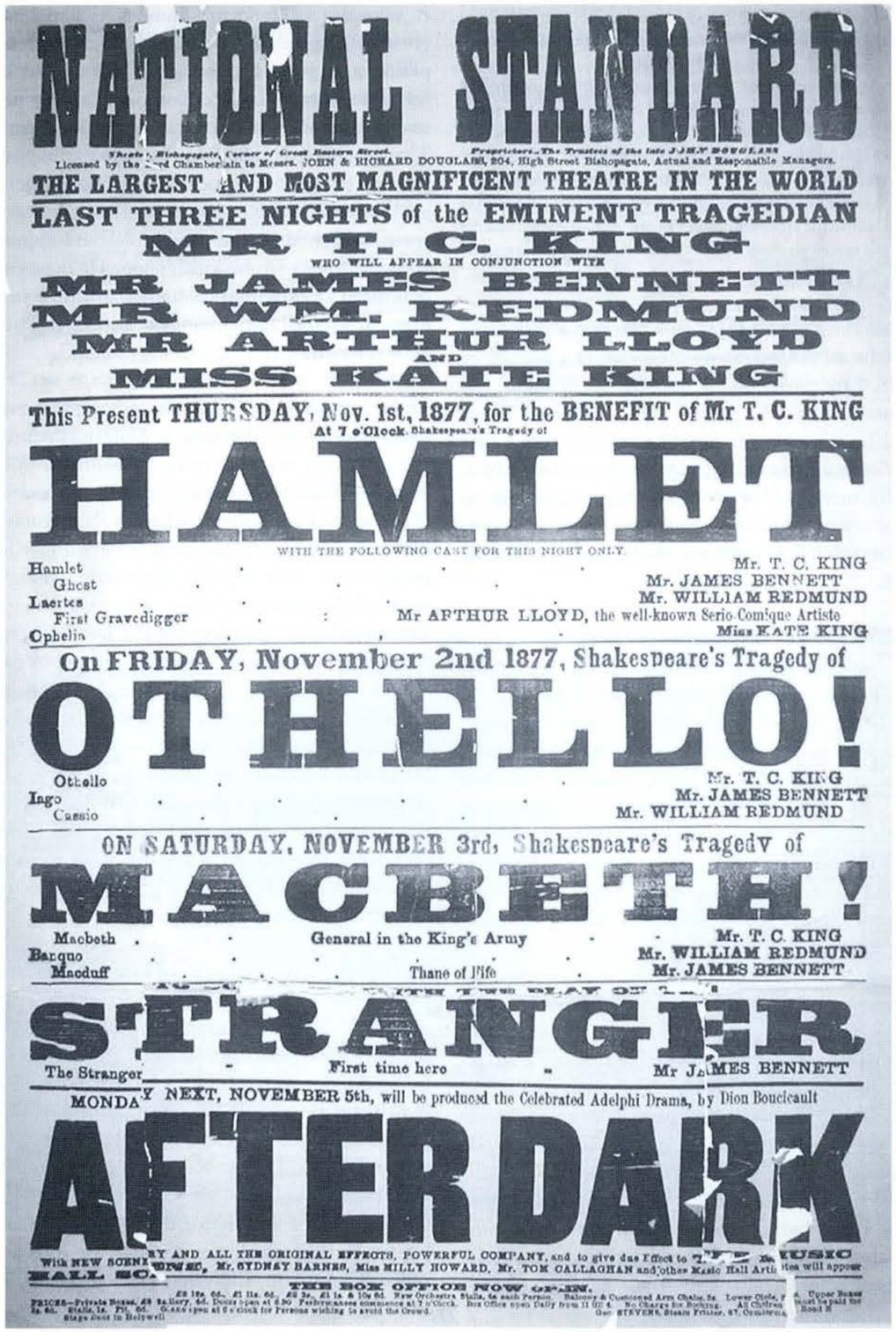
The accounts entry for the week ending 3 November 1877 bears the following header: 'Macbeth. T. C. King, Bennett, Miss Waite – extra expenses', which gives the impression that the tragedy was the production for the week, probably with five or six performances. However, a surviving poster for that week (held in the Lloyd family archives and reproduced overleaf, by courtesy of Matthew Lloyd) reveals additional information, and shows how Victorian actors worked to a very different regime to that of today.

Macbeth would be performed on the Saturday night only. The same actors - James Bennett, William Redmund and the 'eminent tragedian' T. C. King - had already appeared in *Hamlet* on the Thursday and *Othello* on the Friday, and Bennett was to perform in the Standard's first-ever production of *The Stranger*, presumably on the Sunday, although the poster is damaged and it is hard to tell. A different play every night, three of which were among the greatest English tragedies ever written - a tall order for any actor.

A Gloucestershire man, Thomas Chiswell King (1818-93) began his working life as an apprentice plasterer and painter but left that trade to tour with the Alexander Lee Company, appearing in one-act dramas and operettas in the local region. This was his true calling, and so successful was he that in 1851 he performed before Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle. Shakespearean tragedy was his forte; he played all the major roles and appeared with the greats of his profession. He appears to have been an extremely civilised man with a strong interest in the arts, although also a notorious London gambler.

There appears to be little information to be found today about James Bennett or William Redmund, but of King we can learn more from Albert Douglass, who knew the man personally, and who describes being initially petrified by the permanent scowl the apparently ferocious actor wore.[8] King's preparations were equally frightening, though it seems that appearances were deceptive. The great man would apparently lash himself into a terrifying fury before making his entrance but was in fact a kind and loving soul who was forever doing good turns for others. However, if anything went wrong on stage King's furious temper would show itself. He would become very upset, as was witnessed during an unfortunate production of *Macbeth* when the stage hands became confused as to which play they were working on – no doubt an inevitable occurrence when the show changed at almost every performance.

The head flyman was supposed to lower a landscape backcloth but instead dropped a street scene from the previous week's pantomime. Constant giggling by the audience alerted King to the mistake and he turned around to find not highland Scotland but 'BLOCK – BARBER - HAIR CUT WHILE YOU WAIT' and 'CHOP – BUTCHER – PRICES TO SUET ALL POCKETS'. Albert Douglass witnessed King dash off the stage in a furious temper, make a beeline for the prompter, shaking his fist and threatening to strangle the man as he yelled 'Damn you, sir, What do you mean? This



NATIONAL STANDARD

Theatre, Bishopsgate, Corner of Great Eastern Street. Proprietors—The Trustees of the late JOHN DOUGLASS
Licensed by the Lord Chamberlain to Messrs. JOHN & RICHARD DOUGLASS, 204, High Street Bishopsgate, Actual and Responsible Managers.

THE LARGEST AND MOST MAGNIFICENT THEATRE IN THE WORLD

LAST THREE NIGHTS of the EMINENT TRAGEDIAN

MR T. C. KING

WHO WILL APPEAR IN CONJUNCTION WITH

MR JAMES BENNETT
MR WM. REDMUND
MR ARTHUR LLOYD
AND
MISS KATE KING

This Present THURSDAY, Nov. 1st, 1877, for the BENEFIT of Mr T. C. KING
At 7 o'Clock Shakespeare's Tragedy of

HAMLET

WITH THE FOLLOWING CAST FOR THIS NIGHT ONLY.

Hamlet . . . . . Mr. T. C. KING
Ghost . . . . . Mr. JAMES BENNETT
Laertes . . . . . Mr. WILLIAM REDMUND
First Gravedigger . . . Mr ARTHUR LLOYD, the well-known Serio-Comique Artiste
Ophelia . . . . . Miss KATE KING

On FRIDAY, November 2nd 1877, Shakespeare's Tragedy of

OTHELLO!

Othello . . . . . Mr. T. C. KING
Iago . . . . . Mr. JAMES BENNETT
Cassio . . . . . Mr. WILLIAM REDMUND

ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3rd, Shakespeare's Tragedy of

MACBETH!

Macbeth . . General in the King's Army . . Mr. T. C. KING
Banquo . . . . . Mr. WILLIAM REDMUND
Macduff . . . Thane of Fife . . . Mr. JAMES BENNETT

STRANGER

The Stranger . . First time here . . Mr JAMES BENNETT

MONDAY NEXT, NOVEMBER 5th, will be produced the Celebrated Adelphi Drama, by Dion Boucicault

AFTER DARK

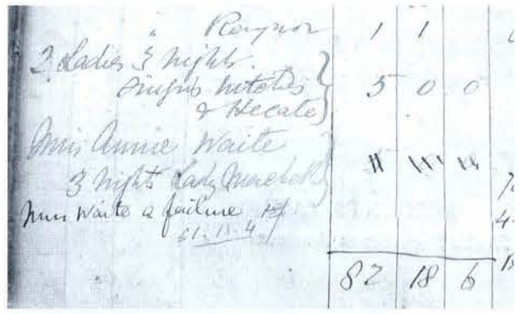
With NEW SCENERY AND ALL THE ORIGINAL EFFECTS, POWERFUL COMPANY, and to give due Effect to THE MUSIC
BALL SCENE, Mr. SYDNEY BARNES, Miss MILLY HOWARD, Mr. TOM CALLAGHAN and other Music Hall Artistes will appear

THE BOX OFFICE NOW OPEN.

PRICES—Private Boxes, £3 3s, £2 12s 6d, £2 2s, £1 11s 6d, £1 1s & 10s 6d. Stalls, 5s each Person. Balcony & Cushioned Arm Chairs, 3s. Lower Circle, 2s. Upper Boxes, 1s 6d. Stalls, 1s. Pit, 6d. Doors open at 6.30. Performance commence at 7 o'Clock. Box Office open Daily from 11 till 4. No Charge for Booking. All Children must be paid for. Gallery, 6d. Doors open at 6 o'clock for Persons wishing to avoid the Crowd. Gen. STEVENS, Steam Printer, 87, Commercial Road E. Stage door in Holywell

scene should be a blasted heath and you give me a blasted butcher's shop'.[9]

Despite *Macbeth* being a favourite of King's, it does seem to have lived up to its unlucky reputation on more than one occasion. Although the account book records that 'extra expenses' were incurred in employing Miss Waite, further down the same page we find a note that tells a different story: 'Miss Annie Waite – 3 nights Lady Macbeth - £5/-/-'. But this payment has subsequently been crossed out and an addendum made: 'Miss Waite a failure – 15/-', although this payment was also later altered to '£1/15/4'. Perhaps Miss Waite refused to quietly accept her initial wage cut and hung out for the extra £1 and 4d!



Men in green - a puzzle solved

Often the weekly accounts show payments 'made to Green Coat Men' or 'Man Green Coat'. Just who or what these people were was a mystery. It seemed unlikely that there was any connection with the Stepney Greencoat School for paupers, but there was no reference to these people in Albert Douglass's book nor in Allan Jackson's account of the Standard.

A friend who is curator of theatrical manuscripts at the British Library had not heard of the term either, but was intrigued enough to do a little research on my behalf. Within a few days she was back in touch, excited to have found the answer as part of an online lecture on theatre lore in a distance learning course from the University of South Florida. This cited an article in the *New York Times* of 23 April 1989 entitled 'On Language: The Greenroom Effect' in which William Safire describes how in Restoration theatres much of the decoration was green – the stage ground-cloth, the seats, the front curtain, and that stagehands were called 'the green coat men'. So – not Stepney orphans strangely employed, but the use of a once-common term now generally forgotten.

Dick Turpin's Ride to the Ukraine

The tale of Mazeppa is today best known through Byron's poem or Tchaikovsky's opera, but in the 19th century it was also a huge stage hit, adapted by H. M. Milner, featuring live horses and often a scantily clad woman playing the eponymous hero. The story tells of a Polish nobleman whose affair with a peer's wife is punished by his being bound naked to the back of a wild horse which is then set loose. The horse, which had come from the Ukraine, returned to its home still carrying Mazeppa half-dead from fatigue and hunger. Succoured by Cossack peasants, Mazeppa remains amongst his rescuers and helps in their fight against the Tartars, his learning and abilities bringing him great prestige and eventually persuading the Tsar to make him prince of the Ukraine.

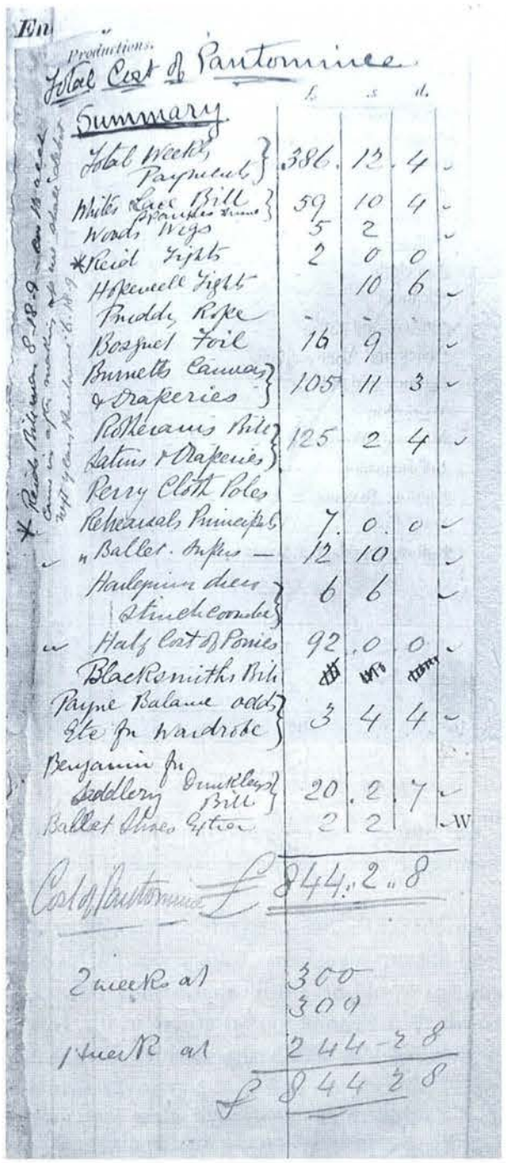
The most exciting part of the production was, of course, the 'naked' Mazeppa being lashed to the horse which then galloped up a 'mountainside', only to expire with the hero still on board. According to Albert Douglass, the scene 'never failed to evoke great applause and volleys of cheers'.[10] The first actress to perform as Mazeppa was Ada Isaac Menken, but a favourite at the Standard was Lisa Weber, who appeared with her own beautiful, white, perfectly-trained 'wild stallion'. The account book shows that Miss Weber appeared for three weeks in late August and early September 1878 at a fee of £20 per week. The first two weeks saw a slight deficit, and one wonders whether this contributed to the decision in the third week to stage an extra equine attraction – the ever-popular interpretation of Dick Turpin's ride to York.

Another theatre was to lend a mare to play 'Black Bess' – a role with which the horse was very familiar, having played it for many years. However, thick fog delayed the train on which the horse was travelling and by the time the curtain was due to rise, Dick Turpin was still without a mount. The orchestra filled in as best they could, while backstage a solution for the crisis was sought. Miss Weber was prevailed upon as to whether she would lend her horse to fill the part as it was the only other suitable creature available. Luckily she agreed, and at last the stage manager appeared before the curtain to apologise and explain to the audience that 'although two blacks did not make a white, with the kind indulgence of the audience, they would take the liberty of making one white do for a black.'[11]

The show must and did go on, and at first all seemed to go smoothly, despite the fact that each time Turpin referred to his pure white mount as 'my bonnie Black Bess' the audience was reduced to fits of laughter. The horse, however, no doubt confused by being thrust into a different play with different actors, staggered through the play in a bewildered manner. When it came to the toll-gate scene and Turpin cried 'The Bow Street runners pursue us! The hounds of the law are on our track! Come my bonnie Black Bess! Take the gate, take the gate!' the horse did just what it always did at the dénouement of *Mazeppa* - and rolled over and died.

The accounts tell us that during the same week, £3 18s 11d was spent on whitewashing the building in preparation for a visit by the Lord Chamberlain. There is no note as to whether he actually witnessed the ill-fated production, nor whether the management felt that events had justified the week-ending profit of £8 11s 1d.

The pantomime of 1876, and some of the ponies stabled beneath the railway arches



Productions.
Total Cost of Pantomime
Summary

	£	s	d	
Total Weekly Payments	386	13	4	~
White Lace Bill	59	10	4	~
Wards Wigs	5	2		~
*Real Fights	2	0	0	
Hopkinville Fights		10	6	~
Paddy Kirke	-	-		
Bosquet Foil	16	9		~
Burnetts Canvas & Draperies	105	11	3	~
Rotherams Bills Satins & Draperies	125	2	4	~
Perry Cloth Poles				
Rehearsals Principals	7	0	0	~
" Ballet Supers —	12	10		~
Harlequin dress Stinchcombe	6	6		~
Half Cost of Ponies	92	0	0	~
Blacksmiths Bill	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	
Payne Balance odds Ste for wardrobe	3	4	4	~
Benjamin for Saddlery Bill Drinkland	20	2	7	~
Ballet Dress Eaton	2	2		~W
Cost of Pantomime	£844	2	8	
2 nights at	300			
	309			
1 night at	244	2	8	
	£844	2	8	

The account for the 1876 pantomime

Underneath the arches

Things equine did not always go so badly for the Standard, though on one occasion this initially appeared not to be the case. Apprentice scenic artist Tommy Robertson also had a keen nose for a business deal, and it was he who offered to purchase the many ponies required for the 1876-77 pantomime production of *Open Sesame, or, Harlequin the Forty Robbers of the Magic Cave*. The ponies were bought as cheaply as possible and the theatre got what it paid for – a troop of broken down nags. The management so despaired of Robertson's deal that forty embroidered cloths were also ordered to cover up the worst of their defects.

But the location of the theatre allowed access to several arches of the adjoining North London Railway, where good stables were prepared. The ponies were well fed and cared for, properly groomed and exercised, and seemingly flourished in the theatrical environment. By the time the pantomime season was over and the ponies were sold on, they were in such good condition that they realised double the price Robertson had paid for them.[12]

The account book gives a detailed breakdown of the total cost of the 1876 pantomime, where it can be seen that the third most expensive item out of a total cost of £844 2s 8d was 'half cost of ponies' at £92. The weekly cost of their keep varied between £10 and £12, and on one occasion an extra 11 shillings was paid towards the ponies' food. It appears that one pony was not sold on in 1877, but kept for use by the bill sticker and inspector at a weekly cost of around 10 shillings, with an extra payment in March that year covering the farrier's bill and medicine for both the pony and a previously unmentioned donkey. It's tempting to think that the stream of long-dried oats which trickled out of the account book on first opening may have come from the comfortable stables beneath the railway arches.

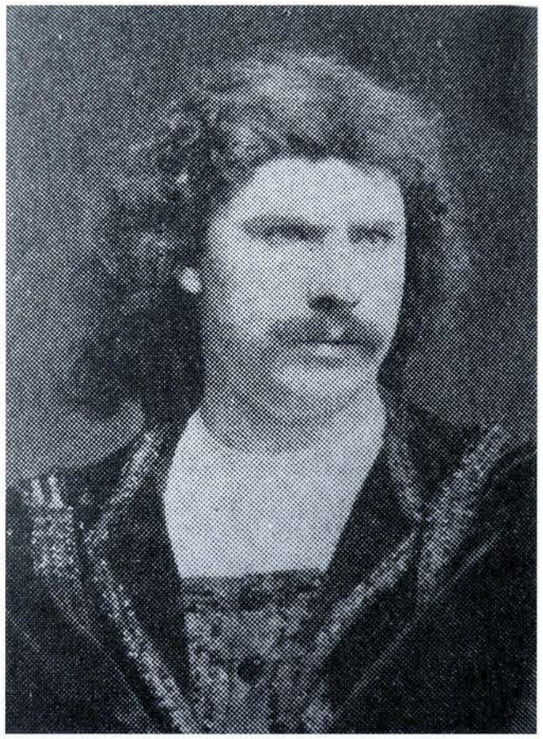
'Stormed at with shot and shell
While horse and hero fell...'[13]

A favourite at the Standard was W. H. Pennington (1832-1923), known as Gladstone's own tragedian, so greatly did the Grand Old Man admire the actor's work. Pennington was another local star. The son of a Shacklewell schoolmaster and originally trained in the same profession, in his later years he taught elocution at the Birkbeck School in Colvestone

Crescent, Dalston, whilst living out his days in Albion Road, Stoke Newington.

Pennington appeared at the Standard for seven nights in May 1878 performing Shakespearian tragedies, although the accounts do not note exactly which plays these were. He was on stage again the following month in *Balaclava* alongside *The Taming of the Shrew*. Albert Douglass mentions Pennington reciting Tennyson's poem at the Standard,[14] but the June 1878 production was something more than just a reading: it was 'a new drama' and as well as Pennington receiving two weekly payments of £9, various other actors were paid, indicating that this was more than a one-man show. That these people were not involved in *The Taming of the Shrew* is suggested by a note that the Shakespeare play cost only £1 11s, so this was possibly a single reading given without formal audience in order to qualify for copyright, rather than a full production. *Balaclava* does appear to have been something rather splendid. Extra kepis and belts were purchased for 7 shillings and uniforms for £6, whilst £5 was the cost for '2 large flags for front -The Standard Theatre and Balaclava' with a further £2 10s worth of extra flags being hired for the first week and 15 shillings the second, as well as the hire of a horse for £2 2s.

The Battle of Balaclava is of course remembered for the disastrous charge of the Light Brigade, immortalised by Tennyson's great poem of 1855 and Lady Elizabeth Butler's painting (page 31). The painting might have been seen by some of the Standard's audience when shown at the Royal Academy in 1876, and if so they would no doubt have been intrigued to compare the central figure of Butler's work with the lead actor in the new drama, for Pennington had given many sittings to the artist. The reason for his role as artist's model would also have made the production even more exciting: Pennington was indeed a survivor of the battle. His horse – whose name really was 'Black Bess' - was shot from under him, he received a leg wound, and but for the swift action of a sergeant-major of the 8th Royal Irish Hussars who



W. H. Pennington

picked him up and re-seated him on a loose horse, Pennington would probably have been killed.

No doubt the theatre management hoped that to see a real-life surviving hero on stage wearing his actual uniform would be a thrill that would draw in the crowds. But Pennington's obituary in the *Hackney Gazette* of 4 May 1923 suggests otherwise:

> His recitations of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', often given in the uniform he wore on the occasion, was always popular with audiences, but when he appeared at the National Standard, Shoreditch, as the dashing hero in a drama entitled 'Balaclava' little success attended the production.

Another actor in the production appears not to have proved value for money. G. Byrne was paid £2 10s for both weeks of *Balaclava*, his role now unknown. Quite what happened is not explained… Was Byrne a failure? Did he come from an agent whose recommendation was subsequently deemed

After Balaclava: in Elizabeth Butler's painting, Private Pennington is standing on the right

misleading? Whatever the circumstances, the management were obviously not impressed, for a marginal note to the second week's accounts reads 'Men: G. Byrne - Chapman & Hinton Black Mark'.

> Was there a man dismayed?
> Not tho' the soldiers knew
> Someone had blundered…[15]

Drunk and disorderly in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Whatever Byrne had – or had not – done, he was back on stage at the Standard the following October in the role of captain of the 'Ohio' steamboat in an adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A French version of the story had been staged at the Gaîté Theatre, Paris in 1853, but this was notoriously full of inaccuracies. Not that the Standard's production was much better:

> This version the Managers very truthfully say, although not pretending to faithfully follow the incidents of Mrs Beecher Stowe's novel, has yet a continuity of action, and many original and genuine dramatic situations, which, with the rejection of superfluous characters, combine to render the piece in everyway attractive and interesting. The expressed desire of the Messrs. Douglass has been to obtain the very best drama on the subject …[16]

The method for obtaining 'the very best drama on the subject' was to prepare an in-house translation of the French version. John T. Douglass, son of John senior, wrote many plays seen at the Standard, usually under the pseudonyms of Leonard Rae or James Willing. As Rae he wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and appears to have been helped by one of the two actors surnamed Percival who appeared in the play, as the accounts for 14 September 1878 include a payment made to 'Mr Percival for translation of Tom's Cabin - £2'.[17] For his acting, W. Percival received £1 10 s per week, whilst F. Percival earned £2 and a mention in *The Era*:

> Something like a genuine hit was made by Mr. F Percival as Julius Caesar, the black boy who has 'notions' far above his station, and who considers that he owns his master rather than his master owns him.[18]

G. Byrne, earning £2 10s per week, played the captain 'with commendable spirit'. Unfortunately, this was not the only spirit to make an appearance in the play, as Richard H. Douglass later remembered. As a small boy Douglass had played the part of Little Harry, son of the escaped slaves George and Eliza Harris. The climax of the play saw the baby thrown from one side of a chasm to the other, into the arms of his father. Being a John Douglass senior production, the chasm contained a cataract of real rushing water. Young Richard - always known as Dickey - was suspended by wires attached to a belt beneath his tunic to save him from a watery tumble into the ravine. What happened during the Saturday production reveals the final destination of much of the payments detailed in the account book, for that morning was when the wages were paid…

The actor playing George Harris took some time to remember that he was in fact appearing in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – long enough for him to first recite Hamlet's entire 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. Meanwhile, the actress playing his wife Eliza smelled so strongly of drink during the pursuit scene that the stage-manager warned her to keep her mouth closed otherwise the bloodhounds would have no difficulty in following the scent.

The final scene saw Dickey as 'Little Harry' being thrown to 'George' across the watery chasm, but the actor was so drunk that he fumbled the catch and Dickey swung back to his starting place. The actor who had thrown him failed to notice this until Dickey kicked him on the ear and floated off again towards 'George'. But not far enough, leaving Dickey suspended over the ravine, defying gravity and spinning around on his harness. Down came the curtain and the stage-manager gave vent to his thoughts on the performance. Richard Douglass remarked that he never heard such language equalled until he worked the music-halls.[19]

'The salaries paid at the Standard were high for everyone, even the minor performers.'[20] Perhaps the management sometimes rued the effects of its own generosity.

Ringing the curtain down

Like Dickey Douglass crossing the ravine, the fortunes of the Standard swung to and fro over the years. The Douglass family held charge for nearly 40 years, always offering their audience both spectacle and excitement, whether intentional or not. This article has only been able to scratch the surface of the wealth of information contained within the account book. For the dedicated researcher into the lost world of Shoreditch's theatrical past, a story awaits that is as fascinating and entertaining as any spectacle produced by John Douglass.

Notes

1. Acknowledgements: grateful thanks for their help and advice to Professor Allan Stuart Jackson, Matthew Lloyd, Janice Norwood, Kathryn Johnson and Laurie Robinson.
2. 1993.
3. *The Era*, 1924.
4. Marie Beatrice Binda, 1839-78.
5. Many thanks to Professor Jackson for his personal communications on this matter.
6. *The Builder* 1 January 1877.
7. *Macbeth,* 3 i.
8. Albert Douglass, *Memories of Mummers* (n.d.) 49-50.
9. *Memories of Mummers,* 50.
10. *Memories of mummers,* 58.
11. ibid.
12. *Memories of mummers,* 77.
13. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade.*
14. Douglass, *Memories of mummers,* 74.
15. Tennyson, *Charge of the Light Brigade.*
16. *The Era* 6 October 1878.
17. This was probably W. Percival who also worked on *Under Two Reigns* with John T. Douglass (writing as James Willing) the following year.
18. *The Era* 6 October 1878.
19. Douglass, *Memories of mummers* 110-12.
20. Jackson, *The Standard Theatre,* 334.

Norfolk Buildings: a story of sanitation in Shoreditch

4

Denise Barnett

From Dorset to Dereham Place

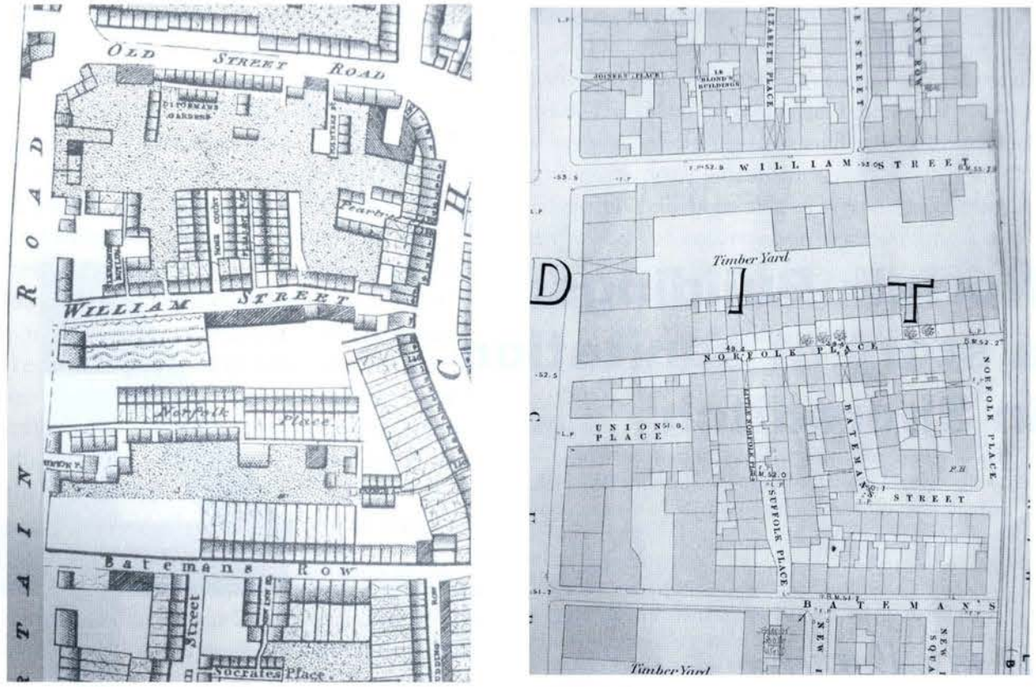
Norfolk Buildings, formerly in Dereham Place, Shoreditch, were mentioned by Isobel Watson as part of 'The first generation of flats' in *Hackney History 11*.[1] Fortuitously, I was shown the article while researching part of my family history, and - using documents found in an attic in Dorset - can trace more of the story of the buildings, which involves Cheltenham, bankruptcy and substantial financial loss. Hackney Archives provided minutes and drainage records from the Shoreditch vestry, newspaper items, and maps.

An area of concern

A drainage application to the vestry of St Leonard's, Shoreditch, for 'model dwellings, to be known as Norfolk Buildings' was made by S. Sabey and Sons, builders and contractors of 96 Ironmonger Row, in 1882.[2] There were to be two blocks running east-west on either side of an open court, and reached through an archway on the east side into Norfolk Street. To the north was Norfolk Place. The area is now known as Dereham Place.

The dwellings were to be built in an area that had been the subject of sanitary concern since at least August 1872. At that time a Mr Pocock, of 7 Norfolk Place, Norfolk Gardens, was ordered to repair a closet within three days, failing which the vestry would obtain a summons. In May 1874 the medical officer submitted a special report on the need for a constant supply of water. It was resolved

> that the owners of certain houses in Norfolk Place and French Alley as specified in the inspector's report be required to close the same as being unfit for habitation.



Before redevelopment: the Norfolk Place area, between Curtain Road and Shoreditch High Street, shown on Horwood's map of the 1790s (left); and (right, post-railway) on the Ordnance Survey of 1868

Mr Stuckey, the owner of property in Norfolk Street, was obviously not co-operative, as he was mentioned at the 19 May meeting, when seven days notice of proceedings were to be given; and again in July 1874, when the medical officer was instructed to see that the orders were carried into effect.[3]

The houses in the area were already old. Mid-18th century maps show the area to have been fields; by 1800 it was built up.[4] Buildings are recorded along William Street (later Rivington Street) to the north and Bateman Street to the south in 1812,[5] with long gardens in between. The North London Railway line later cut across New Norfolk Street and French Alley.

A poor place to live

On 8 December 1876 the sanitary committee of St Leonard's vestry received a report from their medical officer about the state of the houses in Norfolk Place, Little Norfolk Place, Bateman Street and Bateman's Row, and resolved to forward a copy to the owner.[6]

A hand-written note from the medical officer to the vestry explained that nos. 5, 6, 7 and 8 in Little Norfolk Place were exceedingly dilapidated, damp, and without through ventilation. In Norfolk Place (South Street) nos. 1 through 9 were unfit for human habitation for similar reasons, and were dirty; the houses on the north side were also much decayed. Pointers' Buildings, Bateman's Street and to the side of the railway-arch were also unfit for human habitation, as were 22, 23 and 24 in Bateman's Row. In Bateman's Street nos. 13 through 29 were mostly dirty, with walls and ceilings out of repair.[7]

Stuckey, the owner of houses in Norfolk Street and Bateman's Row, was in trouble again. He attended

the Sanitary Committee's meeting in mid-February 1877 when it was resolved that, unless he was prepared

> with some definite proposal for the improvement of his property referred, in 14 days - the medical officer be requested to report the same under the Artizans' and Labourers' Dwellings Act of 1868.

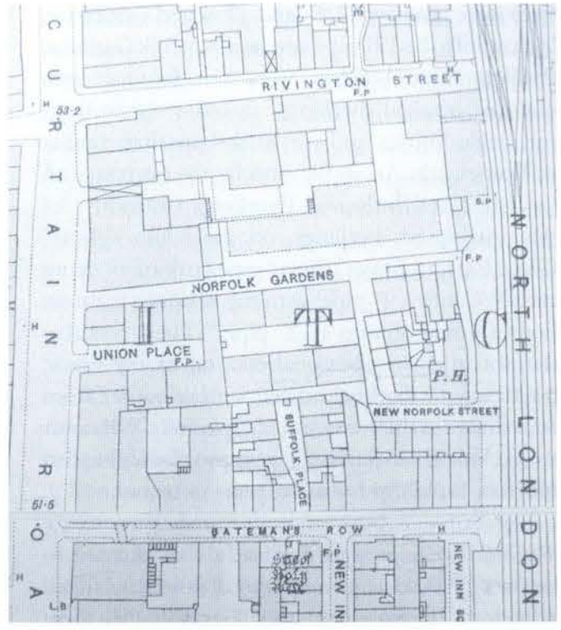
A month later the medical officer was reporting that the property was in a condition dangerous to health and unfit for human habitation. It was resolved

> that the clerk inform Mr Stuckey's surveyor of the same and ask if is willing to meet the vestry's inspector, and arrange for the necessary works before the matter is referred by the vestry to a surveyor for report under the Artizans' Act of 1868.

There is no further mention of the area until the October meeting, when the medical officer was again asked to report on the sanitary condition of the houses in Norfolk Gardens and vicinity. At the December meeting it was Mr Cook's properties in Norfolk Gardens that were of concern, and subject to 14 days' warning. This appears to have had little effect, as at the sanitary committee's meeting of 8th February 1878

> the medical officer reported that the cesspools on these premises are exposed, that the houses are consequently in a dangerous state, and also that satisfactory progress is not being made with the notices served. Ordered that 48 hours' notice be given to the owner, that unless the works are at once rapidly proceeded with, the vestry will carry out the necessary works at the owner's cost - and that authority is hereby given the sanitary officer to enter upon the said premises and effect the necessary repairs etc should the above order not be complied with.

In September the sanitary committee resolved 'that the clerk have authority to proceed against Mr R. O. Cooke of Norton Folgate for the recovery of the cost of work done by the vestry in Norfolk Gardens'. All then seems to go quiet about specific problems in this area until June 1880, when there were concerns about French Alley. At the December meeting 1, 2 and 3 Suffolk Place were noted to have drainage problems.[8]



After redevelopment: the six blocks of Norfolk Buildings shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1894

At some point it would appear that some of the old buildings were cleared and the ground made available for new buildings.

Erecting Norfolk Buildings

Norfolk Buildings were erected by a partnership consisting of Charles Sweeting of Cheltenham and a Mr Harris. The first plan, showing the shape of the building, carried the stamp of a builder and undertaker: Edwin Broom, St James Square, Cheltenham. He wrote to the vestry clerk on 31 March 1882:

> I beg to forward plan of drainage for model dwelling in Norfolk place Curtain Rd and am directed by my client Mr Charles Sweeting to give you notice that we intend to commence the building there of at once under the powers given by the Amendment 1878 and according to the plan sent for the said Buildings to the Metropolitan Board of Works on the 3rd March last.[9]

The drainage plan was very simple. The application form to the Shoreditch vestry was completed by Sabey and Sons and dated 31 July 1882. The pipe

sizes were given as 9", 6" and 4" glazed stoneware, to flow into the 12" pipe sewer in Norfolk Gardens. Perhaps these builders were not familiar with multiple, stacked dwellings, as other applications for single houses and for workshops had similar size pipework. An application by the Secretary of the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company for their proposed dwellings, on the south side of Great Eastern Street, shows pipework of 6" from each WC into a 9" pipe, with the drainage from six houses going on into a 12" pipe.[10] There was also the potential for additional dilution of the waste, on its way to the brick sewer, with rainwater from four drains in the yards and playgrounds. Whatever the technical reason, there were problems ahead at Norfolk Buildings for many years to come.

The 46 dwellings were built at a cost claimed to be over £7,000, on ground leased from the United Kingdom Temperance and General Provident Institution at £230 per annum. If all the flats were let, the annual income would be £1008. 8s 0d. Gas and water were supplied, the cost being passed on as part of the rent. There was also the poor rate to be paid.

Getting the money

The records found in Dorset, mentioned at the beginning of this article,[11] show that in 1882 Henry John Hopwood Marlen, a businessman, had inherited family money on the intestacy of his father, the Revd Henry John Marlen. The valuation of the furniture and effects in Marlen senior's house, in Cheltenham, was undertaken by a Charles Sweeting. In August 1882, the firm who handled the probate, Winterbotham Bell and Co. of Cheltenham, had noted the £5,000 Henry J. H. had available to invest. Somehow these solicitors acted for both the borrower and the lender, for they suggested to Marlen that he lend Sweeting money against his London property: Norfolk Buildings. Subsequent correspondence indicates that the lender did not visit the property. A big mistake.

By December 1883 the general purposes committee of St Leonard's vestry was already concerned about sanitary defects in Norfolk Buildings. The matter was left in the hands of the chief sanitary officer, Hugh Alexander, and the medical officer, to report at the next meeting, in January 1884.

> The clerk read letter from Mr. C. Sweeting complaining of his inability to let the block of model dwellings recently built by him in Little Norfolk Gardens, Curtain Road, in consequence of the loose characters who are allowed to congregate in the neighbourhood to the annoyance and danger of respectable people.
>
> It was resolved that Mr Sweeting's complaint be referred to the Commissioners of Police; and that his attention be called to the sanitary defects in the dwellings. [12]

Family papers show that solicitors, W. H. Gatty Jones and Son of 7 Crosby Square, London, became involved, in the shape of William Wilding Jones. Their correspondence with H. J. H. Marlen indicates that Sweeting was not repaying interest on the loan. The legal work was obviously being kept within the family network, as H. J. H. Marlen's wife's father had married Catherine Jones of 7 Crosby Square in 1852. Her father, William Jones, was a solicitor there.

Sweeting was also keeping things in the family, for he asked his brother Edward Sweeting, also a solicitor, to call on W. H. Gatty Jones and Son in mid-September 1887. He asked that his brother be allowed time to try to sell the property to the Artizans' Dwellings Company. The property was also advertised in the *Standard* of 21 September 1887. It remained unsold.

When Charles Sweeting failed to pay the interest owed on the mortgage, a receiver had to be appointed.[13] He valued the buildings at £4,500.

Marlen was helped to employ a local firm, A. and A. Field, of Hanbury Street, Mile End New Town, to collect the rents and remit them, after deducting their expenses, to him. Rents were either 6s 6d or 7 shillings a week. Two lists of tenants have survived, showing rents due, arrears, and payments over two periods in 1886 and 1887. A Mr Thomas

lived at number 1, and on the accounts is shown as the caretaker. He was not charged rent, and also received payment for 'cleaning'. In December 1886, 14 of the 46 dwellings were empty. At the end of 1887 there were 13 still empty. With gaps in the records, it is not possible to be sure if some had been occupied for short periods, but nine of the same flats were empty on both lists.

The covering letter of 22 January 1887 accompanying a cheque for the balance indicates all was not well.

> It is as you will see a statement of only 8 weeks' collection and the payments are heavier than they should be in future, in consequence of our having to meet the deficiencies of the mortgagor. I hope the next statement will show a better return.

In the covering letter of April 27 1887, Fields mention that it might be wise to let the fire office at which the dwellings were insured know that no. 10 was occupied by a cabinet maker (Hedall), and no. 22 by a brush maker (Pery).

The detailed invoice of W. H. Gatty Jones and Son gives a picture of the efforts made on behalf of H. J. H. Marlen, during February and March 1888, to find a buyer, at £4,500, among the industrial dwellings companies for Norfolk Buildings. They tried the National Conservative Industrial Dwellings Company; the Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company, the Metropolitan Industrial Dwellings Company, the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company, and the Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes. The UK Temperance and General Provident Institution, the owners of the freehold, were also asked if they would purchase the buildings for £4,000.

None of the companies were willing to entertain the idea of taking over the property save at an almost nominal price. The owners of the freehold had a survey carried out, and found the property in such a condition that they were unable to make any offer.

In February 1888 Sweeting filed for bankruptcy. By this time he owed Marlen £450 in interest; even with the collected rents deducted he still owed over £326. Sweeting claimed his annual income was £300. He admitted fully secured creditors to the amount of £15,072 7s. 6d. against securities of £15,815 10s, 10d. Unsecured and part-secured claims, even allowing for the sale of assets, left him £1,473 9s. 6d. short. He was declared bankrupt at the Cheltenham bankruptcy court.

Sweeting was described as an auctioneer and house agent, who had carried on business in the town since 1880. According to the newspaper report, he had previously been in partnership with a Mr Harris in London; after the dissolution of the partnership a joint speculation in some land they had leased was continued.[14] Under a covenant in the lease, they had agreed to put up artisan dwellings on this land. When Harris became bankrupt, Sweeting had been left to fulfil the contract. He told the bankruptcy registrar that he had been led to file his petition by the loss of an action for the balance of an account brought against him by Sabey, who had built the cottages for him in London; and that he had difficulty in raising money on his property, some of which was unlet.

An assessment in June 1888 indicated the probable cost of building had been £5,000 though the property was now valued at £3,000. It was described as structurally bad, the main staircases breaking away and crumbling, whilst the third room of each suite had never been completed, being unplastered and left in bare brick. The exterior cement paving was wholly decayed. Even in this condition, four units were let in September.

Another reason for 'the difficulty of finding tenants' was alleged to arise

> from the excessive supply of such dwellings, and their position necessitating persons carrying their effects from the main road so far before reaching the building.

In August 1888 the possibility of sale by auction

Curtain Road, centre of the furniture trade. Norfolk (Dereham) Place lay to the right and east.

was considered, and G. A. Wilkinson was asked to assess them with this in mind. His report was that they were not in good condition, were dirty, requiring painting, papering and whitewashing. In short 'as bad a marketable commodity that well could be', and worth 'at very utmost £2,000', no more than a small proportion of which should have been lent on mortgage. He advised trying to let the units at any modest rent.

Marlen considered getting redress from the Cheltenham solicitors who had recommended the mortgage to him. The firm admitted to W. H. Gatty Jones

> that no valuation had been made and that they had exercised their own judgement by attending personally in London and reporting favourably to you, and no one was instructed for you to watch the expenditure or manner of construction.

However, it was counsel's opinion that, while there had been negligence, it must be taken to refer to acts and omissions at or before the date of the mortgage in 1882, and in consequence was barred by the statute of limitations.

The property was now Marlen's. He paid the quarterly ground rent of £56 1s. 3d; together with the rates and other expenses, this ate up any profit from rents. Then there were the lawyers' fees. By October 1888 Marlen was willing to sell for just £1,500. E. Clark a surveyor, was approached about a possible buyer, as was another surveyor, Chuter, in December 1888.

In January 1889 the solicitors were still chasing a claim against Sweeting's estate for interest owed on the mortgage. A building society agency was asked to find a client. The manager came up with the

suggestion of an underlease, paying £75 in excess of the ground rent. Negotiations started. Lambert, a solicitor, offered on behalf of 'Fred Corrall' an increase of 5% on the minimum selling price of £1,750. This would give £87 10s. per year before income tax. The new tenant was to undertake all repairs and pay all outgoings. Corrall then withdrew his offer, but Lambert suggested a Mr Othie Smith in his place. Letters were then written to the referees. At this point the family documents start to peter out. The identity of the next owner is not clear. This would later be important for the vestry's purse.

Field was notified that his position as receiver of rents was to be terminated at midsummer. By July 1889 Norfolk Buildings had been emptied of tenants in order for repairs to be made. The vestry clerk of St Leonard's, Shoreditch, was informed of the changes and asked to consider a reduction in rates, as part of the premises were unlet. In July 1889 the solicitors received a reply from the clerk, W. G. Davis, confirming that the charge made would be half the rates for the quarter.[15] Correspondence also took place over fire insurance and the position of the under-lessee. For a while, Marlen began to receive a little money back on his investment.

Enter Mr Pilbrow

Sanitary conditions in Shoreditch had become the subject of a public inquiry set up by the government, and a printed report of 12 March 1891, by D. Cubitt Nichols and Edward Seaton MD, has a telling penultimate paragraph.

> In the course of our inspection we visited many of the so-called 'model blocks' of dwellings built on the flat system. To say that some of these model blocks are built without due regard for sanitary requirements would be a misuse of language. The fact is that they are built in gross violation of the very first principles of sanitation.[16]

On 15 October 1891 the chief sanitary inspector, Alexander, had discovered that a drain under a bedroom was open, and the space under the floor flooded with sewage. It was alleged this had also happened in other flats. There had been difficulty in finding 'Mr Pilbrow' to serve the notice to repair the drain; this had finally been achieved on 18 November. Pilbrow had instructed a surveyor to draw up plans and specifications, but though temporary repairs were made he had done no more.

In February 1892 the condition of Norfolk Buildings was such that further action had to be taken, in the form of works by the vestry in the absence of steps by the owner, whoever he was.[17]

In June 1892 'Our Local Lounger' of the *Hackney Gazette* was writing critical comments on how slow the sanitary committee of Shoreditch vestry was in dealing with reports: some six weeks behind.[18] In the same issue, the report of the vestry meeting covered discussion on the workload and salary for Dr Francis J. Allan, medical officer (and editor of *The Sanitarian Magazine*); a re-division of duties; and the increased workload created by the Public Health (London) Act 1891.[19] There were serious fears of cholera, and the newspaper carried advice and reports in the summer issues.

Precautions against cholera promoted in the newspaper were based on a memorandum issued in 1888 by the Local Government Board, and included special vigilance with regard to courts and alleys in towns; abatement of nuisances of every kind; enforced cleanliness; examining the water supply; boiling drinking water; washing and lime-washing of unclean premises, especially of densely occupied premises; and ample ventilation.

All issues that were pertinent in and around Norfolk Buildings. By late September, the cholera scare had subsided. [20]

Getting the vestry's money back

In August 1892 the *Hackney Gazette* reported

> At Worship street on Wednesday, Mr Rose was occupied for the major portion of the afternoon, for the fourth time, in hearing of a summons taken out by the vestry authority of St Leonard,

> Shoreditch, against a Mr Pilbrow, sen., said to be a surveyor, of Chancery Lane, Holborn, to recover from him a sum of £209 7s. 6d., being an amount paid for sanitary work done by the vestry to certain premises of which Mr Pilbrow was owner.
>
> Some of the facts of the case have been reported, and it may be remembered that the defendant disputed his indebtedness on two or three grounds - that he was not the owner; that if he was found to be the owner the works were unnecessary; and that the charges were excessive.
>
> The work done was sanitary work, and was of a somewhat elaborate character, white glazed pipes, inspection chambers, air-inlets, etc., being provided under the orders of the chief sanitary inspector of the parish, Mr Alexander.[21]

The magistrate found in favour of the vestry, and decided that Pilbrow was liable as the owner. He commented on the fact that Pilbrow had not gone into the witness box to deny he was the owner, and had admitted that the rent had been paid to his son. The vestry were awarded the full amount, with costs. The magistrate refused to state a case at the request of the defendant's counsel, although he subsequently gave a certificate for his finding in order that the defendant might have the opportunity of taking the matter to a higher court.[22]

The *Mercury* was pleased with the outcome:

> … the vestry, to put it plainly, have signally defeated an attempt to saddle the ratepayers with the expense of abating a condition of things arising from the default of the owner. It is somewhat to be regretted that three professional sanitary inspectors should have lent the weight of their official names to an attempt to burden the ratepayers with the expense of private works. One of these admitted in cross-examination that he had been repeatedly censured by his employers, and had been called upon to resign his office, and prohibited from practising in the City.[23]

Pilbrow was obviously determined not to pay. The vestry tried to recoup its costs – ratepayers' money - by using the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890, issuing 46 court summonses (one in respect of each of the 46 flats), directed to the owner of Norfolk Buildings, to show cause why the premises should not be closed. It also tried to have the tenants pay their rents directly to the vestry.

At the vestry meeting on 3 June 1894, one of the councillors, a Mr Moffat

> … explained to the committee that Frederick Nobbs had paid £20 towards the payment of the sum of £229 7s 6d due to the vestry in connection with the above buildings, and was willing to pay £10 per month until the whole sum was paid off. No official receipt has been given for the £20 as it was thought inadvisable to do so until the case now proceeding was settled.[24]

On 8 June 1894 the case started at Worship street. Interestingly, Pilbrow was present, and had instructed counsel. Dr Hugh Mansfield Robinson, the vestry clerk

> said he was surprised, and should object to the *locus standi* of any counsel unless the name of the owner was given. For three years the vestry had been trying to find the owner.… He held a letter from a solicitor stating that Mr. Pilbrow was neither owner, agent, not collector: and that person had himself said that he had nothing to do with the premises.
>
> Mr. Corser said he had no title to appear, and the case proceeded with counsel appearing shortly afterwards. Then he required that the 46 cases should be taken separately, and no. 1 being called counsel was asked if he appeared for the owner. He replied in the affirmative and gave the owner's name as Frederick Carrol. He declined to give the address of that person, and the vestry clerk remarked that he had never heard the name before. Mr Hugh Alexander, chief sanitary inspector, subsequently stating that he believed that such person had no such existence as owner.

The case proceeded for no. 1, being contested at every point. It was then adjourned. According to the *Hackney Gazette,*

> As a climax to the proceedings the vestry clerk was taken ill in court, and the sanitary inspector said he thought it probably due to his having had to inspect the 'model dwellings' in question.[25]

The hearing was resumed the following Tuesday.

> It was stated that in addition to dampness there was defective trapping of the sink which was placed in one of the living rooms, and that the situation of the water closet, in a lobby on the landing, was, by reason of its contiguity to the living rooms, and the certainty, as the witnesses said, that foul vapours would be drawn into the living rooms, a nuisance and injurious to health. The dampness was said to cause the presence of beetles, of which great complaints were made, and that to remedy the defects the premises should be closed.

Hamer, a medical officer with the London County Council, who had formerly worked in Shoreditch, said

> There had been constant complaints and many cases of diphtheria, typhoid, etc., prior to the 1892 work…. counsel for the vestry then said that the death rate in the premises was 44.4 per 1,000, nearly double that of all London, whilst in the rest of the parish of Shoreditch the rate was only 19.7.

Witnesses for the defence included Septimus Gibbon, a medical officer for the Holborn district. His opinion was

> that the buildings were 'remarkably light' with 'open space' on all sides and 'excellently situated'. He agreed, that there had been leakages and defective cement, and that there were beetles, but he disagreed with the evidence of the witness Quelch, and asserted that the situation of the water closets could not be improved, and that the ventilation precluded all chance of vapour passing to the living rooms.[26]

There was a further adjournment until 25 July, when, after a long afternoon

> the magistrate said he had decided not to close No. 1. That case was accordingly dismissed, Mr Corser deferred the question of costs. No. 10 was then proceeded with and the case adjourned.[27]

On 1 August

> Mr Hayden Corser dismissed the adjourned summons against the owner of No. 10 Norfolk Buildings, Shoreditch, on the ground that the vestry's only remedy was by summons after the expiration of notice to the owner to remedy the defects complained of. The rest of the summonses were adjourned *sine die*, pending a statement of a case at the instance of the vestry.[28]

Isobel Watson referred in her article to a cutting, the newspaper not being identified. But committee minutes suggest the chief sanitary inspector had given an interview to the *Star* newspaper.[29] The report suggested corruption, and gave Mr J. Pilbrow's address as 37 Alwyne Road, Canonbury. It also stated that after the 1892 hearings

> when the vestry tried to recover, they found that he was an undischarged bankrupt, and though he was living in a comfortable style in Cannonbury, all the furniture belonged to his wife. The Act, however, provides that the cost may be recovered from the tenants, and so the vestry served notice on one of them to pay over the rents to them. Promptly came
>
> MR. PILBROW'S NEXT MOVE
>
> He promptly ejected the tenant and raised the rents of the remainder on the plea that the property had been improved by the drainage work which the vestry had carried out…. Mr. Pilbrow attended and represented that he was only the manager to the agent of the owner. Mr Woodfin, a barrister, who said he appeared for the owner, gave his name as Frederick Carrol, but declined to give his address. Mr. Alexander, the vestry's sanitary inspector told the magistrate that he believed 'Carrol' to be a bogus name and that no such person existed.

The item gave further details of the conditions in Norfolk Buildings:

> Now the vestry are seeking to have the whole block closed. Their condition is so bad that the sanitary inspector - no novice at such work - actually vomited the other day from nausea. The pipes from the sinks and closets are inside the houses and the joints are so faulty that the constant leakages occur both of liquid and solid matter. The ceiling of the rooms around these pipes is constantly marked with damp, and in many of the tenements the plaster has fallen away. In consequence the buildings swarm with black beetles. One man told the vestry inspector that he had killed 300 in an hour. The closets are so close to the doors of the living rooms and so insufficiently ventilated that the effluvium is
>
> DRAWN INTO THE ROOMS
>
> by the draught of the kitchen fire - an evil that is aggravated by the constant blocks which take place in the pipes. For these clustered dwellings which consisting of two rooms and a tiny bedroom, rents of 6s and 6s 6d. a week are paid….[30]

The vestry discussed the problem, and at its

meeting on 3 July 1892 set up a special committee of nine members to consider and report 'upon the whole question re Norfolk Garden buildings'. This met a further eight times until November.[31] They started with a detailed examination of the medical officer, Dr Bryett, and the chief sanitary inspector, Hugh Alexander. They then considered the rate of infectious diseases and the death rate, before deciding to visit the site.

> After the Committee had viewed the Buildings Mr Pilbrow attended before them. The Chairman asked Mr Pilbrow whether he did not consider it would be a very great improvement if india rubber cones were placed between the points instead of putty. Mr Pilbrow admitted that it would be an improvement and as a matter of fact was being done in some cases and should be carried out in all. Mr Pilbrow also promised that the sinks should be put right. Mr Winkler suggested to Mr Pilbrow that the Buildings would be very much improved if back additions were built for the purpose of carrying the WCs and pipes. Mr Pilbrow informed the Committee that it had been decided not to build at the back of the Buildings.

At their 17 September meeting

> the Committee examined Mr Alexander and Mr Quelch as to the position of the WCs and the fittings, as to the sinks and as to the remedy in case of an overflood. Mr Alexander and Mr Quelch both informed the Committee they considered that the floor of the WCs should be concreted and that they should be removed from their present position and placed on the external wall as shown in the plan produced.

Mr Quelch had been appointed as the vestry's sanitary inspector in 1892, claiming 18 years' experience in sanitary work, some of it as manager of the sanitary department, Co-operative Builders, Brixton.

> Mr Quelch stated that in his opinion if the sinks and WCs as at present constructed were allowed to remain in their present position the overflowing of the sinks and stoppage of the WCs was bound to be a recurring nuisance, and also stated that the traps were not properly connected. Mr Quelch also stated that it would cost as much to put things in a proper condition in their present position as it would to put them where they ought to be - on the external walls - and that it would be necessary to close the building in sections to carry that out.

The special committee focused on the proceedings taken to close Norfolk Buildings. It decided in September

> that it was unwise on the part of the general purposes committee to recommend application for a closing order on the report of the chief sanitary inspector without their having previously inspected the premises.

At the October meeting they

> asked the vestry clerk whether when serving a statutory notice it was necessary to specify the works required to be executed. The vestry clerk stated that it was not necessary for the vestry to do so by section 4 of the Public Health (London) Act 1891.

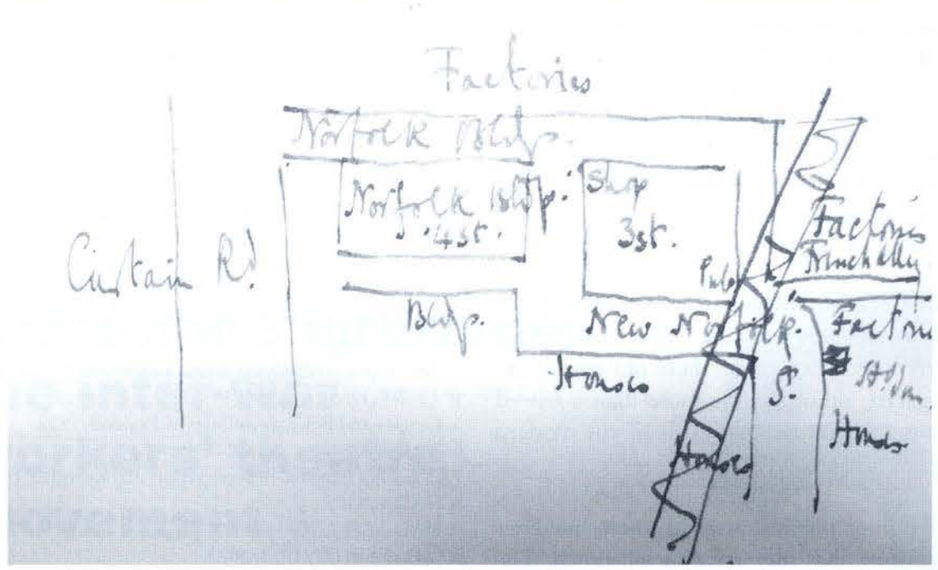
To the question of why a statutory notice giving three months for compliance was followed within two days by application for a closing order, Dr Robinson explained that counsel's advice had been that in proceedings taken under section 32 of the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 it was not necessary to wait until after the expiration of the time specified under the statutory notice served. The proceedings had then been taken under the Public Health (London) Act 1891, quoting *Holmes v Shoreditch Vestry* as the reason for doing it this way.

Dr Robinson was also not in agreement with the magistrate's interpretation of the force of the different Acts. He told the special committee

> the magistrate gave as a reason for this decision that section 32 of the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 was repealed by the Public Health Act (London) 1891 but that in his (the vestry clerk's) opinion, this was not so.

The committee's final resolutions were, in summary, that the buildings were not in such a condition as to justify an application for a closing order; and that the medical officer of health make a fresh inspection with a view to necessary alterations and repair. Then Pilbrow lost his High Court appeal.[32]

The report was adopted by the whole vestry on 13 November 1894. An amendment, that the WCs and sinks should be removed to another room



George Duckworth's sketch of 1898 graphically conveys the impact of the railway on the area

against an exterior wall, or that a back addition be built to contain them, was lost.[33] The vestry started to follow its new procedure of inspection before action, for example in July 1889 with 18 Norfolk Mews.

> Inspector Alexander reported these premises without water, and very dirty and dilapidated. The committee having visited the same, ordered that an order be made for the closing of the premises without delay. [34]

Norfolk Buildings may have had a salutary effect on the proceedings of the vestry, but the conditions for its inhabitants did not improve by very much.

Norfolk Gardens: a rough bit

The Descriptive Map of London Poverty of 1889 shows Norfolk Place peopled by the 'very poor, casual, in chronic want' (coloured dark blue), while Bateman's is inhabited by the (light blue) 'poor', with 18-21 shillings a week for a moderate family.[35]

In May 1898, as part of the work of preparing a revision of this map, George H. Duckworth accompanied PC W. Ryeland on a walk around the area, starting from Shoreditch High Street, along Rivington Street, and into Curtain Road. He described this as

> the great dealing centre for the cabinet trade. The shops are shops of dealers and warehousemen rather than of manufacturers. Curtain Road is the warehouse and most of the side streets the factory of the furniture trade.[36]

They then walked south, then east into Norfolk Gardens. He noted the north side was all factories, but

> the S side is rough as before, 4 st. dwellings, drunk, rowdy, criminal, the west end better than the east or back in appearance: back of the block and east end v. bad.

The sketch map he made at the time makes it clear this was Norfolk Buildings. This is the first mention we have of its number of storeys.

He described the

> broken and patched windows, dirty ragged children talking leaning out of the …. window frames; pools of stagnant dirty water on a piece of ground opposite the 3 storied houses wh. Ryeland said was private ground: - a general shop with thieves: like 'Wilmer Gardens' db [*dark blue*] lined rather than db of map.

They then walked along New Norfolk Street, noting it was asphalted, with houses down and opened up since the first map was drawn (in the late 1880s). French Alley was now all workshops, and widened. The 1898/99 map shows the block with Norfolk Buildings and that to the east in blue, edged with thick black lines; denoting a worsening of the condition of its residents.

Norfolk Gardens became part of Dereham Place in 1907, as did New Norfolk Street and part of Bateman's Row. The line of these old streets can still be traced, although little more than a fenced path behind the car parking yards of the modern buildings.

Given the poor physical state of these buildings it is surprising that they did not fall down. The 46 flats were surveyed by the LCC in 1939 when it was found that the structure was wearing out; rooms were low; passages went directly into living rooms; some had no secondary ventilation. There was rising damp, the rear yards were inadequate and some rooms were overshadowed.

The Buildings survived the Second World War and were included in the 1961 London County Council's slum clearance review, when the brickwork was described as defective with bulging walls.

In March 1963 the medical officer of health at the LCC proposed that Norfolk Buildings (now only 37 units, housing 107 people, with units 25 to 32 missing) be included in the current slum clearance programme as they were unfit for human habitation. The cost of removing the occupiers and re-housing the 35 families was £123,000. The clearance order became operative on 18th December 1964 and demolition was completed by the end of 1966.[37] The area was zoned for industrial use. An amazing 82 years of poor quality housing was at last ended.

Acknowledgements

The staff of Hackney Archives Department gave enthusiastic help in tracking down information that was obscured by filing under other locations. Mr Pilbrow remains hard to trace.

Notes

Digital images of the private papers referred to in this article have been collated and placed with Hackney Archives Department.

1. I. Watson, 'The first generation of flats', *Hackney History* 11 (2005), 33.
2. HAD LBH 7/10/3/3039 (Shoreditch drainage applications). The plan showing the footprint of the buildings is filed with an earlier application for another site, no. 3019.
3. HAD L/G/4/2 (St Leonard's vestry, Shoreditch: sanitary committee minutes).
4. See map accompanying Strype's edition of Stow, *Survey of London* (1755).
5. Langley and Belch, New Map of London, 1812.
6. HAD L/G/5.
7. L/G/4/2 (medical officer's report 22 December 1876).
8. HAD L/G/5.
9. HAD LBH 7/10/3/3039.
10. HAD LBH/7/10/3/3023.
11. See the family material deposited as mentioned above.
12. HAD L/G/6.
13. Conveyancing Act 1881.
14. Cheltenham newspaper clipping 1888.
15. HAD L/V/C/16 (May 1887 to August 1889).
16. HAD L/V/93.
17. *The Mercury* 27 August 1892, 3, col. 1.
18. *Hackney Gazette,* 'Our Local Lounger', June 22 1892, 3.
19. *The Mercury*, 3 September 1892.
20. *Hackney Gazette*, 29 August 1892, 4, col. 2; 14 September 1892, 3, col. 5.
21. *Hackney Gazette*, 26 August 1892, 4, col. 3
22. *Hackney Gazette*, 12 September 1892, 4, col. 2.
23. *The Mercury*, 27 August 1892, 5, col. 2.
24. HAD L/S/6 (St Leonard's vestry special committee, 1891-1900).
25. *Hackney Gazette*, "Insanitary 'Model' Dwellings", 8 June 1894.
26. *Hackney Gazette*, 29 June 1894, 4 col. 2.
27. *Hackney Gazette*, 25 July 1894, 3 col. 6.
28. *Hackney Gazette* 1 August 1894, 4 col. 3. 'Stating a case' enabled a higher court to review a magistrate's decision.
29. HAD L/S/6.
30. HAD S/LD/1/21 (Shoreditch cuttings).
31. HAD L/S/6.
32. *Times* 2 November 1894, 14 col 3.
33.HAD L/S/6.
34. HAD L/S/6.
35. Booth's Descriptive Map of London Poverty, 1889.
36. Duckworth's notes are available as images on www.lse.ac.uk/booth, B352, 208-209.
37. LMA GLC/MA/SC/1/561; 3/1811, 4/33.

A dramatic interlude: the inter-war workers' theatre movement

5

Carole Mills

Prelude

The inter-war period, 1919 to 1939, could be described as politically, economically and culturally totally dramatic. The erosion of traditional conventions of hierarchy and deference, the election of the first Labour governments, the founding of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the General Strike in 1926, the world economic crisis of 1929-31, mass unemployment, mass entertainment, the rise of fascism: and then the advent of a second world war. Life in Hackney during this period reflected these national and international upheavals, not least in being the birthplace of the short-lived British workers theatre movement (WTM). In the late 1920s, the WTM became part of an international movement committed to using dramatic means to promulgate revolutionary ideas to workers, performing without 'props' at factory gates, outside labour exchanges, on street corners or in parks – *agitprop* theatre that flourished from 1926 to 1934. *Agitprop*, a Soviet term for agitational propaganda, was an effective method of communication in post-revolutionary Russia, where it was used widely to convey the new political message to illiterate workers, and workers' theatre became an integral part of the revolutionary process. A strong movement also developed in Germany, despite the collapse of post-war attempts at revolution, and it was taken up in America too. In Britain, the impetus for this development away from 'naturalistic', even if socially relevant, dramatic presentations to confrontational revues was the General Strike of 1926.

The Hackney scene

Radical and progressive thinking had long been a feature of Hackney's political, social and cultural life, from the dissenters of the 18th century and supporters of the revolution in France, to those seeking

democratic reforms throughout the 'long' 19th century. Such thinking was given voice, through numerous organisations and groups, both by and to their members. In *Hackney History 9,* Barry Burke recounted the history of the Borough of Hackney Working Men's Club and Institute, with its 'entertainments' and lecture programmes, and referred to William Morris's diary entry about a talk he gave there in 1887:

> On Sunday I gave my 'Monopoly' at the Borough of Hackney Club … it is a big club numbering 1,600 members… the meeting was a full one, and I suppose I must say attentive; but the coming and going all the time, the pie-boy and the pot-boy was rather trying to my nerves….[1]

Apparently club members, in the eyes of the *Walthamstow and Leyton Guardian*, held advanced political opinions that were 'essentially radical, republican and secularist'.[2]

This climate of radicalism in Hackney, during the great political turmoil of the latter decades of the 19th century, was still apparent fifty years later. In 1926 the most advanced political opinions were held by those on the left of the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party and the recently established Communist Party of Great Britain, and the experiences of visitors to the groups these parties spawned were little different to those of their predecessors. When the Hackney Labour Dramatic Group gave a performance of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* in 1927, the barman advised the players to 'finish by quarter to ten because we have to close the bar at ten and they must have their drinking time…if you haven't finished then they'll walk out on you'.[3]

The Hackney Labour Dramatic Group gave its first performance in the Library Hall, Stoke Newington on 24 April 1926 with financial support from the Hackney Trades Council.[4] Sadly no programme of the performance is in the Hackney archives, but in the scrapbook of handbills and programmes recording events in the hall it would have followed 'an Entertainment by "The Camelias" musical comedy concert party under the direction of Ted Leaver' where the audience enjoyed a comedian, light comedienne, soubrette, baritone, soprano and piano, and saw displayed on the walls a collection of original drawings of London landmarks by Mr. George H. Cook.[5] This genteel programme portrays one side of life in Hackney (and Stoke Newington) at this time. By contrast, earlier in the year at the King's Hall (Hackney Baths) there was an example of 'advanced political opinions' being expressed at a 'crowded and noisy meeting', called by the Hackney Trades Council, and supported by the local Independent Labour Party and Communist Party. It protested at the conviction of Communist Party leaders, who had been charged with seditious libel and incitement to mutiny, tried, and given prison sentences for their activities in the long-running miners' dispute. The miners' leader, A. J. Cook, had attended the Hackney meeting.[6]

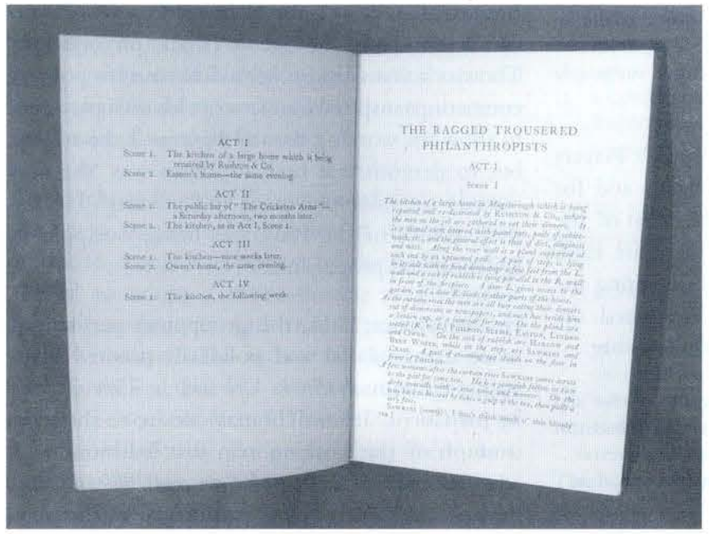
As the industrial situation worsened the miners went on to strike, precipitating the General Strike in early May. In Hackney, the Trades Council (which had several communist members) formed the 'Hackney Council of Action' and, when the General Strike began, 'took over a local boxing hall, the Manor Hall[7] in Kenmure Road, as their headquarters and ran the strike from there'.[8] As Mike Knowles, Secretary of the Trades Council wrote in an introduction to the celebrations held in 1975,

> in seventy five years of chequered history… one outstanding theme is consistent, support for the coal miners. In May 1926 Hackney closed down in their support and at the same time the government stationed troops in Victoria Park against them and their supporters.[9]

Dramatis personae

In 1977 Tom Thomas recounted the history of the workers' theatre movement, which grew rapidly in the late 1920s.

> I was born on 18 June 1902 in Gayhurst Road, Dalston, East London, a road which was a typical mix of comfortable respectability and hand-to-mouth poverty. My father was a basket maker… a staunch trade unionist but politically a Liberal. I became a socialist….[10]


ACT I

Scene 1. The kitchen of a large house which is being renovated by Rushton & Co.
Scene 2. Rushton's home—the same evening.

ACT II

Scene 1. The public bar of "The Cricketers Arms"—a Saturday afternoon, two months later.
Scene 2. The kitchen, as in Act I, Scene 1.

ACT III

Scene 1. The kitchen—nine weeks later.
Scene 2. Owen's home, the same evening.

ACT IV

Scene 1. The kitchen, the following week.

THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS

ACT I

Scene 1

Tom Thomas's adapation of 'The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists'

There must be many a man, reflecting on those times, who might have opened his autobiography with such words, but H. B. 'Tom' Thomas's life developed from these beginnings in a remarkable manner:

> …it was the War which really educated me politically. Seeking the real cause of that ghastly bloodbath, I heard of meetings at Finsbury Park on Sunday mornings … organised by the Herald League.[11] Here I bought my first copy of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* which was to me, as to many others, both a revelation and an inspiration.[12]

Thomas later went on to adapt this book into a successful play, performed at numerous venues across London and in the Manor Hall: a play that in his view attracted a new audience who would normally have attended the music hall.

Tom Thomas is credited with inaugurating the WTM in Hackney, with that first performance in Stoke Newington in April 1926. To enliven Hackney Labour Party meetings in the mid-1920s, one Saturday night Thomas put on a one-act play about a pit tragedy, which was well received. He went on to start the Hackney Labour Dramatic Group, engaging two of the brightest people in the Labour Party, Herbert Butler and Albert Cullington. I disagreed with them politically but they were used to public speaking and once you're a public speaker you're not very far from being an actor.[13]

Herbert Butler went on to have a long and distinguished career as a local councillor, chairman of the Trades Council and, from 1945, Member of Parliament for South Hackney. In 1969, when he stepped down from the Commons, in an interview for the *Hackney Gazette*, Butler recalled those days of his youth when he had 'attended evening classes and studied Marxian economics, the Russian Revolution, the Third International, unemployed movement, Socialist philosophy and tactics'.[14] Following the General Strike, Hackney Trades and Labour Council was disaffiliated by the Labour Party on account of its communist connections, and was disowned by the Trades Union Congress in February 1928. Tom Thomas, like many others, had become disaffected with the TUC and the Labour Party following their failure to support the striking workers, and joined the Communist Party.

The Hackney People's Players

The Hackney Labour Dramatic Group was renamed the Hackney People's Players but, like similar groups, was limited by the availability of suitable material to perform. They did stage works that portrayed issues of social conscience, such as those written by George Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, J. M. Barrie and Gwen John, and were available in the library of the British Drama League, many published by the Labour Publishing Company in a series called 'Plays for the People'.

But Thomas was looking for plays which

> dealt with the realities of the lives of the working class in Britain, and which analysed or dissected the social system which had failed to prevent the war, had completely

failed to deliver the 'homes for heroes' promised during the war, and maintained a class system in which the wealthy flourished, and the great majority of the people were their wage slaves.[15]

Within a short time the Hackney People's Players were performing in working men's clubs and for Labour and Communist Party events. Most of the members were from Hackney or the East End. Raphael Samuel, in recording and celebrating the work of socialist theatre groups, described the members of WTM groups in London as being

drawn largely from the lower professions, clerks and out-of-work young people, together with a substantial complement of East End Jewish proletarians in revolt… more… a cultural stratum than… members of a class.

LABOUR'S DRAMATIC ROLES.

The People's Players, attached to the Hackney Labour Dramatic Group, made their initial bow to the public on Saturday evening in four one-act plays at Library Hall, Stoke Newington. The productions, which were enthusiastically received by a crowded audience, were "The Twelve-Pound Look," by J. M. Barrie, "The Man on the Kerb," by A. Sutro, "A Woman's Honour," by Susan Glaspell, and "Augustus Does His Bit," by G. Bernard Shaw.

Mr. H. B. Thomas was the producer, and the members displayed considerable ability. The cast comprised Catherine Duncan, Paddy Burrows, Tilly Fox, Anita Rimel, Ethel Halpern, Naomi Thomas, Rose Baber, Betty Glasser, Cissie Leveson, Billie Rome, Herbert Butler, Frank Wilson, Herbert Thomas, Jack Solomons, Harry Young and Albert Cullington.

The People's Players are prepared to repeat any or all of the plays for any working-class organisation.

From the Hackney Gazette, 28 April 1926

In particular, he saw the Hackney People's Players as 'more petit bourgeois than proletarian'.[16] Thomas was a stockbroker's clerk, but his political convictions inspired him to write his own plays, not to show the working class as victims of the system, but to demonstrate how socialism was 'the only remedy for unemployment and poverty'. He saw the business of the Players as being 'outspokenly agitation and propaganda'.[17]

By November 1926, the group was performing more experimental and politically pointed plays, such as Thomas's *Strike Up,* and *In Time of Strife* by Joe Corrie. It was Thomas's desire to show the triumph of the working man that led him, in his adaptation of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists,* to omit the novel's tragic end (in which the hero, dying from tuberculosis, vowed to kill his wife and child rather than leave them to suffer hunger and misery) and write a more optimistic finish. This play was undoubtedly successful, with over 30 performances. It was the performance in the Mildmay Radical Club which elicited the comment from the barman to finish before ten because the members would want to get in last orders. Tom Thomas records that the group did not adhere to the warning; despite the warning bell, nobody got up to leave. He also credits the Mildmay Radical Club as being the biggest and best working man's club in North London, although by 1930 it had changed its name to the Mildmay Club and become non-political – an interesting move given the political tensions of the period.[18]

The Players took this show to many clubs across London and into Essex. Thomas recalls that in 1929

one of our best performances was at the Manor Hall, Hackney. We were interrupted by the arrival of a column of Hunger Marchers from the North who received a rousing reception from audience and players alike, after which the play was continued to a super-packed audience and tumultuous applause.

To perform the play in Edmonton Town Hall the Players had to apply for a licence but the Lord Chamberlain objected to the language, too many 'bloodys': in fact 31 in all. Thomas argued that the language used hardly represented the actual language of building workers and after negotiations was finally allowed 15 'bloodys'.[19]

The Hackney People's Players found that although there was support and interest in working class drama, to engage the interest of the workers they needed to adopt a more flexible and portable dramatic technique, and ensure political clarity in their material. The second of their new plays, *The Fight Goes On*, was set in a mining village during the lockout that followed the collapse of the General Strike. Following that, their show in late 1928 had an all-Russian theme, and was performed at the Ladies Tailors' Trade Union Hall in Whitechapel. They then turned their attention to the plight of imprisoned trade unionists in America, performing *Singing Jailbirds* by Upton Sinclair. This they rehearsed in a garage on the corner of Well Street, and the performance took place in the hall of St. Bartholomew's in Dalston Lane. But, there was growing dissatisfaction with the demands of learning lines, and plays were soon replaced by revue presentations, to enable the troupe to respond more speedily to current events and do away with rehearsals while maintaining a polished and staged performance. The new format included songs, dances, sketches and monologues commenting on the political scene. Popular songs from the new 'talkies' were incorporated, but with a twist: Al Jolson's 'Sonny Boy' became 'Money Boy', 'Alice in Wonderland' was transformed into a pantomime skit, 'Malice in Plunderland'. At the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square a revue called *Strike Up* featured such items, and 'plants' were placed in the audience to call out 'Yes, Strike!' every so often, to give the impression that the audience was calling for a strike. One monologue performed was 'The Market Quack in Hackney', reproduced on page 52.[20]

This show, in a packed Conway Hall, brought forth criticism from the *Daily Worker,* which regularly reviewed WTM shows.

Do we want our May Day demonstrations to march to the tune of 'Sonny Boy'? Some of the scenes belong only to the music hall, particularly the impersonation of a London coster. Why does the WTM make the speech and mannerisms of a street seller the object of 'superior' laughter?

In the same edition attention was drawn to the plight of young workers in Hackney:

A Sweat Shop. In an effort to get cheap labour, week by week batches of workers are taken on and sacked, until we find today….a young worker, about 20 years old is making wardrobes for 9d an hour – the union rate is 1s 9d. This firm, which is in Clarence Road, Hackney employs about 60 workers, mainly young workers.[21]

The wider movement

By now there were WTM groups in all major industrial centres. In Hackney the group was

searching around for a new dramatic form. We were fumbling towards the idea of an *Agit-Prop* theatre – a theatre without a stage, a theatre which would use music and song and cabaret, and which could improvise its own material…a theatre in which the audience could take part. Instead of a theatre of illusion ours was to be a theatre of ideas, with people dressed up in ordinary working clothes. No costumes, no props, no special stage. 'A propertyless theatre for the propertyless class'.[22]

It was a time of intense political activity by the working class, culminating in the second hunger march in 1929. These organised marches were backed by the National Unemployed Workers Movement, which received financial support from the Communist Party. Contacts with similar theatre movements in America and Germany also provided new material, and brought the groups out of halls and on to the street corners. Here shows would end by encouraging workers to join a union, give money or buy the *Daily Worker.* Cracking the unions' resistance to their work was a major objective, and bookings by unions were actively sought until a change of policy was announced by international communism.

The tension between the labour movement and the communists came to a head in 1928, when the Third Congress of the Comintern (the Communist

'The Market Quack' in Hackney

I've stood on this market-place for 25 years, and don't forget it, 1906 I first come 'ere on Sat'day night, of course none of you ladies would remember that, you must have been kids then – some of the gents might be older and wiser, so to speak. And my old Dad said to me 'Look 'Orace, look at all them people with ill 'ealth written all over them,' he said, 'ill 'ealth, that's what it is, ill 'ealth'. It's well-known the length and breadth of the medical profession that the people of Hackney is chronic sufferers. Chronic sufferers, that's the word, all sorts of ill health and ailments from the A's – asthma, acidity, alopecia, ancenia, arthritis – what you get from drinking too much port – some of you would like a chance to get it wouldn't you? – apoplexy, appendicitis, allcrotic poisoning. You can go right down the list – boils, biliousness, deafness, headache, fistula, gangrene, hiccoughs, locomotantax (which is nothing to do with railways or taxicabs, though you might think it has), right down to zymotic fever. You can find them all in 'Ackney, including the common cold, which is the most dangerous of the lot. So for 25 years I've stood in this market-place putting the people of Hackney right. And what do I see? Do I see any improvement? No. If my dear old Dad, Gowd bless 'im, were to come back 'ere tonight and look around at yer pasty faces, yer thin bodies with 'ardly enough flesh on 'em to cover your osteopath or bony frame, and listen to yer coughing and yer sneezing and your corns and your 'eadaches, and the common cold that all of you are cursed with, he'd say as he said on that night 25 years ago, 'Horace, Horace, ill health, that's what it is, ill-health.' Now, I've never been to a doctor in my life, except once – I wanted to get a day off work – now mind you, I don't say a word against doctors, they don't do you much 'arm and they're nice men usually, except when you're a panel patient. But if a man or a woman got any common sense, they'd work it out for themselves – now you, guv'nor, you excuse me I hope – just by looking at you – you work in a factory all day long, sweating your guts out, and you eat that cheap and nasty at a cookshop, breathing polluted air, and you come home at night fair worn out, and when the missus puts a nice two-eyed steak in front of you, you can't touch it. The missus gets upset because you can't eat, the kids get on your nerves, everything goes wrong and all you can think of is to go out and 'ave one just to put things right. Now what's wrong with you? It's your blood. You're overworked and overstrained, same as the Prince of Wales when 'e's been shaking 'ands all day, and what will put you right as rain? – why the identical treatment as is given to his Royal 'Ighness – one week of complete rest and nourishment- can you? No? Well one bottle of my blood mixture will make you feel a new man, now this is not a patent medicine....I believe in helping those who can't help themselves – the working class who work so hard for the boss, they've never got time to work for themselves, and so my blood mixture, what's worth as they say a guinea a box, is sold for less than that, far less than that. Yes if you wanted this stuff up West, done up with tissue paper with gold lettering on the cork and sold by a young lady assistant with a voice like a countess, you'd pay ten and sixpence for it, no less. But my price ain't ten and six, it ain't even five bob or 'arf a dollar, yes, my famous blood mixture, which is guaranteed to make you feel a new man, to cure all the ill health, all the ailments which I specified a few minutes ago, is sold for the strictly working-class price of six pence per bottle, or one shilling for two.[20]

International, led by the USSR), in response to the stabilising of capitalism after the post-war crisis, called for all class-conscious workers NOT to vote for Labour but pursue the revolutionary path, grouping the Labour Party and the TUC with the capitalist class as enemies of the worker, all being considered 'social-fascists'. No longer were communists urged to join the Labour Party and Trades Councils to influence them from the inside. By 1929 the theatre groups were satirising the Labour Party, exposing the Party and Ramsay MacDonald, its leader, as one of capitalism's main supports and, after 1931, the National Government too.

> The Labour Government, so they swear,
> Sold the workers' interest everywhere…
>
> The reason why the Tories reign (via the National Government)
> The Labour Party, it's quite plain –
> Were out to serve their private gain[23]

Class-on-class politics was the order of the day, and the WTM adopted new names to match their revolutionary ambitions.

Red stages

RED RADIO TROUPE
Offers sketches in
North London Districts
To all working class organisations
Write Sec: P. J. Poole, 25 Powell Road, E.5

Hackney People's Players became Red Radio, opening their performances with a chant:

> We are Red Radio,
> Workers' Red Radio,
> We show you how you're robbed and bled,
> The old world's crashing,
> Let's help to smash it
> And build a workers' world instead. [24]

There was the Red Flag Troupe in Islington, the Red Blouses in Greenwich (Russia had the Blue Blouses, referring to the workers' uniform); the Red Magnets in Woolwich, the Red Players and the Hammer and Sickle group in north west London, and several others with similar names in south London, notably the Lewisham Red Players. The WTM published *Red Stage*, later *New Red Stage,* which reported on their activities and reviewed each others' work. In 1932, Red Radio of Hackney boasted of doing three shows a week and selling dozens of copies of the paper. In Islington, Red Flag sold their copies outside Sadler's Wells as well as at outdoor performances at Highbury Corner.[25] Another Hackney group was the Rebel Players, destined to play a crucial role in the demise of the workers theatre movement.

The first edition of *The International Theatre* in 1934 features a photograph of a bespectacled Tom Thomas, a history of the British WTM and in the round-up of news of members of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre reports that

> six members of the WTM in England were arrested recently during a performance in Stepney. The indignant spectators demanded the release of the six comrades and followed after the policemen with shouts of 'Down with Fascism'. Meetings of protest are taking place all over the town. The case will come up before the courts.[26]

However, although the WTM promulgated communist ideas, the Communist Party did not provide active support, as its leaders thought it a waste of time and energy. Party membership had declined to 2,500 after the General Strike (along with a decline in Labour Party and trade union membership) and its members were enjoined to commit all their energies to serious political activity, not marginal cultural events. Within the WTM there was pressure to 'toe the party line', and there were sharp differences of opinion about how performances should be conducted.

> Unnecessary and distracting by-play particularly by 'policeman'. The laughs got by presenting the police in a humorous way destroys the value of our propaganda. The 'comic policeman' tradition of the music halls must have no place in the Workers Theatre.
>
> Red Players…Cockney accent of the player very bad.

Masthead of the movement's newspaper

But this early manifestation of political correctness was often rebutted:

> You condemn the Hackney group for use of makeup etc. and say the open platform style should be used.
>
> In our opinion Red Players were very good. It is ridiculous to object to a COCKNEY accent. Don't we want the workers to join the WTM?[27]

With the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Germany, in 1934 the Comintern made a further political U-turn, urging its members to support a united front against these threats to workers and socialists. This left the WTM groups in an impossible position, since the individuals and parties they had been lampooning were now to be considered friends and allies. As Tom Thomas recalled,

> the new Popular Front line didn't lend itself as easily to popular theatre. In theatre terms, it's much more difficult to present an argument for a constructive line…than to write satires and attacks on the class enemy.[28]

Finale

Many found these changes difficult to adjust to. Thomas was asked to step aside, as his continued leadership of the WTM might be considered an obstacle to building the Popular Front. The response to this challenge was the formation of an umbrella body called the New Theatre, with Thomas as secretary. This body absorbed both Red Radio of Hackney and Proltet, the Jewish WTM based in Whitechapel. The other Hackney group, Rebel Players, also took in members from other groups as they disbanded. Not only were attitudes changing towards the Labour Party and the trades unions, but also towards the middle class, now rehabilitated and 'no longer seen as the infected bearers of bourgeois poison'.[29] The style of performance also changed as 'propertyless theatre' began to be produced and directed by professional theatre people, and Rebel Players, this 'troublesome and difficult group in East London', even affiliated to the British Drama League. [30] Young Jewish people formed the hub of Rebel Players, but the group aimed to attract people 'beyond the Jewish community of the East End, performing in areas 'up the social ladder' like Hackney or Stamford Hill and in central London.'[31] Although not entirely abandoning *agitprop,* Rebel Players adopted a variety of dramatic forms and aspired to launching a permanent theatre. Following a dispute with them over a performance of *Waiting for Lefty* in 1935, Tom Thomas and the remnants of the WTM were marginalised and then overtaken. Rebel Players not only eschewed the WTM 'open platform' approach to return to realistic presentations, but also abandoned the old confrontational style of branding 'in favour of a name that summed up the prevailing political strategy of the moment, Unity'. Unity Theatre operated from 1936 until 1976, when its second home in Goldington Street, St Pancras, was destroyed by fire.

Tom Thomas, a son of Hackney, developed the workers' theatre movement at a time of great industrial, economic and political turmoil. In 1977 the East London History Workshop held a weekend event at Hoxton Hall when readings from Thomas's production of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists was part of the evening's 'entertainment' and billed as 'readings from an old East End production'. This weekend featured a line-up of some of the most prestigious of East End writers and historians of the working class – Raphael Samuel, Jerry White, Bill Fishman, Gareth Stedman-Jones - as well as contributions from trades unionists.[32] Tom Thomas died two months later. Almost 30 years after, it seems appropriate to bring the inter-war dramatic interlude to light again, and place those active in the Hackney WTM groups firmly in the long and illustrious line of Hackney dissenters and radicals.

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Notes

1. 'William Morris' Socialist Diary' in *History Workshop Journal*, 13 (Spring 1982).
2. B. Burke, 'The Borough of Hackney Working Men's Club and Institute: The Early Years', *Hackney History* 9 (2003).
3. T. Thomas, 'A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class' *History Workshop Journal* 4 (1977).
This narrative was the result of an interview Tom Thomas gave shortly before his death. He had written a history of the workers' theatre movement in *New Red Stage*, September 1932.
4. R. Stourac and K. McCreery, *Theatre as a Weapon, Workers' Theatre in the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain 1917 – 1934*, 1986. The authors interviewed a number of WTM veterans in the mid 1970s, including several from the Hackney groups, and their book quotes extensively from these interviews.
5. HAD SN/LD/7/3.
6. B. Burke, *Rebels with a cause: the history of Hackney Trades Council 1900-1975*. Typescript HAD D/S/52/8/4/2
7. The Manor Hall was licensed for entertainments on a site behind Mare Street, previously the assembly rooms. These, including a large concert hall and skating rink, were demolished by 1894, being replaced in part by the Manor Theatre, later a film theatre. (VCH, X)
8. Burke, *Rebels with a cause.*
9. Records of Hackney Trades Council, HAD D/S/52.
10. Thomas, 'Propertyless Theatre'.
11. The League was promoted by the *Daily Herald,* a Labour newspaper edited by George Lansbury.
12. Tressell's novel, first published in 1914, concerns a group of housepainters and their daily struggles in Edwardian England. The main character, Owen, agitates his workmates against acceptance of their desperate insecurity and poverty.
13. Thomas, 'Propertyless Theatre'.
14. HAD Subject Index: Politicians: 'Butler, Herbert William (1897-1971) Trade Unionist and Labour MP', unpublished article by Margaret Espinasse, c. 1976.
15. Thomas, 'Propertyless Theatre'.
16. R. Samuel, E. MacColl, S. Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left 1880 – 1935, Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America,*1985.
17. Thomas, 'Propertyless Theatre'.
18. HAD Subject Index: Societies and Clubs: letter from David Mander, Borough Archivist, August 1991.
19. Thomas, 'Propertyless Theatre'.
20. Reprinted in Samuel, MacColl, Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left.*
21. *Daily Worker*, February 10th 1930.
22. Thomas, 'Propertyless Theatre'.
23. *Red Stage, Organ of the Workers' Theatre Movement,* March 1932, quoted in Stourac & McCreery, *Theatre as a Weapon.*
24. Thomas, 'Propertyless Theatre'.
25. *Red Stage* no. 2, January 1932.
26. *The International Theatre* no. 1, 1934. Set up in Moscow and published in English, French and German.
27. *The Workers Theatre Monthly Bulletin* no. 3, February 1933.
28. Thomas, 'Propertyless Theatre'.
29. C. Chambers, *The Story of Unity Theatre*, 1989.
30. Samuels, MacColl, Cosgrave, *Theatres of the Left.*
31. Chambers, *The Story of Unity Theatre.*
32. HAD Subject Index: Politics. Handbill East London History Workshop 2, 'East London Between the Wars; 1919-1939', Hoxton Hall, 2/3 July 1977.

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Robert H. Thompson FSA retired in 2004 after 37 years in Hackney Libraries. He is currently completing the seventh (City of London) volume of tokens in the Norweb Collection, and has proved for publication in the *British Numismatic Journal* that the father of Daniel Defoe was a token-issuer.

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