Copy No. three of Four.

The Lean Years.

By:— John Edmonds.

Completed May 1970.
In the year 1948 when the universal jubilation occasioned by the end of World War Two had simmered down a little, and plans for the rebuilding and reorganization of those districts which had suffered severely from enemy action were being discussed, I visited that part of London in which my earliest years were spent that a memory of the area might be retained before it became changed beyond recognition by bulldozer and builder as indeed has since been the case. The July day chosen for the visit was warm and sunny but I became increasingly depressed as my peregrination of the streets and alleys continued, and on reaching the street in which my old home was situated, regarded the house from across the road with a feeling of sadness. It was still habitable, but looked old battered and forlorn. The crooked flagstone of the tiny porch was still in place, and the damaged railings of the forecourt my father had repaired with pieces of old
gas lamps were visions previously reminded. But
its walls were cracked and scorched, the paint
had peeled from large areas of the front door
and the window frames. Most of the adjacent
houses had damaged roofs, and unglazed window
frames from which scraps of black-out material
flapped and whispered in the faint breeze.
Close by a door which remained hinged to
its frame, cracked and occasionally shut
against its jamb with a soft slam. The
deserted street lacked the crying of a child,
the barking of a dog, a voice raised in anger
or laughter, the shint of a scrubbing
brush, or any of the host of little noises
associated with human habitation. My visit
seemed to me akin to that of viewing an
an old friend corpse prior to its funeral,
and on my journey home a decision was made
that as the scene of my early life was about to
be destroyed forever, I would set down a
record of people and memories associated with
the neighbourhood before advancing years dulled
our remembrance.
This has been attempted in a manner similar in character to its line drawings, in which only the essentials are delineated. The work could have been extended to cover the period from 1925 to the outbreak of the second world war and shown the full impact of the economic depression following the first. To have done so would have shown the gradual improvement in the standard of living during the late thirties, and changed its nature from a brief sketch to a study in social history.

I beg the readers' forgiveness for devoting what may seem to be overmuch space to the railways of the district, and offer the excuse that they are a great monument to the Victorian age about which little is known or appreciated generally. Built almost entirely without mechanical aids, such works constitute major engineering achievements compared with which, the construction of modern motorways is mere child's play.

It has been customary over the centuries for older people to deplore the passing of "the good old days" the existence of which is surely an
illusion. There rarely have been "good old days,"
despite the efforts of commentators from ancient
classical, to recent times, to prove the contrary. Man
is mentally, as well as physically, lazy by nature, and
without realizing it such writers really deplore the
mental effort necessary to successfully adapt an
existing way of life to changes as they occur.
I would ask younger readers to consider this
phenomenon should it become manifest when
perusing the following pages.
The lean Years.

My earliest recollections during The lean Years begin in 1916 when the First World War had been in progress for two years and a large proportion of Europe's manhood was engaged in a determined effort to kill or maim those of the opposing side, in an arena where mud and madness prevailed. Then the civilian population of the same continent "made do" with substitutes for what are nowadays assumed to be basic human needs and the least fortunate of the very young suffered malnutrition and want. My lean Years extended on through the armistice of November 1918, the peace celebrations of 1921, and the years of economic depression which followed. These were the years of unemployment and the dole, where families of which the principal wage earner had regular employment at a wage of from £3 to £4 per week were the aristocracy, and less fortunate men made the rounds of places where employment might be found for a week or maybe even a day. When the children of the less fortunate had sometimes to wear their
mothers, or elder sisters and aunts or go unpaid, and their fathers and other kinsmen are absent in public,
the children present at the funeral, which are normally caused, exposed to view. When many
of these same children bore staves of malnutrition
and vitamin deficiency upon their faces; for
it was reasoned that the unemployed but
potential wage earners must have the best of the
available food to be able to work at the probable
employment that might sustainize at any time.
Hope, in varying degrees, was ever present
among such people, and with it, a silent
resentment of not knowing what or who was
really to blame for the conditions pertaining at
that time. My father read The Daily Herald,
strongly supported the Labour Party and blamed
Mr. Baldwin for every and anything. I thought
this a little unfair but to this day my opinion
to myself.
The scene of these reminiscences is that marked upon postal maps of London as South East 16, and includes parts of the neighbouring South East 8. The area is bounded to the south by the Surrey Canal, and to the north and east by the river Thames which at this point forms the western leg of its loop around the Isle of Dogs. About half of the area contained within these boundaries is occupied by the Surrey Commercial Docks, and at the period of which I write constituted a semi-desert of streets, dwellings, and small factories, with here and there the faithful front gardens of rows of terraced houses where privets, Euonymus japonica, and an occasional lilac tree appeared to be ever on the point of giving up an unequal struggle against dogs, children, an acid soil, and smoke, but never did. The oases in this desert were Southwark Park, Deptford Park, the docks, and certain pieces of open land trapped between the many intersecting railways which run in a southeasterly direction.
from London Bridge to New Cross, Greenwich, and beyond. The area thus situated in close proximist to the railways, the river and docks, meant that the deep note of ocean-going ships’ siren, the higher pitched, urgent toots of steam tugs, and the shrill whistles of locomotives, were familiar sounds in the district. To lie awake at night meant listening to such, and other sounds less significant during daylight hours. The steady one, two, three, four beat of goods train engines making the long haul up the incline from Birkbakers Arms Goods Depot to Canal Junction and the main line, identifies itself in my mind with the beat of Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 now I am older and know of such things. A cock crow becomes the signal to start exchanged by the whistles of the leading and “pusher” engines of a goods train about to make the climb up to Canal Junction.

The metallic clunk of locomotive side
was became more distinct when a change in the weather from fine to rainy conditions was evident, providing a useful barometer; and when the sounds from the river became more distinct, the wind had shifted to the north or east and cold weather was to be expected.

When preparing "The Decent Years," I decided to learn more about this railway system and its viaducts familiar to me in my childhood and found myself confronted with a tangle more difficult to unravel than the history of the later Plantagenets and the Wars of the Roses. A tale of legal squabbles and parliamentary manoeuvres involving the London & Greenwich, the London and Brighton, South Eastern, London Brighton and subsidiary railway companies resulting from mergers of some of the originals. It was surprising to learn the comparative antiquity of the two original lines: London's first railway...
the London and Greenwich dates from 1836, the last year of William the IV's reign. Passenger trains ran between Deptford and Spa Road (London's first railway station) in February of that year. The viaduct from London Bridge to Greenwich measured three and three-quarter miles. Most of the original 378 arches remain, their piers sadly scored in places by modern transport where the railway spans roads in the area around Deptford High St. It was amusing to discover that Captain Hardy of the Victory and Trafalgar fame, when invited to make a trial trip on this railway refused on the grounds that "it was a needless risk to run." The second of these early railways serving areas south east of London, the London and Borough, was incorporated in 1839. This railway used the Greenwich lines as far as Corbetts Lane from which point it branched on an earthen embankment to which is now New Cross Gate and the course
of the Corydon Canal which the railway company purchased together with its associated wharves and grounds for £43,250.

Before the 1939-1945 war, Corbett's Lane was an insignificant roadway with barely sufficient room for two vehicles to pass. Along its western side was a row of small derelict cottages. The opposite side was bounded by the high tarred wooden fence of a narrow strip of ground the Bermondsey Borough Council used as a roadworks depot. Corbett's Lane is not even marked on some street maps of the period. It is nevertheless famous and lends its name officially to an important junction of railways to the south and southeastern parts of this island from London Bridge, Cannon St, and Charing Cross Termini. Approximately 200 yards below Corbett's Lane is a curving roadway connecting what used to be the boroughs of Bermondsey and Camberwell.
This is Bolonia Rd., and here the railway complex provides what is probably the nearest large open space devoid of houses to where the old home at Eugenia Rd. once stood. From the eastern side the road enters the area through a tunnel of archways, and appears to end with the restriction caused by a low bridge which carries the rails from Bricklayers Arms, Willow Walk, and the carriage servicing depot at Bogs Hole, up the incline previously mentioned to Canal Junction, five-eighths of a mile distant. At this point the road bears to the right sufficiently to block direct vision of what lies ahead, and all one can see is the wall skirt ting the southern pier of an iron bridge over which is the widening made in 1903 to the Southeastern Railway. As a result of my father's occasional talks on the subject, I rarely passed this way without
Giving thought to some of the facts he told us children. Above are the arches of the first railway in London. Over the Low Bridge a Queen Alexander had travelled on her way from Denmark via Gravesend and Bricklayers Arms, to Windsor and her marriage to Edward the VII. I helped as a child would, she had passed this way by night and saw none of the multitudinous dead domestic animals in various stages of decomposition which often lay on the railway side of the sleeper fence adjacent to the line.

Emerging from the tunnel into direct daylight, the first structure to be seen is a skew arch of the old London to Croydon Railway. "Its crown has gone" Father had said; and indeed at that time a slight crack was visible in the brickwork where the elliptical arch is thinnest. Imagining it might collapse at any time, I never dallied under or near it when passing that way. It has since received several applications of
first aid treatment, and nowadays may be seen with a pronounced dip at its centre, its former grace further spoiled by an ugly bracing structure of reinforced concrete and cheap brick. The river south of this and the adjoining branch lay upon earthen embankments supporting a mixed flora including the ubiquitous coltsfoot and horseshoe chicory, with occasional stunted elder bushes. Passing through this arch, the observer is faced with the curved retaining wall of the second embankment, and the first two of a series of skew arches. This is a branch of the old horndon to Croydon Railway to a junction with the South Horndon Railway above South Bermondsey station. The brickwork of the retaining wall, and arches of this short viaduct, have developed soft mellow tones over recent years, due perhaps to the loss of soot, which in the days of steam was deposited upon the brickwork at the same rate as its removal by wind,
rain, and frost. The right and left hand arches provide the passages of the footway and road respectively, which almost immediately pass under another bridge bearing a branch line from Bricklayers Arms to a junction with the Croydon and London branch previously mentioned. Bolina Rd. here takes another unexpected twist this time to the left and streets of houses begin again.

Approximately 250 yards along the Greenwich line in a southeasterly direction from Bolina Rd is access to what was another space without streets and houses. This area bounded to the north by Turners Rd., the south and south west by the Surrey Canal and the railway to New Cross Gate, formed a glorious playground for the children of the neighbourhood during the twenties and early thirties when the vacant land enclosed within these bounds was being progressively excavated for its
underlying sand and ballast. The railway arches were largely unoccupied due to there being no easy access to this area by road at that time. There was also little demand for more factory and garage accommodation in the district during those times of economic depression. We children therefore enjoyed the use of a few acres of green space with exciting things to do and see at all times of the year. In winter and bad weather, continuous stretches of interconnected vacant arches provided wonderful places for all kinds of activity, and in the summer many varieties of plant and insect life could be investigated on the adjacent areas where the ballast had been exhausted or worked in connection with its excavation had not begun. There were low trees, mostly elders, there was pink and white clover, spotted persicary, thistles, the ever-present horseraddish, and many varieties of grass. There were dragon flies around.
the old ponds of the ballast pits, and there were
the hives of wild bees. There was close contact
with locomotives and assorted rolling stock, and
light railways with horse drawn ballast wagon
trains. It was a boys paradise. Our parents
termed the place "The Five Hundred Arches"
and naturally placed it out of bounds. We
called it "The Three Bridges" and equally
naturally, ignored their damn.
A traveller seated in the compartment of a train running over the viaducts south east of London Bridge receives little indication of the immensity, and in places, complexity of the structure below. For a mile and a half below London Bridge to a spur line serving South Bermondsey station on the South London line to Victoria, the railway is carried on separate viaducts built at various times during the Victorian era. The structures run in close parallel to the original London Bridge and Greenwich line, and were constructed to accommodate the London Brighton and South Coast, and South Eastern and Chatham Railways. The arches of the viaducts vary considerably in span, those of the old Greenwich line having the narrowest pitch. There are put to many uses and even at one time housed a public house, The Half Way House beneath the railway bridge at Rotherhithe New Rd. In places arches having thicker piers and wider spans may be seen. My father
who as a young man had worked on one of the widening projects in this area, answered my question, why this was so, with the explanation: "Underground water. They drove piles upon piles, night and day for weeks for that one round the corner, and could not find a solid bottom. It broke old Googyan." At this point a digression concerning the system by which nearly all major railway work was conducted at the time of their original construction may be excused, to explain the gist of this reply. The railway companies placed such work in the hands of a specialist contractor who undertook, under the direction of the company's engineer, to build the whole usually within a specified time. The specialist in turn often let out sections of the work to sub-contractors who occasionally contracted again to other sub-contractors. The "old Googyan" mentioned above would have been a sub-contractor and the extra wide pier near the entry to Eugenia Rd from Silwood St,
marks the spot where toward the end of the 19th century the met with a difficulty which forced procrastination upon him, an event by no means rare in the history of railway building in Great Britain during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Grozgan's successor apparently overcame the problem by constructing a much wider pier whereby the weight of the superstructure is distributed over a much larger area than that originally intended. Because of the time penalties included in the original contract, it is hardly likely that Grozgan's difficulty would have halted the project completely, and as work upon the viaduct would have been in progress and arches already constructed below this point, variations in the dimensions of span and pier of some subsequent arches would be necessary to accommodate the extra width of old Grozgan's Waterloo. Prior to demolition in 1970, it was interesting to note the effects of subsidence in houses built at approximately the same time as this pier, across the road in Silwood St.
My parents had resided at several addresses in the South East 8 and 16 postal districts of London during the early years of their marriage, but I have no recollection of living in any house other than 118 Eugenia Rd. for the first thirty or so years of my existence. The house could almost be termed an ancestral home, my paternal grandfather having been its first tenant, to be succeeded by my parents who assumed the tenancy at his death. Nearly all the houses in the district conformed to the pattern adopted by later Victorian planners, they were pleased to call "workmen's dwellings". The design permitted the building of as many two-storied houses into a given space of vacant land as was possible, while avoiding the worst features of the back to back kind identified chiefly with the industrial districts of the North and Midlands. Each house had its individual lavatory and water supply and often boasted four rooms upstairs and four down. Of such a type was 118 Eugenia Rd. Behind each dwelling was a rectangular space 15' x 15', euphemistically termed "the garden", in one corner of which built-back to back fashion with that of the adjacent
GROUND FLOOR PLAN OF WORKMEN'S DWELLINGS QUILL
ABOUT 1880 - MIRROR IMAGE, TERRACED. SCALE - 1/6"=1'
UPPER FLOOR PLAN OF WORKMENS DWELLINGS
BUILT ABOUT 1880 / SCALE 3/8" to 1'
house was the lavatory. Such lavatories formed long, narrow, one-room-wide buildings continuous through the widths of the streets. They were constructed in small rooms, with the rooms opening from an interior passageway and a stairway to the left and right in alternate houses. Each room, with the table

in form of the "kitchen" had its own fireplace, that in the tiny living room, and the room immediately above housing a cooking range. There was no hot water system other than a large bricks built copper situated in the corner of the ante room called the scullery, and the two great iron beds on the back of the kitchen range, the fire of which was rarely extinguished winter or summer.

As built, the original means of artificial lighting was by means of coal gas and the Welsbach incandescent gas mantle. A fragile thing which limited exhibitions of excitement or exuberance and provoked cries of "Mind the mantle," when teenage boys with ambition set fire to the gas mantle, which despite the disapproval of the period were more frequent than otherwise. Many local householders
dispensed with gas as a means of illumination and had a supply of electricity... I believe. I think he was far ahead of his time in his ideas of what the future held. I believe he believed in progress and advancement for the betterment of mankind. My father would have been one of the first to adopt new ideas, although he did not always fully comprehend them.

It was customary for the householders of such premises to sub-let a room or rooms to help pay the rent which by 1935 stood at about 22/- per week inclusive of rates. Three of the eight rooms at 118 were thus sub-let during the early lean years, my brother's sister Ada occupying the "tops front" while both "tops back" rooms which formed a sort of self-contained apartment, were tenanted by a vigorous old lady who twice weekly scented the whole house with boiled rhubarb. The advent of my four sisters, including the twins, within five years of February 1917, presented my parents with the problem of...
...advising suitable sleeping accommodation for a growing family. The "middle bed" had been the bed-room of my two brothers and myself for as long as I could remember. The scullery was damp and unsuitable in any case as sleeping quarters. Sleeping in the living room was unthinkable. The middle room was occupied by my parents, who had no alternative but to use the front room, a lofty of halls constituting part of their Victorian concept of respectability, as a dormitory for the girls. This situation did not last for more than a year or so however, and as the earning power of my two brothers advanced with their age, the economy of the household became such that one or other of its two sub-tenants could be dispensed with. My parents therefore began a campaign to rid themselves of the vigorous old lady whose appurtenances were thought to be a bed-bug factory anyway, and whose vigour did not extend to the biological control of the insects. The campaign opened with a formal request for her to find other accommodation which she rejected volubly. Within a few days a
form printed on bright blue paper, the blank spaces Profitably completed in feathery leaf copperplate
handwriting were affixed to her door with thumb
nails. "I, Joseph Thomas Edmunds hereby give
you notice to quit the rooms occupied by you as
tenant of the same by the first of January," it read. The notice promptly disappeared, and
the vigorous old lady and my aunt began to
hold long councils in the former's rooms. The old
lady then summoned reinforcements, and an
interesting verbal battle took place between she and
her son on the one side, and my parents with
support from my oldest brother, on the other. It
proved to be a short bitter contest, from which the
old lady's son retired with the recommendation
that the family party did their worst. At the
expiry of the notice to quit period, the old lady
was summoned by my parents to Towne Bridge
magistrate's court to show why she should not
vacate her rooms, and my parents successfully
pleading the overcrowding of the house, she lost
the case and eventually moved out in the January of 1924 to enter an old persons' home and, I hope, a state of contented peace. My aunt Ada also left us at about this time to become the wife of a working factory hand, a circumstance which revolutionised the economic and sleeping accommodation situations of the establishment for a while, until the the top floor apartment was again sub-let;

I liked my aunt. She was kind to us boys in a rough sort of way, and occasionally gave us large pieces of stick jaw toffee. She would also allow us to watch her at her home work provided we did not make excessive noise. She was an envelope folder by trade, and brought home work to supplement her earnings. The skillful movements of her large bony hands as she manipulated the two simple tools of her trade, a battered gum brush, and a strip of polished bone, I found fascinating. She would take up about thirty envelope blanks at a time and with a movement almost impossible to follow, have them spread before her in a continuous line, each envelope flap overlapping
...precision...exactly the same amount of three
\( \frac{3}{8} \) of an inch. The gum was applied to the vellum with
a few soft strokes of the brush and allowed to dry
while the vellum was held with clamps already gummed
and dry, in sheaves of about a dozen, and quickly
folded them into neat rectangles with the bone
folder. A quick one, two, three, strokes with the
gum brush and folders in turn, and lo!, an
envelope as exact and true as any made by
machinery. To this day I marvel at the skill
which could produce these perfect rectangles
of exactly the same size without the use of a
measuring device or jig of any description.

Aunt ada and my mother did not like each
other. I don't know why aunt did not like mother
but was able many years later to make a few guesses.
Mother did not like aunt for a variety of reasons.

Aunt indulged in coarsely humorous repartee with
father to the accompaniment of loud laughter
termed "drawing room yells" by my mother. Her
dialect was very homely and remarkable for the
scarcity of aspirates, so mother thought her...
"Aunt Ada," she called me, her niece, "coo," instead of using our Christian names. But she was kind, a natural blonde, nationally wild, and could make uncles live better than anybody, so I thought her great.

My parents had private nicknames for both my aunt and the vigorous old lady. Aunt Ada was "Kia," and the old lady The "De-Co bearer." The latter name are the words Old Bear rendered as back slang.

Mother and father employed a curious mixture of gestures and back slang when not wishing to be understood by neighbours, lodgers, the younger children, or any other chance listener. Their back slang comprised a vocabulary of about a hundred simple words which could be conveniently reversed, and a literal translation of their remarks when using this means of communication would in most instances have been incomprehensible English. I have no idea how this method originated between them, but they were very proficient in its use, an understanding of which I have found useful on occasion.
The council house facing the street was called the "front room". Because it housed the family photographs and heirlooms, children were not normally allowed to remain therein unless an adult was present. The room had a large bay window where my parents would sit on Sunday evenings between May and September, hidden behind lace curtains and aspidistra's set in ornate glazed earthenware pots, observing the local semi-gentry on their way to and from St Patrick's Church. My father would remark on the increasing age of Mrs G's middle portion and my mother would reply with a gently shocked "Oh Tom!" (His name was Joseph but she always called him Tom except when they quarrelled and she called him other names). My father would then sing a ribald "Hairy Taity Taity Taity etc" in time with the movements of Mrs G's fat buttocks while mother would giggle and tell Tom to be quiet. From September to May when there was insufficient daylight to "see the fashions" as they called this Sunday evening stay-bye, my mother would take a brief rest and indulge
formed with newspaper, and the news of the World; while my father would return avaricious and hard. He had acquired in short, payment for a small job. The times he favoured were of the sentimental Irish variety. Sometimes when he felt at peace with the world, and had little money, he would enthrall himself and me children with a recital on the mouth organ upon which he was no mean performer. The Prelude to this sort of entertainment was the consumption of a pint of Burton beer. He would delegate my mother to send one of the children to the Tally Butcher's off license in Alpine Rd. for the beverage, with the instruction to go by way of Silwood St. lest we meet any of the vicar, curate, or congregation with our beer bottle displayed. Going by way of Silwood it involved a journey twice as long as that by way of the church, but the departure and arrival from the corner was watched from the front room window. It was difficult to disregard the instruction during daylight. Having consumed most of the beer, my father would reach down one of his mouth organs from the top of the grandfather...
Glads where they were kept away from the smaller children, douse the instrument with hot water from the kettle which always stood on the fireplace in adjacent to his armchair and commence to play. He would play for an hour or more with his eyes closed completely oblivious to everything and everybody about him, suddenly cease, sometimes in the middle of a tune, and finish his beer. After such an interval he would resume his playing, lively tunes then time jigs, reels, and waltz times until dead time.

My parents were a strangely assorted couple who frequently quarrelled. My father spent a lifetime in rebellion against authority. He didn't like employers or their representatives. He didn't like governments particularly that of Mr Baldwin. He didn't like those he contemptuously called the pillars of the church in whom he meant the regular attendants of St Katharines our local Church of England edifice. He disliked house painters, and when a schoolmaster exclamation of fools differed from his own as it frequently did, he labelled the master "a nigger" (his abbreviation of niggerpoor). Like goldsmith i
schoolmaster. "Even though vanquished he could argue still."
He has been called a lazy man by those who misunderstood
him, but in reality was never idle. Certain it was that
he did not keep a job during the period of which I
write for more than a few months and never lightened
my mother's household work directly in any way. He was
nevertheless always occupied whilst out of regular
employment in repairing and redecorating the house,
making and mending clothes and other items of
household equipment for ourselves and for neighbours,
thereby supplementing the dole with the few shillings
so earned. Within certain limitations he was a
mechanical genius. He also cultivated a 10' x 40'
square of an undeveloped strip of land which ran
behind the row of houses of which ours was one.
This square of land was referred to within the family
as "the allotment." He commenced its cultivation
in the spring of 1917 when such activities were
encouraged by the authorities and German U boats
were sinking food ships bound for Great Britain,
and continued to grow crops on it for many
years despite repeated attempts by the owner to
assert his right of possession. Water barrels and a
tractor finally broke down father's fences and opposition
and a large teakur stone was eventually erected on
the site in 1935. The strip of ground, a devleter
raise wall, had over the years become a convenient
dumping ground for all kinds of unwanted rubble. By
degrees, and with prodigious effort, he had dug the
whole square to depth of about six feet turning the
top two feet of accumulated rubble to the bottom,
and bringing a more consistent mixture of hounson
day and sand to the surface. The vegetables grown
upon this patch helped balance the household's
precarious budget, and provided father with a
healthy sun burned appearance that caused
adverse comment among unkindly neighbours.
I am glad he did not live to see the scene of
so many of his battles and achievements become
the site of the huge blocks of flats which were
built on the site after the second world war.

My mother was a tiny woman possessed of
a degree of spirit and determination I have
never ceased to wonder at. Childbearing, now food,
Facsimile of trade handbill dated in mother's handwriting. The stores were the premises her father acquired when deciding to change his occupation from coachman to shopkeeper.

**A GREAT REDUCTION IN THE PRICE OF BOTTLED BEERS**

**A. EATON'S**
Grocery & Bottled Beer Stores,
39, BRACON ROAD,
ROTHESAYTHER, S.E.

Families waited upon daily. - - Agent for Carter Paterson.
ORDERS BY POST PUNCTUALLY ATTENDED TO.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drink</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<td>Giant Family Ale</td>
<td>2d. Bott. 2/- Doz.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giant Nourishing Stout</td>
<td>2d. 2/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Stout</td>
<td>2 1/2d. 2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Dinner Ale</td>
<td>2 1/2d. 2/4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Star Extra Stout</td>
<td>2 1/2d. 2/6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&quot;Star&quot; Brand 2 1/2d. 2/6</td>
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<td>Mackway's Stout</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackway's Oatmalt Stout</td>
<td>&quot;Star&quot; Brand 2 1/2d. 2/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackway's Dinner Ale</td>
<td>&quot;Star&quot; Brand 2 1/2d. 2/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Pale Ale, &quot;Star&quot; Brand</td>
<td>3 1/2d. 3/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinness's Extra Stout</td>
<td>&quot;Star&quot; Brand 3 1/2d. 3/6</td>
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THE PURE BEER IN GIANT BOTTLES.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackway's Stout</td>
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<tr>
<td>Star Stout</td>
<td>3 1/2d. 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Dinner Ale</td>
<td>3 1/2d. 1/2</td>
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</table>

The shop occupied the eastern corner of the junction of Bracton Rd and Eugenia Rd and faced St Katharine's church vicarage. Bracton Rd and the stores have disappeared, and now form part of the present Goldsworth Gardens.
poverty, and a continual war against dirt, disease, and vermin, with the scrubbing brush, wash tub, carbolic, and tarpaulin the only available weapons, never conquered her and she lived to be 79. There was, for better or worse, much of the Victorian in her make up. She condemned drink and smoking, yet when funds permitted, would take “something to back her up.” The daughter of an ex-coachman turned shopkeeper, she managed her household on strictly business-like lines. Observing the philosophy of Mr Wisemore, a tiny percentage of the fluctuating weekly income invariably went into a reserve fund which was broached only in emergency and not without her voluble protests. By the standards pertaining among the population of the district, she was well educated having received her schooling at Hampton Gymn, private day school situated at the lower end of Edgware Rd. She was passionately fond of animals particularly cats and horses which she understood and could handle, and would not standenance cruelty without active protest, as witness the following incident. On the strick of neglent
land in the back of the house, a two-wheeled cart had dumped its load of rubbish, and became bogged down almost to its wheel hubs. Weather was changing; window curtains win the middle tips room which overlooked the site, and became increasingly agitated as the eastern, a youth of about eighteen, jerked the horses' bridle and called the animal anything but a horse. He finally took to whispering it around the flanks at which she threw down the curtain and hurried to the scene. A surprised youth suddenly found himself confronted by five feet two inches of bristling fury welling on him his own horsewhips which had been torn from his hand. She beat him till he turned tail and continued to lash him with her tongue while she stood silent beyond the range of the horsewhips. Retaining the whip, she forbade the caret to touch the animal while she fetched a bucket of water. She gave the trembling horse a drink, patted and spoke to him, then taking the bridle said softly "Come on, Jock", and out came the cart from the bog as if by magic. I like to think the youth received
a lasting practical lesson in horsemanship that day, and did not later repay Tuck with interest for the long red mark that stretched from his ear to his chin, and for other marks not visible that must have interfered with his comfort for some days.

The distress which mothers of large broods must have experienced in those days of depression can be well imagined. The staple diet was deficient in protein and the vitamins derived from articles of diet such as fresh fruit and milk which, due to the cost, were luxuries in households such as ours. My mother was not above the practice of petty fraud in her attempts to repair the deficiency and would consider it a lucky day if a purchased egg proved to be bad. This provided an opportunity to halve the smelly contents into two teacups, add another half shell to each, and send the children with them to two different shops thereby gaining two replacements for the price of one. She had instinctive faith in the value of fruit and green salad stuffs as an adjunct to diet and
would shops late on Saturdays in the hope of buying at a cheaper rate quantities of wholesome fruit which would be unsaleable by Monday. In common with most married women of the district at that time, she could rarely afford new clothes for herself. Much of her wardrobe and that of her younger children originated from junk shop sales supplemented by gifts from neighbours little more fortunate than she. Such gifts were invariably tendered with a standard preamble on the part of the donor beginning "Don't be offended, but I thought you might find this/these of some use." There existed among these people a pattern of behaviour which employed all manner of subterfuges designed to hide want. They were ashamed of their indigence, and with a strong mixture of gratitude and resentment received what they thought to be charity, what in fact was an gesture of compassion, and an expression of common cause against poverty by folk very often little better off than the receivers. Such attitude of mind is not entirely unknown among the children of the generation under
discussion, and probably accounts for cases of old folks dying from malnutrition and cold in this age of universal social security.

Pawnshops are happily much less common today than during the lean years. The immediate district was served by three such establishments, where the business of pawnbroking and the sale of cheap soft furnishings was conducted in separate departments of the same premises. The entrance to the pawnning department was usually from a discreet side door giving access to a dark passageway leading to an equally dark room, wherein were several narrow cubicles facing a long counter. Here one negotiated a loan on an article or articles, the immediate possession of which was less important than the sum of money the broker was prepared to advance for their temporary custody. Such a broker was Old Toby, who was possessed of a faultless public school accent and biting sarcasm. Thrashing an article of clothing offered as a pledge about with a pencil, he would reply
to a gentleman engaged in the commercial business.

'Are you bidding, Madame? Oh! no.' A point, this.

I would respectfully suggest that as a result of hurried selection, you removed the wrong garment from your wardrobe. 'Shall we agree on half a crown?' Old Tops was a spare-gowned man with the appearance of an early Christian hermit turned bookmaker. He invariably dressed in the same manner, the sleeves of his immaculately laundered shirt covered from wrist to elbow with protectors of shiny black material. He wore a flat check cloth cap, with waistcoat and faultlessly creased trousers of similarly patterned cloth, and his neat black shoes were always well polished, but any claim he might have made to being a dandy were dispelled by the absence of shirt collar, and jacket. A difference in nomenclature was observed by patrons who, when discussing a proposed or actual purchase from such a place, used the owner's name, while if the pawnbroking department was used
... establishment was termed "uncles". The detected use of pawnshops involved a loss of standing by a population wishing to preserve an appearance of respectability in the presence of poverty. There were however a few women whose scale of values placed the state of solvency above that of respectability, and for a small fee would undertake the pawning of neighbours goods. Such women were known as pawnshop runners. Mrs Bogle was a pawnshop runner and on Mondays and Thursdays business was sufficiently brisk to warrant the use of an ancient perambulator which on these days would be filled with well wrapped bundles and crown paper parcels. She habitually wore a man's flat cloth cap skewered to a bun of greasy grey hair with a large thin pin, a long black shawl and voluminous skirt of the same colour, from the hem of which might be seen her bony ankles clothed in navy grey socks. On her feet were gym shoes of the type then known as plimsolls. She regularly
A pawnshop runner.

Figure 5 B.

A travelling tinker
patronized the Earl of Beconsfield public house at the corner of Ultime and Reculver Streets, and the interior surfaces of her anatomy were more accustomed to applications of stout and snuff than were her outer ditty with soups and water. My mother would view her with a shudder of disgust and assent that Mrs Bogle might be stuck to the wall without the use of recognised adhesives.

The hordes of these times supported many different kinds of street traders and entertainers. Most were truly itinerant, but some dwell permanently in the districts they served. Such an one was Old Trunk whose round covered some two miles of the streets around Eustonic Road and who sold shrimps, winkles, and green salade stuff. Old Trunk was a bachelor said to have been crossed in love and lived in a two roomed apartment near the Earl of Beconsfield public house. His face was remarkable in that it always appeared to be in need of a wash and shave, but never got dirtier or more briskly. Above his
pathetic moustache were a host of tiny wrinkles that trooped the cheek, and his eyes were red-rimmed like those of white bull terriers. He wore thin golden casings and an antique bowler hat, once black, but in bright sunlight appeared to reflect a green sheen as do the tail feathers of a cooherce. He wore an Oxford shirt without a collar, shapeless trousers, and jacket with permanently bulging side pockets. His long pointed nose invariably supported a dew droop and as a child, I likened this delicate drooped appearance to that of a snowman in a state of perpetual thaw. He wore large heavy boots with soles almost an inch thick, and years of trundling his two-wheeled barrow had doubtless induced some of the 120° relationship one foot bore to its fellow, a condition my father described as “fine past nine feet.” His thin twangy cries of “Watercases” and “Onions keeping a bundle” were intelligible, though delivered with cadence similar to the chantled responses of the church liturgy, but his “Ophbrahmins,” and “Bee-rooster-flickin’” puzzled me until I
...explained my mother who explained the first meant the "brown ones" referring to the colour of the shrimp, I think. The second she translated as "Beetroots" for pickling." Even so, Old truncks cries were more understandable than those of another in the same line of business whose cries, audible for half a mile on a quiet Sunday afternoon were, "ibbi-i-a-bee-i-lee," followed a minute later with "ibis-a-bossold-lee." Nobody of my acquaintance was ever able to transcribe these. There were many other street sellers all of whom had necessarily to cry their wares or services. There was the carrier man always in a tearing hurry, his two gallon can of the stuff, tin funnel and measure in one hand while he used his free arm as a sort of oar to assist progress, crying every thirty feet or so, "Carror-blue" and the staccato call of the couple who sold block salt neatly sawn into triangular slabs, vinegar from a barrel, and irregularly shaped blocks of hearthstone. Every house used hearthstone. The flagstone of the street door and hearths of the fireplaces received
applications of hearthstone which is a soft rock a little harder than chalk which it resembles. It was rubbed over the moist surface after scrubbing and dried an off white colour containing a suspicion of the yellow/grey tint of Thames river water. Its use served no purpose other than that of furnishing proof that the surfaces received regular attention, although my hostess at a Scottish croft some years later, drew broad scrubbing lines on her freshly scrubbed doorstep and hearth while still wet with a piece of soft red pottery, and explained it "blest the devil out". If there was any connection between both practices, it was not very efficacious in London South East 16. But to return to the street traders of this district, Firewood sellers and coalmen were also among the regular roundsmen, each with a distinctive cry. The ones which interested me children most were the menders of woven cane chair seats, and cocoa nut door mats, and the tinkers who ground knives and scissors and repaired pots and pans. These latter used two wheeled self-contained
workshops of similar basic design, no two of which were ever identical. Many were decorated with expertly polished brass work incorporating knobs from door handles and bed posts. A typical example would have been built with a light but strong wooden framework, nicely balanced upon the axle of a pair of large wine-spun wheel. Suspended from the front, barely free of the roadway when in motion, was a small brazier containing a glowing coke fire and the soldering irons. The handles of the device formed a rest for a piece of board upon which the tinker would sit when treadling a grindstone kept wet by drips of water from a can above it. A small vice and anvil block together with certain small boxes containing tools and materials completed the frieze equipment of such machines which, while obviously constructed of scraps materials were wonders of ingenious adaptability. The chain members gear was usually carried in a carpenter's bag, a shallow canvas bag bound in leather with handles of the same material, or of rope. Strips of cane,
some ready braided coconut fibre, a small knife and palm, a small hammer, and a lump of tallow, were the sum total of equipment used by such men, who for a few pence would squat upon
the pavement and provide an exhibition of skill as they quickly wove cane into a chair seat or
stitched new binding around the edge of a door mat. Lavender sellers, if they had a gambling
streak in their make up, would occasionally
drift into the area where money was too rare
to be squandered on frivolities. Nostalgic writers have lamented the disappearance of these singing street traders, but I can declare with confidence that such loss may be borne without regret if the noise
made by the lavender sellers of my childhood was a representative sample of the choral efforts of the whole tribe. The milkmen were
a noisy lot too with their cries and the jungle of horns produced by the dozens of milk cans hanging from the side of their wheeled barrows that bumped and swung over the bumpy London roads.
Among those who obtained a living from the church were singers and barrel organists. The former were many and respected. Most male vocalists were victims of the 1914/1918 war, while the female variety often carried an infant. How these poor folk managed to extract money from such a financial desert remains a mystery to me, but then it has been said the most generous to the poor are the poor.

The instrument known as a barrel organ fascinates me. Its capacity for taking outrageous liberties with melody and rhythm is remarkable, and seems to equate itself in my mind somehow with the staccato delivery of cockney rhapsodies and the chirps of sooty brown sparrows. Strictly speaking the machine is not an organ at all but a mechanical piano wherein is a wooden cylinder studded with hundreds of iron bags which operate the hammers. These strike a series of stretched wires in a manner similar to that of a piano but without its dampening mechanism. The cylinder is turned through gearing, by the manual operation of a wound-up handle, and on the end of the casing nearest
The crank is a selector lever mounted above a fixed circular dial numbered from one to ten or twelve. By moving the selector lever in a rotary direction, the key cylinder is shifted laterally whereby a fresh series of keys operate the hammers and another tune can be found out.

Perhaps the most spectacular street entertainment, (if so it could be called) we children ever witnessed was that of a local rat-catcher who would occasionally give a demonstration of some clever professional tricks to publicise his dexterity. His equipment was transported in two sacks, one containing two of his ferrets, the other about a dozen live rats. After beginning his patter concerning the danger to health and the destruction of property caused by the creatures, he would plunge his hand into the rat sack, bring out a large specimen and exhibit it to the crowd with more patter. He would then unbuckle his shirt at the waist and insert the rat next to his hove stain. He would then take a ferret from the other sack and stuff it into his shirt on the opposite side. Two bulges moved hither and thither under the garment for a minute or so and then a rapidly
sirenine blood stains stained on the shirt. The rat was then dragged out quite dead, with the ferret still hanging in it by its teeth. More later and and a repeat of the same performance using the second ferret. He would then demonstrate how easily rats could be killed by delivering a sharp sort of Karate chops with the edge of his palm to the animals neck. The act ended with him killing a rat with a quick bite with his strong teeth and handing out business cards to those among the assembly who looked like possible customers. Such demonstrations took place in a side street near to Survey Dockes station, and probably brought the rat catcher business from the ship's officers and warehousemen present among the spectators. The rats were killed quickly without any undue physical suffering, but I do not think it was an edifying spectacle for young children and, I hope, would not be permitted in public these days.
Undertype Sentinel steam lorry of the 1920s

Figure 6A.

Figure 6B.

A barrel organ and its operator.
The character of heavy road transport has changed considerably during the past fifty years. In the early twenties lorries powered by the internal combustion engine were a rarity although the General Omnibuses and Tilting Stevens used this means of power for their buses. The cart horse was still supreme in the field of heavy haulage followed as a close second by the steam lorry. Horses used for towing barges on the Grand Surrey Canal gave the impression of making the most of experience to reduce muscular effort. Taking two short paces, they would pause until the long towrope slackened behind them with the forward motion of the craft, take another two short paces and pause, and so on. It was a strange unhesitating gait that simply employed their great weight as they leaned forward in the collar. These magnificent cart horses were probably owned by the canal authorities and always looked well cared for, as did similar animals employed by breweries and railway companies for road haulage. Thames lighters average 120 tons burden.
and... such craft could often be seen in the town of a single horse who always appeared to be making light of the task. It was interesting to see such horses when harnessed to a heavy dray and negotiating a downward slope, pull the vehicle at a slight angle to the street thereby taking advantage of the braking power of the iron tyred wheels against the granite, the vertical edge of which became worn and polished over a period with the friction so caused.

Steam lorries developed in no European country other than Great Britain, and by the 1920's and 30's had reached a popularity among millers, coal merchants, cement companies and similar concerns where really heavy goods had to be transported, from which they were ousted only by the gradual cheapening of the fuel for internal combustion lorries. A further advantage motor lorry drivers needed to be less skilful in using the vehicle to its best advantage than did their steam lorry counterparts. Steam lorries were designed in two main groups; the
Overtypes and the undertype. Overtypes had the engine over the boiler, and in front of the driver. The chief advantages of this arrangement were short steam piping and consequent efficient use of the steam produced by the boiler. Additionally, the engine was easily accessible for maintenance purposes, but the driver's view could be obscured by steam leaks from glands and leaking piston flanges, and they invariably wore old clothes that became a universal polished black with the absorption of oil thrown out by the motion of the engine before them. There was also the disadvantage of the exceptionally long driving chain to the rear wheels, which was necessarily heavy and subject to heavy wear. The undertype usually had a vertical coal-fired boiler and the engine was placed on the chassis beneath the body near to where the drive was transmitted to the drive wheels. Of such a type was the Sentinel, whose final product of the late 30's was a fine vehicle with pneumatic tires, a moving grate, glass screened driver's cab, and the use of aluminium
whenever possible to reduce weight. The chain drive of earlier models was supplanted by shaft drive, and the vertical boiler moved to a position behind the driver. To ride in one of these was a joy. They had remarkable accelerating and braking power, were comfortable and silent; the latter quality conflicted with a small flow of steam from the roof near to the furnace vent providing the only clues to the fact that such vehicles were steam driven. Foden's also produced a steam lorry with most of the features described above for the Super Sentinel. They called their product the Faced 12, and this also was a fine vehicle until with the development of the diesel engined wagon the end of the steamers was at hand and very few of them survived the Second World War.
OVER-TYPE STEAM LORRY OF THE EARLY 20'S

THE VEHICLE ILLUSTRATED HAD SOLID RUBBER TYRES. ITS MAXIMUM SPEED WAS ABOUT 15 MPH

THAMES SAILING BARGE. APPROXIMATELY 85 FT. LONG. WITH 20FT BEAM. THE BOWSPRIT IS LOWERED AT SEA TO ACCOMMODATE A SECOND FORESAIL. BEING KEELED, THE VESSEL USES LEEBOARDS. FITTED ABREAST THE HAY.
Religion has been called the opiate of the poor, but the majority of the poor of the neighbourhood preferred the tonic of political thought as an escape from their poverty. It is remarkable easy to sell leftist principles to people who have very little of the world's possessions to preserve, and the district was a permanent 'labour Borough'. My father held strong socialistic views. My mother deferred to his political opinions, to the point at which criticism included the established church. Her belief in the Christian faith was unshakeable, and although not given to pious talk, she insisted upon her children's attendance at Sunday church and school. I found my father's political tracts and arguments easier to understand than the religious mysteries and sermons which were dispensed in the name of Christianity at church and Sunday school, but enjoyed reading the Bible at day school where Mr Evans' simple paraphrasing of its antique prose taught more of Christian principles in the weekly hour devoted to the subject than did the
Three spent on Sundays in contact with those whom one would have thought better qualified to explain. I could never understand the church service, most of its words were gabbled in a sing-song manner, and that which was not gabbled was chanted. Certain lines of the Hail Mary which I discovered in after years to be "Blessed art thou amongst women, Blessed is the fruit of thy womb in Jesus," became "Blessed art thou a monks' woman. Blessed is the fruit of thy bloomin' Jesus" to me, and thought vaguely that these two lines referred to a woman with a strange profession whose bloomin' son had a very uncommon name and probably sold fruit from a barrow in the Southwark Park Rd. I chanted "Hosanna, Hosanna, In the highest" I interpreted as "All stand up, all stand up, Who's the highest?" and wondered because the congregation was already on its feet at this stage of the ceremony. My brother Arthur and I found attendance at (Chatwater) Sunday school and church welcome and frequently
"I help'd the way" to visit the docks and river front instead. Our crime was usually detected by Miss Smith, the vicar's secretary, and invariably reported (repeated) to the parental authorities, whereupon my mother would declare us to be "more trouble than the rest of the children put together," and threaten to "put us in a home."

The majority of the neighbourhood's population used the church only for christenings, marriages, and occasional funerals. The vicar or his curate were sometimes consulted by anxious mothers when a small boy was in conflict with the police in the hope that some mitigation of his punishment might thereby be achieved, or when certain documents required the signature of a person of unimpeachable character. For the rest of the time they slept away, probably because:

1. They could not be bothered to fathom out the complications of the church's theology.
2. They resented the snobbish condescension of a regular congregation composed mainly of small tradespeople, white-collar workers,
and their families.

3. They could not afford Sunday clothes and good shoes.

4. The material gains of attending church not worth the trouble.

The vicar and his curate were nevertheless universally respected. The former for his benign scholarly manner, and the latter for his forthright Christianity. It was rumoured that he originated in a South Wales mining village, and had boxed for his university. In those days when dock workers were paid daily, they would often drink much of the pay before going home. He had been known to enter public houses for the purpose of expressing his opinion to certain stewstoves that they were needed at home with wife and family at that precise moment. Wales and the Welsh are invariably associated by most with ideas of fine singing, but the curate definitely destroyed any such image. His delivery was clear but huskier and with
a very limited range. Having arrived at the
sixth of a rising scale, he would continue at
that note, clearly, audibly above the
combined efforts of congregation, choir, and organ.
On Palm Sundays when loud joyful hymns were
in order and the music was supplemented with
timpani, he still won easily. The degree of
respect and affection he had earned was most
apparent at the time of his funeral which was
the most impressive the neighbourhood had ever
known. A cortège a quarter of a mile long
passed through streets lined with mourning
spectators, most of whom had contributed small
sums they could ill afford toward the cost of the
floral tributes which covered the large number
of carriages necessary for their transport. It
was said of him, he lived his faith, and in
the forecourt of the present St Katherine's
Church which replaces that destroyed by
enemy action in 1940 is a memorial in the
form of a granite Celtic cross erected by public
subscription to the memory of this good man.
The vicars secretary lived with her two sisters in a spinster household, a few doors from us. She was tall, angular, and weak faced. She and her sisters kept very much to themselves and the few neighbours who had entered their abode reported the premises to be bare, tidy, and scented with boiled fish and tom cats. They were fond of tom cats, their favourite being a lean, cross-eyed, fleshy eared Persian they had named Timmy who fought off all other suitors when our ginger she Dido was in season. My father hated poor Timmy and would drown at birth any of Dido's kittens bearing the least resemblance to him on the grounds that “We'll have no more bastards such as that running about.”

Timmy was courageous and intelligent but made the mistake of allowing himself to be caught while sharpening his claws on one of father's cabbages. His mistake earned him his permanent squint the result of a glancing blow from the copper stick. After a period of secret warfare between the cat and father, plus dreadful quarrels between father and mother who loved animals, Timmy forfeited his life, and was cremated in the copper fireplace on a certain Monday washday. The cat struck one last posthumous blow however, for his corpse exploded.
during the ceremony, blowing upon the fine door and
picking the scullery with a smell of braised rabbit, a dish
my father ascribed from that day. I have since thought
that a simpler way of dealing with the problem of Dil
and Timmy would have been the taking of Dil on a one-
way journey to the animal clinic, while keeping one of
her male kittens. These were reported by those who
adopted them to be very good "mousers" which was a
very desirable attribute in cats of the district at that
time. Although many of the railway arches in the vicinity
were used as stables and consequently housed a permanent
population of the grey Norwegian rat, the creatures
mercifully kept to their own territory and were
never seen in or around the neighbouring houses.
Mice however were ever present, and with houses
built in continuous terraces, house to house
communication for the animals is difficult if
not impossible to prevent. The house mouse breed
at the age of six weeks and produces from five to six
litters of about seven young per year. Every house
therefore had its cat or cats, and very learned and
wise creatures they were too.
At some time during the early autumn of 1911, my father who was unemployed at the time, became concerned about the condition of his pregnant wife and sought medical advice from a Dr. Atkins. Dr. Atkins had a reputation for remembering for collecting fees, which deteriorated in concert with his patients' ability to pay. He was one of those who do good by stealth and are afraid of being found out. A granite cross in memory of the humanitarian stands a few feet from another also erected by public subscription, to the memory of our good curate David Thomas, in the forecourt of St. Katherine's church. Returning to my father's request for medical advice, the doctor called at the apartment my parents occupied at that time, and made his examination. Re-entering the room where my father sat, he stood staring at him silently over the top of his spectacles. "What is wrong with my wife, Doctor?" asked father. The good doctor exploded. "Good God, man. Don't you know?" He thumped the uncarpeted floor with his silver..."
headed cone as he answered his own question in a
loud voice. "Starvation man. Starvation!" When
he told me this story many years later, father
explained he honestly did not know, and the incident
probably accounted for the "Where's yours, Mag?"
a question he invariably asked my mother as a sort
of grace before beginning a meal during the lean
years. As a result of the doctors' influence, mother's
confinement took place according to my birth
certificate in White End Maternity Hospital, and
on the 26th of December 1911, I was born a true
Rockney within a mile of Cheapside and Bow
Bells.

My earliest recollections are associated with
visits to the extensive flat of a lady novelist who
resided near Victoria station. Here, I was looked
with the cook and housemaid, who made much of
me, while mother did an afternoon cleaning. Her
journey to and from Victoria from South
Bermondsey station must have been the cause
of mother changing her place of employment for
she later took me to the Sir William Gowers
public house off Raymouth Rd where I was turned loose while she scrubbed and cleaned, with the children of the house, into a large upstairs committee room where we could run about and make as much noise as we liked without disturbing anybody. There is also a memory of a little skinny man who danced around a punch ball delivering left and right blows at terrific speed, and who hailed us with a cheerful "Watch me young cock sparrow" whenever he walked into the room. This was Timmy Wills, the light weight pugilist who did some of his training at the establishment.

In 1916, I was enrolled as a pupil at the local London County Council School built, so said a carved gateway built of Portland stone, in 1880. I remember little of the elementary education received in the infant section of the school, but assume it was adequate. In 1917 my eldest sister was born, to be followed within eighteen months by the advent of twin sisters. 1920 was a momentous year for me and I received several shocks.
The first was the discovery that my mother no longer gave the attention I had hitherto enjoyed. Being too young to understand that she now had three infants to care for, my reaction to the situation was to retire within myself, cease to confide in her, and solve my problems as they arose in my own way. The year was also that when it became time for my transfer to the senior boys department where my first master was Mr. P. who enjoyed coming to me. He would come me for the least offence. For changing the colour of my ink by pieces dry AKing small of indelible pencil lead therein. For glancing through the schoolroom window while he was speaking. For accidentally dropping the flap of my desk with a bang. He cared me for any and everything. The result was an increase in my wall of receive and a complete contempt for him and his cuts with the cane, but when he laid it on a little harder than usual, manipulation of my pen became difficult and sometimes earned me more punishment for careless writing. Mr. P. was a jolly looking,
plump individual, below average height, with iron grey
hair and moustache. He wore rimless pince nez
spectacles behind which his eyes used to twinkle,
and the little wrinkles and crow's feet around them
would become more pronounced as extracting the
cane from his desk drawer he would cock a finger
at me and say with exaggerated politeness "Come
out here. This one first please." He would then
raise my outstretched hand to the correct height
by inserting the cane beneath it, take careful aim
and deliver the blow. "And now this one" he would
say with the same politeness and repeat the
operation on my other palm. This man cowed me
so at least once a day, five days a week,
excluding holidays, for six months or so
I remained in his class. He did not gain either
my fear or respect, but as a result of his
treatment I have a thorough appreciation of what
constitutes victimisation and injustice. Subsequent
masters also cowed me but with just cause and never
for trivialities. This was also about the time
I experienced another form of cruelty comparable
to depriving a legless man of his artificial limbs, although I did not recognise it as such at the time. It had been discovered at school that I was myopic and the eventual result was a visit to an optician at New Cross, and a pair of spectacles. It was my misfortune that for some reason or another, my mother was unable to accompany me on the occasion the spectacles were to be tried and collected, so my father was defeated much against his will, to go with me. The glasses were tested and pronounced to be satisfactory by myself and the optician. We left the premises and I looked about me as we walked along New Cross Rd in the direction of the station where we were to entrain for Surrey Docks and home. For the first time ever details of passing vehicles were visible to me. I could see the joints in the brickwork of houses, the outline of clouds against the blue sky, and a hundred other things; and then my father suddenly commanded "Take those bloody things off and give them to me". I removed the glasses and handed them to him. He carefully placed them
in their case and slipped it into his jacket pocket.
I was back to a world of blurred shapes, and at
this stage did not feel too badly about the result
of his strange behaviour. On reaching home,
mother naturally questioned him. What did the
optician say? Will he always have to wear
glasses? etc etc. "If he only wears them for
school his eyesight will get better," he replied.
This was a direct lie and my response was one
of amazement and a silent determination to
have the new world of being able to see things
clearly, for ever and ever if it were at all possible.
However the lie had been spoken, believed, and
relied on by all parties capable of ensuring the
spectacles were only worn at school. My father's
motive remains inexplicable. Certain it is that
parents find difficulty in admitting to themselves
the imperfections of their offspring, or it might
have been a manifestation of the same stubborn
prejudice which forced him in later years when
his own vision became defective, to borrow my
mother's glasses rather than visit an optician.
Suffice it to record that for about six months, home
authority deprived me of two thirds of my vision on
arrival home from school, and home reading became
impossible. My passive resistance to the "born only
at school" decree, worked by slow degrees and the
fact that the youngest son was to be disappointing
accepted by my parents eventually.

Following my term with Mr. P., I became a
pupil of Mr. Evans, a Welshman whose tuition I
enjoyed for about two years moving up school
with him from class to class. He was a man of
fiery but kindly disposition and we came to
understand each other. He would even allow me
the privilege of verbal disagreement at times
and during a certain session dealing with the
physical characteristics of various liquids, he
had drawn a longitudinal section of a simple
reciprocating pump on the blackboard to
illustrate a point upon the behaviour of water.
Attracting his attention, I told him his pump would
not work. "Why not?" said he, "The inlet valve goes
the wrong way." was my reply. "Come out here and show
"he commanded, whereupon I took his chalk and
cluster and corrected the sketch. He thanked me very
much, and awarded me two house marks for what he
thought to be my extra attention, but I had to tell him
my father was making a similar model Kurds at home
and he awarded me a further mark for honesty.

The last two years of my school life were perhaps
the most eventful of the whole. Within three months
of my attaining the top class, I was returned to my
fiery Welshman in the class below by reason of a
rebellion against authority. The school curriculum
included games. Football in winter which I enjoyed;
cricket in summer which I loathed. The
school played inter house matches of both games,
and on a hot sunny afternoon during my house's
turn to bat found me lying in the shade of the
large London plane trees in Southwark Park,
contemplating the pattern of leaves against the blue
sky, when the house captain disturbed my reverie
with a peremptory command of "You! go in and bat".
My reaction to this disturbance was an equally
peremptory but unprintable remark which the
house captain promptly reported to Mr. Brown, the master, who
gave me the choice of either butting for my house, or as
its head it being "dealt with" at school the following
morning. I elected to be "dealt with". This consisted of a
public announcement of my crime, followed by three acts
with the cane on each hand, and exclusion from the class.
So back I went to Mr. Evans, who mercifully made no
mention of the matter and accepted me with 3 insincere,
signation. My school mates were sympathetic, and
my ex house captain said he was sorry but had no
idea my punishment would be so severe. Considering
the incident in after years, I believe the course taken
by the head master and Mr. Brown was justified.
Mr. Brown was the school's head teacher and second
in command to the head master. He was a very strict
master, conscientious and just. Any canings he
dispensable were usually warranted, and in this instance
I am inclined to think the rather harsh sentence
awarded for the crime was the result of exasperation
plus a determination to impress upon the whole
school the importance attached to the then
newly instituted house system.
At the end of term examinations, having come top of Mr Evans' class, I was returned to Mr Graven. He observed a mutual non-aggression pact for the remainder of the time spent under his tuition which terminated with my leaving school when reaching the age of fourteen. I am eternally grateful to Mr Graven for the method he employed to teach subjects other than advanced arithmetic, chemistry, and art. His method consisted of issuing each month papers setting out the particular sections of history, literature, geography, and such subjects upon which we were to be examined at its conclusion. Pupils were given standard copies of textbooks dealing with these various subjects, together with unlimited supplies of notebooks. The textbooks became a personal issue and so were treated with greater care than was the case in the lower classes of the school where textbooks were given out at the beginning, and collected at the conclusion of any particular lesson. Mr Graven also arranged for his pupils to have access to a library of specialized works on most subjects. By this method, more than half
of the initial school hours were devoted to self-instruction, with the master present to explain individual problems concerning the printed word. The method taught me the value of reference books, and the elements of successful self-instruction. Mr. Cameron would encourage interest in current topics by favoring whole newspapers where they could be conveniently read, and was ever ready to explain anything. It might appear that his class was run in a rather haphazard and disorderly manner. On the contrary, it was well-behaved and studious. Part of the system's success I believe to be due to its demanding from pupils a degree of adult responsibility toward their studies and conduct. On the whole, I liked my school life, and was sorry when the time came for me to leave. We were also taken on visits to museums and places of interest whereby I was first introduced to the pleasures of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate, and National Galleries. The Victoria and Albert particularly enchanted me, and I became addicted to viewing the beautiful specimen of past craftsmanship there displayed. The addiction remains.
To reach the museum grounds at South Kensington, cheaply involved a rather long walk, but during those years I would often set out alone during school holidays from my home to where the Old Kent Rd crosses the Grand Surrey Canal, thence to board a Westminster-bound electric tramcar. The fare for this portion of the journey cost twopence at that time. Alighting from the tram at Westminster Bridge my route led me through St James’s Park, up Constitution Hill to Hyde Park, along Rotten Row and the Sculpture line, to Exhibition Rd, and the buildings where I could browse to my heart’s content. I learned in time to organise my visits so that more detailed study could be made of smaller sections, thereby gaining greater benefit from such excursions.

Boots and shoes are the most expensive items of boys’ clothing, and have to withstand harsh treatment. These facts accounted for the delapidated condition of many of my schoolmates’ footwear, particularly during the summer. There was Winkle Savery the comic, whose profile looked like a crescent moon, and in fine weather...
wore boots almost devoid of soles and heels, that resembled
sneakers. There was Tuscanis Turner whose left boot was
minus its toe-cap, and whose socks were of the threecorner
type with great holes where one would normally expect
to find the toe and heel portions of the garments;
and Dingle Donnery who wore his father's cut
down trousers and old boots with the assurance of
one who could fight anyone inclined to scoff, and
Doggy Dowson who had a wonderful brain and
due to the absence of blistering at home, cleaned his
boots with black lead grate polish in an attempt to
hide open seams and cracked leather. During the
summer holidays when expeditions in the company
of gangs such as these were frequent, I would
ask my mother for a pair of her old boots and
cut down the heels to a suitable height with
father's hacksaw. Lowering the heels made the toes
turn up like sleigh runners but that was of little
importance when my footwear was in keeping
with that of my companions and I could run
and climb about in them without fear of being
taken to task on the amount of wear sustained.
Among my companions at school and at home were none with whom many of the deeper problems confronting the young could be discussed. Experience had taught that attempts at serious discussion invariably invited ridicule from my acquaintances. Though well able to hold my own in oral and physical battle, I learned the uselessness of dwelling upon the beauties of plant and animal form, of sunset and cloud formation, the mysteries of religion, animal reproduction, and the example of art, music, and literature which gave me pleasure. I discovered at an early age that my parents could give me little help in these matters, my mother being too busy with her household duties to give time to my questioning, and my father too bigoted to supply answers of any value. My schoolmasters could have helped had they known the existence of my problems and able to penetrate my armour of reserve. As a result my thoughts and opinions suffered some degree of stagnation until I discovered the mind of Angeline. Angeline and her brother David were the only children of a minor dock official who lived near. The mans regular and well paid employment
enabled the children to enjoy among other advantages, a
common school education which induced in David, who was my own age, an irritatingly patronising air.
Angeline although a year older, was subject to an
unmerciful bullying from her brother, her parents did
little to check. Although a mere girl, I felt sorry for
Angeline. Like myself, she was myopic and suffered
in consequence the appellation "Old Four Eyes". She
was also receiving at home similar treatment to
that I had experienced from a master at school. I
often become her champion and as companions in
misfortune will, we become comrades. Together
with the rest of my friends sisters, she was banned from
our games and adventures, but she and I exchanged
confidences and knowledge. Her advantage of an
extra year in age, and her superior education made
our discussions a little one sided at times, but at last
I had found someone to talk to about anything
which interested me without reserve, profiting
greatly from a friendship which incidentally,
by reason of the income barrier, was viewed with
disapprobation by our respective parents. We read
books together, commiserating with Oliver Twist, enjoying the adventures of Tim Hawkin on Treasure Island, and feeling alternately glad and sorry for Gerard and Margaret as we progressed through to Hardy's romance, The Kloister and The Hearth. This latter book led to my enlightenment concerning the phenomena of mammalian reproduction as related below. Our reading of the work progressed and it became increasingly clear that Margaret was to have a child despite the fact that she and Gerard had never cohabited. I was well aware that females became pregnant and had associated the event as far as the human species was concerned, simply with two people getting married in a church and setting up a home together. I was therefore puzzled and remarked upon the situation to Angelina who laughed, said I was silly, and in her gentle hesitant manner proceeded to lecture me upon the function of the sexes. The lecture was delivered and received without a trace of embarrassment and I have since wondered from whence her surprisingly accurate information stemmed.
Her talk cleared up the mystery of what my father had meant some weeks previously when, in a towering rage, he had thrown away my join jar containing a half dozen ground beetles with the words: "I'll not have you watching those things in need." It also revealed why he repeatedly refused to give permission to keep rabbits or white mice. It also gave me an useful clue as to the reason for his insistence upon the return of a book containing illustrations of Classical sculpture borrowed from the school library. He expressed a mixture of horror and indignation when some years later he learned from me that my school's curriculum had included lectures illustrated with lantern slides, dealing with human anatomy and physiology. Such was a Victorian attitude to sex! It could be made the source of adult movement by innuendo and skillful allusion, but the direct approach to the subject by any means was entirely taboo.

In addition to academic matters, Angelina was also interested in such masculine activities as the use of catapults, and the manufacture of net,
for the capture of sticklebacks, providing much valuable help and advice in the construction and design of these and similar articles. Our alliance lasted about two years and terminated with her family removal to the outer suburbs.

I had developed some skill in the acquisition of money by the time of my fourteenth birthday. The prime source was the sale of newspapers on Saturday evenings. These were bought from the distributors' van at the rate of three for twopence, and sold at a penny each. I could sell two quire by crying them in streets away from the recognised rounds of regular newsboys who were employed by newsagents and among whom were many of my school friends, which prevented my "queering their pitch" without loss of honour. Another means of obtaining funds was the conversion of driftwood taken from the Grand Surrey Canal, to kindling wood. This was sold to neighbours at a penny a bundle and was very profitable despite a limited market. There were many other ways of turning an honest bob or two, down to the collection and sale of scrap iron, the hardest work and lowest paid of all.
The Grand Surrey Canal provided a playground where in summer swimming, paddling, and tidleker fishing were practiced. The most popular method of capturing the tidleker, stickleback, or Gasterosteus aculeatus, if you prefer it, was with a simple bag net manufactured from a piece of old lace curtain. This was mounted on a stout wire loop, the legs of which were lashed firmly to a suitable stick. The net method however was regarded as kids stuff by the real enthusiasts who favoured the more skilful cats fishing. The equipment for this mode of angling comprised a yard of black cotton thread with a small worm tied to one end, and the flat cloth cats most components habitually wore. In cats fishing for sticklebackes, the angler ties balanced precariously over the edge of the towpath on his stomach. One hand slowly moves the black thread with its captive worm to and fro some 3 to 6 inches below the surface of the water until it is seized by a fish. The fish is then gently drawn toward the cats held in the other outstretched hand, and at the right moment is jerked from the water.
The fish thereupon released its hold on the worm and
falls into the cauldron to be quickly transferred to a
jum jar filled with water. There were many narrow
escapes, but I believe there to be no recorded deaths
from drowning due to the use of this latter method, the
essential feature of which was to retain one's calm
throughout the operation. There was also the
excitement of dodging policemen and uniformed
conal patrooks, the latter of whom were termed
"cat rangers". Those among us who could swim
would aggravate their scores by quickly
bundling up their pile of clothing and swimming
to the opposite bank there to sit naked hurling suitable insults at the enemy. Those
who could not swim had necessarily to rely
upon fleetness of foot and agility of movement
in dodging as a means of escape. Some were
unlucky and gained a lecture and a stiff or two.
These officers were generally not brutal men, and we
were trespassing despite the many notices in cast iron,
of penalties and fines for the offence displayed at
the entrances to the canal towpaths.
The docks and river front were always interesting places to boys particularly at high water when bridges carrying Redriff Rd across the channel connecting Lebanon and Russia Docks with Greenland Docks were swung aside to permit the passage of ships, sailing barges, and lighters to and from the Thames. Many of the ships displayed the flags of Scandinavian and Baltic countries, and occasionally square rigged sailing vessels like the great steel hulled Whangai decide discharged their cargoes in Greenland Docks.

My favourite vantage points on the river were St George's and Dog and Duck stairs. From here much of Limehouse Reach may be viewed; from the height of Greenwich and Shooters Hill to Limehouse Church tower and the chimney of Deptford power station, the river constituted the longest house free area known to me until at the age of twelve I saw the sea through the windows of the Children's Leaomy Holiday H and O organisation.
Towes, trailing barges were a common sight among the river traffic of those days and on Sundays when traffic was comparatively light, it was a fine sight to see two or more of these tacking up river round the Isle of Dogs with a stiff breeze blowing. There were many kinds of odd-looking vessels to be seen among the more conventional types. These included dredgers, mud hoppers, and the colliers specially built to negotiate the bridge on the way to up-river power stations and gas works. There were the huge floating cranes that used occasionally to move up or down river as required, and the lighters, surely the most ugly and ungainly craft in existence, that were either towed in strings of half a dozen or more by tug boats, or were floated up and down river with the ebb or flood tides with lightermen using long sweeps to keep them in line with the fairway. The river at and near high tide was a very busy thoroughfare.
The Illustrations.

With the exception of Figures 8 and 9, all are from original material produced by the writer.

Figure 1. — The Sweeney Dockers district during the 1920's and 30's. Drawn from old street maps. The site of 118 Eugenia Rd is marked with a red dot.

Figure 2. — The railway complex at Boling Pk. Drawn from street maps and a dash of memory.

Figures 3 and 4. — Lower and upper floor plans of non-existent 118 Eugenia Rd. Drawn from memory.

Figure 5 A. — A townshio's runner. Drawn from a memory of Mrs Bogle.

Figure 5 B. — An itinerant timber and his portable workshops. Drawn from memory.

Figure 6 A. — Undertyle Sentinel steam loco of the 1920's. Drawn from contemporary photographs.

Figure 6 B. — A barrel organ and its afretractor. Drawn from memory.

Figure 7 A. — Overtyle steam loco of the 1920's. A composite sketch of the types manufactured by Robey, Foden, Grieg and Porter, and Howell. There were many more models of both overtyle and undertyle locos in use during the inter-war years (1918 to 1939) from contemporary photographs.

Figure 7 B. — A Thames sailing barge. Drawn from memory

Figure 8. — London lines of the 1920's. That illustrated is a L.G.O.C S. type. Please: Tilting steevns also ran petrol electric vehicles over the same recognised bus routes. The S type did exist.
submit types, a 4.5 h.p. petrol engine, and seated 52 passengers with 28 seats on the upper deck.

Figure 9. — A London County Council tram of the 1920s. These vehicles seated 78 passengers, and were driven by two 60 b.h.p. electric motors. Centrally located between the running rails was a conduit housing the conductor rail from which the necessary power was supplied to the motors by means of a plough attached to the tramcar chassis. In the earlier systems, the conductors and conduit system were substituted by an overhead cable from which power was collected by either of the spring-loaded roof arms shown in the cut of service position in the illustration.

Photographs A. and C. — SKew arches at Bolam Rd. marked E & F on Figure 2.

Photograph B. — Unoccupied arches at The Three Bridges.

Photograph D. — Arch of the old London to Greenwich line where it crosses the Grand Surrey Canal.

Photograph E. — Ecliptic arch at Bolam Rd. marked G on Figure 2.

"Its crown has gone" father had said. (Page 14)

Photograph F. — Rear of house No 68 Silwood St. awaiting demolition. The photograph shows the effects of subsidence and is thus situated within 50 yards of Old Gorgans Waterlo (Page)

Photograph J. K. L. — St Katherine's vicarage, existing church, and the old church hall.

Photograph M. — The Earl of Beaconsfield public house.
Photograph N. — Houses in Silverlocke St. awaiting demolition. Workmen's dwellings of similar age and type to 118 Eugenie Rd.

Photograph O. — Limehouse Reach from St George's Steps. (page...
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME 1982

27th February 10.00 to 17.00

"The Conifers"

Tutor: Mr. J. Lewis.

21st April University of London Extra-Mural Course "Woodland Management".

A course of 8 sessions, 19.00 to 21.00 on Wednesdays, commencing on 21st April.

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MEMBERS' PROGRAMME FOR JANUARY TO JULY, 1982

The venue will be SLBI unless otherwise stated.
Footnote Re: Corbett's Lane

The name suggests that the original Corbett was a public benefactor, or the man who built the long row of cottages in the lane which bears his name. Fact however is stranger than fiction and is discovered in later years, the reason for the alternative name, Chestroats Alley, applied by older inhabitants.

William Corbett was a ship's carpenter of Asian extraction, who in 1764 brutally murdered the elderly couple, with whom he lodged, and robbed them. Found guilty upon his confession, he was executed on Kennington Common, and his body gibbeted in the Lane near the "Jolly Gardener's" public house, which stands at the Lane's junction with Rotherhithe New Road.

The gibbet was subsequently removed by the parish authorities because it was considered a public nuisance.