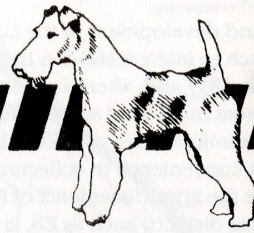


# THE TERRIER



THE FRIENDS OF HACKNEY ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

No. 18

Spring 1990

## The Donations Box

Members, and readers, who have been with us since 1987/8 will remember the success of the Grecian theatre playbills appeal. The fragile playbills are, by the way, now undergoing conservation by the Department's skilled conservator, Sara Archard.

Less dramatic a story, but of continuing importance to the growth of the collections, is that of the Friends' ongoing Donations Fund. Many visitors, at the end of their work in the archives, like to leave some tangible appreciation of their success, or of the assistance they have received.

The small but significant sums that build up in the box have enabled one or two useful rescue missions to be accomplished in the last couple of years. With increasing predictability, in the late months of each year, the Borough has tended to freeze all new expenditure. This could lead to opportunities to purchase new material for the collections being irretrievably lost. Some dealers who put material on the market are prepared to wait, until the new financial year loosens up the Borough's purse-strings again; but this is not always the case, and as a general rule auction houses wait for no man.

Early last year the Friends were able to step in and buy the Jacquin collection, consisting of records and catalogues from a Shoreditch button manufacturing business dating to the early 1900's, as well as other very miscellaneous items. These included the catalogue of a Kingsland Road clothier's of the same period, and some early 18th century deeds relating to Pitfield Street. At the same time a generous donation from a community association, negotiated by Committee member Cam Matheson, enabled the Department to purchase a nice collection of programmes from the Hackney Empire.

The system the committee has adopted for these purchases is not to make an outright gift of these items, but to deposit them in the archives for safe keeping, while retaining ownership. This means that when April comes

round the Borough can purchase the items from the Friends, and the strictly limited amount of cash in the fund is (when, eventually, the money is forthcoming from the Finance Department) freed to be recycled if, or rather when, the next spending freeze strikes.

The latest purchase has been a set of diaries, of which a full account will appear in a future issue. In the meantime, credit where it is due: to the generosity of Friends and searchers who have fed the donations box.



*A postman photographed in front of St Thomas's Church, Clapton Common, about 1904: see overleaf*

## THE LONDON POSTAL DISTRICTS

The origin and development of the London postal districts contains much to interest London historians. They were introduced in 1857 and, after many alterations, sub divided into the present numbered sub districts in 1917. These districts are administrative divisions devised by the Post Office for its convenience in collecting and delivering post. Unlike the arrondissements of Paris none of the London postal districts, such as E8, is coterminous with a municipal, parliamentary or other boundary. Forming part of all Londoners' addresses they have, however, gained far greater significance than the Post office ever intended, and now form one of the most generally understood and widely used bases for the division of London.

### Origins

For so long as London had a postal service the Post Office has divided it into separate areas for deliveries. However, until the 1857 division, they were not widely known to the public, and were not reflected in postal addresses.

In 1830, for instance, the built up area of London was divided into 9 divisions. Figure 1 shows the 1830 walks which were last revised in 1794 despite considerable growth in the built up area during that period. The outermost limits of the town delivery of the General, Foreign, and Twopenny posts, shown in figure 1, were described as "singularly capricious and irregular". Outside the metropolis, districts of delivery extended to a circumference of some 15 miles. These were served by 9 horse drawn delivery van routes, known as "rides", which dropped post off at towns along the route, and from these towns the post was distributed over the immediate district. Hackney came within the country districts of the London distributed post: post was brought here after sorting in London, and it was then delivered in the area by foot on separate walks of around 10 miles each.

### Steps to Reform

At the time of the 1830 Report the Government saw the postal service as a means of raising revenue rather than as a service. Organisation in the London postal districts was complex, haphazard and expensive. There were three

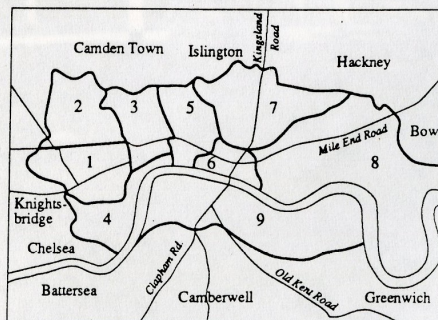


Figure 1: the "walks" in 1830. 1, St James's; 2 Marylebone; 3 East Westminster; 4 South West; 5 West City; 6 Lombard Street; 7 North East; 8 East; 9 Southwark.

distinct categories of mail within London, and separate bodies of postmen for their delivery. Postage on a packet was usually paid by the recipient rather than the sender, and the postage tariff generally depended on the distance the letter travelled.

The first substantial prospect of change came in 1837 when Rowland Hill published a pamphlet entitled "Post Office Reform". This suggested improvements to the Post Office system, and he may have issued it with a view to bringing himself to the attention of the government and being rewarded with a position in the Post Office<sup>3</sup>. He was called to give evidence to the then current Commission of Enquiry into the Post Office<sup>4</sup>. In his evidence he was concerned with speeding deliveries; he recommended the establishment of 8 or 10 sorting offices roughly equal distance from each other, on "great thoroughfares near to principal centres for the departure of coaches", such as Bank and Angel. Each sorting office should be responsible for the delivery of post within a defined postal district and, to facilitate sorting and delivery, he proposed that this was reflected in the postal address. Accordingly "Cornwall Terrace, Regents Park" might become "Cornwall Terrace, London A".

This particular suggestion was rejected but some of Hill's other suggestions, such as a uniform penny post with postage paid by the sender, were introduced in 1840.

Rowland Hill reiterated this proposal before the Select Committee on Postage in 1843 but it was still not accepted. What brought it closer to implementation, and Hill closer to achieving his goal, was his appointment as Secretary to the Postmaster General in 1846, followed by elevation to Secretary of the Post Office in 1854.

No time was lost: in a minute of 21st December 1854 Hill established a Committee of Officers on the Question of establishing District Sorting Offices and Hourly Deliveries in the Metropolis, which reported on 4th July 1855.

### The 1857 Plan

The Committee favoured the existing plan of compact districts within the centre of the metropolis, surrounded by segmental divisions radiating out to the boundary. It recommended the division of the area within 12 miles of the General Post Office into 10 districts of which 2 (EC and WC) were central and 8 others (N, S, E, W, NE, SE, NW and SW) were outer districts stretching through the environs of London to a 12 mile circle bounding the London district.. Each of these was to be treated as a separate town for postal purposes.

The extent of each postal district was fully considered. The boundaries of the WC and EC districts were fixed so that postmen should not have to walk more than 15 minutes from the GPO in St Martins le Grand before commencing their delivery. The limits of the outer districts within the built up area followed main roads and "aimed to keep together parts of a locality which have a connected and

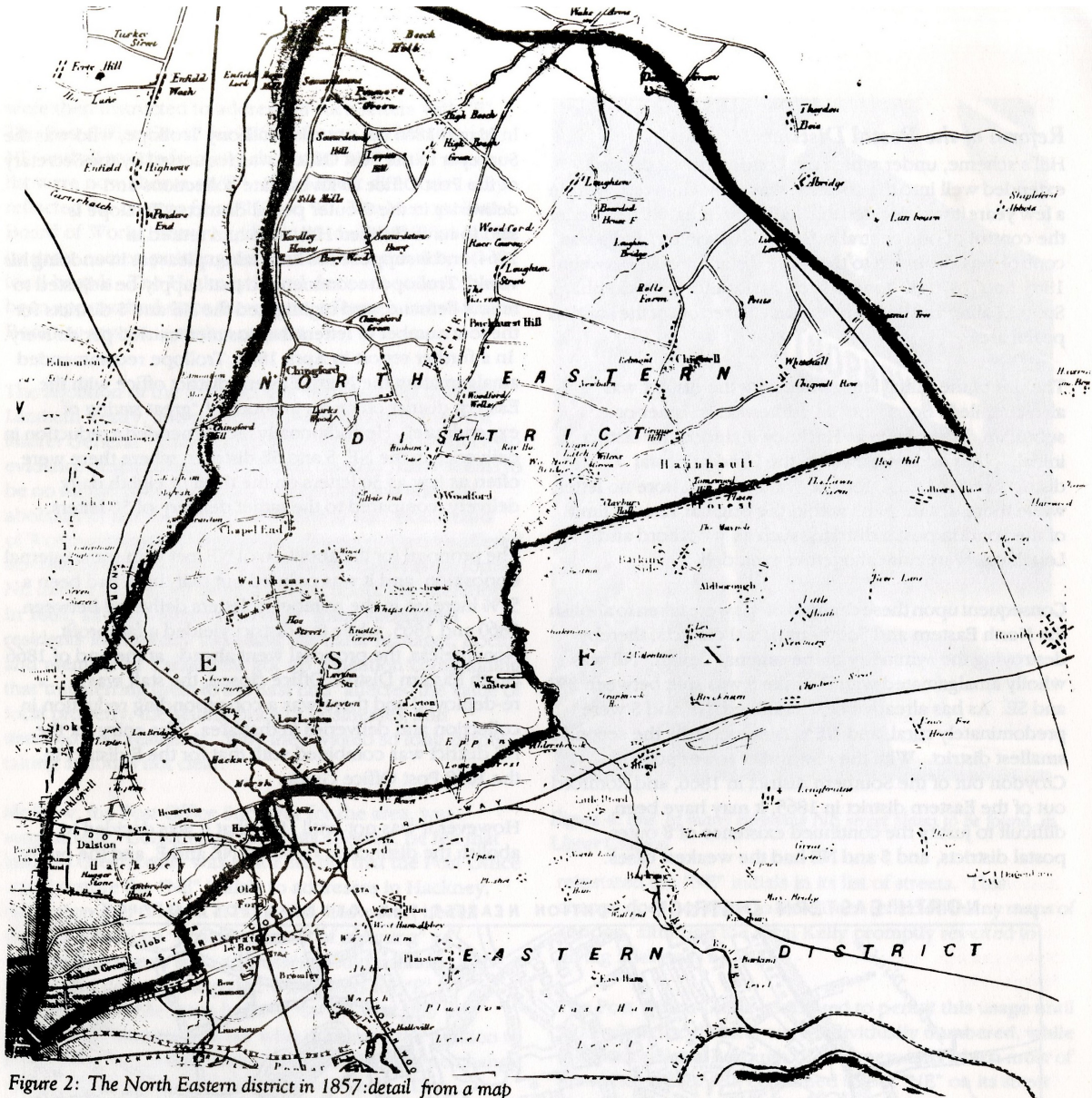


Figure 2: The North Eastern district in 1857: detail from a map in the Post Office Archives

peculiar character". Outside London, the boundaries between the outer districts generally followed the existing limits of the country delivery rides.

As the Committee's report entirely endorsed the Post Office Secretary's long standing proposals, steps were promptly taken for its implementation. In November 1856 a leaflet for each postal district was prepared, exhorting the residents to append district letters to their addresses. It is clear from the number of leaflets initially ordered for each district that they were by no means equal in number of delivery addresses: EC required 30,000, WC 13,000, N 35,000 but NE only 17,000. Indeed, N, SE, S and NW were predominately rural. It was this inequality in size that was shortly to necessitate further reorganisation.

The Post Office also published two booklets listing main

streets and giving their postal district. The Post Office Guides from January 1857 onwards instructed correspondents to add the initial letter to all correspondence addressed within the 12 mile area, and gave the example of Albany Street, New Street, NW.

The new districts were immediately and strikingly reflected in most contemporary maps. London maps prior to 1857 which showed any district boundaries tended to feature the borough boundaries, or possibly only those of the City of London. In 1856 and later the new postal districts were given equal (if not greater) prominence than municipal boundaries, no doubt reflecting the importance of the post as almost the sole means of communication at the time other than personal visits.

### Reform of the Postal Districts

Hill's scheme, under which the London postal districts extended well into the country, was soon changed. Within a few years it was decided that having so great an area under the control of one central office was unwieldy, and some control was devolved to the more distant areas. Between 1865 and 1870 30 towns such as Romford, Beckenham, Sutton, Ealing and Enfield were transferred out of the London postal area.

The use of the initial letter indicating the district was also curtailed. Soon only an address in an inner or suburban district such as Hackney included the district initial; other addresses within the London postal districts such as Chingford or Walthamstow bore no letter, while more distant parts within the original 12 mile limit of the London postal districts, such as Woodford and Loughton, were now altogether excluded.

Consequent upon these changes, steps were taken to abolish the North Eastern and Southern postal districts, thereby destroying the symmetry of the original design. NE was wholly amalgamated with E, while S was split between SW and SE. As has already been remarked, NE and S were predominately rural, and NE was numerically the second smallest district. With the removal of towns such as Croydon out of the Southern district in 1866, and Romford out of the Eastern district in 1865, it may have been difficult to justify the continued existence of 8 outer postal districts, and S and NE had the weakest cases.

In March 1866 the novelist Anthony Trollope, who was the Surveyor to the Post Office, was requested by the Secretary of the Post Office to investigate collections and deliveries in the 8 outer postal districts. Trollope is said to have disliked Hill, who had retired in 1864, and is supposed to have taken pleasure in undoing his work. Trollope recommended that supply be adjusted to reflect demand, and highlighted the NE and S districts for the low number of letters the postmen carried per delivery. In a further report in April 1866, Trollope recommended amalgamating the North Eastern district office with the Eastern district office on grounds of "great saving of expenditure". He additionally recommended a reduction in deliveries in the NE, S and SE districts, where there were often as few as 30 letters on the third or eighth daily delivery, compared to the target delivery of 50 letters.

The proposal for the abolition of NE met with some internal opposition, and it was pointed out that there had been a 57% increase in the number of letters delivered between 1860 and 1865, while the district yielded a fair profit. Nonetheless, the proposal went ahead; at the end of 1866 North Eastern District Office closed, the staff was re-deployed and there was a corresponding reduction in collection and deliveries in that area. The entry for the NE district was combined with that for the E district in the 1868 Post Office Guide.

However it was not until 1869 that it was decided to abolish the distinction between NE and E, and the public

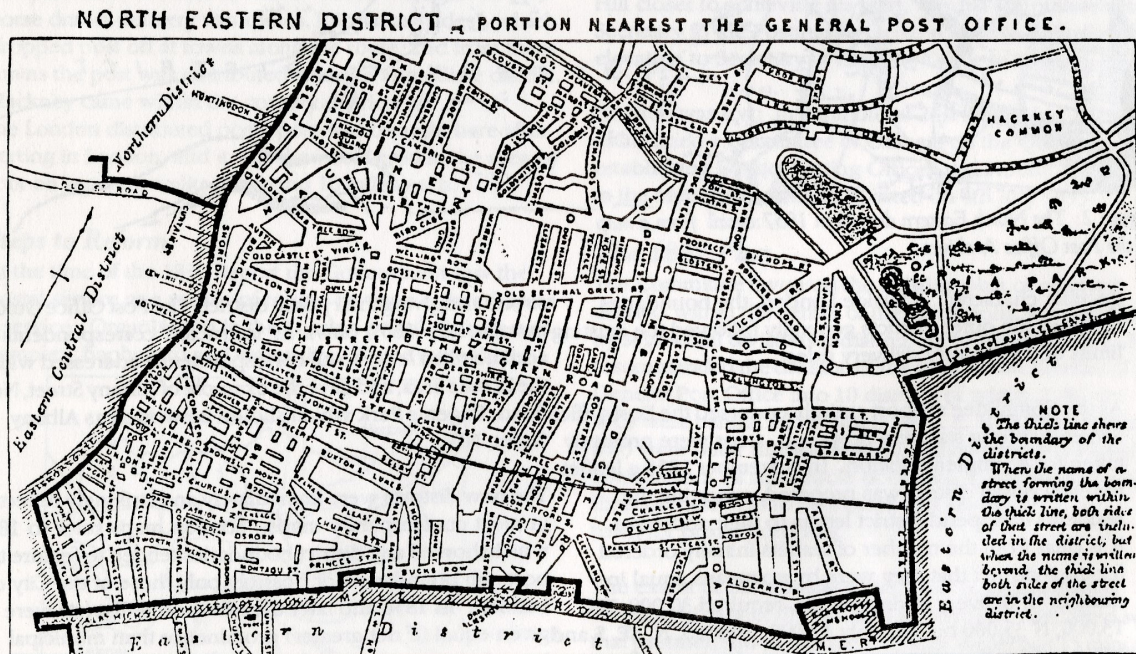


Figure 3: plate from Stanford's "Principal Streets and Places in London", 1857

were then instructed to address all such letters with "E". The Post Office Guide for 1869 refers to the abolition of NE, and all streets formerly shown as "NE" in the street list were now shown as "E". Local street directories duly reflected the change from "NE" to "E". The Metropolitan Board of Works, however, declined to alter "NE" to "E" in its street names, pointing out that this was the duty of local boards. The Hackney board does not seem to have been approached since there is no reference in its Minute Books to receiving such a request.

The abolition of the S district met with protests from the Lambeth Vestry, and provoked a delegation to the Post Master General. These failed since they could produce no evidence of any damage. By way of contrast, there seems to be no record of contemporary dissatisfaction with the abolition of the NE district. The Vestry and local Board of Works minutes are silent and the Hackney Gazette offered no comment. However, at least some residents in the former NE district must have been unhappy about the alteration. In 1881, 12 years after the change, some substantial residents in Hackney including the bank manager, doctor and member of Parliament got up a petition complaining that "transferring them to the East End" affected the value of local property, the selling price of businesses, and deterred new residents. Why they waited so long before taking action is not clear.

Mr Stow, the Post Office Surveyor for the area, was sympathetic. Considering the areas affected, he felt that Bethnal Green really was East End, but that the Post Office could restore the "NE" initials to addresses in Hackney, Homerton and Clapton at little cost. However, he felt that this would be "postally devoid of meaning" as correspondence to such addresses would continue to be sorted and delivered together with letters for "E". Transferring those areas from "E" to "N" was also considered, but the local MP who presented the petition to the Postmaster General was shortly notified that no change was possible, especially after so many years. The petitioner, Dr Daly of Dalston, was not deterred; he wrote with evidence of the effect of the reorganisation, including a statement from a private school master in Hackney who said that he continued to use the "NE" initials on his writing paper in order to keep his boarders. The Postmaster General, however, rejected all possibility of change: it would be inconvenient and expensive to reintroduce "NE" although he estimated the cost at the small figure of £170 per annum.

Strangely, though, this was not the end of the matter. For reasons which are not recorded the decision was eventually taken to authorise the use of "NE" on addresses within the former "NE" district: perhaps a significant number of correspondents in the area were still using these initials, or there was further agitation.

The first reference to the Post Office's change of mind is in the Post Office Guide for January 1889, which stated that correspondents might use E or NE as preferred, and

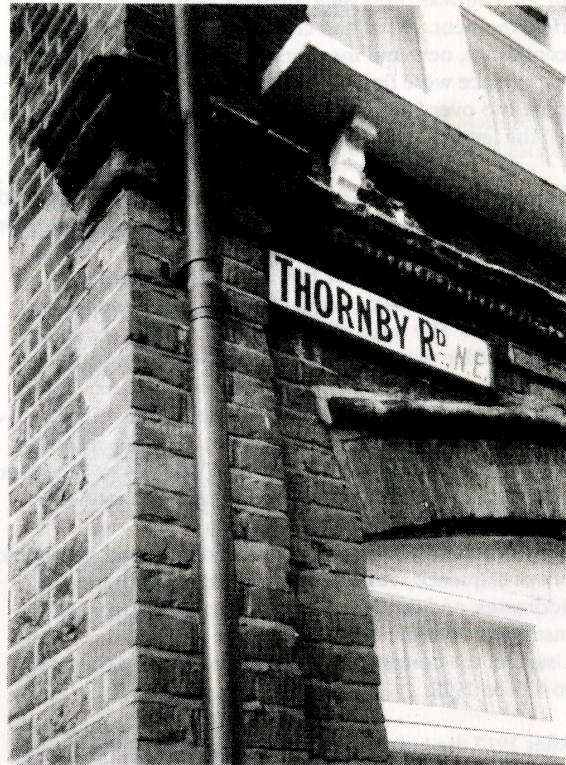


Figure 4: one of many surviving NE street plates to be found in Upper Clapton

reinstated the "NE" initials in its list of streets. This change does not seem to have been reflected in any maps of London, although the local Kelly promptly reverted to giving addresses as "NE".

The Post Office Guide continued to permit this usage until 1917 when the districts were individually numbered, while the Metropolitan Borough of Hackney, into which most of the affected area fell, continued to put "NE" on its street signs until at least 1917 (figure 4).

Local Post Office practice seems to have been fairly haphazard. Miss Bagust records Hackney franking stamps bearing "E" in use throughout this period, yet notes a Clapton Common counter stamp with "NE" in use as late as October 1921.

#### **Further Reform: The Numbered Postal Districts**

One frequently recurring proposal for reform was for the postal districts to be sub-divided into smaller areas, with the sub-divisions made known to the public. Each postal district had long been divided into sub-districts, the area of each being generally the distance postmen could reasonably cover on foot, and each sub-division could correspond to the delivery area of a sub-district office.

On previous occasions this proposal had been rejected as too complicated and insufficiently cost effective. However, when Mr Percy Holland of Cadogan Gardens, SW wrote to the Post Office raising this very idea

in 1916 he was proposing the right suggestion at just the right moment. What had changed was that, under war conditions, new and inexperienced sorters with little or no experience were finding it difficult to sort the London post into over 100 correct sub-districts by the name given on the letter.

Mr Holland's suggestion was swiftly approved and adopted, although he does not seem to have received any recognition or reward. It was decided to number each sub-district within a postal district as part of a separate series, rather than as a single series beginning EC1 and ending with N116. The basis of the division was that the head district office was numbered 1, followed by other offices in alphabetical order. There were, however, exceptions: Paddington, a head district office, was numbered W2. Battersea, another head district office, began a separate alphabetical sequence starting with SW11. Norwood, then a head district office, commenced a separate sequence beginning with SE19. Golders Green (NW11) and West Wimbledon (SW20) were introduced later and numbered out of sequence. An explanatory leaflet was issued to all addresses, and the Post Office Guide for January 1917 instructed correspondents to use the individual numbers. Usage of the correct postal district rose from 32% in 1917 to 65% in 1922.

After 1917 the London postal districts have remained substantially intact, although a number of detailed alterations have taken place, such as moving Albert Embankment from SE11 to SE1 head district office in 1961 to accommodate office development. There have, indeed, been surprisingly few changes in inner London between the introduction of the 1856 postal districts and today, while most of these have been made to accommodate new developments. For example, EC has expanded to include Aldgate High Street, the Mint, Mount Pleasant and Clerkenwell Road, while WC now accommodates Shaftsbury Avenue and Northumberland Avenue and W has gained Park Crescent from NW, and NW the area of Kilburn Park from W.

**Simon Morris**

*The author wishes to thank the staff of the Post Office Archives, and David Mander and Jean Wait for help with Hackney Sources.*

*This article first appeared in the newsletter of the London Topographical Society. Particular thanks are owed to Simon Morris for permitting it to be reproduced here, and revising it specially for a North East London readership. Thanks also to Dr Penelope Hunting and Patrick Frazer for permission to reproduce illustrations.*

*The LTS is a publishing society, and has for over a century been reproducing maps and view of London, and publishing new research (as well as its excellent newsletter). Membership is £10 per calendar year; this entitles members to the annual publication,*

*and to a hefty discount on any Society publication in print. The Society's current publications can be seen and purchased from the Bishopsgate Institute Reference Library, 230 Bishopsgate EC2 (tel. 071-247 6844).*

*The membership secretary is Trevor Ford, 151 Mount View Road, N4 4JT; general enquiries can be made to the Hon. Secretary, Patrick Frazer, 36 Old Deer Park gardens, Richmond, Surrey TW9 2TL.*

## **NEWS FROM HACKNEY ARCHIVES**

### **Deposits received in 1989**

The following are the most important records deposited at the Archives Department in 1989. Where a catalogue number is given (e.g. D/S/13) this means that the records have already been catalogued and can therefore be produced for you to see.

Additional parish records, St John at Hackney, including 18th century vouchers and 1821 census (P/J)

Hackney Downs (formerly Grocers Company) School, records, 19th and 20th centuries.

League of Friends, Hackney, Eastern and St John's Hospitals; records, post 1945

De Beauvoir Association (residents association) records 1972 - 1985

Ordnance Survey Minor Control Point albums for the Hackney area (details of specific points, e.g. drainpipes, corners of buildings, used for surveying) 1946 - 1988 (D/P 3)

Hackney Photographic Society, additional records to 1989 (D/S/13)

W J Rawlings, personal papers, including local rowing clubs, 1909 - 1939 (D/F RAW)

Cambridge Heath Congregational Church records, including registers, 1869 - 1901 (D/E 233 CAM 1)

Victoria Park Congregational Tabernacle records (minutes only), 1869 - 1901 (D/E 233 CAM 2)

Shrubland Road Congregational Church records, including registers, 1874 - 1968 (D/E 233 CAM 3 and D/E 233 SHR)

Hackney Methodist Circuit, additional records, 1878 - 1939 (D/E 234 B)

Packington Street Methodist Church, minutes and accounts 1930 - 1968 (D/E/234 PAC)

## New Books

And here is a note of some more new books that we did not have space to mention in Terrier 16:

In darkest London, by Mrs Cecil Chesterton (published 1926). The author (a journalist) pretended to be destitute and tried to find lodgings and work, to see what life was like for truly destitute women. Among various institutions she describes the Salvation Army hostel in Mare Street, where she was well treated.

The sanitary condition of the labouring population of Great Britain, by Edwin Chadwick, edited by M W Flinn. Chadwick's great work established the link between poverty, ill health and poor sanitary conditions, and led to the Public Health Act of 1848.

The making of the English middle class, by Peter Earle. A study of business, society and family life in London, 1660-1730; the lives of the Hackney middle classes would have been similar.

The nation's memory: a pictorial guide to the Public Record Office, edited by Jane Cox. The other end of the scale from Hackney Archives Department!

Jean Wait

## BACK NUMBERS OF "THE TERRIER"

are available by post, from Friends of Hackney Archives, 29 Stepney Green London E1 3JX, at 75p each (to include postage and packing)

*Please make cheques payable to Friends of Hackney Archives*

### Issue No. 3

The Hackney Cuttings Book  
Travels in Japan, from the records of the British Xylonite Co.

### Issue no. 4

Benjamin Clarke, local historian of Hackney  
The New Gravel Pit Chapel school  
A direct labour organisation of 1893, from the records of the Shoreditch Vestry  
French Revolutions and Hackney reactions (1)

### Issue No. 5

The demise of South Hornsey Urban District Council, 1900  
French Revolutions and Hackney reactions (2)

### Issue no. 6

"The Old House at the Corner" (Sutton House)

Israel Renson, historian of Hackney  
Hackney Town Hall

### Issue no.7

Visit by the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts  
A Clarke miscellanea (1): some recently acquired estate records  
Sanitation in Shoreditch  
The Vegetable Sermon of St Leonard's, Shoreditch

### Issue No. 8

A Clarke miscellanea (2)  
Florence Bagust, historian of Clapton  
High jinks in Shoreditch Church

### Issue no. 9

The Saxon log boat  
Children as local historians  
Victorian Pantomimes

### Issue No. 10

The Rosemary Branch tavern  
The 1837 riot on Hackney Downs

### Issue No. 11

Saving the Hackney log boat  
Thomas Cubitt and Albion Road  
The Bookies' Turning (Florfield Road)

### Issue No. 12

Lewis Berger & Sons Ltd: a company history  
The Orphan Working School and its first master

### Issue No. 13

Memories of an Apprentice Pharmacist (1)  
The French Protestant Hospital

### Issue No.14

Clissold Park 100  
London's China Garden  
Memories of an Apprentice Pharmacist (2)  
Burke's Last Victim: Dr Knox in Hackney

### Issue No. 15

The 1821 Parish Census  
West Hackney Almshouses

### Issue No. 16

The 1745 Parish map of Shoreditch  
Boats Banners and Birthdays: Hackney Museum update

### Issue No. 17

Archaeology in Hackney: the Hunt for Holywell Priory  
Sutton House: the Good News

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 3rd June

### 150 years of Abney Park

A celebration organised by the Friends of Abney Park, and held in Abney Park Cemetery

Sunday 15th July at 2.30 p.m.

### Lower Clapton Walk, led by Jean Wait

Meet by the Old Church Tower, Mare Street E8

Saturday 29th September at 2.30 p.m. in Hackney Archives Department, Rose Lipman Library, De Beauvoir Road N1

### Cemetery Records: a talk by John Rayment

Wednesday 14th November at 6 p.m.

### Visit to Bishopsgate Institute and Library

led by the Librarian, David Webb

Meet at the Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, EC2

## HAPPENINGS

### The Ragged School Museum

This new museum, featuring East End life and education and youth provision in London, is now open at 46-8 Copperfield Road, Bow, E3. The building was Dr Barnardo's ragged school, the largest in London. Opening is on Wednesdays, Thursdays and the first Sunday in each month. Ring (081) 980 6405 for more information.

### "London's Pride"

The Museum of London's exhibition on London gardens has opened at the Museum at 150 London Wall, and runs until 12 August. It is open from 10 a.m. till 6 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday, and from 2 p.m. till 6 p.m. on Sundays. Needless to say there is a significant Hackney contribution.

### "Clerkenwell's Hidden Heritage"

Recent facts and finds in historic Clerkenwell

A joint exhibition of the Museum of London and the Museum of the Order of St John

The Grand Priory Church of the Order of St John, St Johns's Square EC1

20th June - 24th August Monday - Saturday 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. except Bank Holiday weekends and 22 June

### Sutton House

Remember that Sutton House is open from 12 noon till 5 p.m. on the first Saturday of each month.

### The German Hospital

The City and Hackney Health Authority's plans for the hospital are now available for inspection at the Borough Planning Offices, 161-189 City Road EC1, or by appointment at the Health Authority's estate management department, 21a Charterhouse Square EC1 (tel. 071-601-7342, Mr McCully or Mr Hynes).

# BRITANNIA

## THE GREAT THEATRE (HOXTON)

(Approved by the Lord Chamberlain. LICENCE GRANTED by Her Majesty's Patent Office in the County of Middlesex. Printed and Published by Messrs. G. & J. Colver, Ltd.)

**PRICES.**—Stage Boxes 7s. each. Ball-price 1s. Boxes and Stalls 1s. each, half-price 6d. each. Admissions by Box Entrance to all parts by each except Stage Boxes. No person admitted to Boxes or Stalls unless suitably attired. Pit and Dress Circle 6d. Lower Gallery 4d. Upper Gallery 2d. Half-price to Pit and Gallery 4d. each. Doors open at 8 o'clock. Performance to commence at half-past. Children under 7 years of age half-price to Pit and Boxes.

HALF-PRICE TO BOXES AT EIGHT O'CLOCK, TO PIT & GALLERY AT HALF-PAST EIGHT.

## HAVE YOU SEEN THE NEW SPECTRAL ILLUSION!

The **MOST IMPRESSIVE** ever yet attempted!

Thus making the 34th WEEK of the **GREAT GHOST EFFECT!**

Patronised by their Royal Highnesses, the **PRINCE & PRINCESS OF WALES**

PROFESSOR PRINCEY assisted by the Typographer of Mr. W. BIRNIE.

In the next issue - the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, in 1863

Produced for the Friends of Hackney Archives, Hackney Archives Department, Rose Lipman Library, De Beauvoir Road N1 (tel 071-241-2886) by Wednesbury Wordsetters, London E1