

LONDON TOPOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY  
**Newsletter**  
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Prévost Panorama © Sotheby's

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## Notes and News

The well attended **Annual General Meeting** of the Society was held on Monday 25 June in the generous space of the Beveridge Hall, Senate House, University of London. Tea was provided beforehand, and members were able to collect a bumper pack of this year's publications: the two panoramas by Thomas Girtin and Lawrence Wright, and a copy of the Historic Towns Trust's *Map of Tudor London*. Minutes of the meeting will be published in the May 2019 *Newsletter*. After the business Vanessa Harding spoke about the process of creating the Tudor map and how the new edition takes account of recent archaeological and historical discoveries, as well as having the advantage of a georectified scale so that it matches Ordnance Survey maps, and can form part of the Institute of Historical Research's 'Layers of London' project (for this see [layersofLondon.org](http://layersofLondon.org)). There was also a report from Ros Branston, curator at the British Film Institute, on the digitisation of films in the national collection which the LTS had helped to fund), including clips from some fascinating London market scenes of the 1920s. Our principal speaker, Rosemary Ashton, took us back to Bloomsbury in the nineteenth century, a period when over 300 foundations and institutions were founded in the area, among them the 'radical infidel college' (now UCL) on a 'swampy rubbish dump', which was established in 1825 as a non-residential place of study for London's middle classes. Other places of learning and nurture proliferated, ranging from the 'Ladies' College' in Bedford Square (1849) to the Working Men's College, Birkbeck College, the Mary Ward centre, and the 'Kindergarten' in Tavistock Place established by German exiles after 1853. Among the numerous specialist hospitals, Great Ormond Street dates from 1852, while University College Hospital was the first teaching hospital associated with an English university. We were reminded too of the many writers with Bloomsbury connections (well before the 'Bloomsbury group'). An immensely rich and stimulating mass of information to give one food for thought about Victorian ideals and achievements as one walks through the area.



Graham Maney (2nd from left) and Council members

Following the meeting a celebratory meal was held to thank Graham Maney for his work over many years as the painstaking and meticulous publisher of the Society's publications.

## Data Protection and YOU: a note from our council member Andrew Thorp

Following the notice in May's *Newsletter* I have received responses from roughly half of our members confirming that they wish to have their name and contact details included in the list of members in the *London Topographical Record*. The next volume is planned for publication in 2020. Many thanks to all members who have responded.

If you have not yet replied but wish to have your contact details to be included please email me at [lontopsoc.andrew@gmail.com](mailto:lontopsoc.andrew@gmail.com) or write to me at 45 Stanton Road, London SW20 8RW. If you do not wish your postal address to be included your email address can be included instead. Please let me know.

The more members' addresses that are included, obviously the more useful the list will be for Society members, other *Record* readers and researchers. When we now look at the early *Record* volumes we see names of people who had an appreciable influence on the governance and history of London, people like Lawrence Gomme of the LCC, the prolific author E. Beresford-Chancellor and bibliophile Henry B. Wheatley. It would be a shame to deny future researchers such a source of interest, no matter how insignificant we presently feel our individual contribution to be.

## Miscellanea

Members may be interested to learn that the value of the Sun insurance policies as historical records, discussed in our last issue in an article by Isobel Watson, has been demonstrated by an article by our member Derek Morris, which is to be published in the Autumn 2018 edition of *Local Population Studies*, 101: *The Thames as a Barrier in the eighteenth century*. The article draws attention to the powerful function in the LMA search facility that enables one to identify links between two separate places, e.g. Wapping and Southwark, London and Dover, and challenges many assumptions about trade and marriage in eighteenth-century London. Analysis of marriage registers, apprentice records, wills and insurance policies demonstrates that, in the eighteenth century, the Thames, downstream from the Tower of London, was a major barrier to the development of strong business and marriage links between the residents on the north bank in Stepney, and those on the south bank in Surrey and Kent. The article examines possible reasons for these findings, in the context of London's growth, migration patterns and business opportunities.

More about life in Wapping will be revealed in an article in a future *Newsletter*, based on Derek's further study of the London Dock Company's property transactions.

## A newly discovered panorama

Our cover picture is a new discovery. It is a remarkable coincidence that in the year of the society's publication of two panoramas, a hitherto unknown panorama came onto the market. Sotheby's catalogue of 4 July 2018 described this complete, circular image, joined at Westminster Abbey, as 'one of the finest drawings of its type': a preparatory study for a lost panorama of approximately 30 metres in diameter, by the French artist Prévost, showing the artist at the pinnacle of a highly successful career as a panoramist. The happy outcome of this discovery was the purchase of the drawing by the Museum of London, and we are grateful to Francis Marshall from the Museum of London for the account which appears in this *Newsletter* (see p.4).

## Our Backlist: Check up on your LTS publications

Our stocks of some of our A to Z map volumes are getting low. We have a few copies of **Elizabethan**, **Regency** and **Restoration**. If you have been thinking of adding these titles to your library, please contact the Treasurer to see if there are copies left for you.

We have a few boxes of **Georgian** and plenty of **Victorian**, **Edwardian** and **Charles II**, so they can be ordered in the normal way, via the website or the Treasurer.

Another publication which is about to go out of print is 130, the **Booth Poverty Maps**. The cost to members in UK of the remaining copies is £22 including postage and packing. Order via the Treasurer, using a cheque or paying via Paypal quoting the Treasurer's email.

## And a note from your Treasurer

Please check your *Newsletter* for enclosures. If you have received a subscription invoice please make your payment by one of the methods indicated in the invoice. You can save money by completing the standing order form which appears below the invoice and sending it to your bank to arrive before Christmas. You can of course set up the order using internet banking, but please include the reference.

If you have paid your 2018 subscription by standing order or have paid in advance already to cover 2019 there will be no invoice enclosed.

## Historic Transport Map: A Special Offer to LTS members

Ordnance Survey London Passenger Transport Map, Sheet 106, Watford, 1" to 1 mile, published 1934, reprinted by 'The Charles Close Society for the study of Ordnance Survey Maps'.

This map is a reproduction of one of the twelve 1" sheets produced as a result of the 1933 London Passenger Transport Act 1933. The map tells an important part of the early history of London Transport and was an essential planning tool

both for LT and other railway and bus operators in and around London. It shows, in colour, the various operating boundaries, roads and railways on a black/blue outline. The map identifies where LT was given operating powers, the absolute monopoly of carriage of passengers by buses and coaches as well as confirming operating rights along key access roads outside the LPTB area.

Included with the map are two introductory essays. The first, by Mike Horne, explains the background to the formation of the LPTB and the need for the map. Amazingly one of the causes of the formation of LT was as a result of the stultifying effects of bus and coach competition. This essay also considers the different boundaries of London. The second essay, by Richard Oliver, explains the OS mapping history of the twelve sheets.

Despite the title of the Sheet being 'Watford' it does in fact cover an area between Notting Hill, Maidenhead, Wendover and Hatfield.

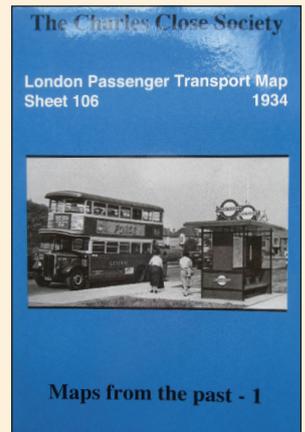
The offer is on a first come, first served basis. LTS members may purchase the map for £5 (P&P in the U.K. included) in two ways:

[www.charlesclose.org/mapshop](http://www.charlesclose.org/mapshop)

Select Maps from the past, Number 1 and under Special price for CCS members enter the code 1934 in the membership number.

Or by post: CCS Publications Manager, St Nicholas, 16 East Hill Road, Oxted, Surrey RH8 9HZ. Cheques should be made payable to the Charles Close Society.

The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from **Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close**, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.





Prévost Panorama

## ***“Earth has nothing to shew more fair”*** **A Panoramic View of London from the Tower** **of St Margaret’s Church, Westminster**

*London from the Tower of St Margaret’s Church, Westminster*, by the French panorama painter, Pierre Prévost (1764-1823), is perhaps the most important topographical image the Museum of London has acquired since the *Rhinebeck Panorama* in 1998. Measuring 85cm high x 605cm wide, it is certainly the largest.

A strikingly realistic image of London in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the view is a full 360° panorama of London seen from the tower of St Margaret’s, the church situated within the shadow of Westminster Abbey. In the immediate foreground is Parliament Square, with Middlesex Guildhall on the left, and the old Palace of Westminster and the abbey on the right. Beyond are cattle grazing in St James’s Park; Buckingham and Carlton Houses; Banqueting House and St Martin-in-the-Fields; the Thames and its crossings, Westminster and Strand (soon to be renamed Waterloo) Bridges; semi-rural stretches of Lambeth, with Randall Mill’s windmill adjacent to the palace; and, above all, the dominating mass of St Paul’s on the easterly horizon. In the streets a company of soldiers marches up towards Whitehall, a fight has broken out, carriages are drawn-up alongside the Palace of Westminster, and a large throng has gathered in a side street. Shop fronts and doors are carefully picked out in reds, yellows and greens, and, though few are identifiable from the drawing, one is clearly marked: Johnson’s Emery and Glass Paper Manufactory.

Although clearly unfinished on the north bank, John Rennie’s Strand Bridge, begun in 1810, is largely complete. It opened in 1817, helping us to pinpoint the date of the painting. Prévost had painted London before, following a visit in 1802, during the Peace of Amiens. It seems most likely he returned in 1815, shortly after the Battle of Waterloo, to prepare his second panorama of the British capital. The result of this trip was the present painting and a canvas, now lost, of some 32 metres in diameter exhibited in a custom-made rotunda in Paris in 1817.<sup>1</sup>

The painting is on a continuous strip of paper and not, as was previously thought, on a series of sheets glued together.<sup>2</sup> Appropriately enough, continuous paper was invented in France but further developed in England. Louis-Nicolas Robert invented a means of producing continuous paper in France, in 1799, but his business partner, Saint-Léger Didot, felt the idea had a better chance of success in Britain than in revolutionary France. Consequently, a refined version of Robert’s system was patented in Britain in 1801, by Didot’s brother-in-law, backed by London stationers, the Fourdrinier brothers, who gave their name to the new machine.<sup>3</sup> The first Fourdrinier machine was introduced into France in 1811, although there were only four in the country by 1827.<sup>4</sup> This raises the question of whether Prévost bought his strip of paper whilst he was in London or on his return to Paris.

It is not clear why Prévost chose this particular tower as his vantage point. As the painting makes plain, there were many other towers from which to take in the broadest sweep of the metropolis, some of which would have served his purpose as well, if not better, than St Margaret’s. From a panorama painter’s point of view, St Margaret’s has one distinct problem: its close proximity to Westminster Abbey means the medieval building entirely blocks the western perspective. Prévost has turned this to his advantage with a tour-de-force rendering of light playing across the complex surfaces of the abbey. Perhaps he had a contact who arranged access to this church. On the other hand, he may have actively sought this location. The panorama contains a finely detailed depiction of the Old Palace of Westminster. Bernard Comment raises the question of the artist’s political views, noting the omission of the Arc de Triomphe and the Vendôme column from Prévost’s panorama of Paris (c.1813-15).<sup>5</sup> Might the emphasis on the seat of British government, in the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, be evidence of the artist’s political sympathies? Whatever the likelihood of this, the painting certainly reveals London’s



ongoing attraction for Parisian and, more broadly, European audiences, even at a time of profound political turbulence.

The panorama's focus on London as a seat of political power complements the *Rhinebeck Panorama*, which has mercantile London at its heart, exemplified by the City, the Pool of London and the wharves of Bermondsey. Furthermore, in contrast to the *Rhinebeck*, which looks down on London, as if from a balloon, Prévost's panorama looks across it, revealing an astonishingly low-rise city. Alongside the bulk of St Paul's, the only other man-made features punctuating the horizon appear to be the Foundling Hospital and Coldbath Fields Prison.

Prévost's painting is, in effect, the view of London conjured a decade earlier by William Wordsworth in his sonnet *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, 3 Sept. 1802*.

*Earth has nothing to shew more fair [...] Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie Open unto the fields, and to the sky; All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.*<sup>6</sup>

One wonders just how smokeless the air would have been. Wordsworth's recollection that '[t]he houses were not overhung by their cloud of smoke' indicates how, even in the early nineteenth century, the number and density of fires for heating and for driving industry created a distinct pall over the city – one all the more notable when absent.<sup>7</sup> By 1819, London 'particulars', especially dense, lingering fogs, were already becoming a sufficient issue for

parliament to establish a select committee to consider the 'problem of smoke from steam engines and furnaces.'<sup>8</sup>

By 1815, then, it is likely that London would have basked only infrequently under quite such luminous skies as Wordsworth and Prévost envision. But, alongside realism, Prévost's intention was to create a dazzling visual spectacle and this remarkable study provides ample evidence of his ability to do just that.

– Francis Marshall, *Museum of London*

1. Sotheby's, *Old Master & British Works on Paper*, London 07/04/2018, Lot 79.
2. *Ibid.* The catalogue describes the drawing as being on 'multiple sheet of paper'.
3. Hunter, D., *Papermaking: the History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1947), 524.
4. *Ibid.*, 536-7.
5. Comment, B., *The Panorama* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 44.
6. William Wordsworth, Gill, S. (ed.). *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, pbk ed 2000), 285.
7. *Ibid.*, 710.
8. Nead, L., *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 23. See ref. to Stern, A. C. (ed.), *Air Pollution: Volume 1, Air Pollution and its Effects* (London and New York: Academic Press, 1968), 5.



## Changing London

**Burlington Gardens**, the very urban street parallel and to the north of Piccadilly, may seem ill named. It recalls the once extensive grounds that lay behind the Duke of Burlington's mansion, one of the first to be built along Piccadilly, which in the early eighteenth century was still on the outskirts of built up London. By the nineteenth century the gardens had disappeared and in the 1860s, when Burlington House was transformed into the Royal Academy of Art, the back of the site was developed with a grand building in Renaissance style by Sir James Pennethorne, designed as headquarters for the University of London. But as we learned at our last AGM, in the twentieth century the central organisation of the university moved to Bloomsbury; the large white elephant in Burlington Gardens, after various uses, has now been refurbished as an extension to the Royal Academy.

The exterior, liberally ornamented with statues of eminent European writers, philosophers and scientists, is currently enlivened by a bright red object which is not, as one might guess, a piece of abstract sculpture, but a copy of one of the cantilevering 'rocker beams' used in the Pompidou Centre in Paris, the radical 1970s building which made the architects Richard Rogers and Renzo

Piano famous; inside, until 20 January, there is an **exhibition about the work of Renzo Piano**, now better known in London as architect of 'the Shard'. The interior has other features to explore. From the entrance hall one can ascend the grand stone stair to the richly decorated 'Senate Room' (now bar and café). Or one can penetrate the building further and reach the old Royal Academy through the capacious basements below the back of Burlington House, where contemporary projects share the space with casts, once the staple subject matter for art students. The prelude to the basements is a lively display (on until 3 February) devised by the artist 'Bob and Roberta Smith' (Patrick Brill) which celebrates his mother, the artist Deidre Borlase (1925-2018), who studied at the RA and exhibited at the Summer exhibitions. The longstanding prejudice against women artists which she encountered, which is now at last being recognised, and which led her to avoid signing her works with her first name, lasted into the later twentieth century. Among her earlier works are some atmospheric views of London backstreets and industrial areas, painted on excursions when she escaped from home, using her car as a studio. Sadly, few of these survive. Her story is told in a book by her son, *The Secret to a Good Life*. Are there other forgotten London views by neglected women artists? Please let us know!



The Royal Academy extension in Burlington Gardens, with copy of the cantilevered beam used at Piano and Rogers' Pompidou centre in Paris

## The topography of London's early playhouses

*There is a fascinating reference in Grenade's Singularities of London (1578) to the 'two very fine theatres on the edge of Finsbury Fields – one of which is magnificent in comparison with the other and has an imposing appearance on the outside'. The character of London's early theatres has long been a subject for debate, spurred by recent discoveries. Julian Bowsher assesses both the archaeological and the documentary evidence, and sets these building in their topographical context.*

Despite the size and diversity of modern London, it's 'theatreland' is still described as the 'West End' which lies just west of the original City and not far from Westminster. In the sixteenth century the famous 'Shakespearean' playhouses were distinctly situated outside the City, particularly in the suburbs to the north (Shoreditch), south (Newington Butts) and east (Mile End); the last two areas being almost rural.

In the sixteenth century London saw an enormous growth in its population, both in the City itself and in the expanding suburbs. The mid-sixteenth-century population of Greater London of c.100,000 was doubled within a century. Sixteenth century roads were generally abominable; south of the Thames conditions were dominated by riverine flooding and unhealthy marshlands. The Privy Council's description of 'the tediousness of the way' to Newington was not a comment on the half hour from London Bridge but more likely referred to the notorious flooding along the route. However the walk of an hour or so from the City was an almost negligible time for most Elizabethans, when it took two weeks to walk to Scotland.

Commercial playing in London started in the late 1530s, developing out of older traditions of

religious drama, fairground shows, and royal, aristocratic and civic entertainment. In 1557 two inns beyond the City limits put on plays: at the Saracen's Head in Islington and the Boar's Head outside Aldgate. Commercial considerations encouraged the establishment of playhouses along the major thoroughfares such as Mile End, where seasonal fairs attracted the City populace.

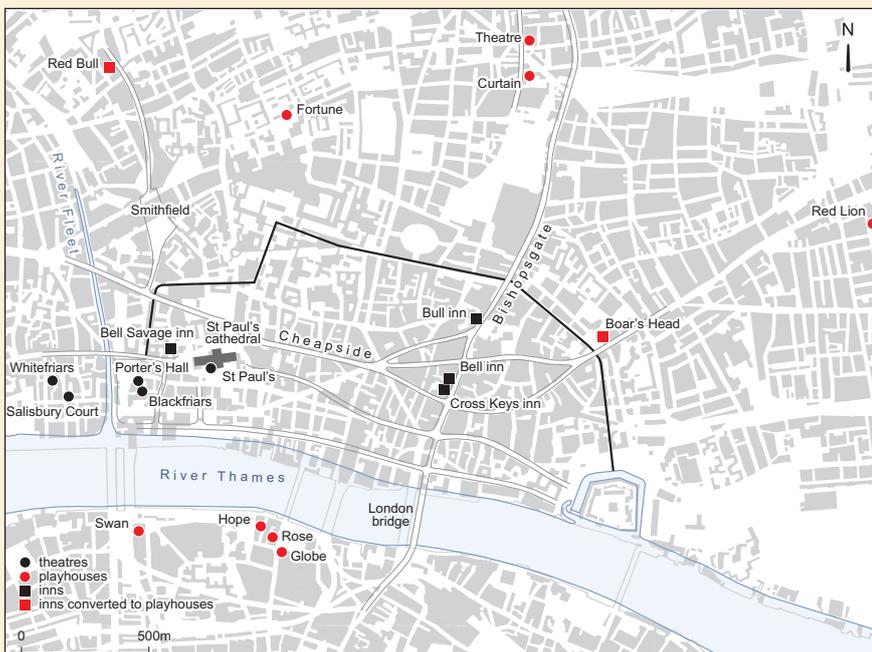
For purpose built venues, a location in the suburbs was cheaper and more spacious. But the natural forces were (as now) tempered by demographic, economic and political criteria firmly in the hands of the City. The Lord Mayor could extend his jurisdiction into Middlesex in order to safeguard the City. Southwark on the south bank was actually part of Surrey but from 1555 it was a 'Ward Without (the City)' allowing the Lord Mayor to oversee this area. Moreover, the Privy Council, with an eye on national safety, could override suburban development. The plague, always a recurrent theme in the history of London, had been particularly bad in 1563; it was thought that it may have been caused, and certainly exacerbated, by the crowded playhouses.

The main north-south axis through London linked the two most famous theatrical areas, from Shoreditch High Street to the north then through the City itself, where plays were licensed in inns along the way: the Bull in Bishopsgate and the Cross Keys and the Bell in Gracious (now Gracechurch) Street. Drama was a side show to the main business of inn-keeping and coaching, but performances were within large rooms within the inn (sometimes upstairs) as well as in the yards. Across the river, via London Bridge into Southwark with its entertainment area on Bankside, the road continued south to Newington Butts (now the Elephant and Castle area) with its early playhouse.

To the east, Mile End, well known for its fairs and the annual mustering of the London militia, was a popular location for city revellers and there is

indeed evidence that a play was performed there in 1501. The 'scaffold or stage' in the 'courte or yarde' of the Red Lion built by John Brayne in 1567 appears to be the first purpose built venue 'for public interludes or plays' in (greater) London. Legal disputes between Brayne and his carpenters provides some detail of the building but other than the performance of a play *Samson* little is known beyond that year.

South of the river at Newington Butts, a well to do village at a major road junction, Richard Hicks leased a plot in 1566 and built 'a messuage or tenement'. Jerome Savage, a leading player with the Earl of Warwick's Company, took a sub-lease from Hicks on the property before 1576, for on 25 March of that year he extended it to 30 years with Hicks. In 1596, the



The sites of London's early playhouses. © Mola

site contained 'one messuage or tenement heretofore by one Richard Hicks, deceased, erected and built upon parcel of the said lands, now called the playhouse'. The clear inference is that Savage converted the original building into a playhouse – probably therefore square or rectangular. Numerous performances were recorded there before it was finally closed by 1596.

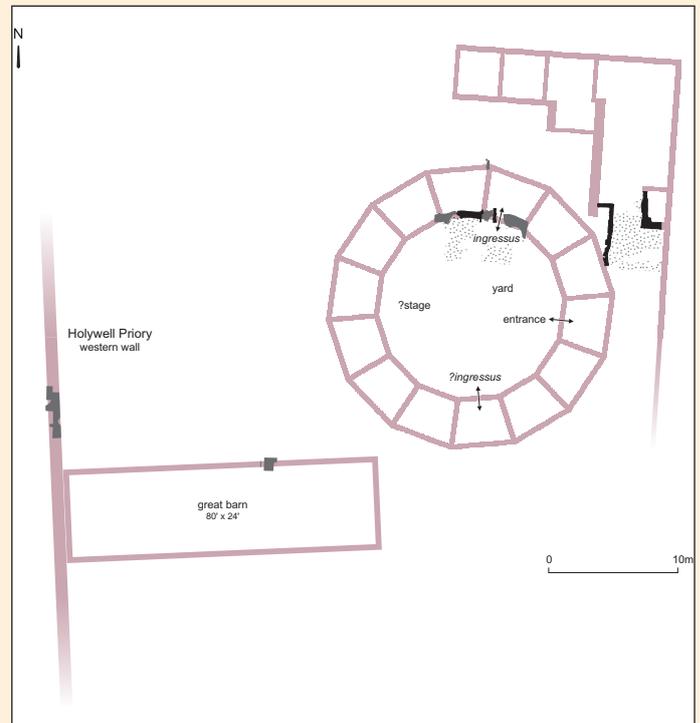
North of the City, a 'private' theatre was built by the courtier John Rastell in 1524 in the 'back garden' of his property on Old Street, to the north-west of Shoreditch, a thriving City suburb which became the first theatrical 'district' of London. The parish church of St Leonard's was often known as the actors' church on account of the many who were baptised, married or buried there. Even after the theatrical area of London had shifted southwards, many actors and writers were still living here and commuting to the Bankside.

One of the major impresarios of this theatrical period was James Burbage who built the 'Theatre' in the former precinct of Holywell Priory from April 1576 – (Grenade's 'magnificent' theatre) – the first successful venue and the first to be built in a polygonal shape. His son later described him as 'first builder of playhouses', although he may have been associated with his brother-in-law Brayne – with whom he fell out – at the Red Lion, Mile End, and indeed at other venues later. It is also fairly certain that the Newington Butts venue was open before the Theatre. Laurie Johnson has made the intriguing observation that as the Newington Butts site was specifically described as the Playhouse, Burbage called his new venue the Theatre in contradistinction!

The term playhouse derived from the medieval 'pleghows' or 'pleghus' whereas theatre came from the Greek (and later Latin) *theatrum* meaning a 'place for viewing'. The two terms were clearly known and used by the 1570s, but very few Englishmen at the time would have seen the theatres of ancient Greece or Rome. I have used the terms here to distinguish between an open-air (usually polygonal) venue (playhouse) and a covered indoor venue (theatre).

The second playhouse in Shoreditch, was the Curtain. It was situated within the Curtain estate, or Close, being a paddock of the Priory just to the north. The Curtain is thought to have been opened just after the Theatre because it was not mentioned in an order of August 1577, which only mentions 'the Theatre and such like', though this is not conclusive, but it was certainly open for business by December of that year, when it is mentioned with its neighbour as a 'school for wickedness'.

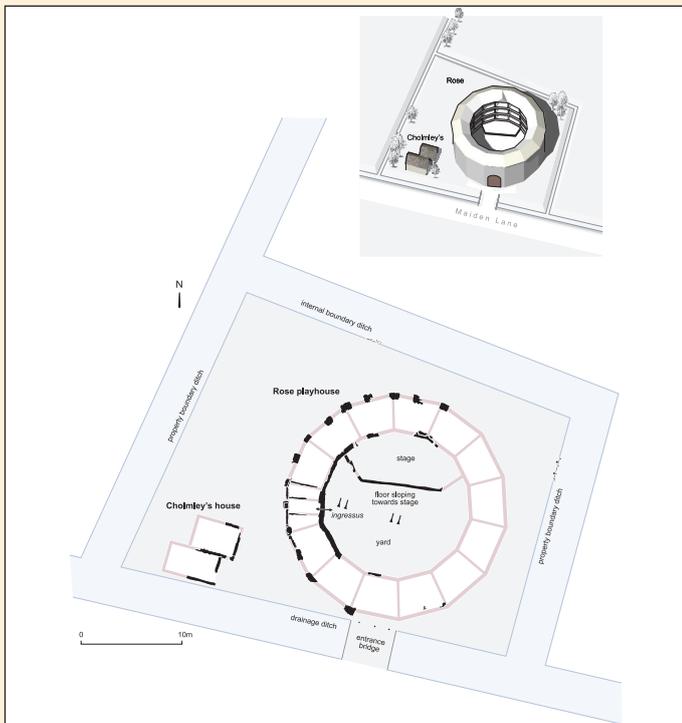
This playhouse has long been an enigma owing to the shortage of documentary sources relating to its exact location, construction or layout. Initial interpretation of the archaeological investigation on Curtain Road was confused as it revealed remains of a rectangular building built and rebuilt a number of times. Like Newington it was probably a converted house. Leases, beginning in 1567,



Plan of the Theatre, Holywell. ©Mola

describe a 'house, tenement or lodge commonly called the Curtain' (and adjoining land). It was probably built sometime between 1538 and 1567. William Middleton owned a lease, described in a petition of 1584, in 'the gronde called the Curteyn where *now comenlye the Playes be playde*' (my italics). More telling is a passage in a lease of 1611 which describes, slightly ambiguously 'All that large messuage or tenement built of timber and thatch, now in decay, called the Curtain with a parcel of ground adjoining thereto wherein they use to keep stage plays' – (though we know that playing continued through this period). If this conversion is accepted, the playhouse might be identified on the Booth engraving as that rectangular building with a flag just to the right of the polygonal playhouse which must be the Theatre, albeit with some artistic licence.

Bankside on the south bank, next to London Bridge and on the highway into Kent, had a history of 'entertainment' – another red light district, albeit closed before the advent of the playhouses and the animal baiting arenas known as the 'bear gardens' – mostly also polygonal in form. The first appeared in the 1520s and the last was pulled down only in 1682. One of them, the Hope of 1613', was ingeniously designed to be dual purpose, having animal baiting on four days and drama – on a temporary stage – on the remaining three. Nevertheless, the arrival of the playhouses created a new theatrical district. The Rose was built in 1587 by Philip Henslowe – another great impresario whose surviving papers have provided so much about theatrical life in the Shakespearean age. The Rose seems to have been based on the Theatre; it was the same shape and size and its carpenter John Grigge was possibly involved in the construction of the



Plan of the Rose, Bankside. ©Mola

Theatre. It was partially enlarged in 1591 and was a successful playhouse until finally pulled down in 1606.

The attraction of the Bankside brought competition, firstly from the Swan in 1595, 490 yds to the west. A drawing of its interior is unique amongst London's playhouses. It was described as the most lavish such venue when new but it was sorely dilapidated by the 1630s. Much more serious competition arrived with the Globe – 'The Glory of the Banke' – in 1599. This first building burned down in 1613 but was swiftly rebuilt – to the same size – the next year. The association with Shakespeare certainly enhanced its reputation and it was much larger than the earlier generation of playhouses.

As the Rose lost ground to the Globe, Henslowe and his son in law Edward Alleyn crossed over to Cripplegate to build the Fortune in 1600. Inventive as ever, Henslowe hired the carpenter Peter Street (who had just built the Globe) who created a square building according to the surviving building contract. There had been local opposition to a new playhouse but Henslowe's aristocratic patrons put pressure on the local community by saying that the location was very remote from any population centre that 'none could be annoyed thereby' and that the builders would contribute generously to the parish poor, at a time when their own funds were hard stretched.

John Wolf was a well-known printer and publisher with a large and diverse portfolio but without, it seems, influential backers. In 1600 the Privy Council discovered that 'contrary to Her Majesty's proclamation and orders', he 'hath begun to erect and build a playhouse in Nightingale Lane, leading down to the small settlement of Wapping on the Thames. Foundations of this playhouse may

have been laid but the project seems to have been abandoned.

Theatrical development around London was still a feasible business. The Boar's Head inn in Aldgate was fully converted into a playhouse in 1598, with some success as it was remodelled the next year. However, another attempt to convert the George Inn, just east of the Boar's Head, by John Brayne into a playhouse fell foul of the law. The Red Bull inn in St John's Street was successfully converted in 1607 and flourished for many years. This area, just west of Cripplegate, was already a 'red light' district with bowling alleys, a puppet theatre and, later, an animal baiting ring.

Within the City itself, there was a theatrical development in and around the former Blackfriars Friary 'scituated in the bosome of the Cittie'. The smart and wealthy residents in this area overcame their initial opposition as the venues were much more refined and exclusive than the suburban playhouses. The audience were all seated and as they were covered, there was expensive lighting by candlelight. There was also a ready audience amongst the gentlemen scholars at the nearby Inns of Court. There was also a short lived 'theatre' within St Paul's Cathedral, ostensibly training choir boys in religious drama. Burbage's first 'Blackfriars' theatre foundered in 1576 but its successor thrived from 1609. A late Henslowe development in the area was the Porters Hall of 1615.

Inevitably theatres spread westward over the Fleet, firstly within the former Whitefriars in 1606 and lastly the Salisbury Court in 1629. The farthest was the conversion of a cockpit in Drury Lane into the Phoenix theatre in 1615. All the playhouses, theatres, tennis courts and other entertainment venues were closed by Parliament in 1642. The Phoenix however survived the Commonwealth into the Restoration only to be redeveloped as a tenement block in the mid 1660s. Nevertheless, it was clearly the beginning of the modern 'West End' theatre land.

Archaeology has uncovered, in various limits, the Rose (1989) – the largest excavation, the Theatre (2008), what is probably the Curtain (2011), the Hope (1999) and the Globe (1989). An attempt to locate the Boar's Head (1998) found nothing. Nothing is visible now, but the outline of the Rose is marked out below Rose Court, as is a small area of the Globe in a yard over the road.

The buildings reveal a topographical concern for traffic and commerce. It used to be thought that all the stages were situated in the southern or south-west of the playhouses because that was the area of even light in the afternoons. Excavation and documentary research revealed that the stages were opposite the main entrances and the main entrances were on the public highway regardless of orientation, in order to channel people through one paying area. We know that there were back doors, behind the stage, at the Rose, Globe and Fortune at least, however these would be private access points, 'stage doors' or service entrances.



map, which may have been made when that division was mooted. Brasenose College purchased the advowson of Whitechapel in 1708 and held it until 1864; a handwritten inscription on the back of the map informs us that it was given by a Mr Hargreaves to the Rev. Mr Barton, possibly John Yarker Barton, who matriculated at Brasenose in 1849 and later became curate of Chilham in Kent and an Army chaplain.

Anyone wishing to experience the current and ongoing transformation of London's East End can do much worse than to take a walk from Whitechapel churchyard, close to Aldgate East underground station, to Wapping station on the old East London underground line, now rebranded as part of the Overground system. A tiny image on the Brasenose map shows the church with a transept that was part of a rebuilding in 1673, supplying a date before which the map cannot have been produced; the Second World War blitz put paid to the Victorian church on the site, which was not rebuilt. John Stow, writing in 1598, referred to the 'filthy cottages' nearby, and the churchyard, never one of the more salubrious of London's open spaces, is still somewhat dingy despite the gradual encroachment of glitzy office blocks to the west. South of Whitechapel Road, the main road leading east from the City, was Goodman's Fields, taking their name, according to Stow, from a farmer whose son 'let out the ground first for grazing of horses, and then for garden-plots, and lived like a gentleman thereby'. Still open ground when the map was produced, the fields were surrounded by houses in the early eighteenth century and were completely built over in the nineteenth; the name has been revived in a recent development of shared-ownership flats by Berkeley Homes.

'Loft-style apartments' are currently being advertised in nineteenth-century warehouses in Church Lane, now Backchurch Lane, extending south from Whitechapel churchyard along the parish boundary with Stepney. At its southern end was Rosemary Lane, which continued east as 'Knock Furgus', now Cable Street, the setting for a famous confrontation between local residents and Sir Oswald Mosley's blackshirt marchers in 1936. Ever since the late seventeenth century Whitechapel has seen successive waves of immigrants: first Sephardic Jews, German Lutherans, Danes, Norwegians and Irish, then in the later nineteenth century Ashkenazy Jews, and more recently Bangladeshis. The Bangladeshi presence is clearly visible at the beginning and ending of the day at St Paul's Church of England School, a building of 1869-70 that stands in the middle of Wellclose Square, between Cable Street and Ratcliffe Highway, now a noisy traffic-filled main road leading east from the City to Canary Wharf. The square, developed from 1682 by Nicholas Barbon and others, is shown in the Brasenose map together with a tiny picture of a pump, but the Danish church on the site of the Victorian school, built in 1694-6, was not included. Some of the surrounding houses survived until the 1960s; a

photograph taken in 1943 shows a timber-framed and weatherboarded house of c.1730 with a Venetian window, next to a row of earlier brick houses. Diagonal alleys (not shown in the Brasenose map) led off from each corner of the square, in one of which (Grace's Alley) John Wilton, a butcher's son from Bath, built the music hall that still bears his name behind a pub in 1858-9. Now the square is overlooked by the St George's Estate of 28-storey blocks of council flats built by the LCC in the 1960s.

The parish of Wapping had a very different character. Occupying a narrow slither of reclaimed marshland alongside the Thames, the hamlet already contained 'many small tenements' when Stow wrote, and by the time Strype issued his edition of 1720 it was 'chiefly inhabited by seafaring men and tradesmen dealing in commodities for the supply of shipping and shipmen'. The street layout, clearly shown in the Brasenose map, was determined by the underlying topography, with a main street snaking east along the river bank from 'Armitage' [Hermitage] Stairs to Execution Dock, where pirates were hanged. The tower of the parish church of 1756 survives, as does the churchyard, now a public garden, and the former charity school, rebuilt after 1756 with Coade Stone figures of children in niches over the doorway. But in the nineteenth century the landscape was transformed by the building of tall brick warehouses, creating one of London's most distinctive urban ensembles, which can still be enjoyed following the conversion of the buildings into expensive flats, advertised in the estate agents' premises that have colonised some of the former shops. Low-rise council flats went up in the inter-war period along the narrow streets behind (Green Bank, etc), but the open ground to the north, still in the late seventeenth century part of the very large parish of Stepney, was given over in 1801-5 to the newly created London Dock, which disgorged into the Thames through a lock still lined with handsome brick houses built for dock officials. Following the closure of the docks in 1969 new private housing went up on part of the site in the 1980s, and more is still being built at the time of writing, one development promising a 'vibrant new neighbourhood with shops, cafes and restaurants': a far cry from the isolated, quiet and somewhat forlorn neighbourhood that I remember when I first started exploring this part of London in the 1960s. But change is of the essence of cities, and should not always be regretted; the important thing is to try and understand it within the context of the past, and with the publication by the London Topographical Society of Simon Morris's catalogue of the parish maps of London, promised for next year, and in due course of the Whitechapel volume of the Survey of London, that is a task that will become easier, and even more worthwhile.

– Geoffrey Tyack

*Acknowledgment: I am grateful to Peter Guillery of the Survey of London for his helpful comments on a draft of this article.*

## London's almshouses, a living tradition

David Crawford moves through history.

Scope for Londoners to experience the history of the city's oldest form of social housing has been splendidly enriched since the 2017 opening of its doors by the Grade I-listed Charterhouse in Islington. Its buildings have been in continuous occupation since their founding in 1611 – as refuges for aged single men alongside a (now departed) school, originally for boys from poor families.

Currently resident are some 40 'Brothers' (a number now women) aged over 60 who lead some of the tours that are now available, adding the flavour of their own individual experiences. Services in the chapel, which continue to use the language of the seventeenth century *Book of Common Prayer*, are also open to the public. (Information from [www.thecharterhouse.org](http://www.thecharterhouse.org).)

New features include a small, but meticulously laid-out, museum (free entry), slotted into a previously underused space whose previous roles have been as a school staff room, billiards room and archive store. Designers Pringle Richards Sharratt have imaginatively taken advantage of its narrowness to create a 'U'-shaped journey through six centuries of history in reverse, from the lives of today's Brothers to the remains of a Black Death victim, found during an archaeological dig in advance of Crossrail.



Inside the new Charterhouse Museum



The London Charterhouse

In between come a fifteenth-century map of the medieval water supply system, evidence of its grandeur as a Tudor mansion and echoes of the long departed school. Among these is a 'black book' of discipline recording pupils' lapses, every three of which earned a birching. Late in its occupancy, the school offered its pupils a less physical option – which they rejected on the grounds that the birch was more 'gentlemanly'. O tempora! O mores!

Meanwhile, a glimpse of life in almshouses in the more recent past has long been on offer at the Geffrye Museum of the Home, in Hoxton, which occupies a Grade I-listed range of buildings put up in 1714 by the Ironmongers' Company to house poor pensioners. In the early twentieth century, with Hoxton now a slum, the company moved these away, selling the site to the then London County Council, which preserved the front gardens as public open space.

At the same time, leaders of the Arts and Crafts movement, which championed traditional craftsmanship, petitioned the Council not to demolish the buildings, most of which were accordingly converted into the museum that opened in 1914. One fully restored section continues, to show – with appropriate furnishings – how successive generations of London's poor lived.

The museum is closed until early 2020 for a £14 million upgrade, overseen by Wright & Wright Architects, which will unlock 40% more space. But the exhibition almshouse remains open for tours on specific dates, while a programme of outdoor events also runs in the front gardens.

Most almshouses, being private residential accommodation, are not normally open to the public, so the two described above offer rare and worthwhile experiences.

Meanwhile, new buildings and extensions continue to be commissioned, designed and developed – the needs that inspired their predecessors continuing to press today. Some are winning recognition and awards in competition with conventional housing schemes.

In Streatham, for example, a scheme by BTPW architects for the Thrale Almshouses & Relief in Need Charity adds nine new homes to a refurbished cluster of locally-listed and sympathetically



**The Holmes Road Studios**

modernised and extended dwellings. These were originally built in the 1930s for women aged 60 or over, with strong local connections, to the design of Cecil M. Quilter. (They replaced an earlier building nearby – founded in 1832 by the surviving daughters of the Southwark brewer Henry Thrale, and his wife Hester, close friends of Dr Johnson – which had been demolished for redevelopment.)

The result has been selected as one of 15 case studies in Historic England’s 2017 study *Translating Good Growth for London’s Historic Environment*, written by architects and engineers Arup. This describes it as an “exemplar residential development”, which maintains and enhances “the existing historic character of a locally listed site, while adapting and improving housing provision to ensure it meets the needs of modern Londoners”.

The new dwellings complete an originally partly open quadrangle, delivering a previously lacking sense of enclosure and privacy – a traditional feature of almshouses. Allotment-style patches allow residents to plant their own vegetables or flowers within sight of their homes. The quality of the scheme has prompted Lambeth London Borough Council to include it within the Streatham Common Conservation Area.

North of the River Thames, Holmes Road Studios, which *The Guardian* has called an “imaginative reinvention of the almshouse for the twenty-first century”, made the newspaper’s 2016 list of the world’s 10 top buildings. Architect Peter Barber describes the resulting terraced ‘cottages’ as “micro homes for temporarily homeless people”. Twin terraces of small cottages built in companionable brick share an undulating overall parapet and show brightly painted front doors – as colourful as a row of beach huts – all fronting onto a central garden. Completion is due in 2019.

Barber sees residents working together on planting the garden and harvesting fruit and vegetables – sharing a toolshed and gaining a sense of control over their new environment. The site will also offer counselling and training support.

At project stage, this was the overall winner in the 2016 New London Architecture awards. The jury



commended it for giving residents the real sense of belonging, empowerment and self-worth needed to enable them to find their feet again “after the experiences that have brought them to homelessness”.



## **London Diaries of the Second World War**

*The London historian Professor Jerry White explores the variety of London diaries written during World War II, now made available through the London Record Society.*

Historians value diaries for many reasons; but for historians of war, diaries have a particular value. They show the individual in the thrall of extraordinary circumstances, often reacting to extreme events, where diarists are self-consciously aware that they are ‘living history’. It is no surprise that in the London Record Society’s [LRS] invaluable bibliography of unpublished Londoners’ diaries, those kept during the great wars of the twentieth century figure large:<sup>1</sup> no less than 76 per cent of London diaries begun in the fifty years from 1900 to 1949 were started in the twelve years of Britain’s major wars; over half were stimulated by involvement in Mass-Observation, the organisation established in 1937 as a ‘nation-wide intelligence service’.

Some of those diaries, unpublished in 2003 when the bibliography was produced, have now been printed by the LRS. The diary form has been something of a favourite for the LRS for some years, publishing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts and, in more recent years, twentieth-century diaries with a significant focus on Britain’s war years. They make fascinating reading, and I’ll try to give a flavour of them here.

Gladys Langford kept a diary from 1936, when she was 46, an elementary school teacher in one of the toughest and poorest London districts, Hoxton in Shoreditch.<sup>2</sup> From early 1939 she contributed extensively to Mass-Observation questionnaires and the LRS diary contains her entries for these as

well as her daily journal. She was a misfit in many ways and often low in spirit; some of the rare moments of joy in her life come from her physical relationship with her married Jewish lover, but her capacity for love was never fully requited. One consequence perhaps was an increasing tendency to depression and anxiety as she approached her fifties, made worse by the international political climate of the times she was unlucky enough to live through. She rather shied away from wartime responsibilities, saying she was unfit to leave London when the school and its children were evacuated two days before war was declared, though assisting in the planning. Yet, as it became clear that many children stayed behind with their parents, and as many others returned to London during the Phoney War period, her school reopened and Gladys resumed teaching there once more. This was one of the most demanding jobs in wartime London, children's lives disrupted in so many ways, their behaviour even more unruly than in peacetime, but Gladys found some rewards in the task: "It is strange how engrossed I am nowadays in my work and how great is my affection for the boys I teach," she wrote in 1942.

Kathleen Tipper, another LRS diarist, was just twenty at the outbreak of war, so a generation younger than Gladys Langford.<sup>3</sup> It was Mass-Observation that inspired her to begin a daily journal from July 1941, after the main London blitz had been ended a month. She was born and brought up in Woolwich, where both her parents had worked in munitions at the Arsenal during the First World War; the family were not at all well off, aspiring working-class is probably the best way to describe them, for the children were all encouraged to win scholarships to a sound education. Kathleen was a clerk for a shipping company in Holborn, one of the worst-bombed districts in London by the blitz's end. Like so many of these diarists she was a fluent and captivating writer with a sharp-eyed interest in everything about her. Kathleen was a home girl, very close to her parents and two siblings, and part of the diary's charm is the way it unfolds for us the complete penetration of war into their everyday lives, and yet how everyday life could sometimes become so overwhelming that the most momentous of world events shrink into insignificance: her life is shattered for many months when her mother is diagnosed with cancer and dies in November 1943. In general, though, the war was indeed pervasive. Kathleen notes at one point how, among the doctors who had treated her mother, there had been two Austrians and a Czech surgeon, an entirely new experience for patients in London's hospital services. And the war completely took over her daily life. Not only did she work each day at the office but many evenings and most weekends were taken up by voluntary work: serving in the YMCA canteen for men and women in uniform, taking out mobile canteens to workers on bomb sites, barrage balloon crews and so on. Later in the war she spent evenings working at the NZ

Club for New Zealanders and other allied soldiers in Charing Cross Road. Kathleen, who knew very little of the world beyond Woolwich and central London, suddenly found the world had come to her.

The final and most recent LRS wartime diary is that of Anthony Heap, a rather extraordinary man for many of the wrong reasons.<sup>4</sup> Heap was lower middle-class with intellectual pretensions that were frustrated less by social disadvantage than by lack of talent. He was a bitter and vituperative individual, naturally drawn to a contrarianism that turned towards right-wing conservatism and for a time to fascism. He spent all his life in the north London borough of St Pancras, twenty-nine when war broke out. He was an obsessive longterm diarist, keeping a daily diary for fifty-seven years from 1928 to 1985, from which the LRS has made a selection from 1931 to 1945, with most emphasis on the war years. The war was problematic for Anthony. Sympathising with Hitler's ambitions and politics, antisemitic but not rabidly so, Heap opposed the declaration of war in 1939 and even when London was blitzed felt that was a justified punishment for Churchill's obduracy in opposing Germany's legitimate objectives. On the other hand, he was also a knowledgeable Londonist. He loved and cared for his city and deplored the damage done to it, which he charted day by day in St Pancras and more widely afield. So, like most of us, he was a mixture. Heap's diary, then, is an extraordinary and fascinating document. And when one reads it, and treads through the perplexities of his life and his yearnings, so often unrequited, for women and for a career as a theatre critic – he visited first nights on the London stage as a quasi-religious obligation – he becomes almost lovable. Almost.

In all, these diaries present us with a clear-sighted window on London at war. Inevitably they throw light on class relations and gender relations too. They cannot stand alone, because no historical source can. But they can certainly stand proud.

– Jerry White, Birkbeck

1. Heather Creaton (compiler), *Unpublished London Diaries. A Checklist of unpublished diaries by Londoners and visitors with a Select Bibliography of published diaries*, 2003.
2. Patricia and Robert Malcolmson (eds), *A Free-Spirited Woman. The London Diaries of Gladys Langford, 1936-1940*, 2014.
3. Patricia and Robert Malcolmson (eds), *A Woman in Wartime London. The Diary of Kathleen Tipper 1941-1945*, 2006, p45.
4. Robin Woolven (ed), *The London Diary of Anthony Heap 1931-1945*, 2017.



## Reviews

### **The Livery Halls of the City of London**

by Anya Lucas and Henry Russell with  
photography by Andreas von Einsiedel. Merrell,  
2018 280pp. ISBN 978 1 85894 670 2. HB £45

Here is a valuable and beautifully presented book on a surprisingly neglected subject – for there has never before been a satisfactory, fully illustrated account of the City's livery halls. The most recent pictorial treatment is that by W. A. D. Englefield, edited and partly rewritten by Peter Lubbock for publication in 1981. This was illustrated with Howard Penton's pre-war drawings, many of which show buildings or interiors lost in the Blitz, or otherwise remade since. George Whiteman's *Halls and Treasures of the City Companies* (1970) has contemporary illustrations, but covers only fourteen halls: ten from the 'Great Twelve', and four from the unbombed minor companies further down the order of precedence. *The Buildings of England City* volume of 1997, revised by this reviewer, includes just six plans, and a dozen or so other illustrations. Even detailed studies covering all the incarnations of individual companies' halls are few; Priscilla Metcalf on the Fishmongers' Halls (1984) and Jean Imray on the Mercers' (LTS, 1991) are the outstanding ones.

The new survey is an initiative of the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects, founded in 1985 and ninety-eighth in order of precedence (just above the Environmental Cleaners and just below the Constructors). That new livery companies continue to be founded is a testimony to their enduring appeal as social and charitable organisations, even if few of the newcomers have acquired halls of their own. Exceptions include the Furniture Makers, granted livery status in 1963, and since 2006 ensconced in converted late Victorian premises in Austin Friars.

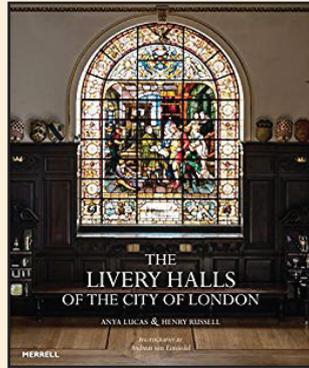
The Furniture Makers' sweeping cantilevered timber staircase is duly included among the book's wonderfully comprehensive colour photographs. Typically combining natural with artificial lighting, Andreas von Einsiedel's views capture the companies' interiors and furnishings in great detail, in many cases for the first time in book form. The only penalty of his clear lighting is that individual atmospheres tend to be suppressed. For instance, the Ironmongers' Hall, opened in 1925, appears here without much sense of the haunting nostalgia for Old England that pervades its finely crafted Jacobethan interiors, with their thick plasterwork and gently blurring outlook through leaded lights to

the towers of the Barbican and London Wall. Against this, the livery companies themselves strongly incline to an up-to-date, bright-gilt-and-polish look, even where their buildings date back to the great rebuilding after the Great Fire. Topographically speaking, Einsiedel's beautifully legible treatment is also all gain and no loss.

In addition, plans are provided for every hall (though without scales or north points), as well as many historic plans and views. These are concentrated in two chapters by Anya Lucas, comprising an introduction and a summary of the lost halls, which top and tail the forty individual descriptions by Henry Russell. Some of this graphic material is inevitably familiar, but much is little-known or new. One coup is the inclusion of several recently identified watercolours of livery hall exteriors made by Samuel Ireland around 1794, and now at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven.

These two chapters are full of insights into the patronage, function and design of the seventeenth-century livery halls especially, and the book would make a major contribution to understanding of the period for these alone. The London building world before the Civil War, when Charles I and his ministers sought to impose their own ideals on an increasingly restive City and its guilds, is contrasted with the post-Fire reconstruction, when the livery companies were left to rebuild according to their own lights. What resulted drew on the mixed classicism which Summerson labelled Artisan Mannerism, especially for the halls' public frontispieces of carved stone. Already outdated by the standards of Wren and the Court, the style was nonetheless well matched to the task of projecting the companies' image of prosperity and continuity, and their need for heraldic display. The link between architectural display and contemporary ideas of credit and honour, both corporate and individual, emerges as a consistent theme. Anja Lucas's article on the livery halls in the *Georgian Group Journal* for 2018, and her chapter in the Paul Mellon Centre's multi-authored volume *Court, Country, City: British Art and Architecture 1660–1735* (2016), both explore this rewarding territory in greater depth.

The companies' architectural history over later centuries awaits comprehensive study, including the crucial phase of post-war rebuilding, though there is much useful information in Henry Russell's detailed accounts. The tone of this section is more descriptive and celebratory, as might be expected in a book dependent on the companies' own collaboration and sponsorship. Here and there, the companies' own traditions concerning their homes receive more deference than they deserve. Thus the Coopers' Hall in Devonshire Square is certainly not a survivor from Nicholas Barbon's development of 1675 onwards, but one of a pair of solid mid-Georgian houses, presumably built as replacements after the expiry of Barbon's customary sixty-year leases. Likewise, Englefield's



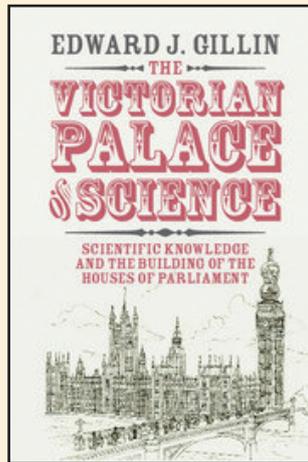
hopeful suggestion that Wren rather than Edward Jerman may have designed the Haberdashers' Hall of 1667-8 does not deserve resurrection here.

The Haberdashers' current Hall stands off West Smithfield, designed by Sir Michael Hopkins and built on back land in 2000-2. It features the expected livery hall, court room and lesser offices, here laid out around a courtyard, like the late medieval houses with which the building type originated. Anya Lucas and Henry Russell's book is a worthy tribute to this extraordinary longevity.

– Simon Bradley

**The Victorian Palace of Science. Scientific Knowledge and the Building of the Houses of Parliament** by Edward J. Gillin. Cambridge University Press, 2017. 325 pp 39 figures, bibliography and index. ISBN 978 1 10841 966 6. £75

The current controversy about the repair of the Houses of Parliament reminds one of the controversies that surrounded them when building, after the old Houses were burned out in October 1834. Dr Gillin has drawn on the extensive body of recent publications in 'science in history' as well as a very wide range of contemporary archives and periodicals to penetrate the arguments that raged around the New Palace at Westminster: matters of site, form and style for a start; then geology and metallurgy for the building material; ventilation and lighting for the comfort of MPs; and time-keeping to ensure their efficiency.



The site, for a start, was denounced as low-lying, unhealthy and poverty-stricken; symbolic of 'old corruption'. But the rival power of the tradition of centuries and historical associations triumphed. Style, too, was regarded as powerfully symbolic; the successful Gothic could be variously interpreted.

Utilitarians, such as David Hume, MP and physician, with their radical tendencies, played a significant role in advocating innovative projects, most notably and with some success in questions of ventilation and lighting, promoting the claims of experts. Science was then an uncertain matter, admits Dr Gillin: it is the nature of the scientific controversies in these several fields that fascinates him and that he explores in depth. The architect Charles Barry asserted his professionalism by seeking a scientific choice of building stone, through examining quarries and the endurance of ancient buildings.

Ventilation is the major element in this study: having the greatest impact on the comfort of MPs it

was the most irritably argued; though for the public chiefly a source of amusement, in cartoons and ephemera. Giffin makes a fair case for the expert at the centre of this controversy, Dr David Boswell Reid, a medical man from the industrial and academic vortex of Edinburgh, brought forward by Hume. His continuous experiments in the Temporary Houses of Parliament, a science of observation and induction, gave some satisfaction in the Commons, but the New House demanded a more stable science that Reid was unable to provide, though he forced Barry to design a central tower in the new Palace, 'the first occasion', as Peter Collins observed (*Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, 1976), 'when mechanical services had a real influence on architectural design'. Similarly, lighting was to be determined on the basis of stable, not merely experimental science.

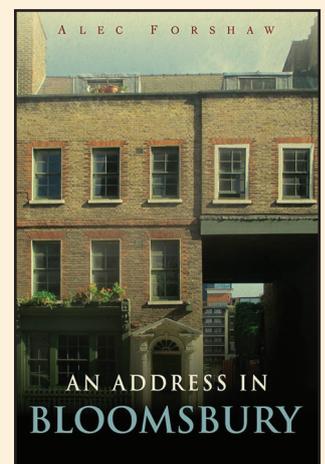
Time was the empire of Sir George Airy, Astronomer Royal, who sought to establish a nation-wide uniform time, transmitted from Greenwich via Westminster by electro-magnetism, whereby 'Science could govern Parliament', by bringing order to the day's business. This, one may argue, was a political issue, but in general, although Utilitarian radicals were vociferous enough, it is difficult to fix these issues as political except in the most general sense.

The manifold references required for the impressive range of sources cited are mercifully housed at the foot of each page. It is a pity, though, in so expensive a book, that the illustrations, ranging from cartoons to architectural drawings, are not of a better quality.

– M. H. Port

**An Address in Bloomsbury** by Alec Forshaw, Brown Dog Books 2017 397pp. ISBN 978 1 78545 198 0. £20

In 1993 Alec Forshaw purchased 49 Great Ormond Street, a house built in 1686 as part of Nicholas Barbon's development of a terrace looking north from the edge of London over open fields to Hampstead and Highgate. During nearly 300 years the house had been altered to some extent but because the area gradually became less fashionable it had escaped major modernisation and internal reorganisation. Forshaw made exciting discoveries. Original



panelling painted green with red trim was hidden under early eighteenth-century panelling itself covered in modern plaster board. A layer of concrete screed on the floor of the entrance hall was removed to reveal the original Purbeck flagstones and diamond-shaped black Namur

marble inserts. The account of the year-long process of removing decayed linoleum “congealed like black bitumen” from six flights of stairs indicates how much determination was involved in his meticulous restoration.

Until renumbering by the Post Office in 1885 Forshaw’s house was 13 Great Ormond Street, and number 49 was the address of one of the mansions built between 1708 and 1714 on the north side of the street. The author has used this duplication of numbers as a reason to discuss in detail not only the history of his own house but also that of the house opposite on the site of the present Great Ormond Street Hospital. It was the home of the eminent physician Richard Mead (1673-1754), whose great art collection would have been enjoyed by visitors including Alexander Pope, Edmund Halley, William Hogarth and Hans Sloane. As well as treating royalty and the rich and famous, Mead was a governor of the nearby Foundling Hospital. It was in his house, a hundred years later, that Dr Charles West set up the first hospital in Britain to focus on the care of sick children. Forshaw discusses a whole range of historical figures who have been connected with the immediate area from the financier John Law who killed a man in a duel in 1694 before fleeing abroad, to the antiquarian William Stukeley, rector of St George the Martyr, who was the first to make a scholarly study of Stonehenge, Elihu Yale who left a huge bequest that went to found a university in Connecticut, and William Morris who taught at the Working Men’s College at 45 Great Ormond Street and ran his business in Queen Square.

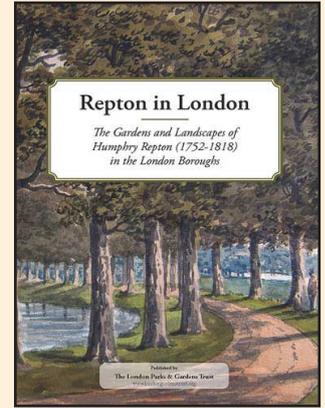
Of most interest for the built history of London are Forshaw’s accounts of Barbon’s development in open fields on the edge of town, of the laying out of the streets of eastern Bloomsbury in the eighteenth century, and of the recovery after devastating Second World War bombing. Barbon’s developments increased the demand for water which could not be met by Lamb’s Conduit or by the Devil’s Conduit in what became the north-west corner of Queen Square. In 1704 the New River Company built a reservoir on higher land near Islington (now Claremont Square) so that the pressure would be sufficient to take water in wooden pipes across the valley of the Fleet, but water supply was unreliable and until the twentieth century poor families still relied on fetching water from public pumps.

The book is an excellent introduction to the topography and changing history of this small part of London, and proves that a tight focus can reveal a great deal of wider interest.

– Sheila O’Connell

**Repton in London. The Gardens and Landscapes of Humphry Repton (1752-1818) in the London Boroughs**, 2018, The London Parks and Gardens Trust. 116pp, numerous illustration, soft covers. £15 + £2.28 p&p.  
Available from [londongardenstrust.org](http://londongardenstrust.org)

The London Parks and Gardens Trust must be congratulated for publishing this collection of essays celebrating Repton 200 years after his death. The book brings together an impressive body of research by different authors, adding to our understanding of landscapes created on the periphery of London at a time when wealthy owners delighted in enhancing the setting of their country residences. Humphry Repton, who specialised in improvements of this kind, began working in the London area in 1789, a year after he set himself up as a professional consultant. As is shown by the gazetteer compiled by Susan Dorling, for nearly 30 years he was involved in more than 50 sites in the London boroughs; on 25 of these something remains, and, we are told, ‘it is likely there are more Repton sites to be discovered’. Repton worked for both large and small clients. Many of his schemes were published in *Peacock’s Polite Repository* and helped to form the taste for picturesque settings, even though aspects of the grander schemes proposed in his famous ‘Red Books’ with their ‘before and after’ views were not always executed.



An introduction by Michael Sykes discusses how Repton had ‘the eye and the ability of an artist’, and favoured a picturesque style, but had a more flexible approach than his rivals, the country gentlemen Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight. Aware of the needs of the client, Repton often provided for pleasure grounds near the house, with more natural parkland beyond, unlike Capability Brown’s practice of bringing meadowland right up to the house.

Kenwood and Wanstead were the subjects of his two major London studies. For Kenwood, discussed by Emily Parker, Repton produced a Red Book in 1793 for the second Earl of Mansfield. Although Repton was little involved in the detailed work which followed, his basic principles were adopted and Kenwood was transformed from a modest villa into the landscaped country mansion still visible today. The road to the north was moved away from the entrance, offices and farm buildings rebuilt further east, a pleasure ground created to the west, and the houses of Kentish Town to the south concealed by a belt of trees, giving the illusion of a much larger estate extending to the edge of built up London. Wanstead is a different story. Repton reported in 1813 to the current owners, the ambitious but impecunious Wellesleys (the full account was discovered only in 2002); he respected the formal aesthetic of Colen Campbell’s grandiose palace and extensive formal grounds completed c.1720 for Sir Richard Child, but wished to exploit the distant views through artful frames of arbours, trees, bridges and other features. Sally Jeffery



An autumn view of the curved arbour, Russell Square, inspired by Repton's design

discusses both Repton's report and a set of proposals by Lewis Kennedy – all fruitless as the owners ran out of money; the house was sold in 1822 and demolished. Yet substantial parts of the park remain (partly as a golf course), and this is a valuable discussion of an important historic landscape whose future management remains under discussion.

At the other end of the scale, Repton produced innovative ideas for the landscaping of London squares. These can now be seen only in Russell Square, where the re-landscaping of 2000-1 was inspired by Repton's layout of 1800, and his horseshoe-shaped arbour and central lawn were re-created. His inventiveness was also demonstrated in proposals for Cadogan Square (1806) – creating interest by contouring the site with a valley through the centre – and for pleasure grounds with groups of tall trees to enhance the older Bloomsbury Square, but his proposals there were rejected by the local residents.

One can wander through this book as if one was an artist, or a seeker for the picturesque led by one of those numerous early nineteenth-century tourist guides to London's environs – to the grounds of the Casina at Dulwich, where Repton converted the eyesore of brick pits to a 'spacious canal'; to Haling Park in South Croydon where Repton's landscape was entered past a rustic cottage orné lodge (the main house has been replaced by Whitgift School), or to White Lodge in Richmond Park, where Repton created gardens for the Ranger, Viscount Sidmouth, in place of the deer and cattle wandering freely around the entrance; and to more sites than can be discussed here – in south-west London, the Northern Heights, Wembley, north-west Kent. The book is carefully referenced, and the illustrations are charming and numerous, but too small, as is the font size. Keeping the price down is praiseworthy, but it should not be at the expense of legibility.

– Bridget Cherry

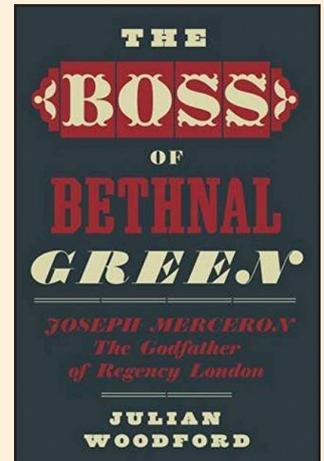
## The Boss of Bethnal Green: Joseph Merceron, The Godfather of Regency London

by Julian Woodford, Spitalfields Life Books Ltd, 2016, 396pp, ISBN 978 0 95765 696 3, £20

This book is a scholarly biography of Joseph Merceron, a figure who scowls across the history of late-Georgian London. Malevolent and corrupt beyond measure, and all-powerful in Bethnal Green, Merceron had tentacles that stretched more widely. His impact was extensive and his methods supply a salutary lesson for historians.

Joseph Merceron (1764-1839) was the son of James Merceron, a Huguenot silk weaver who had become a Brick Lane pawnbroker. The father's profits permitted diversification into property, as a landlord and a developer of poor-quality tenement housing. Joseph picked up from this grounding and manoeuvred through the vestry to become Bethnal Green's treasurer in 1787, and thence a Middlesex magistrate in 1795. He was ruthless and shameless – he bullied Mary Cheesman, the mentally infirm owner of around fifty tenements at the north end of Brick Lane, into signing away her property for five shillings, he had his half-sister committed to an asylum as a lunatic to deprive her of her inheritance, and he siphoned poor-relief funds into his own pockets. It is important to know that Merceron had numerous cronies, including the Reverend Anthony Natt and the brewer Sampson Hanbury. He became untouchable, and early attempts to combat his corruption failed. His power held until he was jailed in 1818 for misappropriation of funds and the licensing of public houses used as brothels. Out a year later, he quickly re-established himself. Still refusing to conform to notions of law-abiding respectability, he was imprisoned again for organising bullock hunting in Bethnal Green's churchyard. Again he returned and still retained his power, and his popularity, which was generated perhaps by awe as much as fear. Merceron had a grand funeral. Merceron Street is in the south-west corner of the parish of Bethnal Green, and the East End Dwellings Company put up Merceron Houses off Globe Road in 1901. Despite the Luftwaffe's local attentions, the Merceron family tomb survives in Bethnal Green's parish churchyard.

Through parish and other administration, Merceron controlled numerous documents that historians and topographers now use as sources. Not the least valuable aspect of Woodford's biography is its careful use of documents (court papers, newspapers and parish accounts) to illustrate how dodgy other documents can be.



Numerous instances of ratebook fraud are cited. These overlap with some good anecdotes. Here's one.

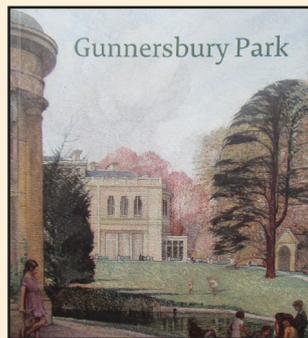
Merceron crossed swords with John Liptrap, a major Whitechapel distiller and a man of distinction, a magistrate, philanthropist and a Sheriff of London in 1795, whose most egregious claim to fame came a year later when he chased Prince George from his house on finding him in bed with his wife. Liptrap exposed Merceron's fraudulent management of parish funds in 1800, but his righteous campaign was mysteriously undone. In 1803 there were allegations of duty fraud at the distillery, and bankruptcy proceedings followed. Thomas Barnes, a bricklayer and Whitechapel's leading builder, was a Tower Hamlets Commissioner of Sewers under Merceron's chairmanship. He had developed a large plot west of Liptrap's distillery with around a hundred small houses in the late 1790s. Having read Woodford's book, I was startled to stumble onto entries in a sewer commissioners' ratebook from 1803 that record Liptrap and Barnes on successive lines as holding property valued respectively at 12s and £9, overwritten and reversed in January 1804, a marginal note claiming an error. Liptrap's struggle with bankruptcy in 1804 was perhaps not unrelated.

As this demonstrates, Merceron's life had resonance beyond Bethnal Green, in Spitalfields, Whitechapel and the other Tower hamlets, but also for all of London in what it reveals about some of the worst aspects of the period's local government and judicial systems. Woodford's deeply researched account in what is his first book tells us much about parish administration and magistracy in general. It is at once unedifying and entertaining, disturbing and much recommended.

– Peter Guillery

**Gunnersbury Park. The Place and the People,**  
2018. 48pp. Scala Arts and Heritage Publishers Ltd  
and Friends of Gunnersbury Park Museum.  
ISBN 978 1 78551 132 5

This attractively produced booklet, with a lively text by the West London historians Val Bott and James Wisdom, celebrates a site of great historical interest which for decades has been a major conservation nightmare. Now, thanks to impressive fundraising, in a £21 million first phase the attractive park has been given new life, the crumbling garden buildings repaired, the café rebuilt, and the mansion restored so that it can now more adequately house the local history museum of the boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow, the joint owners of the park.



The text, excellently illustrated, tells the complicated story of the two mansions, outbuildings, gardens and park sited at the western end of the North Circular Road. The present main mansion is best known for its ownership from 1834 by Nathan Mayer Rothschild. The Rothschilds made lavish improvements to garden and grounds, acquiring the neighbouring Gunnersbury House in 1889, once part of the original estate. The family sold up in the 1920s when the appeal of the area had decreased with the advent of suburban development. After much prevarication Gunnersbury was eventually acquired by the local authorities and opened as a public park.

The older history of owners and occupiers is equally interesting. Records start with Alice Perrers, mistress of Edward III, when the park was arable and pasture land; she was followed by a series of London families, then the lawyer Sir John Maynard who in 1663 commissioned John Webb to build the novelty of a Palladian mansion in the tradition of Inigo Jones. In the earlier eighteenth century this was owned by the merchant and connoisseur Henry Furnese, who invited Handel to stay and employed William Kent to lay out the grounds. In 1762 the estate was acquired for Princess Amelia, second daughter of George II, who gave lavish parties, built a chapel and made additions to the grounds including a still surviving grotto. But Gunnersbury fell on hard times in the 1790s and was eventually bought by John Morley, floor cloth manufacturer, who demolished the house in 1800 and divided up the grounds for sale. Hence the existence of two mansions on the present site, the small mansion, an elegant Regency villa with veranda decorated with bells, and the large mansion built for entrepreneur and developer Alexander Copland. On a third plot, a house was created from a former temple, and the old walled garden was let to the nurseryman Samuel Poupert. Copland bought up the remaining plots and so preserved the gardens and park, adding much distinguished planting before the estate was acquired by the Rothschilds.

So the present buildings and park offer an amazing wealth of older stories to explore, not only about the people involved but about changing taste in architecture and landscape gardening on the fringe of London, and finally about the changing priorities in the management of public spaces over the last hundred years. The authors must be congratulated on drawing so much material together in this modest publication. It deserves a much bigger book, with space for references and larger pictures – could this be among the aims of the further stages of the development programme? This aims at completion in 2026, centenary of the creation of the public park.

– Bridget Cherry

## London Topographical Society

The London Topographical Society was founded in 1880 for the study and appreciation of London. It is a registered charity (No. 271590) with around 1,200 members. The Society remains true to the vision of its founders by making available maps, plans and views illustrating the history, growth and topographical development of London at all periods, and by publishing research in the London Topographical Record. Details of all publications can be found on the Society's website: [www.londontopsoc.org](http://www.londontopsoc.org)

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