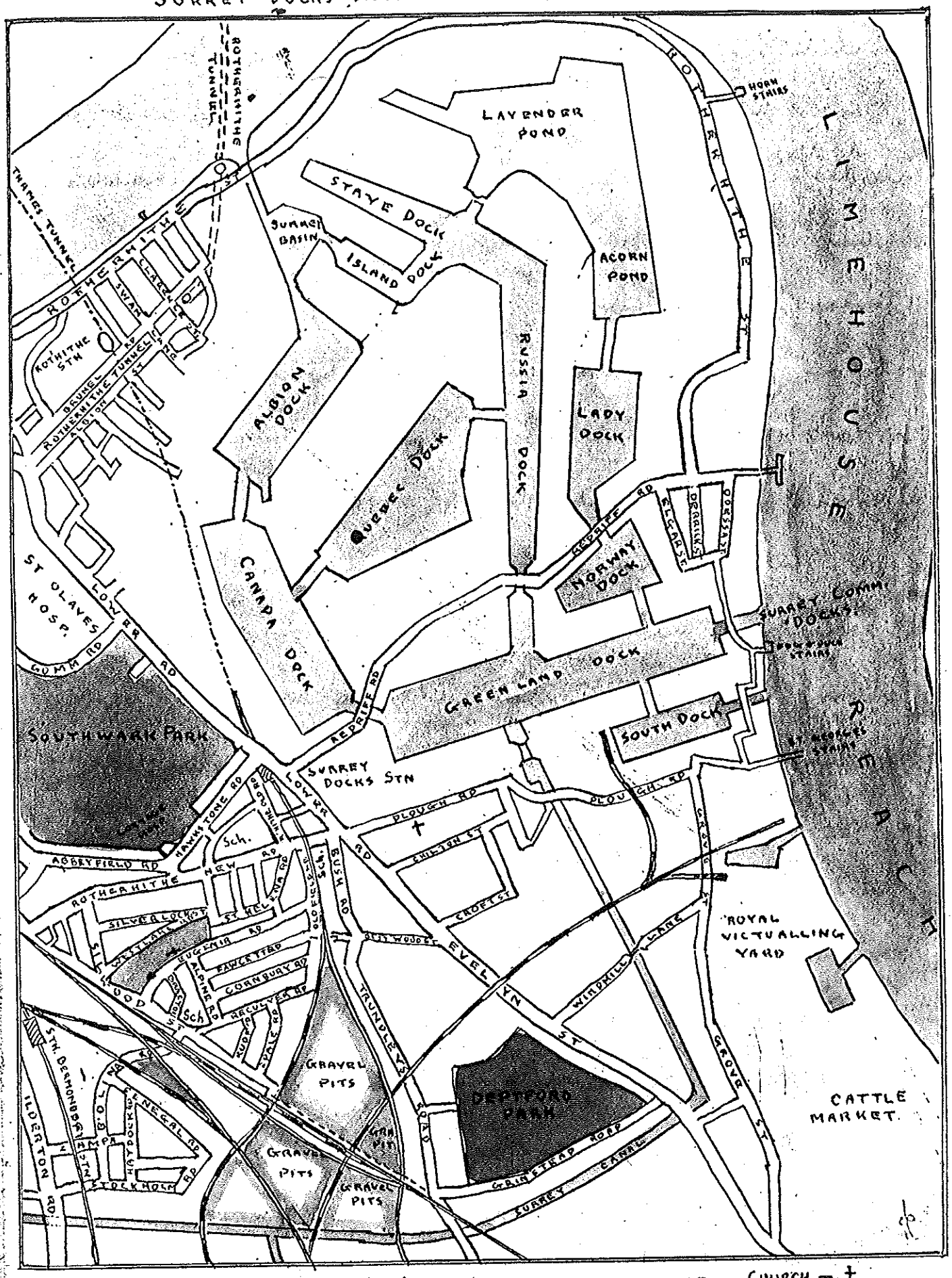
Copy No. three of Four.

The Lean Years.

By:- John Edmonds.

Completed May 1970.

SURREY DOCKS DISTRICT DURING THE 1920's AND 30's



REFERENCE:—

RAILWAYS — GOODS LINES; PASSENGER LINES; UNDERGROUND

FOOTPATHS

SCALE 0 ¼ ½ MILE

CHURCH — †

SCHOOL — SCH.

Foreword.

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 reorganisation 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 become 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 perambulation 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 cracked 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 pipes many years previously removed. But the walls were cracked and scarred, 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 windows from which scraps of black out material flapped and whispered in the faint breeze. Close by a door which remained hinged to its frame, creaked 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 shirr 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 friends 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 for ever, I would set down a record of people and memories associated with the neighbourhood before advancing years dulled my recollection

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 childsplay.

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 realising 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. When 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 principle 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 older sisters who go unshod, and their fathers cut down trousers or appear in public with certain portions of the anatomy which are normally covered, exposed to view. When many of these same children bore signs of malnutrition and vitamin deficiency upon their faces; for it was reasoned that the unemployed but potential wage earner must have the best of the available food to be able to work at the probable employment that might materialize 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, stoutly supported the Labour Party and blamed Mr Baldwin for every and anything. I thought this a little unfair but kept 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 pitiful 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 proximity to the railways, the river and docks, meant that the deep note of ocean going ships' sirens, 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 apparent during daylight hours. The steady one, two, three, four, beat of goods train engines making the long haul up the incline from Bricklayers Arms Goods Depôt 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 exchanges by the whistles of the leading and "pusher" engines of a goods train about to make the climb up to Canal Junction.

The metalic clank of locomotive side

[illegible] became more distinct when a change in the weather from fine to rainy conditions was imminent 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.

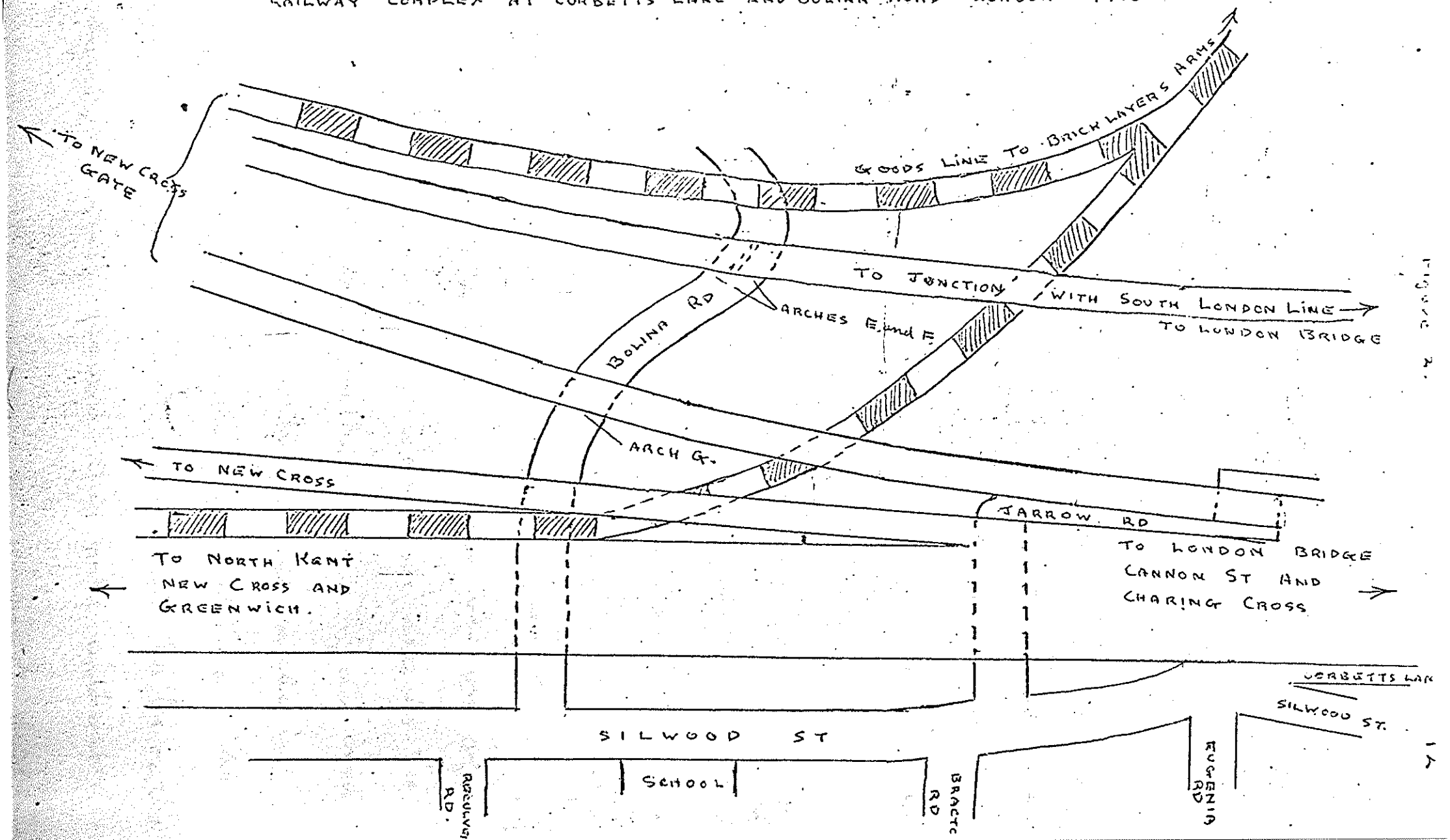
When preparing "The Lean Years." I decided to learn more about this railway system and its viaducts familiar to me in my childhood and found myself confronted with a tangle more difficult to unravel than the history of the later Plantagenets and the Wars of the Roses. A tale of legal squabbles and parliamentary manoeuvres involving the London + Greenwich, the London and Croydon, South Eastern, London Brighton and subsequent 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 [illegible]

the London and Greenwich dates from 1836, the last year of William the IV.th reign. Passenger trains ran between Deptford and Spa Road (London's first railway station) in the February of that year. The viaduct from London Bridge to Greenwich measured three and three-quarter miles. Most of the original 878 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 Croydon, 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 what is now New Cross Gate and the course

of the Croydon Canal which the railway company purchased together with its associated wharves and grounds for £ 44,250.

Before the 1939—1945 war, Corbetts Lane was an insignificant roadway with barely sufficient room for two vehicles to pass. Along its western side was a row of small dilapidated 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 depôt. Corbetts 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 Corbetts Lane is a curving roadway connecting what used to be the boroughs of Bermondsey and Camberwell.

RAILWAY COMPLEX AT CORBETTS LANE AND BOLINA ROAD LONDON S.E.16



This is Bolina 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 depôt 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 skirting the southern pier of an iron bridge over which is the widening made in 1903 to the Southeastern Railway. As a result of my fathers 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 iron bridge Queen Alexandra had travelled on her way from Denmark via Gravesend and Bricklayers Arms, to Windsor and her marriage to Edward the VII. I hoped, as a child would, she had passed this way by night and saw none of the rubbish and 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 was thinnest. Imagining it might collapse at any time, I never dawdled 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 lines south of this and the adjoining branch lay upon earthen embankments supporting a mixed flora including the ubiquitous coltsfoot and horseradish, 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 London to Croydon Railway to a junction with the South London 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 Trundleys 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 accomodation in the district during these 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 work in connection with its excavation had not begun. There were low trees, mostly elders, there was pinks 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 ban.

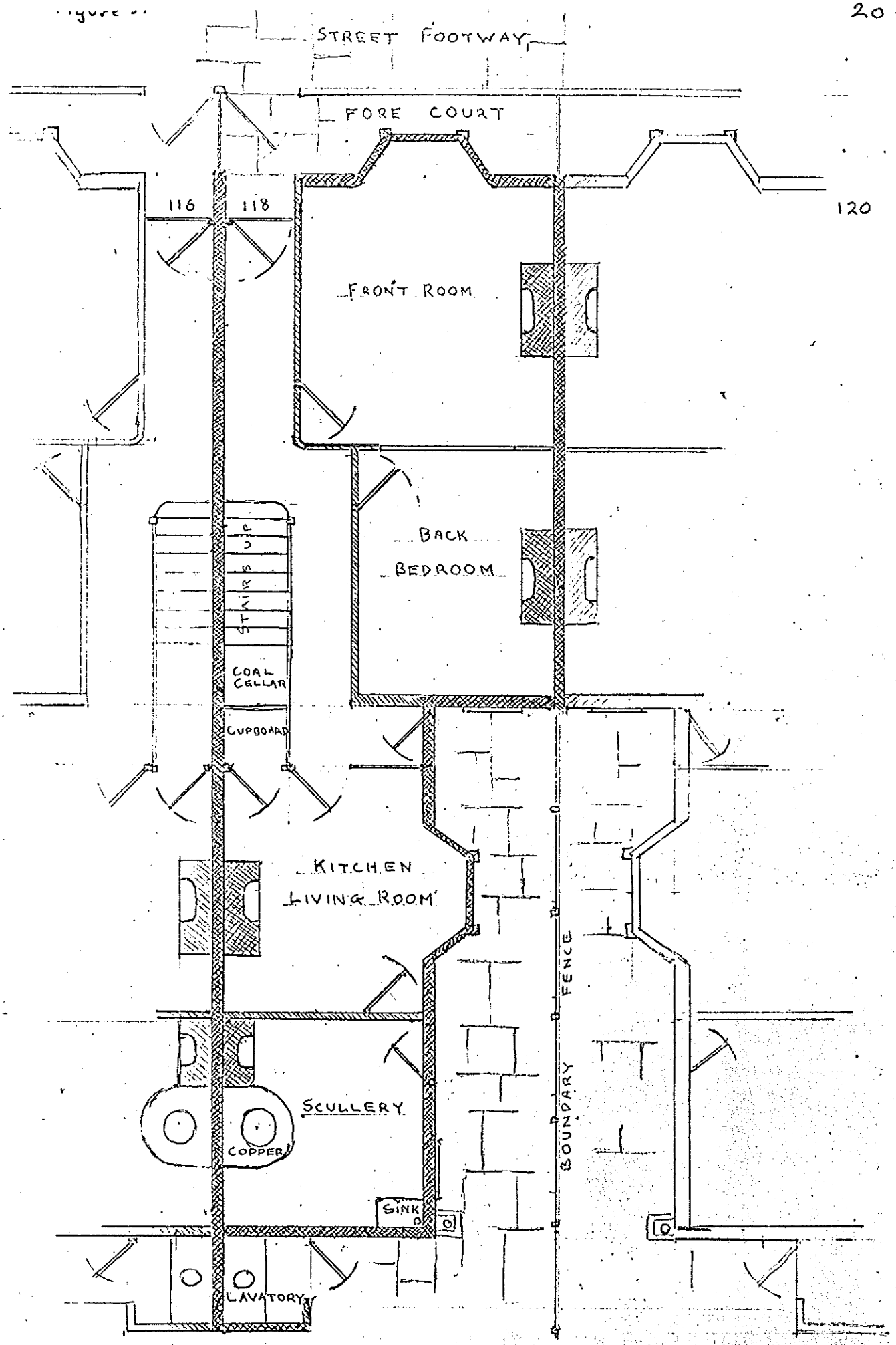
A traveller seated in the compartment of a train running over the viaducts south east of London Bridge receives little indication of the immensity, and in places, complexity of the structure below. For a mile and a half below London Bridge to a spur line serving South Bermondsey station on the South 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 accomodate 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. These 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,

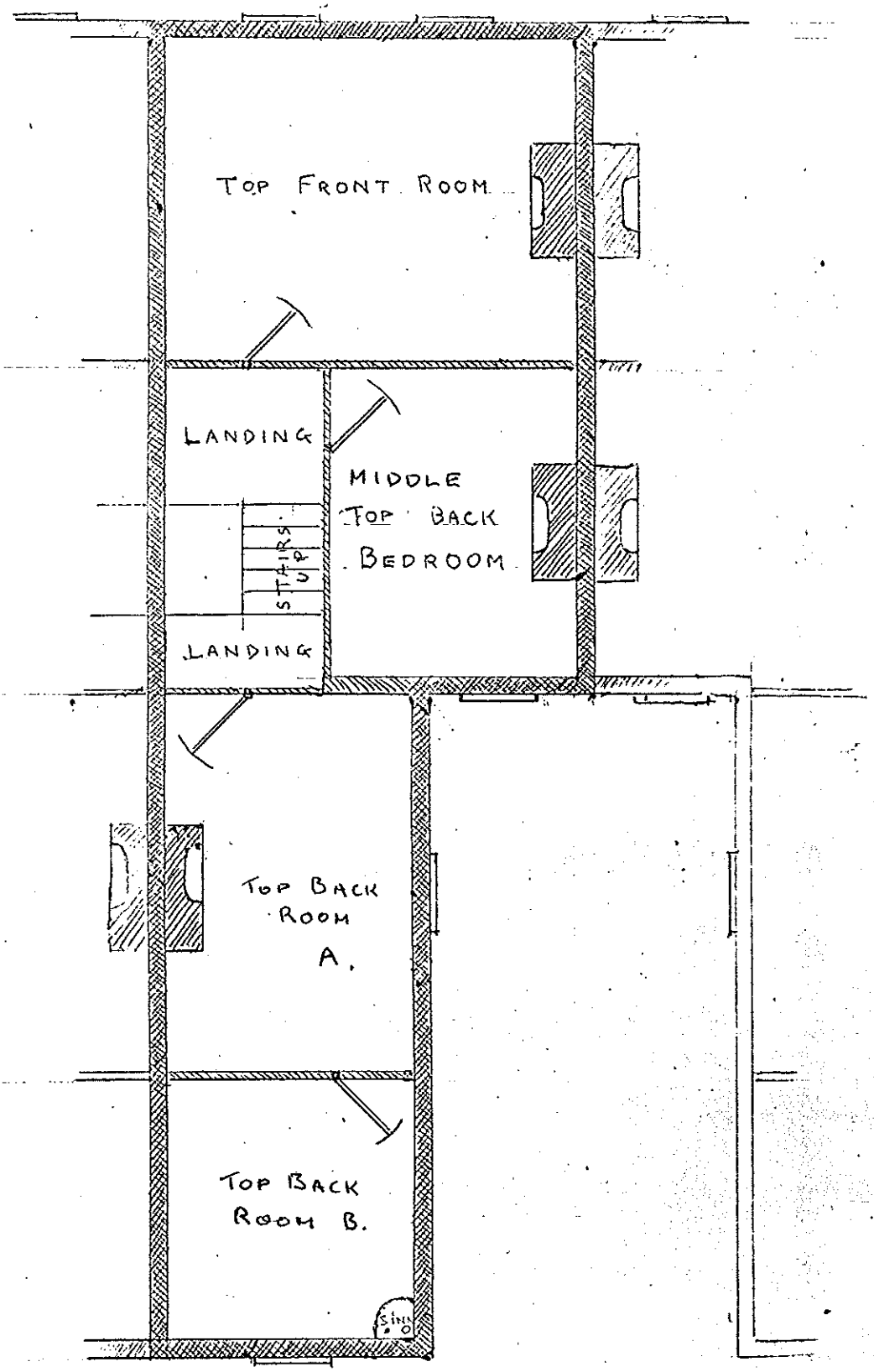
who as a young man had worked on one of the widening projects in this area, answered my question why this was so, with the explanation "Underground water. They drove piles upon piles, night and day for weeks for that one round the corner, and could not find a solid bottom. It broke old Groggan." At this 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 Groggan" 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 he met with a difficulty which forced bankruptcy upon him, an event by no means rare in the history of railway building in Great Britain during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Groggan's successor apparently overcame the problem by constructing a much wider pier whereby the weight of the superstructure is distributed over a much longer area than that originally intended. Because of the time penalties included in the original contract, it is hardly likely that Groggan'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 accomodate the extra width of old Groggan'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 "workmans 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'x15' euphemistically termed "the garden", in one corner of which built back to back fashion with that of the adjacent



GROUND FLOOR PLAN OF WORKMENS DWELLINGS BUILT ABOUT 1880 — MIRROR IMAGE, TERRACED. / SCALE — 3/16" to 1'



UPPER FLOOR PLAN OF WORKMENS DWELLINGS BUILT ABOUT 1880 / SCALE 3/16" to 1'.

house was the lavatory. Such [illegible] formed long narrow [illegible] one room wide built in continuous terraces [illegible] of the roads. They were constructed in mirror image pairs, the rooms opening from an internal passage and stairway to the left and right in alternate houses. Each room, with the single exception of the "top back" 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 huge brick built copper situated in the corner of an ante room called the scullery, and the two great iron kettles on the hob 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 teenaged high spirits exploded into general rough and tumbles which despite the deficiencies of the period were more frequent than otherwise. Many local householders

dispensed with gas as a means of illumination and had a supply of Municipal electricity installed, I believe shilling and tuppence per week for the privilege, which included free 60 watt lamps. Why father would have none of this new fangled stuff, disliking through fear. Fear of what three sons, each with an enquiring and inventive mind might devise with such a form of power conveniently handy, combined with a deeper somewhat superstitious fear of a force he did not fully comprehend.

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 fathers sister Ada occupying the "top front" while both "top back" rooms which formed a sort of self contained apartment, were tenanted by a vigorous old lady who thrice weekly scented the whole house with boiled shalte. The advent of my four sisters, including the twins, within five years of February 1917, presented my parents with the problem of

living suitable sleeping accommodation for a growing family. The "middle top" 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 holy of holies 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 appartments 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

[illegible] of war in the shape of a notice to Quit
form printed on bright blue paper, its blank spaces
peremptorily completed in feathery black copper plate
handwriting was affixed to her door with five
tacks. "I Joseph Thomas Edmonds hereby give
you notice to quit the rooms occupied by you as
tenant etc etc." by the — th of — 19 —"
it read. The notice promptly disappeared and
the vigorous old lady and my aunt began to
hold long councils in the formers 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 eldest 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 Tower Bridge
magistrates 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 1927 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 accomodation situations of the establishment for a while, until the the top back 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

six flaps exactly by exactly the same amount of some 3/8's of an inch. The gum was applied to the whole with a few deft strokes of the brush and allowed to dry while she took up those with flaps 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 folder 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 dont 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 London and remarkable for the scarcity of aspirates, so mother thought her

"Auntie". She called me, her nephew, "Cock" instead of using our Christian names. But she was funny, a natural blonde, nationality Irish, and could make people 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 "Ria", and the old lady The "De-lo bare". The latter name are the words Old Brute 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 front room 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 Katharines 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 "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 spying bout, my mother would take a brief rest and indulge

newspaper with the proceeds of [illegible] and the News of the World, while my father would return a zither he had acquired in part payment for a small job. The tunes he favoured were of the sentimental Irish variety. Sometimes when he felt at peace with the world and had a little money, he would entertain himself and we children with a session 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 Jolly Butchers off licence in Alpine Rd for the beverage, with the instruction to go by way of Silwood St lest we meet any of the sisters of the church, its vicar, curate, or congregation, with our beer bottle displayed. Going by way of Silwood St involved a journey twice as long as that by way of the church but our departure and arrival from the errand was watched from the front room window. It was difficult to disregard the instructions during daylight. Having consumed most of the beer, my father would reach down one of his mouth organs from the top of the grandfather

Church where they were kept away from the smaller children, douse the instrument with hot water from the kettle which always stood on the fireside hob 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, to suddenly cease, sometimes in the middle of a tune, and finish his beer. After such an interval he would resume his playing, lively tunes this time jigs, reels, and waltz tunes until last 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" by whom he meant the regular attenders of St Katharines our local Church of England edifice. He disliked house painters, and when a schoolmaster's explanation of facts differed from his own as it frequently did, he labelled the master "a nink" (his abbreviation of nincompoop). Like Goldsmith's

schoolmaster. "E'en 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 clocks 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 40' x 60' 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. Victor Corrin and a tractor finally broke down fathers fences and opposition and a large timber store was eventually erected on the site in 1935. The strip of ground, a derelict waste waste, had over the years become a convenient dumping ground for all kinds of unwanted rubbish. 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 rubbish to the bottom, and bringing a more consistent mixture of London clay and sand to the surface. The vegetables grown upon this patch helped balance the households precarious budget, and provided father with a healthy sun burned appearance that caused adverse comment among unsightly 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, poor food,

Facsimile of trade handbill dated in mothers handwriting. The stores were the premises her father acquired when deciding to change his occupation from coach man to shop keeper

15th June 1894

A GREAT REDUCTION IN THE PRICE OF BOTTLED BEERS.

A. EATON'S

Grocery & Bottled Beer Stores,

39, BRACTON ROAD,
ROTHERHITHE, S.E.

Families Waited Upon Daily. - - Agent for Carter Paterson.

ORDERS BY POST PUNCTUALLY ATTENDED TO.

Giant Family Ale	2d. Bott.	2/- Doz.
Giant Nourishing Stout ...	2d. ,,	2/- ,,
Star Stout	2½d. ,,	2/4 ,,
Star Dinner Ale	2½d. ,,	2/4 ,,
Star Extra Stout	2½d. ,,	2/6 ,,
Mackway's Trent Ale ... "Star" Brand	2½d. ,,	2/6 ,,
Mackway's Stout ... ... "Star" Brand	2½d. ,,	2/6 ,,
Mackway's Oatmalt Stout "Star" Brand	2½d. ,,	2/6 ,,
Mackway's Dinner Ale ... "Star" Brand	2½d. ,,	2/6 ,,
Bass Pale Ale, "Star" Brand	3½d. ,,	3/6 ,,
Guinness's Extra Stout ... "Star" Brand	3½d. ,,	3/6 ,,

PURE BEER IN GIANT BOTTLES.

Mackway's Dinner Ale ...	4d. Bot.	1/4 Crate
Mackway's Stout	4d. ,,	1/4 ,,
Mackway's Oatmalt Stout ...	4d. ,,	1/4 ,,
Star Stout	3½d. ,,	1/2 ,,
Star Dinner Ale	3½d. ,,	1/2 ,,

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 Goldsworthy Gardens.

poverty, and a continual war against dirt, disease, and vermin, with the scrubbing brush, wash tub, carbolic, and paraffin 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 drinkers, yet when funds permitted, would take "something to buck her up". The daughter of an ex coachman turned shop keeper, she managed her household on strictly business like lines. Observing the philosophy of Mr Micawber, 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 Gurney 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 countenance cruelty without active protest, as witness the following incident. On the strip of vacant

land at the back of the house, a two wheeled tip cart had dumped its load of rubbish, and became bogged down almost to its wheel hubs. Whitton was changing window curtains in the "middle bits" room which overlooked the site, and became increasingly agitated as the carter, a youth of about eighteen, jerked the horse's bridle and called the animal anything but a horse. He finally took to whipping 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 wielding on him his own horsewhip which had been torn from his hand. She beat him till he turned tail and continued to lash him with her tongue while he stood silent beyond the range of the horsewhip. Retaining the whip, she forbade the carter 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 Jack 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 shop late on Saturdays in the hope of buying at a cheap rate quantities of seasonable 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 jumble 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 strange 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 receiver. Such attitude of mind is not entirely unknown among the children of the generation under

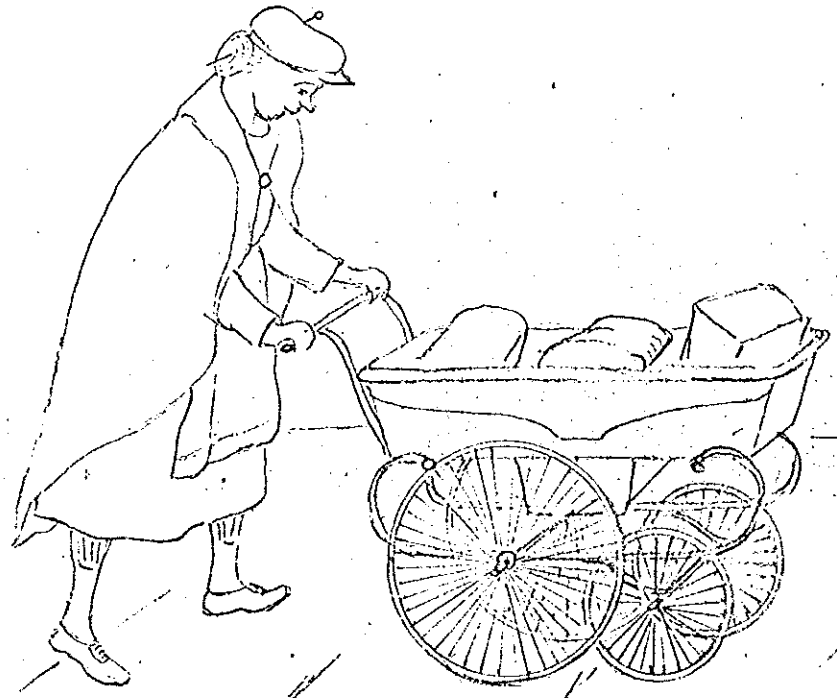
discussion, and probably accounts for cases of old folk dying from malnutrition and cold in this age of universal social security.

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 pawning 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 Topps who was possessed of a faultless public school accent and biting sarcasm. Flicking an article of clothing offered as a pledge about with a pencil, he would reply

to a gentleman suggestion of the amount to be found, "Two shillings Madame? Oh! no." A pause, then, "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 Topp was a spare framed 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 owners name, while if the pawnbroking department was used

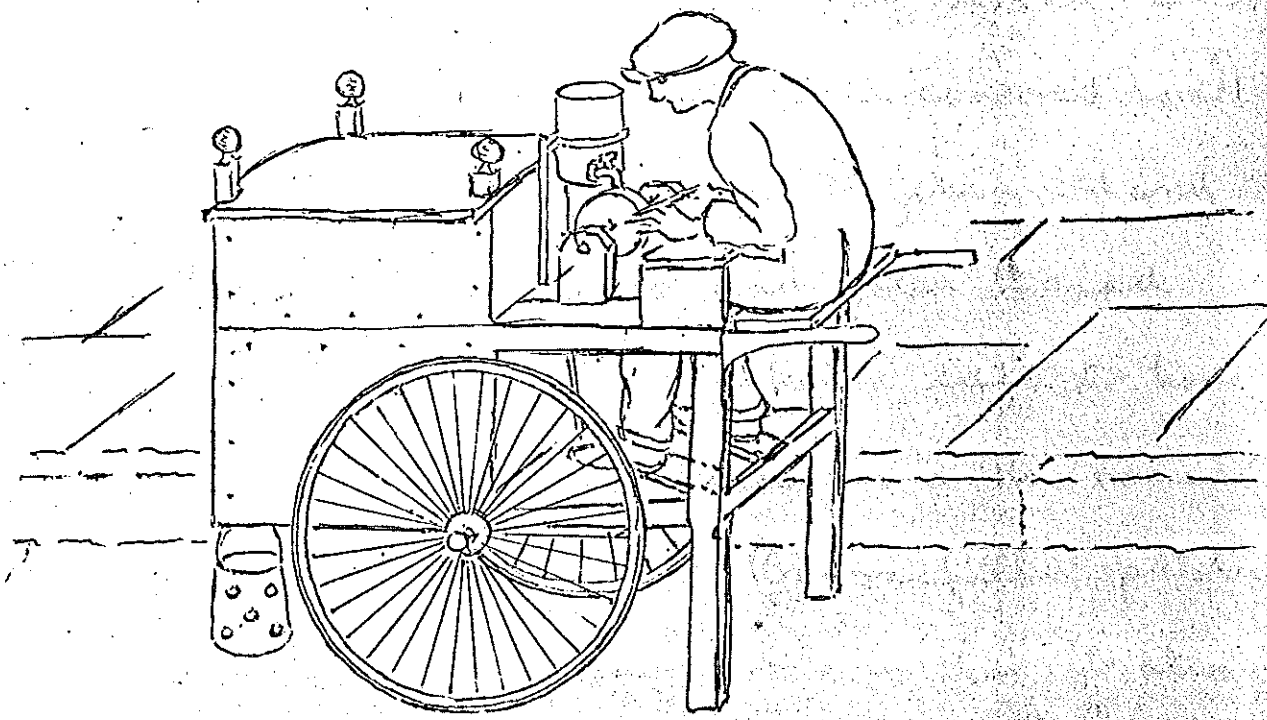
establishment was termed "uncles". The detected use of pawnshops involved a loss of standing by a population wishing to preserve an appearance of respectability in the presence of poverty. There were however a few women whose scale of values placed the state of solvency above that of respectability, 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 brown paper parcels. She habitually wore a man's flat cloth cap skewered to a bun of greasy grey hair with a large hat 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 mens army grey socks. On her feet were gym shoes of the type then known as plimsols. She regularly

Figure 5A



A pawnshop runner.

Figure 5B.



A travelling tinker

patronised the Earl of Beconsfield public house at the corner of Alpine and Rowsley Roads, and the interior surfaces of her anatomy were more accustomed to applications of stout and snuff than were her outer skin with soap and water. My mother would view her with a shudder of disgust and assert that Mrs Bogle might be stuck to the wall without the use of recognised adhesives.

The London of these times supported many different kinds of street traders and entertainers. Most were truly 'itinerant', but some dwelt permanently in the districts they served. Such an one was Old Frank whose round covered some two miles of the streets around Eugenia Rd and who sold shrimps, winkles, and green salad stuff. Old Frank 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 bristly. Above his

pathetic moustache were a host of tiny wrinkles that trapped the dirt, and his eyes were red rimmed like those of white bull terriers'. He wore thin golden earrings and an antique bowler hat, once black, that in bright sunlight appeared to reflect a green sheen as do the tail feathers of a cockerel. 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 drop, and as a child, I likened his dilapidated 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 treble cries of "Watercresses" and "Onions penny a bundle" were intelligible, though delivered with cadence similar to the chanted responses of the church litany, but his "Orlbrahmins", and "Bee-rooster-picklin" puzzled me until I

explained my mother who explained the first meant "brown ones" referring to the colour of the shrimps in acid. The second she translated as "Beetroots for pickling". Even so, Old Franks 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, "Ibccii - a - bee - tie," followed a minute later with "hike-a- booolb - pee." Nobody of my aquaintance was ever able to translate these. There were many other street sellers all of whom had necessarily to cry their wares or services. There was the carbolic man always in a roaring 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 "Carrr - blic" 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 at 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 scribbling lines on her freshly scrubbed doorsteps and hearth while still wet with a piece of soft red pottery, and explained it "kept 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 that district. Firewood sellers and coalmen were also among the regular roundsmen, each with a distinctive cry. The ones which interested we 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 brightly 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 wire spoked wheels. 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 lockers containing tools and materials completed the fitted equipment of such machines which, while obviously constructed of scrap materials were wonders of ingenious adaptability. The chair menders gear was usually carried in a carpenters frail, a shallow oblong canvas bag bound in leather with handles of the same material, or of rope. Strips of cane,

some ready braided cocoanut fibre, a sailmaker's needle and palm, a small hammer, and a lump of tallow, were the sum total of equipment used by a rush man, 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 a commodity to be squandered on frivolities. Nostalgic writers have lamented the disappearance of wore 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 jangle of sounds produced by the dozens of milk cans hanging from the sides of three wheeled barrows that lurched and swung over the bodily bespoke roads.

many there who obtained a living from the streets were
managers and barrel organists. The former were many
and assorted. Most male vocalists were results 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
facinates me. Its capacity for taking outrageous
liberties with melody and rythm is remarkable, and
seems to equate itself in my mind somehow with
the staccato delivery of Cockney repartee 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 pegs which operate the
hammers. These strike a series of stretched wires in
a manner similar to that of a piano but minus
its dampening mechanism. The cylinder is turned
through gearing, by the manual operation of a
cranked 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 poured 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 demostration 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 unbutton his shirt at the waist and insert the rat next to his bare skin. He would then take a ferret from the other sack and slip 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

widening blood stain showed on the shirt. The rat was then dragged out quite dead, with the ferret still hanging on it by its teeth. More patter 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 chop 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 Surrey Docks station, and probably brought the rat catcher business from the police 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

Figure 6A.

Undertype Sentinel steam lorry of the 1920's

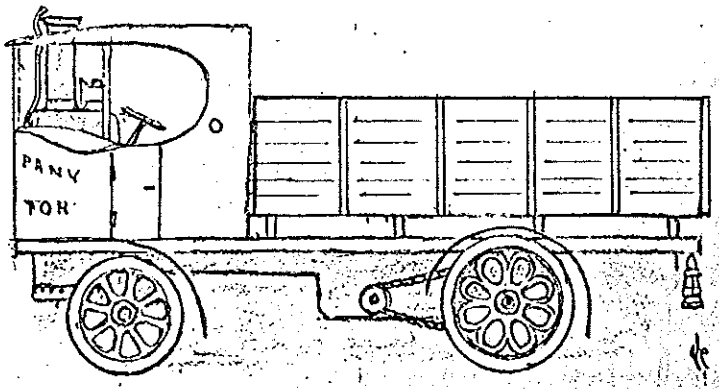
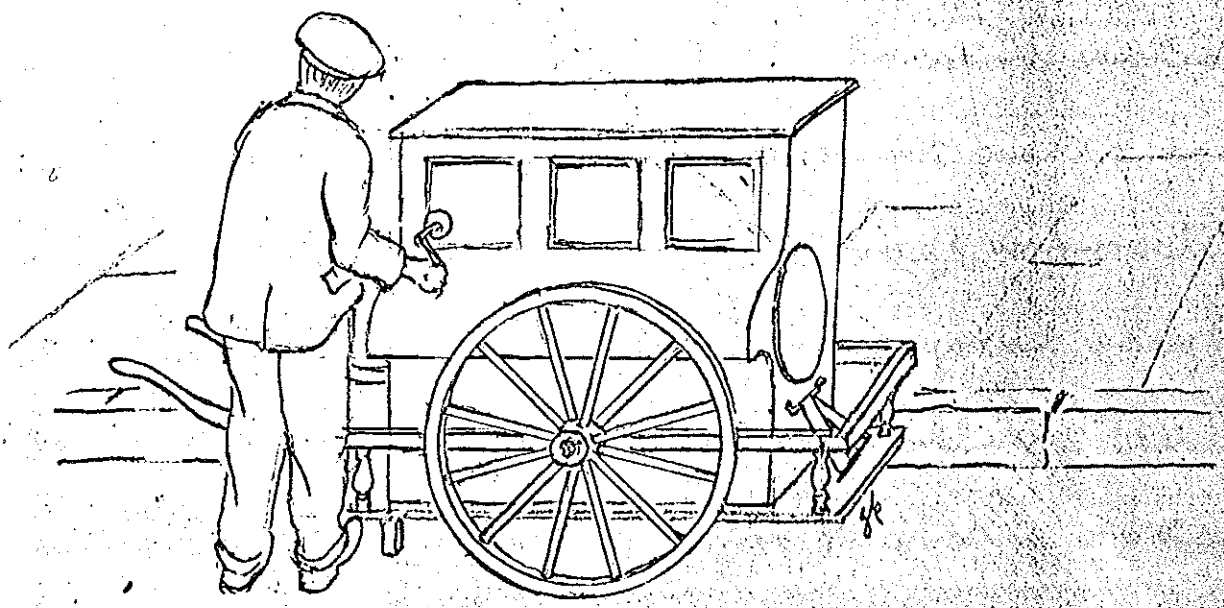


Figure 6.B.



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 Omnibus and Tilling 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 unhorselike 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

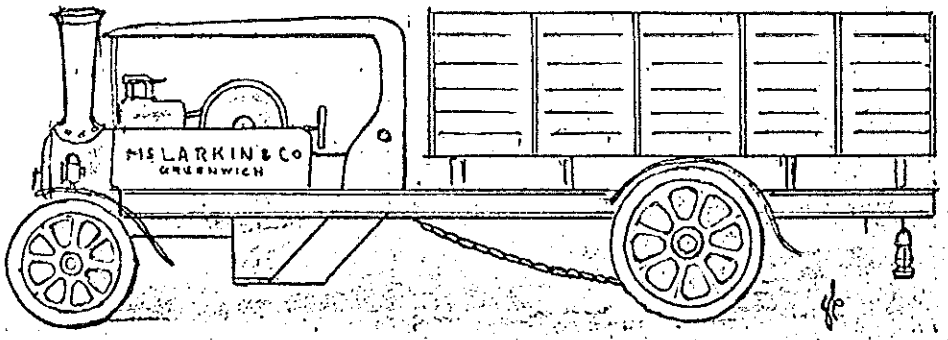
and thus such craft could often be seen in the tow of a single horse who always appeared to be making light of the task. It was interesting to see such horses when harnessed to a heavy dray and negotiating a downward slope, pull the vehicle at a slight angle to the kerb thereby taking advantage of the 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 & 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. As 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

overtype 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 pipework and consequent efficient use of the steam produced by the boiler. Additionally the engine was easily accessible for maintenance purposes, but the drivers view could be obscured by steam leaks from glands and leaking pipe flanges and they invariably wore old clothes that became a universal polished black with the absorbtion of oil thrown out by the motion of the engine before them. There was also the disadvantage of the acceptionally long driving chain to the rear wheels which was necessarily heavy and subject to heavy wear. The undertype usually had a vertical coke fired boiler and the engine was placed on the chassis beneath the body near to where the drive was transmitted to the back wheels. Of such a type was the Sentinel whose final product of the late 30's was a fine vehicle with pneumatic tyres, a moving grate, glass screened drivers cab, and the use of aluminium

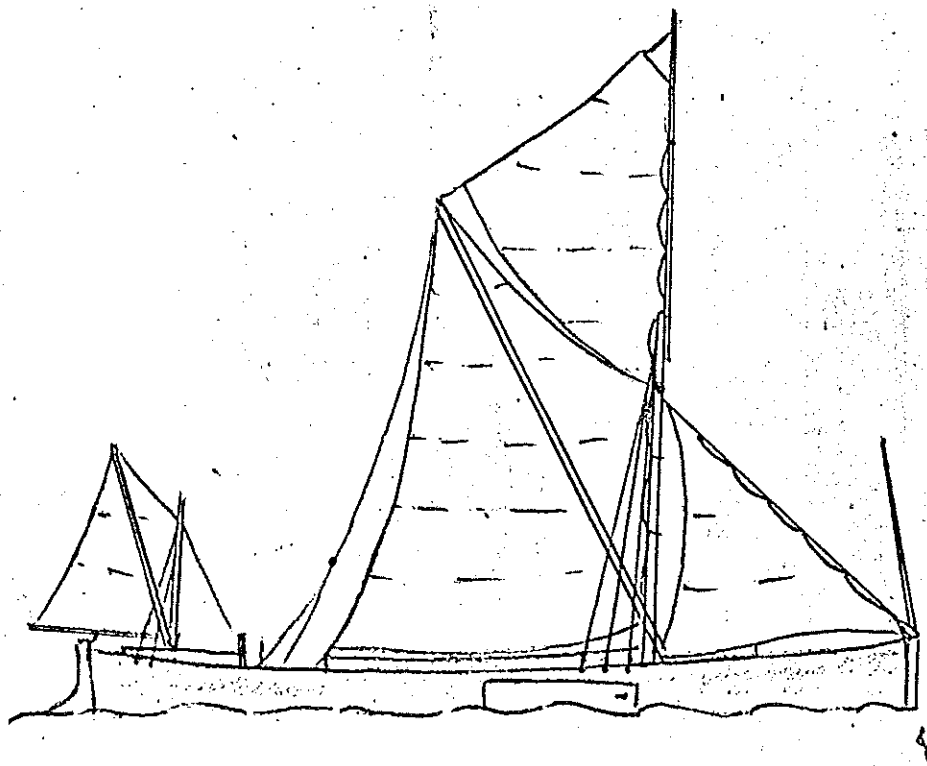
wherever possible to reduce weight. The chain drive of earlier models was supplanted by shaft drive, and the vertical boiler moved to a position behind the driver. To ride in one of these was a joy. They had remarkable accelerating and braking power, were comfortable and silent; the latter quality coupled 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. Fodens also produced a steam lorry with most of the features described above for the Super Sentinel. They called their product the Speed 12, and this also was a fine vehicle but, with the development of the diesel engined waggon the end of the steamers was at hand and very few of them survived the second world war.

Figure 7A.



OVERTYPE STEAM LORRY OF THE EARLY 20's
THE VEHICLE ILLUSTRATED HAD SOLID RUBBER
TYRES. ITS MAXIMUM SPEED WAS ABOUT 15 M.P.H

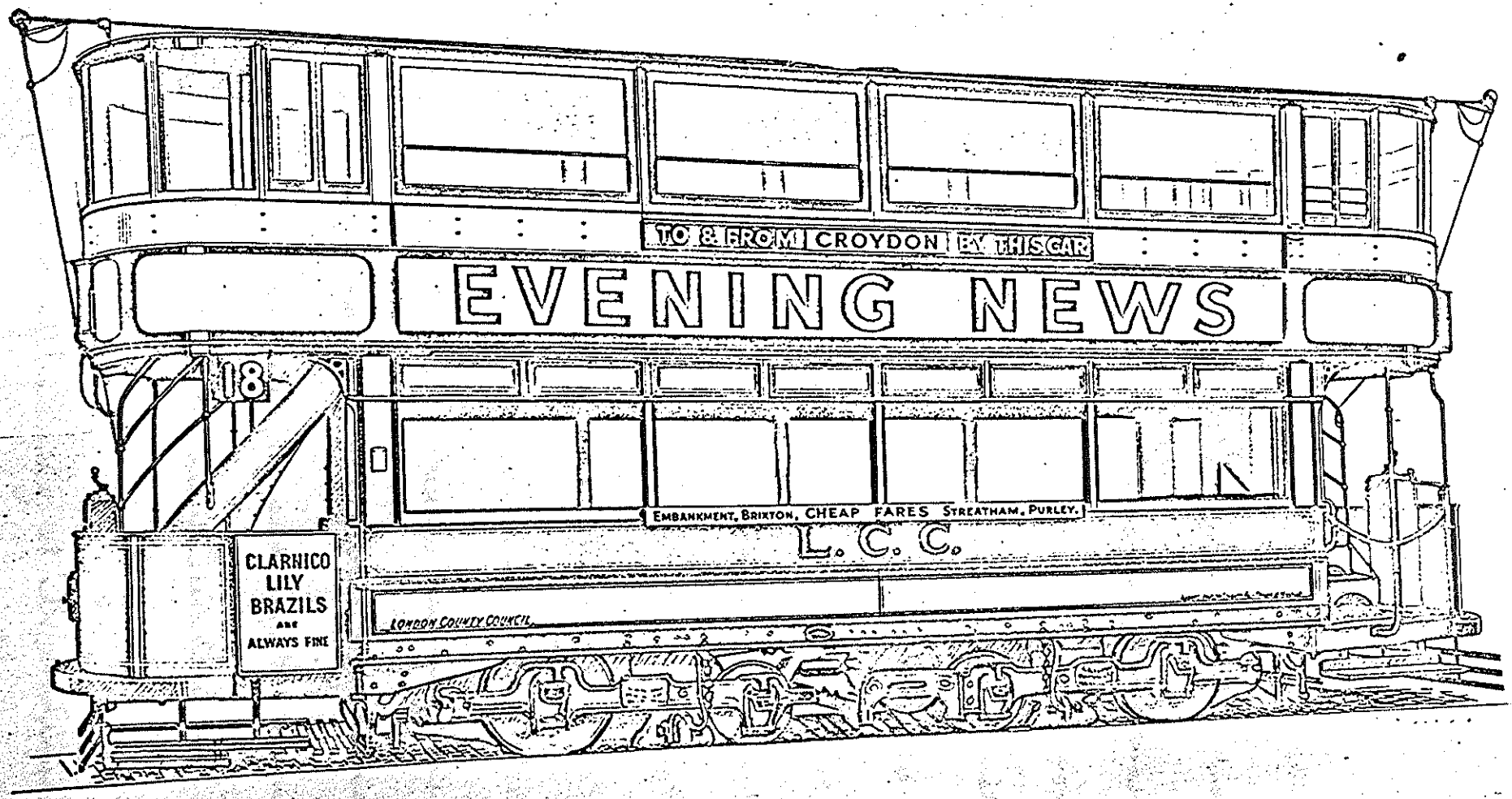
Figure 7B.



THAMES SAILING BARGE. APPROXIMATELY
85 ft. LONG. WITH 20ft BEAM. THE BOWSPRIT
IS LOWERED AT SEA TO ACCOMODATE A SECOND
FORESAIL. BEING KEELESS, THE VESSEL USES
LEEBOARDS. FITTED ABREAST THE MAST.

1920. LONDON GENERAL OMNIBUS COMPANY BUS

Figure 8.



1920. LONDON COUNTY COUNTY COUNCIL TRAM

Figure 8.

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 remarkably easy to sell leftish principles to people who have very little of the worlds 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 childrens attendance at Sunday church and school. I found my fathers political tirades 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

Hours spent on Sundays in contact with those who 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 refered 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. A chanted "Hosana, Hosana, 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 (Church and) Sunday school and church in some and frequently

"helped the way" to visit the docks and river front instead. Our crime was usually detected by Miss Smith the vicars secretary, and invariably reported (~~reported~~) 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 neighbourhoods' 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 kept 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 stevedores 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 harsh and with

a very limited range. Having arrived at the sixth of a rising scale, he would continue at that note, clearly audible 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 tympani, 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 cortege 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 Katharines 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.

D. Thomas

The vicars secretary lived with her two sisters in a spinster household, a few doors from us. She was tall, angular, and acid 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, crosseyed, flap eared Persian they had named Timmy who fought off all other suitors when our ginger she Dib was in season. My father hated poor Timmy and would drown at birth any of Dib'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 fathers 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 open the fire door and filling the scullery with a smell of baked rabbit, a dish my father eschewed from that day. I have since thought that a simpler way of dealing with the problem of Dib and Timmy would have been the taking of Dib 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 breeds 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 at the condition of his pregnant wife and sought medical advice from a Dr Atkins. Dr Atkins was said to have had a memory 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 Katherines church. Returning to my fathers 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 tops 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 cove 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, mothers confinement took place according to my birth certificate in Mile End Maternity Hospital, and on the 20th of December 1911 I was born a true Cockney 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 parked with the cook and housemaid who made much of me, while mother did an afternoons 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 Gomm

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 "Watcher me young cock sparrers" whenever he walked into the room. This was Jimmy Wild the light weight pugilist who did some of his training at the establishment.

In 1916, I was enrolled as a pupil at the the local London County Council School built, so said a carved gateway lintel of Portland stone, in 1880. I remember little of the elementary education received in the infants 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 caning me. He would cane me for the least offence. For changing the colour of my ink by dropping small pieces 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 caned me for any and every thing. The result was an increase in my wall of reserve 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 crinkles and crowsfeet around them would become more pronounced as extracting the cane from his desk drawer he would crook 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 caned me so at least once a day, five days a week excluding holidays, for the 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 caned 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 deputed 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 this 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 this 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 relayed to all parties capable of ensuring the spectacles were only worn at school. My fathers 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 mothers glasses rather than visit an optician.

Suffice 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 "worn only at school" decree, worked by slow degrees and the fact that their youngest son was to be despectacled, accepted by my parents eventually.

Following my term with Mr P. I became a pupil of Mr Evans, a Welshman whose tutorage 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 opens the wrong way" was my reply. "Come out here and show

me", he commanded, whereupon I took his chalk and duster 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 pump 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 revolt against authority. The school curriculum included games. Football in winter which I enjoyed, and cricket in summer which I loathed. The school played inter house matches of both games, and 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 Craven the master, who gave me the choice of either bathing for my house, or as to put 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 cuts 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 I suppose, resignation. 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 Craven was justified. Mr Craven was the schools head teacher and second in command to the head master. He was a very strict master, conciention and just. Any canings he dispensed 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 Craven. We observed a mutual non-aggression pact for the remainder of the time spent under his tuition which terminated with my leaving school upon reaching the age of fourteen. I am eternally grateful to Mr Craven 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 Craven also arranged for his pupils to have access to a library of specialised works on most subjects. By this method, more than half

of the total 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 Leraven would encourage interest in current topics by fostering 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 become addicted to viewing the beautiful specimens of past craftsmanship there displayed. The addiction remains...

To reach the museum groups 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, there to board a Westminster bound electric tramcar. The fare for this portion of the journey cost tuppence 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 Serpentine, to Exhibition Rd and the buildings where I could browse to my hearts 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 dilapidated 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 skates. There was Tadhg Turner whose left boot was minus its toecap, and whose socks were of the threadbare 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 fathers 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 blacking 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 fathers 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 play 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 aquaintances, Though well able to hold my own in oral and physical battle, I learned the uselessness of remarking upon the beauties of plant and animal form, of sunset and cloud formation, the mysteries of religion, animal reproduction, and the examples 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 superior 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 appelation "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 disapproval by our respective parents. We read

books together, commiserating with Oliver Twist, enjoying the adventures of Jim Hawkins on Treasure Island, and feeling alternately glad and sorry for Gerard and Margaret as we progressed through Charles Reade's romance, The Cloister and The Hearth. This latter book led to my enlightenment concerning the phenomena of mammalian reproduction as related below. As 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 Angeline 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 jam jar containing a half dozen ground beetles with the words "I'll not have you watching those things incest." It also revealed why he repeatedly refused we boys permission to keep rabbits or white mice. It also gave me nebulous clue 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 schools' curriculum had included lectures illustrated with lantern slides, dealing with human anatomy and physiology. Such was a Victorians attitude to sex. It could be made the source of adult merriment by innuendo and skillful allusion, but the direct approach to the subject by any means was entirely taboo.

In addition to accademic matters, Anyclime was also interested in such masculine activities as the use of catapults, and the manufacture of nets

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's removal to the outer suburbs.

I had developed some skill in the aquisition 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 grounds 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 copper 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 tiddler fishing were practised. The most favourite method of capturing the tiddler, 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 enthusiast who favoured the more skillful cap 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 cap most exponents habitually wore. In cap fishing for sticklebacks, the angler lies 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 cap held in the other outstretched hand, and at the right moment is jerked from the water.

The fish thereupon releases its hold on the worm and falls into the can to be quickly transferred to a jam 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 canal patrolmen, the latter of whom were termed "cut rangers". Those among us who could swim would aggravate both species 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 cuff 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 channels connecting Canada 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 Herzogin Cecile discharged their cargoes in Greenland Dock.

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 heights of Greenwich and Shooters Hill to Limehouse Church tower and the chimney of Stepney power station, the river constituted the largest house free area known to me until at the age of twelve I saw the sea through the auspices of the Children's Country Holiday Fund Organisation

Trows sailing 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 bridges 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 tide 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 Surrey Docks district during the 1920's and 3. Drawn from old street maps. The site of 118 Eugenia Rd is marked with a red dot.

Figure .2. – The railway complex at Bolina Rd. Drawn from street maps and a dash of memory.

Figures. 3 and 4. – lower and upper floor plans of now non existent 118 Eugenia Rd Drawn from memory.

Figure .5 A. – A pawnshop runner. Drawn from a memory of Mrs Bogle.

Figure .5.B. – An itinerent tinker and his portable workshop. Drawn from memory.

Figure .6 A. – Undertype Sentinel steam lorry of the 1920's Drawn from contemporary photographs.

Figure. 6.B. – A barrel organ and its operator. Drawn from memory.

Figure. 7 A – Overtype steam lorry of the 1920's. A composite sketch of the types manufactured by by Robey, Foden, Aveling and Porter, and Fowler There were many more makes of both over and undertype lorries in use during the interwar years. (1918 to 1939) From contemporary photographs

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

Figure .8 – London bus of the 1920's. That illustrated is a L.G.O.C S. type. Messrs Tilling Stevens also ran petrol electric vehicles over the same recognised bus routes. The S type had solid

rubber tyres, a 45 b.h.p petrol engine, and seated 52 passengers with 28 seats on the upper deck.

Figure .9. — A London County Council tram of the 1920's. 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 outer suburbs the conduit and conductor rail were substituted by an overhead cable from which power was collected by either of the spring loaded roof arms shown in the out of service positio in the illustration.

Photographs. A. and C - Skew arches at Bolina Rd marked E + F on Figure 2.

Photograph. B. — Unoccupied arches at The Three Boidges

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

Photograph E — Elliptic arch at Bolina Rd. marked G on Figure 2..
"Its crown has gone" father had said. (page .14)

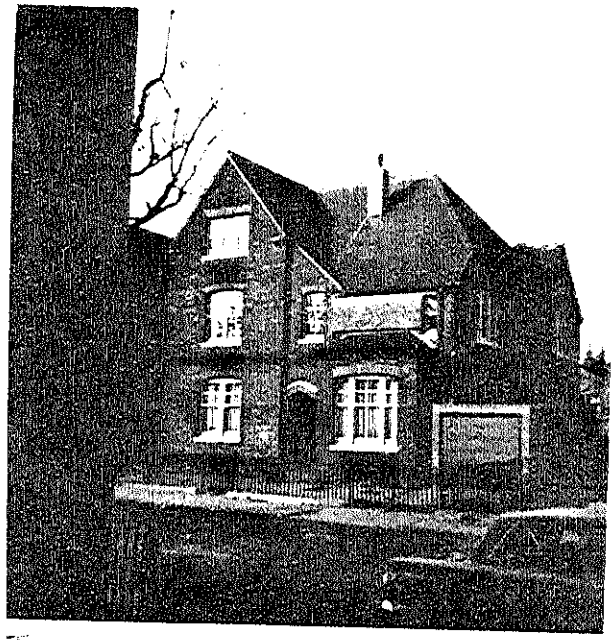
Photograph F. — Rear of house No 68 Silwood St. awaiting demolition. The photograph shows the effects of subsidence and is/was situated within 50 yards of Old Grogrames Waterloo. (page)

Photographs J. K. L. — St Katharines vicarage, existing church, and the old church hall.

Photograph .M, — The Earl of Beaconsfield public house

Photograph N. — Houses in Silverlock St. awaiting demolition. Workmens dwellings of similar age and type to 118 Eugenia Rd.

Photograph O. — Limehouse Reach from St Georges Stairs. (page)



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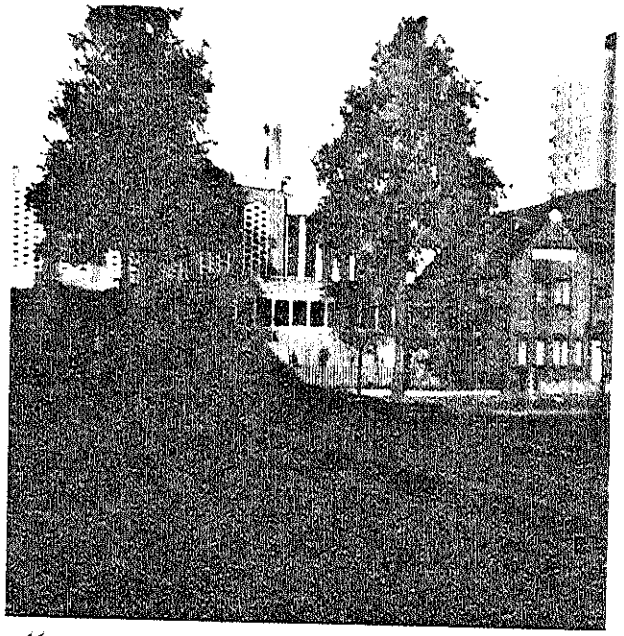

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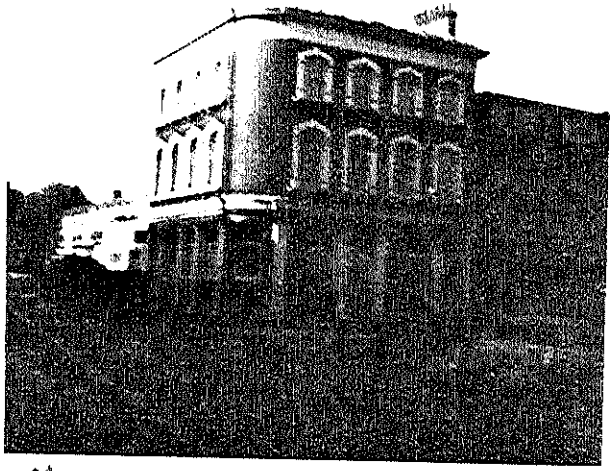

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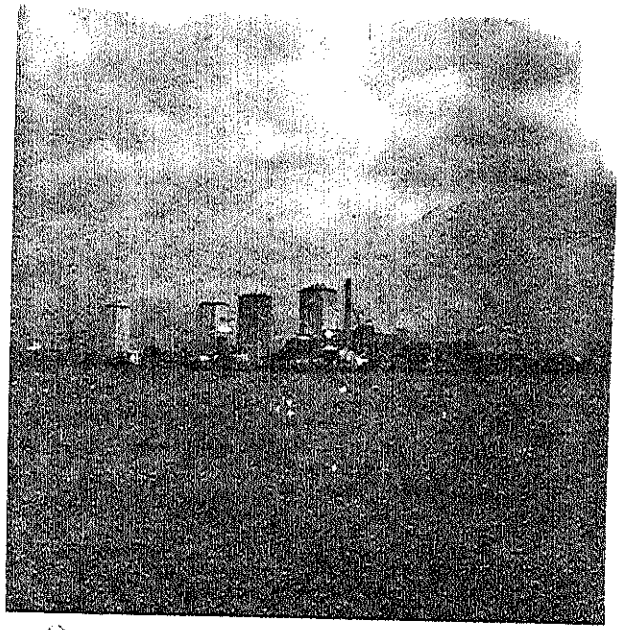

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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME 1982

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.

South London
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323, Norwood Road,
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01 674 5787

SOUTH LONDON BOTANICAL INSTITUTE

MEMBERS' PROGRAMME FOR JANUARY TO JULY, 1982

The venue will be SLBI unless otherwise stated

Footnote Re: Corbetts 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 I discovered in later years, the reason for the alternative name, but Throats Alley, applied by older inhabitants.

William Corbett was a ships carpenter of American esctraction, who in 1764 brutally murdered the elderly couple, with whom he lodged, and robbed them. Found guilty upon his confession, he was exceuted on Kennington Common, and his body gibbeted in the lane, near the "Jolly Gardeners 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.