

# The Hackney Terrier

*The Friends of Hackney Archives Newsletter*

# 109



Summer 2021

**Dear Friends,**

This Terrier comes as we are easing out of lockdown, and tentatively looking to the future. The good news is that the Archives have re-opened, on a limited basis but with the intention of increasing opening hours going forward. Various restrictions still apply, see below. The London Metropolitan Archive has re-opened, too.

The Friends are re-instating our Events programme, starting with Carolyn Clark's postponed talk on the Regent's Canal on Wednesday 16th June. This will be a Zoom talk, a first for us, as it is still too early to allow a large number of people to gather in one room. However we hope that an online talk will attract some who are otherwise unable to attend our conventional talks at the Archives, and we would welcome those from further afield. Joining details below.

The Women from Hackney's History volume has been a great success, congratulations to all the contributors. If you've not yet bought a copy, be quick as they are selling fast. Copies can be found in local bookshops, or obtained via the Hackney Society website. We give some of the background to its compilation in this newsletter, and Sue Doe and Lucy Madison also talk about it in a YouTube talk linked from the Hackney Society website.

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We do hope you will be able to resume your studies and research into Hackney's history, beyond that available online, over the coming months.

**Robert Whytehead**  
Chair, Friends of  
Hackney Archives

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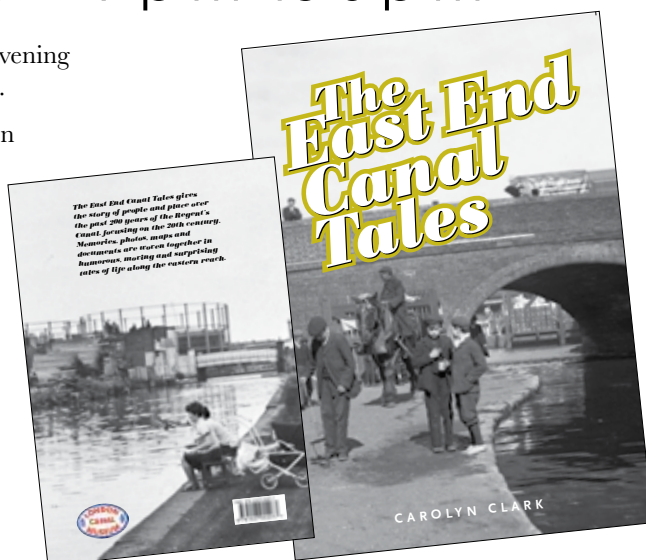
## A Date for your Diary: June 16<sup>th</sup> – 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Carolyn Clark has accepted our invitation to give a Zoom talk on the evening of June 16th (7pm-8pm) about her book ***The East End Canal Tales***.

Carolyn will talk about canal industries and trades and life by the Cut in Hackney and the East End over 200 years. Find out what happened in the old buildings which you can still find by the canal banks and what it was like to work on the canal. Carolyn will bring the Cut's history to life with many images and quotes from local people.

**Book your ticket through Eventbrite [details]\***

*Carolyn Clark is the author of 'The East End Canal Tales', 'The Lower Clapton Tales' and 'The Shoreditch Tales'. Carolyn ran the Regent's Canal Heritage projects with Laburnum Boat Club in Hackney and Tower Hamlets and, latterly, in Islington with the Young Actors Theatre.*



## Sir Robert Geffery, City Merchant, 1613-1704

It is almost a year since the Museum of the Home launched a consultation on the future placement of the statue of Sir Robert Geffery/Geffrye. The consultation demonstrated overwhelming local support for removal of the statue from the Museum frontage but, following ministerial intervention, no final decision has been made. This has prompted some discussion of the facts of Geffery's involvement with the slave trade. As the best source of information – a 2013 biography published by the Museum and authored by City historian, Penelope Hunting – is no longer in print and can be difficult to find, we offer this brief summary of his dealings as an international merchant.



Robert Geffery, a Cornish boy, arrived in the City of London in 1630 as an apprentice of the Ironmongers Company. His master was a Senior Warden of the Company and his parents probably relied on family connections to gain this opportunity for which they also paid fees to the master himself, the City Corporation and the Company. The Ironmongers were one of the twelve great livery companies and a well-placed apprentice could expect to secure valuable connections. He completed his apprenticeship to become a freeman of the Company in 1637 when he was 24.

Although he rose to become Master of the Company, Geffery's ambitions extended beyond those of a trading ironmonger, a supplier of cutlery, hinges and nails. His apprenticeship delivered a broad induction to the knowledge and skills, people and institutions needed to operate as a City merchant. He became a familiar figure at the Royal Exchange and served as Alderman of his ward. He joined the community of international merchants benefitting from monopolistic trading advantages awarded to City companies by royal charter.

The Ironmongers Company had a strong relationship with the Levant or Turkey Company as tin, lead and pewter were significant exports to Turkey and the Mediterranean. The Levant Company was meeting at Ironmongers Hall in 1653 when Geffery first paid his membership fee. The value of this investment gained a substantial boost at the Restoration when Charles II granted a new charter giving the Company exclusive trading rights in Venice, Turkey and the region. Trade tripled, dividends went higher than 50% and Geffery spread his now considerable assets.

In 1657 he became a stockholder with the East India Company. By the 1680s Geffery was also part-owner of a ship, the China Merchant, chartered by the Company and one of the first East Indiamen built to establish trade with China. In 1689 the China Merchant was chartered by the Royal African Company to transport enslaved Africans as well as gold and ivory. A refit in India had probably readied the ship for this new cargo including provision of the chains and shackles, that would have been familiar to Geffery from his commercial origins in ironmongery. The surviving human cargo

was sold for £500 on arrival in Barbados. The China Merchant made a further voyage for the Royal African Company in 1692 when 262 men and women were taken from West Africa to Jamaica. The 985 brass rings used to chain them on this voyage were returned to London and properly accounted for, presumably to facilitate their reuse.

When the Royal African Company was rechartered in 1672, gaining a monopoly of the West African trade, Geffery invested directly as a charter member. Between 1662 and 1731, while Britain dominated the trade, the Company transported over 200,000 enslaved Africans. Geffery was certainly not alone in profiting from this trade. Between 1660, when the Royal African Company was founded, and 1690 all 15 Lord Mayors, 25 sheriffs and 38 aldermen of the City were also shareholders. But the benefits of the trade were anyway not limited to direct investors. The credit required and the risk undertaken stimulated financial innovation and the rise of the City as a centre of banking and insurance. Slavery underpins London's commercial infrastructure, its hospitals, arts collections and philanthropy.

It is clear, however, that his position as investor in and supplier to the Royal African Company and the slave trade contributed significantly to Geffery's prosperity. His political success – knighted in 1673 and elected Lord Mayor in 1685 – tracked his commercial success. While his rise through the City hierarchy was not always smooth, he continued to hold prestigious roles up to his death. He left no immediate family and Geffery's philanthropic bequests amounted to just over £10,000 most of which was to be administered by the Ironmongers Company. He had identified no site for the almshouses he wished built for the elderly poor. In 1712 the Company spent £200 on land for the Kingsland almshouses and £4,500 to build them.

**Dates for your Diary:** The LAMAS Local History Conference 2021 will be delivered entirely online

The theme for the conference will be "*London Overcomes*": *Resilience and Recovery in the History of the Capital*. It will take place across two half-days on 6 and 13 November 2021. Details will be posted on the [lamas.org.uk](http://lamas.org.uk) website.

## Mary Wollstonecraft Comic

A “world-first” comic book about the life of ‘mother of feminism’ Mary Wollstonecraft is to be given away to primary schools across Hackney and Islington, along with a free six-week lesson plan designed to fit in with the national curriculum.

The project is the result of a partnership between the Newington Green Meeting House, which Wollstonecraft once frequented, the People’s History Museum, and the Wollstonecraft Society.

It will see youngsters explore different aspects of Wollstonecraft’s philosophy and learn about concepts including mindfulness, feminism and preservation of the past.

The 12-page comic is the work of artist Martha Mackay, who charts Wollstonecraft’s life, work and relationships from her birth in Spitalfields in 1759 to her death in 1797.

Pupils will get their own workbook for each weekly lesson, while PowerPoint slides explain activities they can take part in, such as creating the perfect recipe for a supportive friendship, becoming feminist time detectives by analysing historical photographs, and researching and sharing information about people in their local area who inspire them.

Two sculptures of Mary Wollstonecraft have been installed in Newington Green recently – one on the Green itself and another inside the Meeting House.



Wollstonecraft is widely known as the ‘mother of feminism’. Her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, called for gender equality a century before the cause was taken up by the suffragettes.

She belonged to the Newington Green Unitarian Church that once used the Meeting House, which has come to be known as the ‘birthplace of feminism’. Along with having a room named after her, Wollstonecraft’s favourite pew has been memorialised inside the main hall.

Primary schools in Hackney and Islington will receive a free copy of the comic and anyone can email [amy@new-unity.org](mailto:amy@new-unity.org) to buy a copy.

## Remnants of the Tyssen-Amherst Library

The forced sale in 1906 of the Tyssen-Amherst collection of manuscripts and incunabula to reimburse creditors, the result of embezzlement of his fortune by his solicitor Charles Cheston, broke up one of the richest private archives in England. Among other treasures, Tyssen-Amherst had collected the earliest English printed books – the work of the fifteenth-century printer William Caxton. Sixteen of these volumes were bought by J.P. Morgan for \$500,000 and are now in the Morgan Library in New York. Other texts, manuscripts and his exceptional collection of Egyptian papyri were snapped up by individuals and libraries and dispersed across the English-speaking world.

Occasionally remnants of his library turn up for sale. If you are feeling particularly flush, Abebooks currently has on offer *Le Grant Voyage de Hierusalem diuisé en deux parties* (1522) – yours for £40,000. If that is a little steep, you could try *A Perfect Booke for Keping of Sparhawkes or Goshawkes* at £4,000. This was printed on velum in 1886 from a manuscript of c. 1575 ‘found at Dodington Hall, Norfolk in the possession of Mr W.A. Tyssen-Amherst’. For £2,000 you could buy

Tyssen-Amherst’s own *Collection of views of different places, seen during a tour of the Continent, February 1852*. Tyssen would have been 17 in 1852, undertaking a late-in-the-day Grand Tour while still matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford – though in February, surely, he should have been in College. An avid collector, he began young. The loss of his treasured collection is said to have contributed to his death in 1909.



*Lord let me not, in Vanitie, Delight more, then I should in Thee.*

For more on Charles Cheston, see Wendy Forrest’s article ‘The Redmonds and the Chestons’ in *Hackney History*, vol. 20, pp. 13-22.

# Hackney Archives Terrier Contribution for May 2021

## Reopening

After a long year of Covid, we are delighted to announce that we have reopened! We opened alongside libraries on the week of 12th April, and are looking forward to welcoming in the many users who have been sorely missing the texture of aged paper beneath their fingers. .

At first we will be only opening on Wednesday & Thursday between 11am and 6pm. In order to keep everyone safe, we're operating an appointment only system and limiting the number of visitors at any one time. Appointments are staggered to allow for social distanced arrival and departure, and cleaning equipment is supplied for sanitizing working spaces. You can book an appointment and select what you would like to see using our [online catalogue](#). For more information about booking please head to the [Before you visit Hackney Archives](#) page on our website. We look forward to welcoming you all back!

## Grants

You may remember from our last update that Etienne was working hard applying for grants from the National Archives. Thanks to his hard work we have been awarded both grants!

The Covid 19 Archives Fund will enable us to support the rescue, conservation and eventual re-homing (if that is a word!) of the An-Viet Foundation archives. Having sadly suffered a period of neglect in the old Bath House on Englefield Road following the formal winding up of the An Viet Foundation organisation in 2017, the emergency conservation alarm was raised late in 2019 by Hackney Chinese Community Services and the University of East London. Unfortunately, by the time Hackney Archives were in a position to answer this call, Covid had hit and lockdowns ensued.

The Covid-19 Archives Fund, designed to save archives put at risk by the ongoing pandemic, means that the Archives will be able to give this collection a temporary home, fund emergency conservation work on the most at risk material, support the development of a community steering group and project consortium to help shape future work on the collection and most importantly, identify a suitable permanent home for the material. We are really excited to be able to support the preservation of what appears to be the largest collection of material relating to the British-Vietnamese experience in the UK and have already started getting our hands dirty with the (careful) lifting and shifting of the collection to our site.

The Archives Revealed scoping grant funds a specialist consultant to produce a report on an archives collection which can help with advocacy and the attraction of further funding for the processing and sharing of the collection in question. We are very pleased that Hackney Archives bid to this fund for the 'Sir Collins Collection' was successful and



*Photos from an exhibition held at An Viet House called 'Record, Retrieve, Reactivate' March 2018, co-curated by Cuong Pham & Will Pham. Image Credit: Jalaikon*

we are now a step closer to completing the mammoth task of assessing, cataloguing and sharing this unique collection of material documenting everything from local carnivals to the campaign to save the 4 Aces Club which operated on the very spot on which the Dalston CLR James Library now stands. We are very thankful to the National Archives for their support and excited to move both projects forward.

## Volunteers

Having paused our volunteer programme during lockdown, we have now launched two new opportunities and recruited three new volunteers. Two volunteers will be working remotely with Hannah and Elizabeth to transcribe our religious collections' paper catalogues. Despite having over 50 fully catalogued collections, only 21 are currently available to browse on our online catalogue. We hope adding them to our online catalogue will encourage people to explore this rich collection of material.

Our other new volunteer will be working on adding key terms and context to our newly digitized collection of photographs from the Hackney People's Press. A snapshot of life in the 1970s and 1980s, the Hackney People's Press collection has always been popular and we hope to give it an even wider reach by adding these photographs to our online image library. As part of this project we are also appealing for anyone who worked on the Hackney People's Press to get in touch as we would love to know more about how this wonderful local newspaper came into being!

## New Team Member

In April we welcomed a new member of staff Lydia.

"Ever since attending Cordwainers College on Mare Street to do a foundation course, I have had a long association with Hackney. I have explored its sights, its streets constantly revealing things anew. Even now, walking from the Archives in Dalston, past the former CLR James library, meandering past the old Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children, down to the once lively happenings of artist spaces in Vyner Street, there is so much one can discover. My working background is in the book trade and libraries. Working for Hackney Libraries since 2006, I have been lucky to be involved in many different projects, initiatives and facilitating volunteering for young people and adults over

the years. In 2017 I was able to work on a project at Peppie Close, organising an oral history project. With a group of vulnerable adults, usually aged 55 and older, who live as independently as possible in the community and avoid the need for nursing care for as long as possible, the project's aim was to enable a process of sharing based around life experience and memory. As a record of the time working together, a long poem was created, performed at the first Windrush tea party in 2018. Based within the Local Studies Library, I am privileged to work with such a rich and diverse collection of material from posters, directories, leaflets to pamphlets and books.

I endeavour to continue the work of opening out more of the collection to the local community in a multitude of

ways whether in person, physically or online. I truly believe it is an exciting time for Hackney Archives and I am honoured to be part of that journey”

Photographer Unknown, taken from the *Hackney People's Press* collection. For more information on the collection see Hackney Archive catalogue.



## Transcribing the 1886 petition to save Clissold Park – A community project

### Introduction

Clissold Park, the jewel at the heart of Stoke Newington, wouldn't exist if it hadn't been for a passionate local campaign in the 1880s to save the then private estate from development. As the last remaining open space in the area, the prospect of losing it to housing developers prompted concerned local residents to mobilise and lobby bodies such as the Metropolitan Board of Works to raise the funds to purchase the park for the public.

The Clissold Park Preservation Committee organised a 'mega-petition' in 1886, which was signed by 11,000 people, mainly from Stoke Newington, Hackney and Islington. The scale of the petition is remarkable and it was pivotal to the success of the campaign, which led to Clissold Park opening as a public park on July 24th 1889.

The petition consists of 412 pages with roughly 30 signatures and addresses on each page. It is kept in the London Metropolitan Archives as it was submitted to the Metropolitan Board of Works, which was succeeded by

the London County Council in 1889. In March 2021, Stoke Newington history enthusiast Amir Dotan, who runs [www.StokeNewingtonHistory.com](http://www.StokeNewingtonHistory.com), organised a crowdsourcing project to transcribe the petition, which he had photographed, by volunteers.

You can view the transcription of the petition at [www.StokeNewington.com/clissold-park-petition](http://www.StokeNewington.com/clissold-park-petition)

### Amir Dotan

### Clissold House and the New River

One of the distinctive elements of Clissold Park is the short stretch of the New River – neither new nor a river but an aqueduct from New Gauge in Hertfordshire. It makes its ornamental appearance in the Park before debouching into the East Reservoir (though formerly it flowed to New River Head by Sadler's Wells).

Check out: <https://www.londonslostrivers.com/the-new-river.html>



## On Writing *Women from Hackney's History*



In 2019, Wendy Forrest of Hackney History proposed to update and expand into a book the 1998 Hackney Society leaflet, 'Famous Women of Hackney'. It would widen the scope both to include more well-known but also 'ordinary' Hackney women with a story to tell.

Wendy both steered and edited the entire process. Hackney women themselves agreed to write, edit and design the book which commemorated past Hackney women from all walks of life. The Hackney Society and The Friends of Hackney Archives (Hackney History) confirmed they would co-publish *Women from Hackney's History* – the final milestone.

Names initially came from Hackney Archives' records and local history books, but the 2020 pandemic gifted additional ways to research. Julia Lafferty found that "the internet became my most valuable research tool, and it was through this means that anti-slavery campaigner Isabella Massie (1794-1857) came to my attention." The correspondence written from Upper Clapton and now on the Digital Commonwealth website gives valuable insight into her and other women's campaigning against slavery in the southern states of the USA.

Rabbit holes of ancestry websites led some "to become obsessed for months looking for Hackney women everywhere". Such ardent sleuthing continues to this day. Sue Doe, a Hackney tour guide born and bred in Hackney, now has a list of over 150 more Hackney women and groups suitable for a future update, possibly online.

Another Hackney tour guide and writer, Lucy Madison, reported: "I typed 'women from Hackney' into a Google search. Not exactly academic stuff, but it was effective. Pleasingly, if you Google 'women from Hackney' now, its top result is our book." Using this method Lucy added Helen Bamber of Amnesty International, Syrie Maugham the interior designer and Hetty King the 'male impersonator' who wasn't on the Hackney music hall 'radar' unlike many of the stars buried at Abney Park.

A few of the writers were already experts. Monica Blake had published and co-edited a book about Lotte Moos (David Perman, *Stranger in a Borrowed Land: Lotte Moos and her Writing*, 2012), Lil Warren had been part of a project commemorating the centenary of the execution of Edith Cavell (*Brussels at Dawn*) and Eleanor Coade's entry was written by Dr Amy Erickson, a specialist in City women of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Wendy recalls that one difficulty in biography is "sticking to what is known [or] knowable. It is tempting to use imaginative leaps to fill the gaps, but ultimately self-indulgent and disrespectful of subject and reader." Contributors, however, did find it frustrating to restrict each biography to 500 words.

Elaine Burrows, a former moving image archivist, wrote about producer Betty Box and other women working behind the scenes at Gainsborough Islington (actually in Shoreditch) Studios. Unfortunately the records from the company's

Islington and Shepherd's Bush studios do not always distinguish which films were 'Hackney-made'.

Did the researchers have favourites? Wendy "liked Eliza Askew because it was completely original research. I knew no one had heard of her or ever written about her before. I hope Hackney will name something after her – she wouldn't have expected that." For Julia Lafferty, it was suffragette Edith Garrud, "whose martial arts skills had marked her out as a woman to be reckoned with in the often bitter struggle for female emancipation."

Avril Broadley of Broadbase in Kingsland Road was an inspired recommendation as designer. She commented: "As well as designing the book I suggested approaching Ella Doran for the cover illustration. I tracked down the mosaic image of Claudia Jones and filtered the images to find ones of production quality. Working with Wendy was a joy, as was discovering so many wonderful stories and I am very pleased that together we have done these women proud."

**Lucy Madison**

## London Metropolitan Archives

The LMA have announced they are reopening on Monday 10 May for pre-booked visitors. Bookings will be taken from Wednesday 21 April for the period 10 May to 29 July 2021. Details on their website.

### Collections Care at Home

The LMA conservation team have produced seven leaflets about safe and easy ways to look after your collection at home covering loose documents, books, prints and drawings, photographs, LPs and CDs, newspaper cuttings and offcuts, and pest monitoring. The leaflets explain how to care for your precious and important archives and collection items. It highlights best practice for storage to prevent further deterioration, environments that are harmful and how to handle items to avoid further damage.

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/history-and-heritage/london-metropolitan-archives/about-lma/conservation>

### County Maps

The Metropolitan Map collection at LMA is a major collection of maps which form part of the core collections. They are mainly printed and are an important source for documenting the history of London and its environs. The Metropolitan Map project to catalogue the maps in order to make them easily available to researchers was completed at the end of January. The collection is particularly strong in maps representing the ancient county of Middlesex, but also includes maps for other counties such as Surrey, Kent and Essex.

The project archivist Amy Proctor provides a tour around the county maps: <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/history-and-heritage/london-metropolitan-archives/collections/county-maps>

## London Remembers Website ([www.Londonremembers.com](http://www.Londonremembers.com))

"The aim of this website is to document all the memorials in London. That's the plaques, monuments, statues, fountains, etc, that commemorate a person, an event, a building, etc. It's an aim we don't think we will ever achieve but we will enjoy the attempt. Our prime objective is not to research biographies, etc. – anyone can do that using web resources. This website focuses on finding the memorials, photographing them, plotting them on a map and logging them in a searchable database, thus providing a powerful research tool. As far as we know, we are the only people doing this: treating

all memorials equally, from the rich and famous to the poor and humble."

This website does not discriminate between memorials, whether blue plaques, municipal commemorations or personal and individual markers. There is some interest in the variety of inscriptions, and may perhaps prompt further research. It is a map-based delivery, fairly easy to use, but with some glitches. Hackney is only lightly covered, so an opportunity to feed into the website, perhaps from discoveries made on your lockdown walks.

## Hackney Museum Current Exhibition

### **Hackney in the 1980s: Photographs from the Tape/Slide project**

From bingo halls to bmx bikes, demos to dole queues... This photography exhibition explores and celebrates the resilience, spirit and solidarity of Hackney's communities in the 1980s.

On display for the first time, the images taken by The Rio Cinema's Tape/Slide – Hackney's ground-breaking community photography project, capture a unique view of the highs and lows of everyday life.

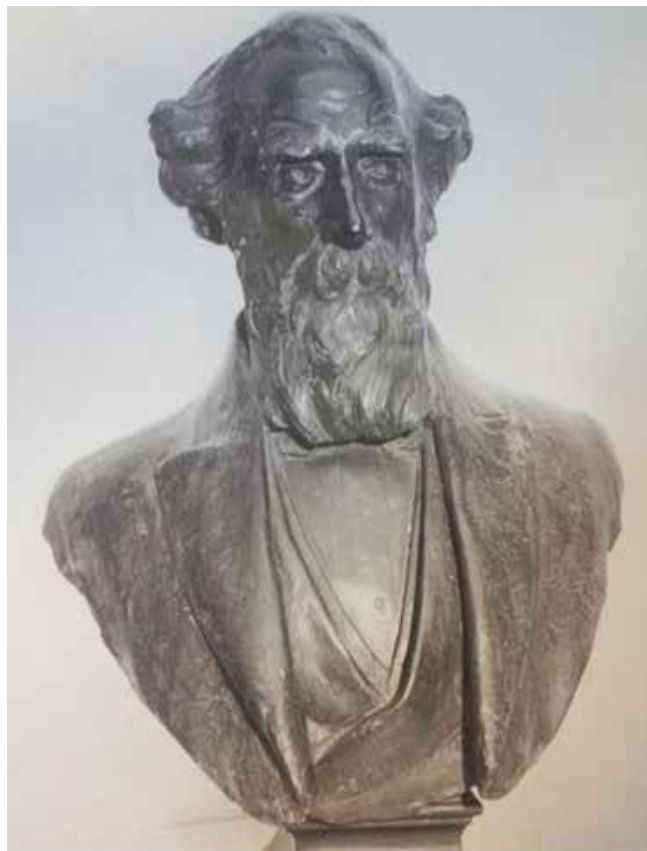
Visit the exhibition to discover activism, creativity and community organising in Hackney.

## Passmore Edwards: Biography

*This is the first of two articles on Passmore Edwards: in the next Terrier we will look at some of the projects he sponsored in Hackney.*

John Passmore Edwards was born in Blackwater, a mining village near St. Agnes, Cornwall in 1823. He learned his 3Rs at a school run by a disabled miner and widened his knowledge by reading the weekly *Penny Magazine*, attending the nearest reading society in Chacewater three miles away, and from any books he could obtain – including geographical, historical, and scientific texts as well as the writings of Shakespeare and Milton. As a teenager he and a friend ran reading and writing classes for men and boys in the village. There was an enormously energetic working-class reading culture. The Establishment regarded such clubs and classes as radical, self-driven.

Edwards became involved in radical politics fixing first on the Corn Laws – which levied taxes on imported wheat thereby raising prices at the same time as factory owners were trying to cut wages. On his own initiative he wrote to the Anti-Corn Law League for pamphlets to distribute in Cornwall despite being told that to distribute such pamphlets was seditious. Aged 20, he arrived penniless in Manchester, then a radical centre. It was here the Anti-Corn Law League had been formed in 1839 by Cobden and Bright. It was also the site of the 1819 ‘Peterloo Massacre’ of demonstrators advocating reform of the House of Commons. Manchester would itself provide research material for Engels’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Edwards scraped a living as a free-lance journalist. He met the leaders of the Anti-Corn Law League. By 1846 he was in London to see the Corn Laws repealed. Determined to campaign for other reforms he created his own paper *The Public Good*. By the age of 30, overworked, ill-fed and in debt he became ill and then bankrupt. He continued as a free-lance journalist and by the age of 40 had purchased two building-trade magazines. These, thanks to the abolition of the taxes on newspapers and to the rapid expansion of London, did so well that he was able to repay his debtors and get married. At 53 he purchased *The Echo*, a London evening newspaper priced at only a halfpenny and sold in the street. Now a successful man and seeking another way to forward reform, he became an MP but quickly became disillusioned that he could get any worthwhile changes through Parliament. He wrote: “As a rule, rich and titled men can no more fitly represent working men than working men can fitly represent the rich



and titled. There were only two working-men representatives in the Parliament of 1880-85. What were two among so many? There ought, at least, to have been two hundred such representatives...”.

Disillusioned by the unwillingness of Parliament to implement reform, he determined to take more direct action and, now wealthy, funded changes he cared about. Of first importance were the opportunities for poor men to educate themselves. Edwards wrote “knowledge is more valuable than wealth”. Although the Libraries Act of 1850 enabled local boroughs to fund Free Libraries there were only three in London by 1890. Now in his late 60s and a wealthy man Passmore Edwards helped fund 17 more including two in Hackney – Haggerston and Hoxton. To these and his other Hackney projects we will return in the next issue of *The Terrier*.

**Ann Hunte**

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