

Overview of Section E

Section page

FULL OVERVIEW

REFERENCES

Tracing a little of the History of the Parish

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In the beginning ...

The story of St. Paul's, Bow Common cannot be just the story of a notable modern church building. Were this purely an architectural monument there would be little need to go further. However, for those on the ground who use the church to worship in, or to gather for community events, its meaning extends beyond all that has been explored so far in this account, into the context of their lives and community and history.

Every Church of England church does not just stand in isolation as a place of worship but is also the church of a **parish** – a geographical area in which there is pastoral care, ministry and service, irrespective of any religious adherence or none. The concerns of a parish should also be the concern of the minister and people of the parish church. It is interesting that in the annual election of churchwardens, the electorate are not just those on the particular church's electoral roll of church members but all who are on the **civil** electoral roll of the parish! The Incumbent and churchwardens have a duty and ministry to the **whole** parish & not just to the members of a given church. Thus it is at St. Paul's, Bow Common. The parish and its people and life, give fullest meaning to the parish church.

The account of the story of the present church building as presented earlier is supplemented in this section by this wider context. When I came to the parish as a new incumbent in 1995, as mentioned earlier, there was no archive at all beyond a small but valuable collection of photographs and a little archival material on the first church to stand here. These had been gathered by lay members in the 18 months between incumbencies and usefully and beautifully organised and displayed in an album. Between 2008 and the 50th anniversary of the church in 2010, I did research into the first church and parish and discovered quite a number of strands which were not at all known about, even by Fr. Kirkby or the early church members. These are all brought together in this section.

But the story of Bow Common goes back well before there was ever a church on this spot! Up to the middle of the 19th century this was a rural area of fields and grazing land. The bustling metropolis lay some miles to the west and, apart from scattered cottages, the nearest populations were in the village of Bow to the north-east and the ancient village of Stepney to the south west. The churches of both villages continue to be used, at St. Mary's, Bow, which celebrated its 700th anniversary a few years ago and at St. Dunstan and All Saints, Stepney, originally a Saxon foundation re-built and re-founded late in the 10th century by St. Dunstan, when he was Bishop of London. This church is dear to me as the place in which I spent the first six years of ordained ministry and first preached and celebrated the Holy Communion. Both these one-time villages are now completely embedded into the vast city which is London.

The maps which follow show, first, London in the later 16th century and then the site of the church from the early 18th to mid-19th centuries.



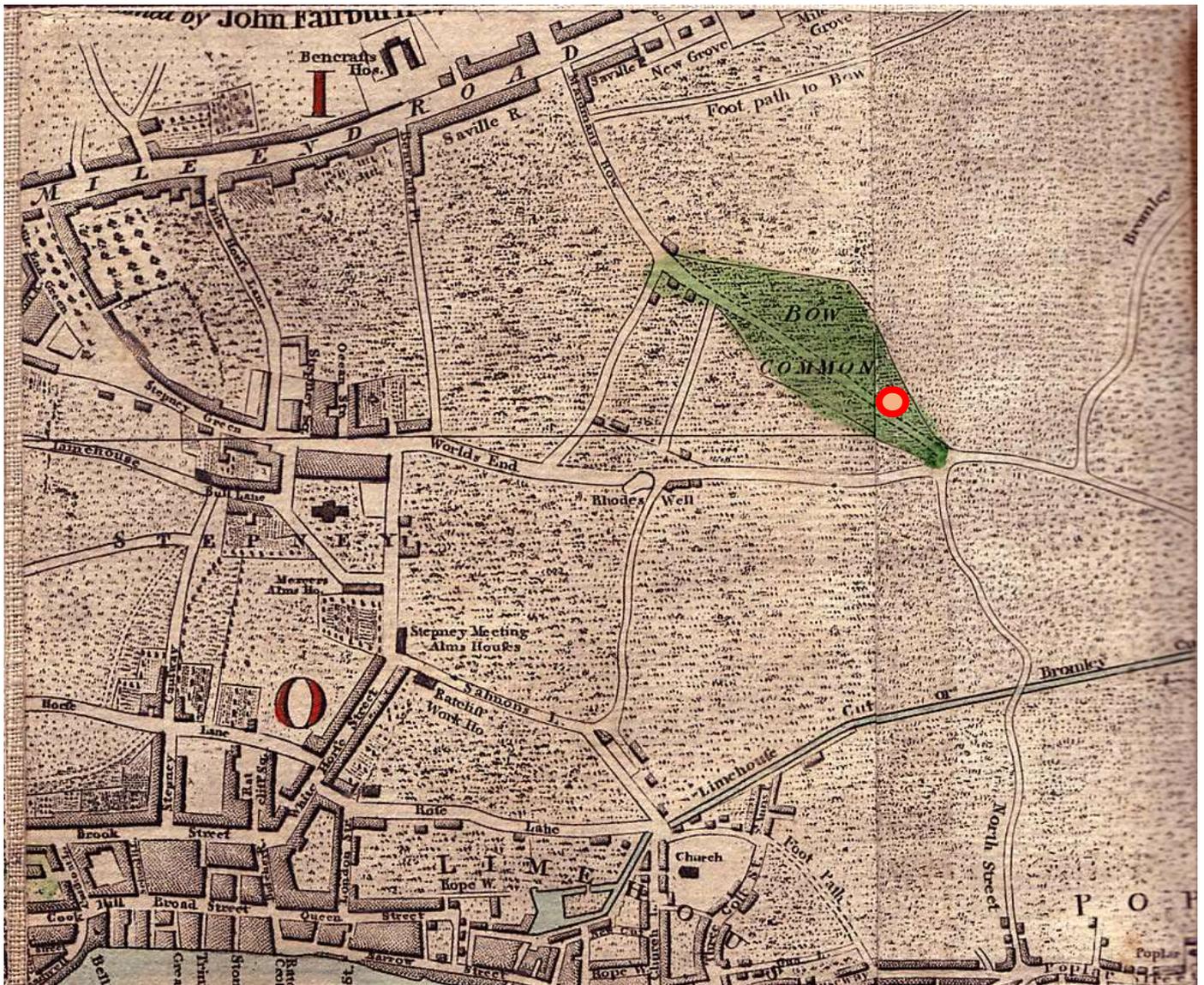


John Strype's map shows the common land as 'Pesthouse Common' (circled area) with pasture lands all around.

The map is of Stepney Parish which for centuries had been the largest parish in Europe but now was in the process of splitting into smaller parishes as populations increased and moved and needed to be served by a number of local churches. Most of the area of the map, including what is now the parish of St. Paul's, Bow Common, were part of that parish of which the parish church is St. Dunstan's (shown at the centre as Stepney Church).

London was quite far out off the left of the map and these various clusters of population were the **Tower Hamlets** (the Hamlets of Mile End Old Town, Mile End New Town, Wapping Stepney, Ratcliff, Limehouse, Bethnal Green, Bow etc.), this name being used from the 16th Century. The Constable of the Tower of London was the Lord Lieutenant of Tower Hamlets and commanded the 'Tower Hamlet Militia,' for which the Hamlets paid taxes and presumably were then under the general protection of the Militia. The name 'Tower Hamlets' continues to be used up to the present day for the large London Borough which took that name for the borough in reorganisation of 1965, absorbing the metropolitan boroughs of Poplar, Bow, Bethnal Green, Stepney etc.

After 1770

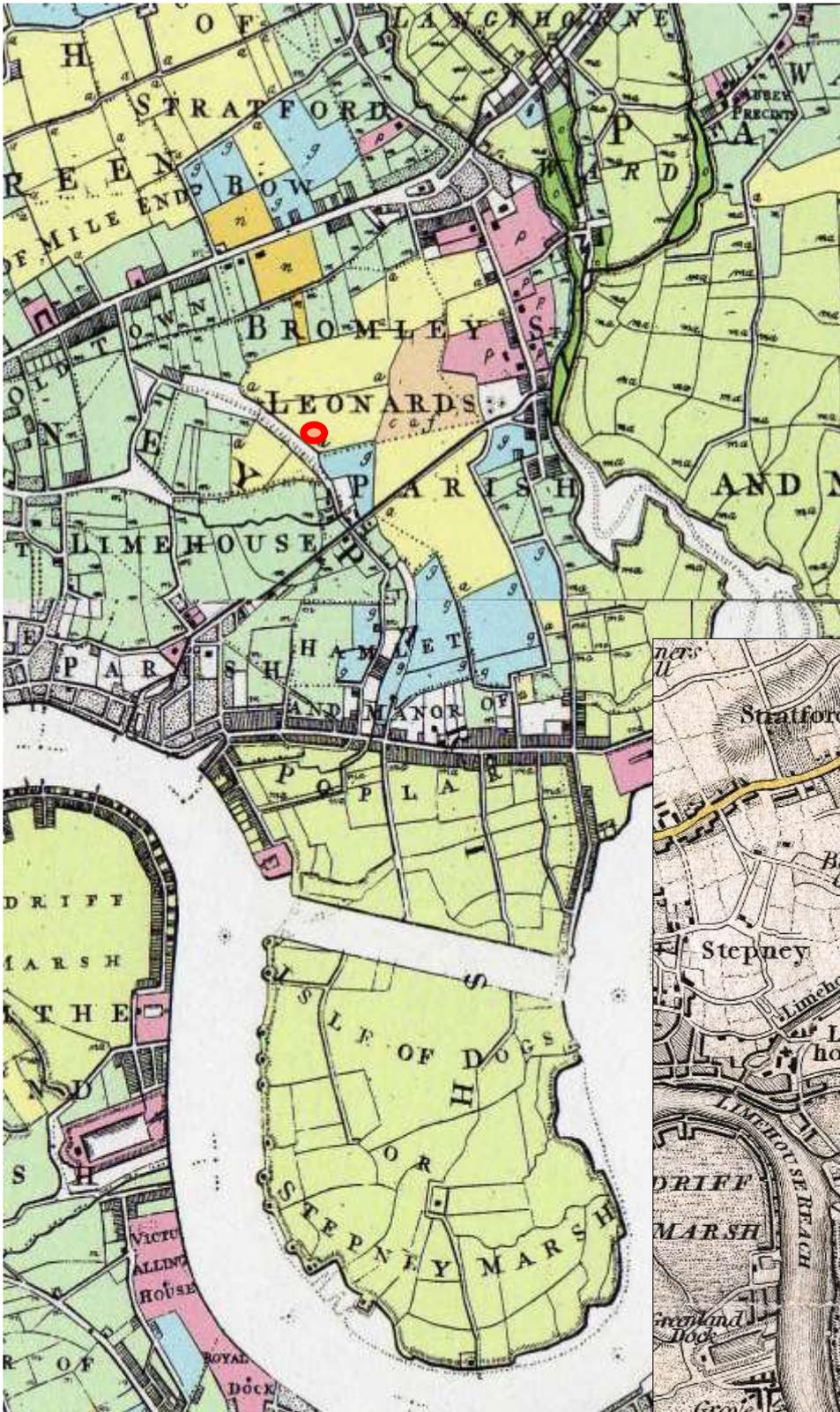


This map must be dated after late 1770 as that was the year in which the first canal in London was opened – the Limehouse Cut (or Bromley Cut or Lea Cut) – shown towards the lower edge. Stepney parish is shown on the western side of this map with St. Dunstan's Church indicated.

What are now familiar names and features also begin to appear – Mile End Road at the north end, Whitehorse Lane and Stepney Green further south. Salmon Lane is called 'Salmons' Lane here – interestingly, I remember older local people calling this 'Salmons' Lane up to a few years ago and not 'Salmon' as on the street signs – a hangover from long past days?

Along the northern edge of the map is 'Bencrafts Hos.' This is intriguing because today in that place is 'Bancroft Rd.' on which sits 'Mile End Hospital'! Since the first church was built, St. Paul's, Bow Common has been situated on a major connection between the major east-west route into the City to the north and Limehouse, to the south, a kind of gateway to the cut-off wilderness of the Isle of Dogs (still called 'The Island'). This road on which the church sits is now Burdett Rd.

However, all of this remains a very rural setting here and is not yet populated.



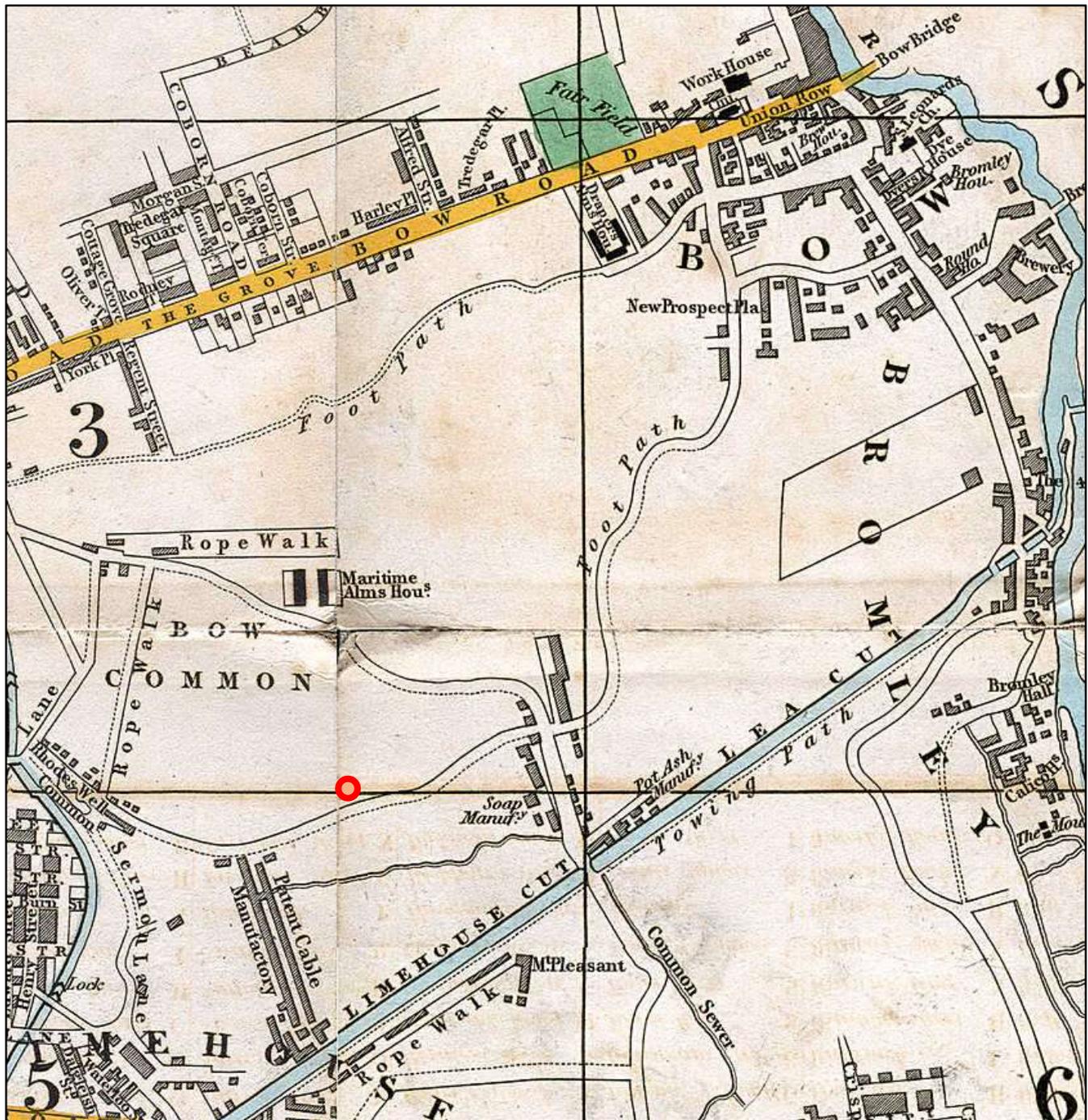
This interesting record by Thomas Milne of land use in 1801 shows an almost completely rural land-landscape of arable land and meadows, with some extensive enclosed market gardens.

The presence of Limehouse Cut Canal now shows a growing 'industrial' use of land, with the presence now of West India Docks south of the canal.



Key to Thomas Milne's Land Use Map of London & Environs, 1800.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Arable Land | Pale Brown |
| Meadow Land | Light green |
| Enclosed Market Gardens | Light Blue |
| Nurseries | Orange |
| Paddocks or Little Parks | Pink |



Both urbanisation and industrialisation begin to emerge. The Regent's Canal has now appeared and can be seen running north to south in the lower left part of this map segment. The Rope Walks and Cable Manufactory are signs of the growing importance of the shipping industry in the nearby London docks. There is still a street in the parish of Bow Common called Roper Street and not far away to the south near Limehouse there is still Cable Street. The road running along the northern side of Bow Common is now known as 'Bow Common Lane' and is one of the parish boundaries.

London, further to the west, is expanding rapidly and housing has begun to spread across the area on all sides but Bow Common remains as open land. As a later part of this historical review will soon testify, the increase of factories with growing air pollution had already begun and was beginning to have a considerable environmental impact. The Soap Manufactory, Potash Manufactory as well as the common sewer would have made the air anything but sweet!

The snaking 'Footpath' running by the site of the future church evolves later into St. Paul's Rd., and then into St. Paul's Way, with Devons Rd., further east.



Not only are there canals to west and south of Bow Common but the London and Blackwall Extension Railway now also runs right across the middle of it . With the increasingly busy London docks nearby and urban housing closing in on what was a totally rural setting, it cannot be long before the property developers will move in and London will have spread to swallow up this common land. Just 5 years later the first church of St. Paul's, Bow Common was to be built. (Note how Tower Hamlets Cemetery has now appeared - not only the living gather here!)

Bow Common - A Nuisance to the whole East End!

By the middle of the 1850's the urban sprawl of London had long since swallowed up rural Stepney and Bow but Bow Common was a bit of a No-Man's Land. The better-off population was now living 'out east' and in Stepney Green and on Mile End Rd. were some fine houses with ready access to London. But, very nearby there were cottages still scattered across Bow Common and eastwards, in which much poorer citizens dwelled.

As London expanded eastwards, what had once been outlying districts such as Whitechapel, where factories and industry were at a safe distance from London, now began to be surrounded by housing. Bow, Bromley and the River Lea were far out enough for these unpleasantnesses to be relocated there. Surely London would never extend out to such a distance! In these new more distant industrial regions serviced by the Limehouse Cut and Regent's Canal, as well as the railway lines for freight, there was now a great deal of chemical industry with factories lining the canal banks and the air full of noxious fumes and smells, mercifully all at a safe distance from London.

However, by 1850 the ever-expanding city did in fact begin to reach out towards these areas, Bow Common was becoming a national scandal and the matter even reached the leader columns in *The Times*! While the poor lived out in such unacceptable conditions no-one raised much of a fuss. However, now that the better-off were also having to live so near such a noisome nuisance, protests began to be lodged! The writer of this letter of 1847 did not mince his words! Living conditions sound truly appalling.

'letter to *The Times*, December 11, 1847

Sir, - The Times has on various occasions published letters and itself commented on the great necessity which exists for the Government and police magistrates, as well as the parochial authorities, to insist on the removal of such nuisances as are prejudicial to the inhabitants of this great metropolis and its environs.

Various manufactories of an obnoxious kind, besides places for the collection of night soil and other offensive matters, although 30 years since they might have been considered at a sufficient distance from inhabited houses, are now, from the great extent of buildings, much too near for health and propriety, being situated as it were in the very midst of our habitations.

In my own neighbourhood, that of the East India-road, a place exists called Bow-common, which is a nuisance to all the east end of London, but more particularly to the parishes of Stepney, Bow, Bromley, Poplar, and Limehouse, in which live about 80,000 inhabitants. On this spot are manufactories of the most noxious and injurious kind, carried on by chymical compounders, as they call themselves; and amongst whom are some who manufacture ammonia from night soil, a process which deserves special notice. The soil goes under the operation of boiling, and the liquid which exudes from it is allowed to run into the common sewer, whence it emits, through the gratings in North-street and High-street, Poplar, as also in Limehouse-causeway, the most horrid stench polluting the atmosphere until it enters the river at Limekiln-dock.

What the authorities, public and local, are about to allow such nuisances to exist, I am at a loss to guess. The said Bow-common belongs, as I am informed, to the lord of the manor; and as for building or other common purposes that would increase its value, a good title cannot, it appears, be given. The land under these circumstances is let for purposes the most offensive. In fact, advertisements have at different periods appeared, drawing attention to the eligibility of the spot for manufactures of such commodities as would be deemed nuisances in other neighbourhoods and representing that they might here be carried on with impunity.

Owing to the laxity of those who should interfere in these matters, manufacturing chymists, bone collectors and burners, patent night soil manure manufactures, night and dust men, as well as other obnoxious trades, are now establishing themselves in Mile-end and Limehouse, alongside the Regent's-canal and River Lea-cut, to the serious inconvenience of the inhabitants as to their health and to the detriment of vegetation.

Within the last two or three years a very sensible difference has been apparent in our gardens; the smells are even greater during the night than in the day, and many inhabitants in the surrounding and immediate neighbourhood of Bow-common are awakened from their sleep by a suffocating feeling arising from the stench thence when the wind sets from that quarter, and which sometimes even reaches the densely populated parish of Whitechapel.

No wonder the people complain of the impurity of the Thames water, or that but a small quantity of fish are now caught in the river, or that it is quite abandoned by smelts & salmon which abounded in it 40 years ago – Thames salmon was then considered a great luxury, but is now rarely heard of.

Now that most of the commissioners of sewers for London and its suburban neighbourhoods are renewed by authority, and a single board for all the divisions has been named by the Government, I do trust the Legislature will invest the new commissioners with such power as will enable them to compel all landlords of houses near to common sewers to open communications to them, and also to prevent the filth from gas works and other obnoxious manufactures (which filth should be carted away) running into the sewers, thereby causing pestilence to rage in every house communicating with the sewers, owing to the exhalations arising from them.

The late commissioners of sewers failed in completing the salutary arrangements necessary to be taken, owing to their want of sufficient authority; the outlay which has been complained of having arisen from the expensive mode the commissioners had to pursue in levying rates under the authority invested in them to execute the commission, and their not being allowed when large works had to be carried out to borrow the money on the rates, and distribute the collection for expenditure over several years, as it is not just that present occupiers of houses should make improvements for the gratuitous benefit of posterity. This has been the cause of very many sewers not being made that otherwise would have been.

The object of my making these remarks is not only to get rid of the crying nuisances that now exist, but to cause them to be removed to a safe distance from London and its immediate neighbourhood, by an act of the Legislature; and at the same time to call the attention of the House of Commons to the subject generally, when the Sanitary Bill is brought prominently forward by Lord Morpeth.

AN OLD INHABITANT OF THE TOWER HAMLETS'

Enough is enough! The people rise up against the nuisance!

As time progressed not only did more people begin to live in the area but so did industry continue to grow and with it the increasing nuisance of pollution. Reading backwards from newspaper articles which I researched, it seems that by 1859 the people of Bow Common had had enough and the 'Metropolitan Alum Works' whose 'proprietor' was one **Mr. Alexander Angus Croll**, was taken to trial, as responsible for permitting the chief source of the noxious fumes.

This evoked a lead article in The Times of London on **Wednesday 19th October 1859**. (The 'new' church of St. Paul's, Bow Common had just been consecrated a year previously on 30th October 1858 and so was in the thick of these controversies). The trial had been going for some months with the judge deciding to go out to Bow Common to experience the problem first hand of which the local inhabitants had been complaining.

Following is the article itself and my own transcription as parts of the copy which I found are very difficult to read.

A Lead article in The Times: Wednesday 19th October 1859

Fifty years hence, or so, when people are all living by the rules of sanitary science, breathing pure air, drinking pure water, and prolonging their days accordingly, some public man will perhaps entertain a philosophic audience with a retrospect of the old 19th century, and a sketch of the conditions under which Englishmen actually lived in that historic age. Possibly the lecturer may turn to a back volume of *The Times* in illustration of his subject; and he could hardly do better, we think, than reproduce the report of the great nuisance question on Bow-common. Certainly the example is a most extraordinary one, not in one of its features only, but in all. The prosecution itself has been remarkable, the defence even more so, and the whole procedure instructive in the extreme.

Several months ago the complaints of the residents in the vicinity of Bow-common against certain manufactories there established assumed so serious a character that, after the case had been partly argued, the magistrate himself repaired in person to the spot and tested the grievance by actual observation. The specific charge was advanced against the "Metropolitan Alum-Works," an establishment in which, by the ingenuity of the proprietor, Mr. A. A. CROLL, the refuse liquor of gas-works is converted into good useful alum, and ultimately, perhaps, into fine baker's bread. Unluckily, this triumph of chymistry was attended with unpleasant incidents. The vapour evolved from the ammoniacal fluid in course of solidification was inexpressibly abominable, and, as it was urged, directly prejudicial to health. Gas liquor does not become alum without a struggle, and the conflict of chymical elements was destructive to the natural atmosphere of the place. However, Mr. CROLL took the advice of the Inspectors, laid out a good bit of money, and flattered himself that he had succeeded in abating the evil. If he could have brought his neighbours to share that opinion, it would have been all very well, but in this attempt he failed. The obstinate people of the district persisted in their discontent, and the chief part of Mr. YARDLEY'S time towards the close of last week was occupied in hearing the case over again. Here it was that the arguments took so curious and notable a turn.

There was no meeting the charge with an absolute contradiction. Mr. CROLL'S advocate was fain to admit that a "certain amount of unpleasant smells" could, no doubt, be proved; but what he denied was that the real noxious and particular odour of which the neighbours complained could be traced to the works of his client. Bow-common was full of nuisances, always had been, and in fact was "used to it." There were metallurgical works, there of all descriptions, extensive chymical works, and

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manure establishments in every variety, some of which worked up stale blood, some fish, and others might soil, as the case might be. Now, who was to say, in the face of these facts, that the bad smells on the Common came from the alum-works only? To be sure this argument was attempted. People did come forward to certify that they had run the chief nuisance fairly down, that they had followed their noses, and gone straight to CROLL's works without a check; but it wouldn't do. Defendant's counsel was too many for them, and matched all their complaints with something as bad, or worse, in another quarter. Mr. ANSELL, a medical officer of health, declared that the vapour from the alum-works had tarnished the brass taps in a publichouse 200 yards off, and that he tracked the scent fully half a mile, identifying it all the time. When pushed, however, by Mr. CHILD, he was forced to confess that there were other "noxious factories" close by, and that, in point of fact, they were "too numerous to mention." Another professional witness found the particular taint in the air at 40 yards' distance from the establishment, followed it right into the works, and caught, as it were, the vapour itself ascending from the liquor-tanks—a "deleterious and fetid gas, dangerous both to health and comfort." But Mr. CHILD was "down upon him" in a second. Not only were "other works" on the spot excessively offensive, but deponent was compelled to own, on cross-examination, that whereas he had noticed only one barge full of gas liquor unloading alongside Mr. CROLL's premises, there were no fewer than four such craft discharging the same commodity at the establishment adjoining. Evidently, Mr. CROLL was only answerable for one-fifth of the nuisance, if for that.

Then came the general argument—the defence "on the whole case." Here was an enterprising and scientific speculator who had invested a vast amount of money—20,000L. at least—in an ingenious and useful process. Was all this capital to be shut up because an indefinite and inappreciable amount of pollution was added to the atmosphere of Bow-common? It "was not like going to Grosvenor-square or Belgravia;" that might have been a nuisance, no doubt; but at Bow-common it was all natural and prescriptive. Very likely the manufacture was disagreeable and the effluvia rather noxious; but it was too bad to say it produced sore throats, for it only caused sickness, as was deposed by a medical witness in mitigation of the charge. Then, as to the neighbours who had been complaining, who were they? Why, they were house proprietors, who had taken tenants so unconscionable and fastidious as to object to any corruption of the atmosphere whatever, who had "let their houses to persons to whom "any odour would be offensive, and the evidence of these gentlemen ought not to be taken "as disinterested."

that the real noxious and particular odour of which the neighbours complained could be traced to the works of his client. Bow-common was full of nuisances, always had been and, in fact, was "used to it." There were substantial (?) works there of all descriptions, extensive chymical works, and manure establishments in every variety some of which worked up stale blood, some fish and others night soil, as the case might be. Now, who was to say, in the face of these facts, that the bad smells on the Common came from the alum-works only? To be sure this argument was attempted. People did come forward to certify that they had run the chief nuisance fairly down, that they had followed their noses, and gone straight to CROLL's works without a check; but it wouldn't do. Defendant's counsel was too many for them and matched all their complaints with something as bad, or worse, in another quarter.

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Of course not. Nothing would please people of that sort but really pure air, and could any such extravagant notions justify the "bold interference with the employment of "capital" now proposed? Mr. YARDLEY appeared affected by these arguments. Something, he remarked, had been actually done by way of abatement, whereas the "whole force of the law" could not make Bow-common a pleasant place to live at. Moreover, Mr. CROLL was a man of great scientific attainments, who was obtaining "valuable results from a liquor considered dangerous and useless before." Finally, there was a superior court to which the question, in this important stage, might be carried for further consideration; and so, upon the whole, the case against Mr. CROLL was dismissed from the police-court jurisdiction.

This will not be very satisfactory to the people of Bow-common, nor very encouraging to the promoters of social science. One nuisance, it is evident, can be made to protect another, and 50 in a lump will be perfectly unassailable. Very likely the alum-works are not much worse than the manure-works, perhaps not so bad; but the true question is whether any such establishments ought to be permitted in the heart of a populous district. Mr. YARDLEY's argument, that nothing would purify Bow-common, is not good for much. Precisely the same was said of the Thames, and we know what all that has come to. We do not mean to impugn the particular decision of the magistrate in this particular case. Perhaps, as things are actually tolerated, Mr. CROLL's works could not have been condemned without injustice, though the evidence was not conclusive even on this point; but it is as plain as possible that the inhabitants of Bow-common are suffering under a wrong for which, by some course or other, there ought to be an effectual remedy. The air of the place is directly poisoned by noxious vapours arising from certain manufactures, and it is contrary to all reason that such manufactures should be permitted. The case, however, furnishes a singular commentary on the addresses just delivered at Bradford. In one part of the kingdom we have statesmen and philosophers introducing the truths of sanitary science to applauding hearers; in the metropolis itself we have lawyers arguing that nuisances destructive to public health are in great measure defensible, and magistrates ruling that they are not to be summarily put down. If sanitary science is to make any real progress, these anomalies must be terminated, and proceedings detrimental to the health of the population must be subjected to immediate control on the simple proof of the fact.

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This rather compassionate and 'non-Establishment' report highlights what was quite a divided society - as was suggested in the trial itself, Belgravia was decidedly not Bow Common and the 'rules' were administered accordingly!

Not surprisingly, this article stirred up some feeling and on the same day a reader was moved to write a letter to the Times, on reading the leader comment, and very clearly revealed which side of the social fence he sat on! There is a readable transcript on the following page.

A Letter to The Times of Wed. 19th October in response to the above:

BOW COMMON.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—There could hardly be a more convincing proof of the utter dearth of matter of public interest at this season than the fact that Bow-common and its so-called "nuisances" should have been honoured with a "leader" in *The Times*.

There are people to be found who will grumble at anything, no matter how natural or how much in accordance with the fitness of things; but I do intreat you, for I know this Bow-common case very well indeed, to spare your sympathy for some more deserving object.

"Nuisances," indeed! Why, Sir, must not every gentleman's establishment in the country have its "nuisances"? You don't put the wash-tub in the conservatory, or the manure heap in the carriage drive, or make the stables open out of the drawing-room by folding doors; but you can't get rid of these appendages, so you put them out of the way, in some convenient place, and hide them with a wall or a plantation.

Everybody can understand that it would never do to set up ammoniacal works or a blood-bolling establishment in Hyde Park. On the contrary, the necessity for supplying the Serpentine with *eau de Cologne* at the public expense has already been very nearly established, and will, it is hoped, be universally recognised next summer. But the East-end of London is in the nature of things, as well as by common consent, the proper receptacle for everything that would be intolerable anywhere else, Whitechapel sugar bakeries, Petticoat-lane, and Bow-common manure works included.

Nor could a better place be found for the collection of these "nuisances" than Bow-common itself. It says as plainly as a very large open space in the midst of a dense population can speak, "Rubbish of all sorts may be shot here." If you are incredulous, get into a North London train in Fenchurch-street and see for yourself.

If there should be some foolish sanitary man or other "philanthropist" in the carriage with you, he will tell you, no doubt, that it is the very place to secure for a people's park; that, in fact, it occupies at the East-end precisely the position which Hyde Park occupies in the West, the Victoria Park being matched by the Regent's Park in exactly the same way. But people with crotchets—especially with crotchets about social reforms—will say anything.

The East-end, as I have already said, is the very place for the metropolitan pigsties and manure heap. Have not we been for years sending all the London sewage down there, *videlicet* the Thames, although the obstinacy of the tide, as democratical as it was in the days of King Canute, the Dane, has been deliberately taking it back to Westminster? And are not we now proceeding to "sell" the tide in this matter, by taking all the sewage down to the east by a private road, and by establishing (not so far from Bow-common, by the way) some delightful pumping works to enable the "low level" and the "high level" to mingle their limpid streams?

Of course you will understand that the population in the immediate vicinity of Bow-common consists only of those who are very properly called "the lower orders;" and whilst the importance of fresh and pure air is evident for respectable people, and for the richer classes, who are accustomed to well-ventilated houses, and to a summer holiday at the seaside or in the country, it must be as plain that the same necessity does not exist in the case of those who have been accustomed all their lives to small and crowded dwellings, and whose occupations and means prevent either themselves or their children from ever getting out of London.

Trusting that you will allow these remarks, although just now they may be somewhat unfashionable, a place in your impartial columns,

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Oct. 19.

SUUM CUIQUE.

**BOW COMMON
TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES**

Sir,- there could hardly be more convincing proof of the utter dearth of matter of public interest at this season than the fact that Bow-common and its so-called "nuisances" should have been honoured with a "leader" in *The Times*.

There are people to be found who will grumble at anything, no matter how natural or how much accordance in the fitness of things; but I do intreat you, for I know this Bow-common case very well, to spare your sympathy for some more deserving object.

"Nuisances," indeed! Why, Sir, must not every gentleman's establishment in the country have its "nuisances?" You don't put the wash-tub in the conservatory, or the manure heap in the carriage drive, or make the stables open out of the drawing-room by folding doors; but you can't get rid of these appendages, as you put them out of the way, in some convenient place, and hide them with a wall or a plantation.

Everybody can understand that it would never do to set up ammoniacal works or a blood-boiling establishment in Hyde Park. On the contrary, the necessity for supplying the Serpentine with *eau de Cologne* at the public expense has already been very nearly established, and will, it is hoped, be universally recognised next summer. **But the East-end of London is in the nature of things, as well by common consent, the proper receptacle for everything that would be intolerable elsewhere, Whitechapel sugar bakeries, Petticoat-lane and Bow-common manure works included.**

Nor could a better place be found for the collection of these "nuisances" than Bow-common itself. It says as plainly as a very large open space in the midst of a dense population can speak, "Rubbish of all sorts may be shot here." If you are incredulous, get into a North London train at Fenchurch-street and see for yourself. If there should be some foolish sanitary man or other "philanthropist" in the carriage with you, he will tell you, no doubt, that it is the very place to secure for a people's park; that it occupies at the East-end precisely the position which Hyde Park occupies in the West, the Victoria Park being matched by the Regent's Park in exactly the same way. But people with crochets - especially with crochets about social reforms - will say anything.

The East-end, as I have already said, is the very place for the metropolitan pigsties and manure heap. Have we not for years been sending all the London sewage down there, *via* the Thames, although the obstinacy of the tide, as democatrical as it was in the days of King Canute the Dane, has been deliberately taking it back to Westminster? And are we not now proceeding to "sell" the tide in this matter, by taking all the sewage down to the east by a private road and by establishing (not so far from Bow-common by the way) some delightful pumping works to enable the "low level" and "high level" to mingle their limpid streams.

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Oct. 19

SUUM CUIQUE

('Suum Cuique' means 'To each his own.' Or, 'may all get what is due to them.')

Either this is a deeply offensive view of the poor and of the people of the East End, or it is a sharply and almost dangerously ironic piece about the view of the poor in society and social attitudes, generally. I really do hope it is the latter! But, for sure such attitudes did hold, whether we like it or not, even up to our own time.

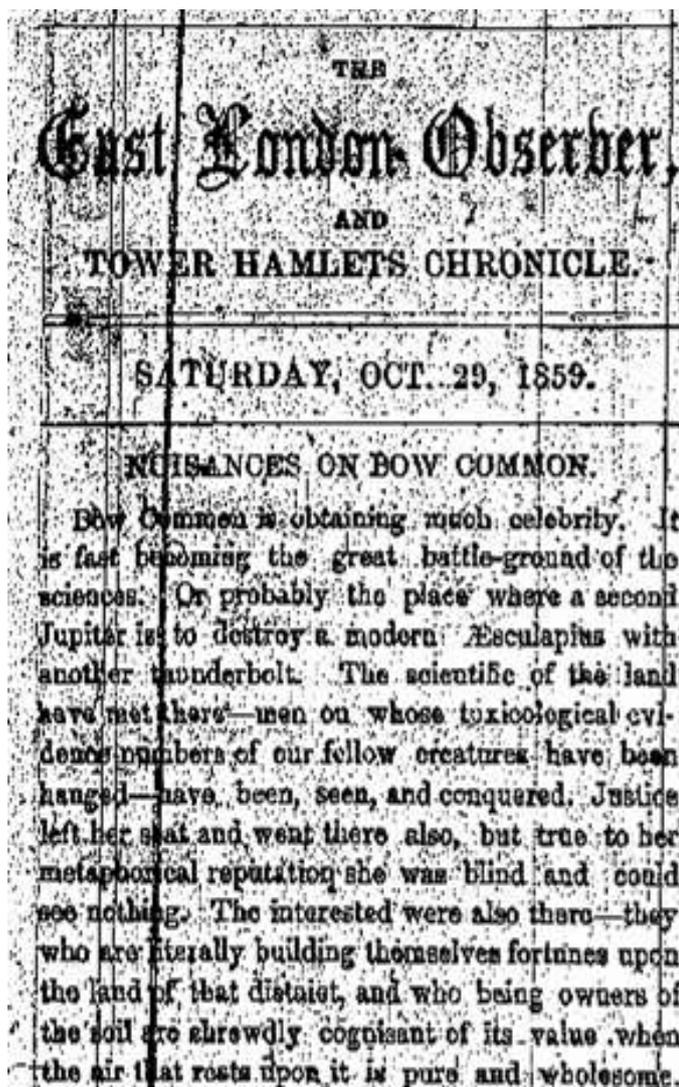
It has been extraordinary to see in places which were among the poorest and most shunned parts of London for the best part of a century, in both parishes in which I have been incumbent, turn about in the past couple of decades to become fashionable and even chic! My previous parish of Hackney Wick was called 'The Sink' at about the time this correspondence was written and was looked down upon even by the other poor areas of Hackney. With the nearness of the new Olympic Park it is now a chic place to be! An article in the magazine Time Out in 2014 had an article headed, 'Hackney Wick: fashion capital of the world?'

In the parish of Bow Common there are strong connections in the 2nd half of the 19th century with the work of the legendary **Dr. Thomas Barnado** (see later for the 'Barnardo Connection' in both parishes of St. Paul's, Bow Common and St. Luke's, Burdett Rd.) Near to the church was an area rather offensively called the 'Fenian Barracks' on account of the large number of Irish inhabitants. Police never went into the area except in pairs and the largest number of police injuries in the Metropolitan area were credited to this area. After the turn of the new millennium we began to see good new housing appearing in the parish, both social housing and part-owned, part-rented – a major change in the housing pattern in that area. More will be said later about the Victorian profile of the church.

After the article in the Times, a few days later the local press took up the matter of the 'Nuisances' of Bow Common and this carefully considered and balanced article, cynical of the given reasons for complaint and looking rather to pressures from rich land speculators, appeared in the East London Observer and Tower Hamlets Chronicle.

*** It is worth reading! ***

Lead Article of Saturday 29th October 1859: East London Observer:



THE
East London Observer
 AND
 TOWER HAMLETS CHRONICLE
 SATURDAY, OCT. 29, 1859
 NUISANCES IN BOW COMMON

Bow Common is obtaining much celebrity. It is fast becoming the great battle-ground of the sciences. Or probably the place where a second Jupiter is to destroy a modern Aesculapius with another thunderbolt. The scientific of the land have met there – men on whose toxicological evidence members of our fellow creatures have been hanged – have been, seen and conquered. Justice left her seat and went there also, but true to her metaphorical reputation she was blind and could see nothing. The interested were also there – they who are literally building fortunes upon the land of that district, and who being owners of the soil are shrewdly cognisant of its value, when the air that rests upon it is pure and wholesome.

Then, because science is lame and justice blind, there came upon the scene a posse of mere lawyers, who care for neither science nor justice, and poor Bow Common is pulled and tossed about by this contention until nobody knows what is to be done. Scientific men and justice none know what to be at — nor is the conclusion when arrived at a whit more satisfactory than the contest. Seeing this, the leviathan of the press steps in, and, if anything, makes matters still worse. The *Times* honours Bow Common with a leader, racy and descriptive as usual, but as far as conviction of what should be done is concerned, was as void as an exhausted receiver. It was one of those see-saw leaders for which the *Times* is famous. Pithy, readable, and in parts exceedingly funny, but from which no guide for sensible action can be drawn.

There can be no doubt that the question is a difficult one, and requires considerable care in dealing with it. As to the whole place being a nuisance, no person can honestly deny it. The evidence of Drs. Taylor and Odling was of a piece with their recent Old Bailey performances; no reliance can be placed upon it. Sergeant Thomas, who was retained for the Poplar Board of Works, thus estimated the evidence of three eminent M.Ds., two of them being also professors of chemistry. He said "He thought the evidence of Dr. Taylor, Dr. Odling and Dr. Murdock would have been very different if they had been retained for the public interest instead of being retained for the defendant." We should have looked upon that as a serious charge, but unfortunately the public has had too many illustrations of the ease with which scientific men can be induced to give evidence for or against anything, to attach much importance to it. The case need not rest upon any such evidence. The difficulties are of an entirely different nature. They go to the justice of any interference such as would necessitate a removal of the manufactories altogether. It is to that we must really come, and as the time is not far distant we may as well begin to understand the real state of the case.

Bow Common, as every body knows who knows anything of the East of London, was, until recently an isolated out-of-the-way place, in which manufactories which could not be tolerated in populated places found space and convenience for their establishment. It has consequently offered facilities for the establishment of such manufactories, and upon it have existed chemical works and other works of a deleterious nature for a longer period than can be remembered.

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It has been notorious for its filthy odours time out of mind. So much so that its most important works have been made to indicate its peculiar characteristics. It is a manufactory of bad smells, and its principal bridge is called "Stink House Bridge." Nothing could more clearly indicate the feeling of the people in respect of the "Common" than the term universally applied to the bridge. But now Drs. Taylor, Odling, and Murdock are brought down with a scientific thesis to prove there is no nuisance. True, say they, there was a slight smell of sulphurous acid, but not sufficient of sulphuretted hydrogen to be a nuisance. This is simple nonsense. The whole common is filled with nuisances. We do not say that Mr. Croll's is worse than others. But there are many of them, and in all likelihood they will be all removed, not abated—that can never be permanently effective. They must be entirely removed, and therein lies the difficulty.

If Mr. Croll were to remove his manufactory at once to some out-of-the-way place near to which there were no residences, nor a population to destroy, there would soon arise in the immediate neighbourhood a number of dwellings for the work-people to live in. Other manufactories would be established there, and other dwellings raised, and then most certainly there would be a house larger than the rest for which some speculative builder would ask and obtain a licence. With brass taps and other fine fittings liable to be discoloured with the foul vapours arising from the deleterious manufactures, and then would come the interference of the medical officer of health to condemn the works as injurious to public health.

To say what would be in the case of a removal of these stinking manufactories is only to give a History of Bow Common, for that is precisely the way in which it has grown, and is now deemed to

be represented by the Poplar Board of Works and their officers of health. It is also a question of interest to certain proprietors in the district. Men who have become possessed of land at a cheap rate because of its contiguity to this field of nuisances, now desire to remove the nuisances, so as to make fortunes out of their land. Mr. Cotton, Mr. Tomlin, and others are in this position, and it is of no consideration to them that Mr. Croll or any other person has invested £20,000 in their manufactories; their object is to improve their own property. In doing this they profess to have great regard for the sanitary state of the district and the health of its population. That is so much cant on their part. It is evident they desire to improve the value of their property. When the health of the people alone was a question, they were silent, and no doubt would have been so now if their interests were not concerned in the matter.

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As fairly as possible we have stated the facts on both sides, and from them the difficulty of doing justice to all parties will be apparent. Viewed commercially the manufacturers have the greater right. They were on the spot first, when it was an out-of-the-way, abandoned place. Their capital was invested there, and gave rise to the buildings and population which until recently were all that were there. Now Bow Common is surrounded by a large class of houses, and consequently by a more fastidious population, and proprietors are anxious to change the character of the place. If we were to judge the matter from a commercial point of view only we should decide that builders have no right to take a population to a nuisance and then complain that the nuisance is there, and for their own profit, remove it.

There is, however, a much higher ground than this to take. We acknowledge no mere commercial principle when dealing with the health and lives of the people. Paramount above such selfish considerations is the real happiness of health, and we therefore feel that even if a commercial injustice is forced upon the manufacturers of the district, they must move on. The metropolis is gradually expanding, the suburbs are elbowing the country and shifting it further outward. Mile-end Old-town is extending eastward; Poplar northward; Bromley westward; and between them Bow Common is being gradually reduced to the merest centre of a populous circle. It must become absorbed and its sanitary condition improved. With the full acknowledgement of all the commercial claims the manufacturers have to perpetuate the nuisance, we contend for the higher principle, and feel bound to promote and help forward the efforts of the health officers of Poplar. Their duty is to uproot and finally extinguish that which, notwithstanding all that the Taylors and Odings may say to the contrary, is an intolerable nuisance, and there needs no ghost come from the grave to tell us, that Dr. Ansell is doing good service, and we hope he will persevere, even against temporary defeat, for in the end he must succeed.

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REMOVAL OF NUISANCES.—CHEMICAL WORKS, BOW COMMON.

On Friday and Saturday, October 14 and 15, Mr. Yardley was engaged at the Thames Police Court in hearing evidence on a summons against Mr. Alexander Angus Croll, of the Metropolitan Alum Works, Bow Common Lane, for an alleged nuisance, the summons stating that noxious gases injurious to health were evolved in and upon the premises of Mr. Croll, who was called upon to show cause why an order should not be made upon him to remove the nuisance and carry on his trade without injury to the health of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The prosecution was instituted by the Poplar Board of Works, and was conducted by Mr. Serjeant Thomas, instructed by Mr. W. H. Turner, solicitor. Mr. Child, solicitor, appeared for the defence. The case had been several times before the Court, and adjournments had taken place in order to enable Mr. Croll to carry on his operations in a less offensive manner. Various alterations and improvements suggested by the magistrate and several scientific men who made a visit to the premises in July last, had been carried out. The parochial authorities, however, contended that the nuisance still existed.

Mr. Yardley said the great difficulty was the escape of vapour from the tanks containing the ammoniacal liquor.

Mr. Serjeant Thomas contended that the state of things complained of had not been altered, and called upon the magistrate to order it to be done.

Mr. Yardley objected to make an order for the suppression of a business, or entirely close a large manufactory; if that were required, application must be made to a superior court.

Mr. Serjeant Thomas believed it was not difficult to get rid of the vapour; all that was required was a lofty chimney shaft, or that the sulphuretted hydrogen evolved in the process should be entirely consumed, and not allowed to pass into the air at all. It was contended by Mr. Child that all which could be reasonably expected had been done. A long discussion followed, Mr. Serjeant Thomas contending that the process as at present carried on was prejudicial to the health of the inhabitants, and a nuisance, Mr. Child arguing the contrary.

Mr. E. Warrington, of Apothecaries' Hall, said he attended Mr. Croll's works on Oct. 11th, with Dr. Ansell. The ammoniacal liquor tanks were in operation, and gaseous matter was evolved, and there was a smell of sulphuretted hydrogen; he applied a piece of white test paper, which became brown. The vapour could be smelt thirty or forty yards from the tank shed, and also at the corner of the Bow Road, which vapour he considered dangerous both to health and comfort. He had suggested two things to get rid of the nuisance: either to burn the sulphuretted hydrogen, or absorb it; the most effectual plan would be to have a gasometer into which the vapour could be collected and burnt, or pass it into a chamber containing oxide of iron, and absorb it. In cross-examination by Mr. Child, witness said he would not undertake to say the offensive smell he experienced in the street came from Mr. Croll's works; there were other works in the neighbourhood from which sulphuretted hydrogen was evolved.

Mr. T. Ansell, medical officer of health for the Poplar district, and several other witnesses, confirmed Mr. Warrington's evidence.

Mr. Child then called Dr. A. S. Taylor, Professor of Chemistry, for the defence.

Dr. Taylor said he went to the defendant's works, expecting to find a state of things different from that which actually existed, and the conclusion he came to was, that the sulphuretted hydrogen was not evolved in sufficient quantity to extend to the neighbourhood, and was not a nuisance. Dr. Odling and Dr. Murdoch followed on the same side, confirming Dr. Taylor's evidence.

Mr. Yardley, in summing up the case, said the question was narrowed to this—Was there a sufficient amount of sulphuretted hydrogen to injure health and be a nuisance? He did not consider that this was proved. He therefore refused to make the order, and dismissed the summons. Mr. Serjeant Thomas applied for costs, which were refused, on the ground that as no order had been made no costs could be ordered.

In the wider story of Bow Common this is very telling story and witnesses to the earliest phase of social transition which has taken place in this area. From centuries of being an unpopulated rural back-water it then became a useful place for industry to relocate to, away from London, as the city grew. An interesting little feature of the climate also suited this state of affairs! In the British Isles the prevailing winds are mostly south-westerly and so noxious fumes would be blown up to Essex and not back towards the city or the suburbs of London! Only the poor who had fewer choices would put up with such unpleasant conditions and as the article above shows the complaints began to be raised once the more vocal and more prosperous found that London was already full & people needed to live out east.

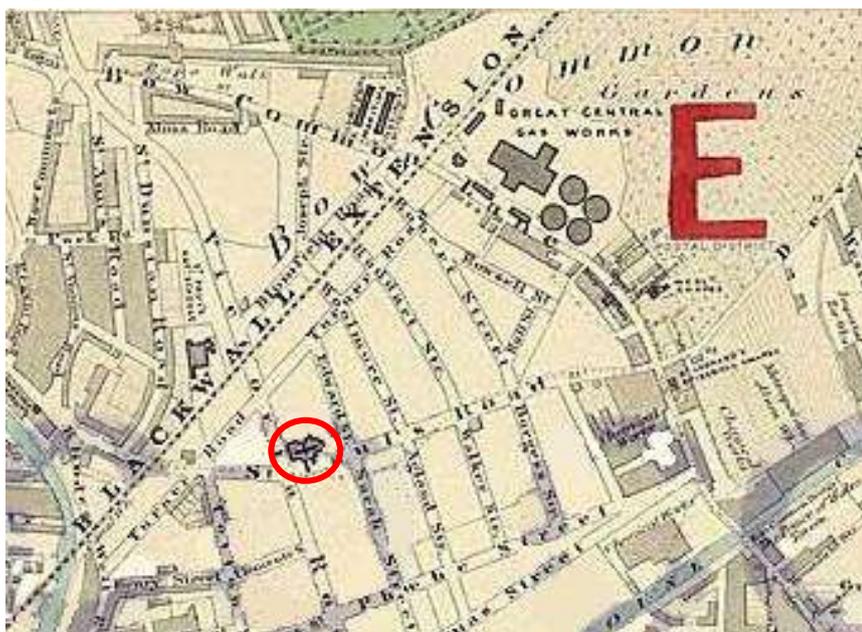
The underlying story above is that better off people now wanted to live in the East End and, understandably, neither they nor the poor wanted to be poisoned by noxious fumes. But the property developers were on the case and could see the potential in buying up land in Bow Common and in the article above Mr. Cotton and Mr. Tomlin are named. This virgin land was rich for snapping up and building decent housing upon. From 1871 there was a station on Burdett Rd., which connected with Fenchurch Street in the heart of the City of London and as roads were built and improved, this area was very effectively joined up now with the rest of the metropolis.

Of particular relevance and interest to this account is one of those property developers mentioned above, **Mr. Cotton!** The lead article in the East London Observer is quite damning about their part and their motivation in the 'Nuisance' controversy: *'their object is to improve their own property. In doing this they profess to have great regard for the sanitary state of the district and the health of its population. That is so much cant on their part. It is evident they desire to improve the value of their property, When the health of the people alone was a question, they were silent, and would have been so now if their interests were not concerned in the matter.'* It was the same **William Cotton** who bought up the heart of Bow Common and built some very decent housing along Burdett Rd., and elsewhere but who also, out of his own pocket, **built the first church of St. Paul's, Bow Common in 1858!**

More, soon, about this man and his generous act which gave rise to the stream of faith which has flowed in that place even to the present day in a remarkable successor to the church he built.

Even in *Punch* (Issue 37 of 1859) there was mention of this controversy! *'Mr Croll, the proprietor of Croll's Metropolitan Alum Works on Bow Common, has avoided proposals to deodorize his noxious gas-producing factory on the grounds that it is only 'one great nuisance among a variety of greater nuisances'. Advises Croll that to satisfy plaintiffs he should use the 'very liquor out of which he gets alum attended with foul exhalations' to produce 'exquisite scents' that 'shall over-power all offensive emanations'. Inhabitants of surrounding areas, it adds, 'will be only ready to die' in such perfumes.'*

1862



The modern pattern of streets is established (though the 2nd World War and later redevelopment would see further changes, as well as complete reconfiguration of what one would actually find on all these streets).

For the first time the church (built just 4 years previously) appears on a map (in the red circle). It stands at the corner of Victoria Rd. (now Burdett Rd.) and St. Paul's Road (now St. Paul's Way)

By 1875 it can be seen Victoria Rd. has now become **Burdett Rd.** This renaming was in honour of a hugely generous philanthropist who helped so many in the East End, **Angela Burdett-Coutts**, who was perhaps the

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wealthiest heiress in England but gave away literally millions, to help others. Queen Victoria made her a Baroness in 1871 and perhaps it was this act that triggered this local recognition, of renaming Victoria Rd. in her honour before 1875 as seen on the next map. A Coutts Rd. was also named quite near to St. Luke's church, at a later time.

1875



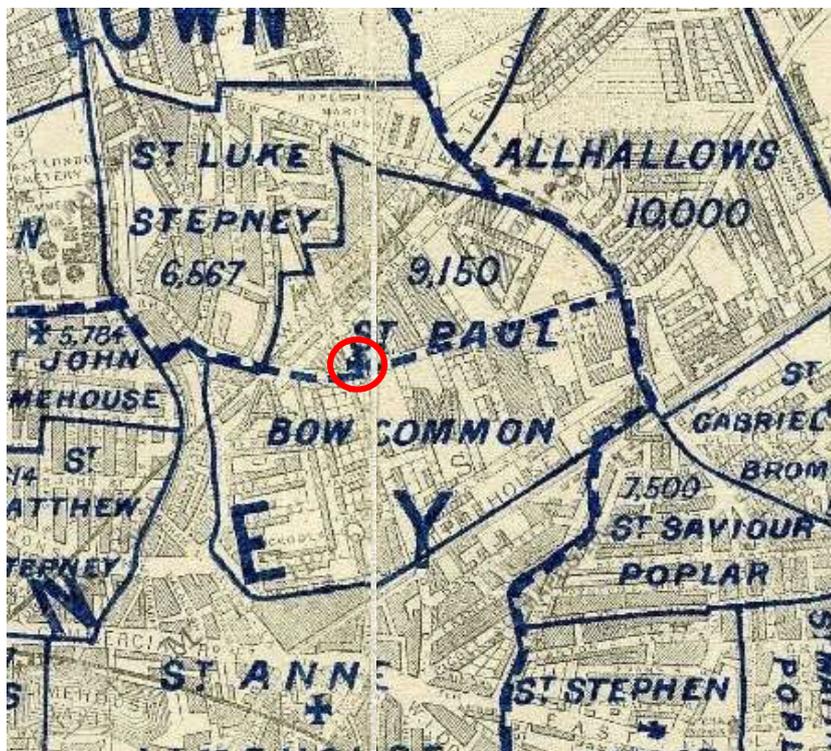
For some reason buildings such as churches are not shown on this map! But the position is indicated here.

Victoria Rd., has now been re-named Burdett Rd.

Bow Common, now very much reduced, can be seen east of Bow Common Lane. It is today still open land but is now Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, a valuable nature

reserve on the City of London and Tower Hamlets Cemetery closed in 1966 and opened in 1841

1877

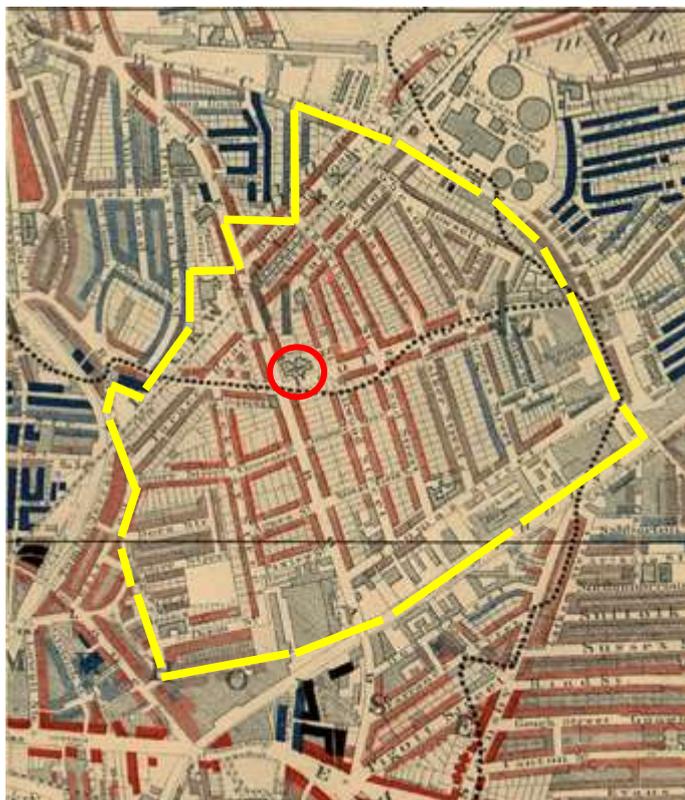


In October 1865 the new Mission District of St. Luke's, Burdett Rd. was instituted, separated out from the larger mother parish of Holy Trinity Stepney supported by the Bishop of London's Fund. The Mission priest, The Revd. William Wallace worked hard and produced results in what was a very deprived area. There was no church and the first service was held in the School building next door, of St. Paul's, Bow Common. The enterprise began to prove itself and by 1869 a permanent church had been consecrated. There is more about this later.

This map of 1877 shows the parish boundaries and populations of all the parishes of East London. The parish of St. Paul's, Bow Common has a population of 9150 and looking at nearby much smaller parishes and their populations it can be seen how desneely populated some of them were, with serious overcrowding.

Parish boundaries are usually smooth and tidy things and follow certain natural boundaries such as railway lines, canals, motorways, parkland etc. In the case of Bow Common near the end of the C19 these were the Limehouse Cut, Regent's Canal and Bow Common Lane (not quite as simple as that, but more or less!). I wondered, therefore, about the deliberately ragged boundary between St. Luke's parish and that of St. Paul's. St. Luke's parish came into being some 10 years after St. Paul's and so the latter church's boundaries must have been adjusted to accommodate this, as well as St. Luke's other neighbouring parishes.

1889



The Streets are coloured according to the general condition of the inhabitants, as under--

■ Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.	■ Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.
■ Very poor, casual. Chronic want.	■ Middle-class. Well-to-do.
■ Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family.	■ Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.
■ Mixed. Some comfortable, others poor.	

A combination of colours— as dark blue and black, or pink and red— indicates that the street contains a fair proportion of each of the classes represented by the respective colours.

In 1889, just 12 years later, Charles Booth carried out his survey of poverty in London. It was a remarkable work with every street walked and recorded for its living conditions. He used a colour code which can also be seen below his map to the left.

A few years ago just for interest I projected Booth's poverty map onto a map of the parish at about that time and, as can be seen, it is very revealing. The parish itself seems to be mostly coloured as 'Fairly comfortable, good ordinary earnings,' with the peripheries of the parish being 'Mixed, some comfortable others poor.'

Just to the east in All Hallows Parish (where the so-called Fenian Barracks were located) there is street after street labelled, 'Lowest Class, Vicious, semi-criminal.' These are appalling labels and speak of social attitudes of the time, however here was deep poverty, just a street away from our parish.

And then, when one examines the curiously contrived ragged boundary at the north-western end of the parish it is clear that it very precisely avoids the poorer streets in that area.

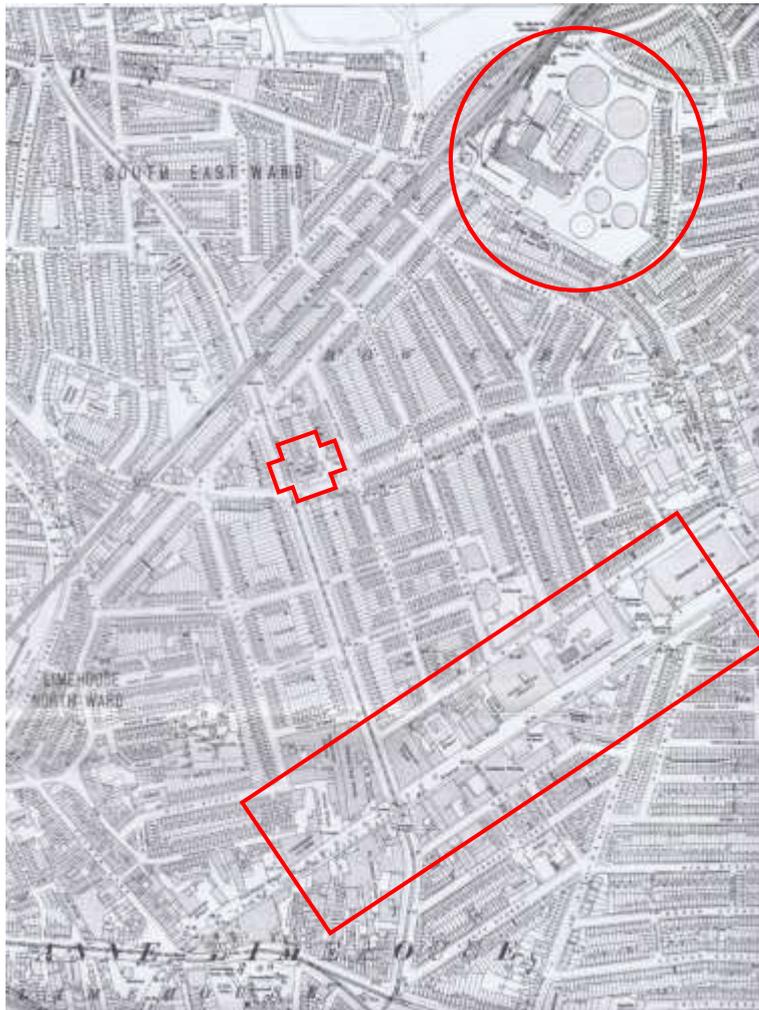
At first site it hints rather alarmingly at avoidance and socially engineered parish boundaries! There are no records that I have access to which reveal how those boundaries were arrived at but one has to guess that since St. Luke's started as a Mission District to serve those very poor people (who were part of another parish after all) they then chose to embrace those streets and people into the new parish of St. Luke when it was was formed. One would like to think so, at least!

Even so this map is revealing as to how very varied living conditions were in the East End, even one street away. At the end of the 1800's it could be estimated then that the parish of St. Paul's, Bow Common was, by and large, populated by comfortably-off people. As mentioned again a little later, the fortunes of the parish dipped considerably by the time of post-War recovery and the parish remained the 4th most deprived in the Diocese of London on the Index of Mass Deprivation (IMD), up to shortly before the time of my retirement. In 2012 it was 294th most deprived out 12,707 parishes nationwide (ie in the 2% most deprived parishes across a range of indices of deprivation). And by 2014 it had risen out of the 10 most deprived parishes in the Diocese of London.

The expansion of London began long before this period. During Medieval times plagues and famines effectively kept population growth under control. However by the time of the Tudors, London's population began to grow - to around 200,000. In 1714 the population of London was around 630,000 but the years of Industrial Revolution came and in 1800 already stood around one million. By 1840, London's population had swollen to nearly 2 million, making it the largest city in the world. During the C19 London expanded further and the population grew to around 6.5 million by 1900. With the opening of the London Underground in 1863 one of the biggest problems for an expanding population - that of mobility - enabled people (who could afford it) to leave the crowded city and move to new suburban developments, but still with access to the metropolis.

(As an aside, an expanding population and the need for more churches also meant the need for more Bishops! There was an Elizabethan experiment with new suffragan bishops under the Suffragan Bishops' Act of 1534. Bedford was created under this but fell into abeyance after 1560. In 1879 Bishop William Walsham How was appointed to minister in East London. And then Area Bishoprics with more appropriate titles were established, beginning with a Bishop of Stepney in 1895. In 1979 the Area system was established and Stepney became an Area Bishopric.)

All of this had a direct effect on the fortunes of Bow Common. On one hand fine houses were built by developers such as William Cotton in the new parish of St. Paul's, Bow Common while, as can be seen from Booth's maps, just a few streets away conditions could be grim. I have the impression that some of these sharp social disparities evened out by the end of the First World War. There is no description or evidence that I have found, of what the social landscape was like after that and, to be honest, it is very hard to tell how things were in Bow Common.



As to what became of Mr. Croll's Alum Works, I have not been able to find out when, presumably, he relocated or perhaps closed down at some later stage.

In 2010 during Lent in the year of the 50th Anniversary of the consecration of the present-day St. Paul's, Bow Common, I led a small group around the parish armed with an OS map of 1914. A huge amount of development had already begun inside the parish and as we prepared for all of that I wanted us to trace what had been there before and have a slightly more 'joined-up' sense of our history, ministry and mission.

In this map of 1914 the first striking feature is the density of housing. The church is indicated by the red cross shape. But even with so much population, in the midst of it all was industry. The large gas works shown within the circle first appears in the map of 1862 (see above) as 'The Great Central Gas Works' and 10 minutes' walk off the left side of the map would have brought

you to the other equally large Stepney gas works.

Within the square red box above, from left to right are to be found:

Copenhagen Oil Mills, Disinfectant Factory, Victoria Lead works (where a branch of LIDL supermarket stands today!), numerous wharves which include a Biscuit Works, Cabinet Works, Saltpetre Works, a Gold and Silver Refinery, Radium Works and chemical works (the latter being the site of some very fine and luxurious residences of several storeys, today).

Some of these are very much chemical manufactories and one wonders whether the smells and nuisance were still a trouble to what by then was a much increased population. Did people just put up with it? Did the richer folk simply head further out away from the fumes? Had there been any outcome of the public outcry way back in 1859 which, in some way, tempered the worst effects of the pollution or persuaded those industries to relocate?

And then came World War II with huge destruction of old housing and the established old population pretty much broken up with many dispersed. The strong 'village-like' identity of areas like Bow Common came to an end and new residents arrived with little connection to the area or reason to feel they 'belonged.' It was a struggle for Fr. Kirkby in those post-War years to draw people to the church. Not only had the old habits of church-going ended, such as they were, but there were no allegiances to any 'social centres' such as churches could be.

Social housing for rent and the Welfare State made decent living more affordable & certainly even up to the mid 1990's when I came to the parish the vast majority of housing was rented from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and then from a variety of social landlords and Housing Associations who took over the Borough's housing stock. The London Plan was never carried out after the War and the 'quick-fix' of putting up enormous tower-blocks fortunately did not prevail - there are only 2 in the parish, of about 20-odd storeys. Owner occupiers were rare in the parish apart from the few who had bought their flats under the Right to Buy Policy of 1980.

Even so, as already mentioned, for the duration of my ministry in Bow Common the parish scored as the 4th most deprived parish in the Diocese of London on the IMD. And then, from about 2008 or so, even with a financial collapse of banks and other institutions, cranes were seen in almost any direction on the skyline! A new chapter has begun in the life and fortunes of those living in Bow Common. Just as in 1858 it would have been impossible to imagine what was to come, so, humbly, we have to admit to the impossibility of speculation as to the future both of the church and of the people of Bow Common. Whatever it is, what we can be sure of, however, is that the church and people of St. Paul's will be there to serve and to witness.

The point of including this history of the parish alongside the full architectural story of the present St. Paul's, Bow Common is to underline that the building is not just an amazing and radical expression of some remarkable minds. I would say it is **above all** and **first** of all, a parish church, there for the worship of God by the Christian community which gathers in that place. It is equally there to welcome, witness, serve & embrace all who make up the population of the ever changing face of that small patch of land whose history I have been trying to trace in this account & which, since 1858, has been the Parish of St. Paul's, Bow Common.



The First St. Paul's, Bow Common

In an earlier section, in the editorial article of 29th October 1859 from the East London Observer we saw some criticism of land speculators who, as London's population spread ever eastwards, were buying up open land such as Bow Common to build housing and to make a fortune. The strong suggestion was they are opportunistic speculators and didn't have much care for the people already there or their needs. One such named was a **Mr. Cotton**.

This judgement may have been rather harsh in his case as William Cotton had a lifetime record of generosity and philanthropy. And, of most relevance to this account, **he built the first St. Paul's, Bow Common out of his own funds** for the people of the district who were already there and for those who would later live in the houses he would build.

William Cotton 1786 - 1866

From www.thepeerage.com/e58.htm (compiler Darryl Lundy) We learn that: *'William Cotton, 1786-1866, merchant and philanthropist, was the third son of Joseph Cotton. He was born at Leyton on 12 Sept. 1786, and was educated at the Chigwell grammar school. Despite an inclination (which recurred more than once during his life) to take holy orders, he entered the counting-house of his father's friend, Charles H. Turner, at the early age of fifteen; and henceforth all his education was self-acquired in the intervals of business.*

In 1807 he was admitted a partner in the firm of Huddart & Co. at Limehouse, (and so, had a connection with this area of the East End from age 21) which had been founded a few years earlier by Sir R. Wigram, Captain J. Woolmore, and C. H. Turner, in order to carry out on a large scale Captain Joseph Huddart's ingenious inventions for the manufacture of cordage. Of this business he was soon entrusted with the general management ...

In 1821 he was first elected a director of the Bank of England, an office that he continued to hold until a few months before his death, having been for many years father of the bank. From 1843 to 1845 he was governor, the usual term of two years being extended to three years, in consideration of his services in connection with the renewal of the charter, which was then being managed by Sir Robert Peel.

But though Cotton prospered in business, his chief title to fame is derived from his lifelong devotion to the cause of philanthropy, especially in connection with the Church of England in the east of London. Though never a very rich man, the total of his charitable donations would amount to a large sum, for from the first he set apart a tithe of his income for this purpose. But the time, the personal care, and the organising faculty that he bestowed were of far more value than the mere money, and won for him from Bishop Blomfield the honourable title of his lay archdeacon.

His earliest philanthropic efforts, as was natural, were on behalf of the men employed by his firm at Limehouse. Here he was the first to break down the vicious practice of paying wages on Saturday evening by orders on a public-house. This practice, it is curious to find, was supported by the difficulty of getting small change during the French war.'



William Cotton



William Cotton, presumed on his death-bed. Wearing a biretta maybe because he was an honorary lay Archdeacon and also a High Churchman

'He took the greatest interest in St. Anne's schools, Limehouse; he was chairman of the committee in 1814 that placed the administration of the London Hospital on its present successful basis; and he was active in building the church of St. Peter's, Stepney, the first example of parochial subdivision by private effort in the east of London. **Henceforth the building of churches became little short of a passion with him.** A letter of his to John Bowdler, dated 1813, may be regarded as the earliest suggestion of the Incorporated Church Building Society, which dates its actual commencement from a meeting held at the London Tavern in 1818, where his father, Captain Joseph Cotton, was in the chair.

Somewhat later he was Bishop Blomfield's most enthusiastic helper in the organisation of the Metropolis Churches Fund, which afterwards developed into the London Diocesan Church Building Society. His own special work in connection with this society was the **erection of no less than ten churches in Bethnal Green, the last of which (St. Thomas's) he built and endowed out of his own purse as a memorial of a son he had lost.**

Yet another church—that of St. Paul's, Stepney, on Bow Common—he built himself, to carry out his principle that ground landlords should thus perform their duty to those who live in their houses. To this church Bishop Blomfield gave on his deathbed the gold communion plate that had been made for Queen Adelaide; and the first incumbent was William Cotton's youngest son. (This was the **Revd. Arthur Benjamin Cotton**, Vicar from 1858-1878).

But his charitable energies were by no means limited to the building of churches. When quite a young man (1811) he was one of the founders of the National Society, formed for establishing schools in which the principles of the Church of England should be taught. He was on the original council of King's College, and a governor of Christ's Hospital from 1821. For fifty years he was a member, and for a large portion of that time the treasurer, of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. He was also an active supporter of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Colonial Bishops Fund, the Additional Curates Society, &c.

From 1819 until his death he lived at Walwood House, Leytonstone. (Due south of the church across St. Paul's Way in line with the rear of the church hall is currently 'Wallwood Street'!) He died on 1 Dec. 1866, and lies buried in the churchyard of St. John the Baptist, Leytonstone, a church which he had himself been largely instrumental in building. A painted window to his memory was placed, by public subscription, in St. Paul's Cathedral.'



Bishop Charles James Blomfield,
Bishop of London 1828 - 1857

All of this seems genuinely to indicate a man who certainly did care for others and whose avowed Christian beliefs underpinned his lifelong philanthropy. Bishop Charles Blomfield was not only a great supporter of William Cotton but strove hard for the poor of his Diocese. Alas, he died before the new church was built. This generous spirit is witnessed to below.

The first church of St. Paul's, Bow Common is built

And so, having bought up most of the land of Bow Common which was to form the extent of the new parish, the church by **Rhode Hawkins** was built and consecrated on 30th October 1858 by Bishop Archibald Campbell Tait, successor as Bishop of London (1856-1868) to Bishop Blomfield and translated later to become Archbishop of Canterbury (1868-1882).

When one looks at this earliest view of the church taken in 1860, it had already been standing for two years. But it is still surrounded by open land – in fact largely rhubarb fields with perilous gravel pits. The fine housing which he built later can be seen in later views but clearly came a few years after the church was opened. This implies that he had recognised that there were already inhabitants of Bow Common and that their spiritual needs were to be addressed immediately, as well as the needs of those who were yet to come in the housing he would build. The generous nature and spiritual outlook of the man seem once again to be demonstrated.



This is the earliest picture (in fact, a photograph) of 1860 of the church standing in open land. The building materials and piles of bricks could be for the making or paving of Victoria Road (later Burdett Rd.) or for putting up the first buildings on the opposite side of the road. The railway arches which are still there can be seen in the background.

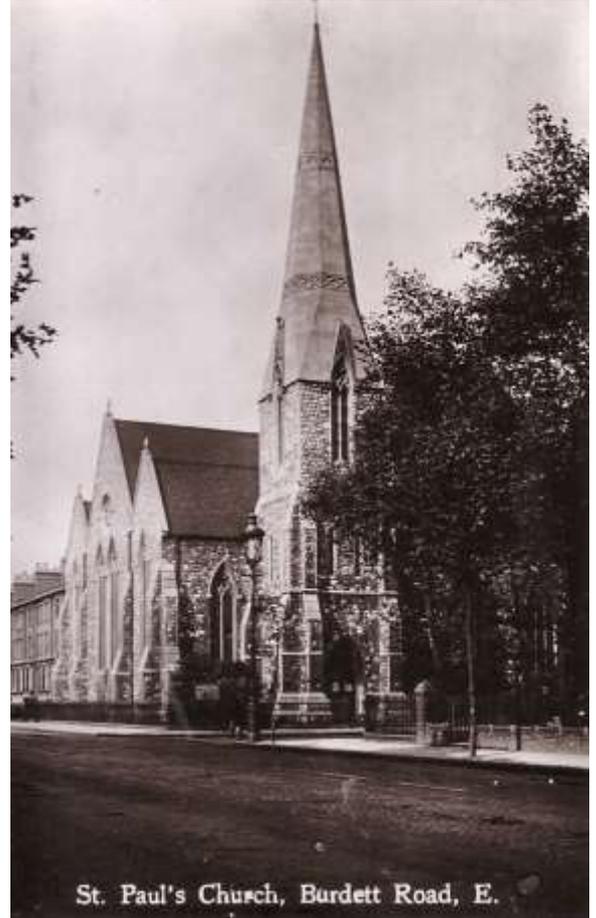
What is almost certainly the Vicarage/Clergy House can be seen where the modern vicarage now stands, behind the church to the north-east. Housing has already been built along what was then St. Paul's Rd. (now St. Paul's Way) – even with street-lamps! – and further beyond (in Bow Common Lane?) as can be seen at the rear of the image. It appears that the church had a main entrance situated in the base of the bell tower (the South Door) and another entrance on the north side of the front face of the church on the main road, through a porch (the West Door).

When William Cotton built his very decent housing alongside the church and all around, these views give a glimpse of what no-one would have imagined in such a forlorn out-of-the-way place just a few decades earlier. They are probably all taken in the early 1900's.



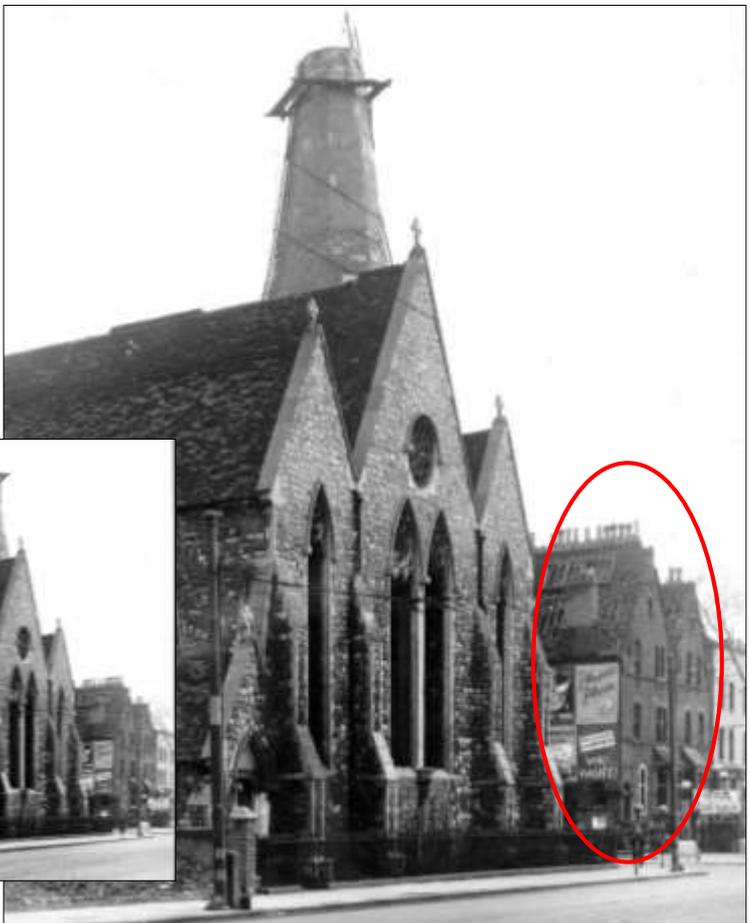
1908

1906



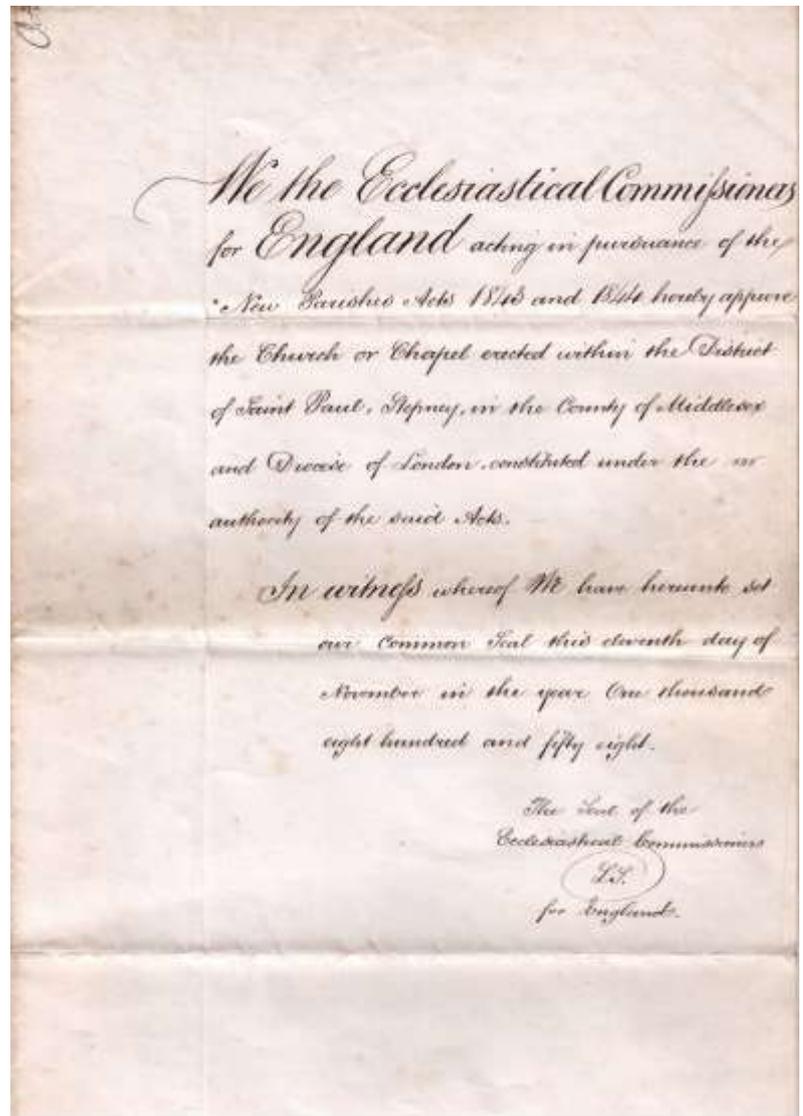
Somewhere I have seen that the large building seen above, opposite the church on St. Paul's Rd. was the clergy house for assistant clergy (there was a staff of 5 clergy in 1892) and others helping in the parish, a sizeable building if that was the case. Whatever it was, it seems much larger than the adjoining terraces.

This view of 1941 shows the vicarage at the left edge of the view, as well as the church damaged by the land mine which fell nearby. This marked the end of the first church of St. Paul's Bow Common and the end of a chapter in the church's history.

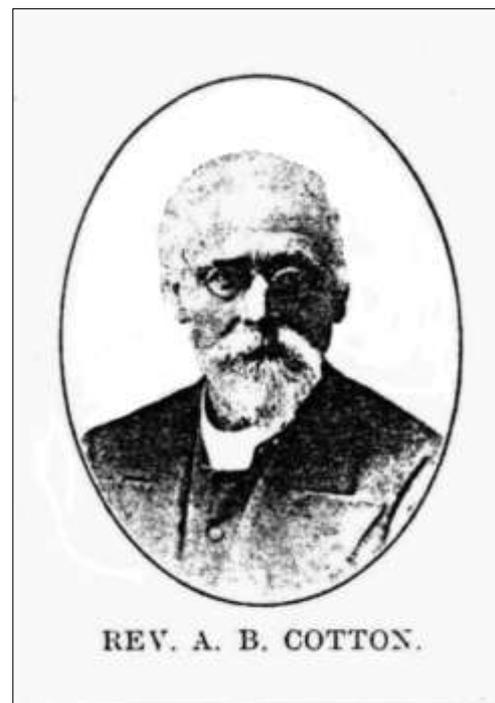
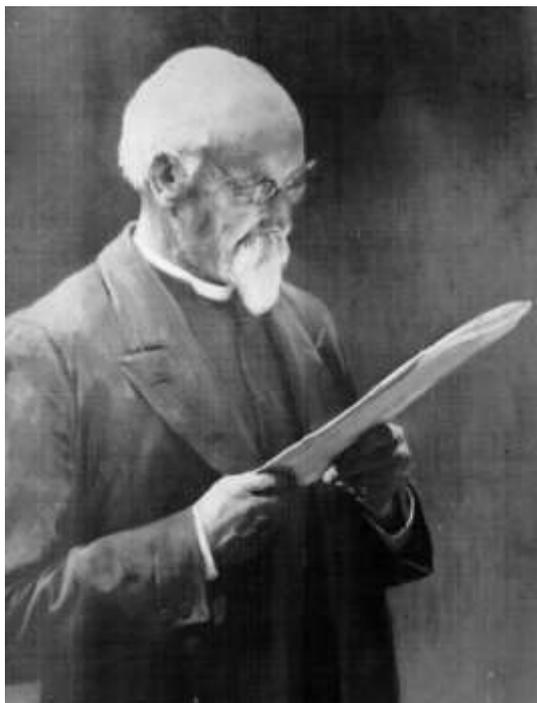


But the story has only just begun!
Just a few days after the new church
was consecrated, this formal Licence
was issued by the Ecclesiastical
Commissioners on 11th November
1858.

Below is the Bishop of London,
Archibald Campbell Tait, who
consecrated the new church.



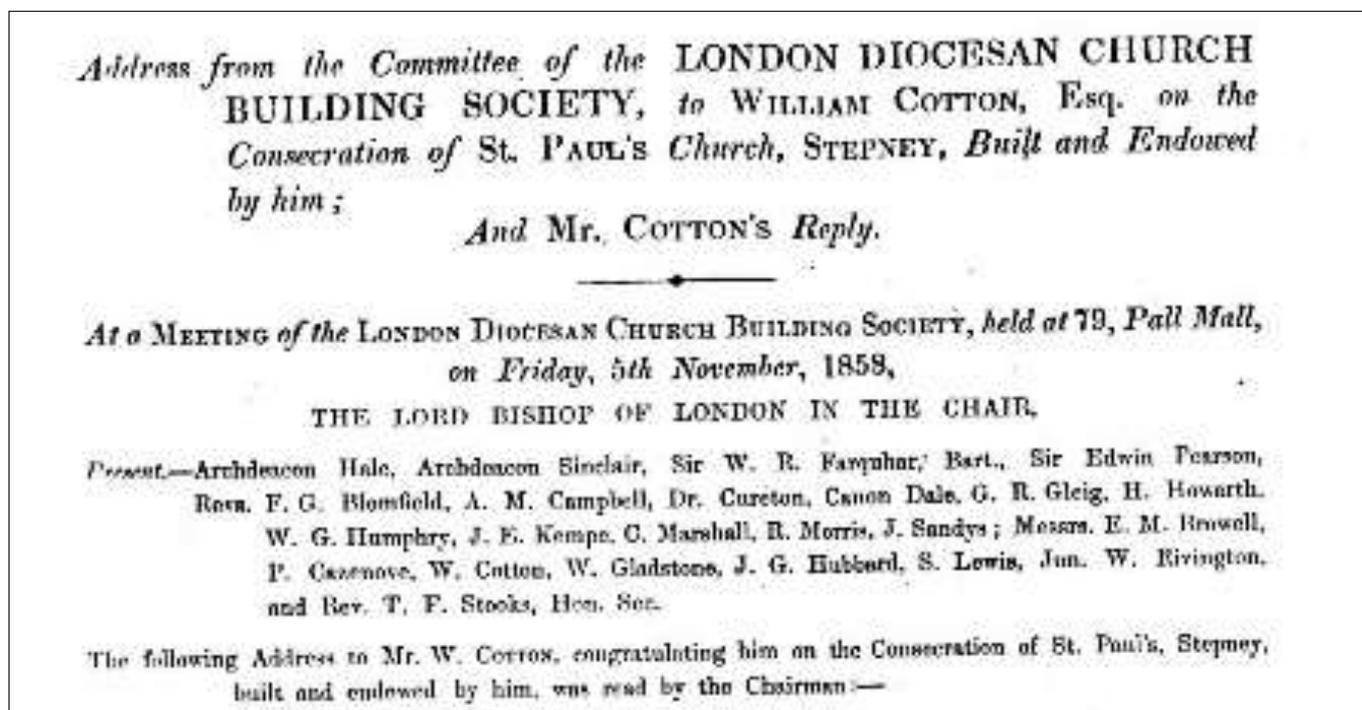
The First Vicar of St. Paul's, Bow Common
Was the Revd. Arthur Benjamin Cotton,
Son of William Cotton who endowed the building of the church



REV. A. B. COTTON.

Less than a week after the consecration of the church there was a meeting of the London Diocesan Church Building Society, which had an important role in supporting the building and maintenance of churches in poorer areas of the Diocese.

The Address below, presented in full, was given by the Bishop of London in honour of William Cotton and, in particular, to congratulate him on the Consecration of the new church of St. Paul's, Stepney. It confirms the generous kind of man that he was and it is very telling about him.



“ THE COMMITTEE of the LONDON DIOCESAN CHURCH BUILDING SOCIETY gladly avail themselves of the opportunity afforded them by the **completion and consecration of St. Paul's Church, Stepney**, to congratulate you upon the realisation of one more among your many efforts to promote the glory of God and the extension of his holy Church.

You have now the inestimable blessing of being able to look back upon a long life spent, not for yourself, nor for the attainment of worldly wealth, but in exertions for the benefit of your fellow-Christian's, and in the laying up of those treasures which shall endure for ever. At a very early age you showed your interest in the welfare of the poor by taking part in the foundation of the National Society, a step which has been fraught with incalculable advantages to the cause of sound and Scriptural Education among the humbler classes. The crying want of additional Churches to supply the means of grace for the rapidly increasing population of the country next engaged your attention, and we find you a few years later (in conjunction with your venerable father) employed in the formation of the Incorporated Society for the Building of Churches and Chapels in England and Wales. It is only necessary to refer to what has been effected by that Society, to learn what a deep debt of gratitude the Church owes to the first promoters of so valuable an institution.

When the attention of BISHOP BLOMFIELD was first called to the spiritual destitution existing in many of the vast parishes of London, it was to you he turned as his chief assistor and adviser, and to your unwearied exertions, your personal investigation into the minutest details, your active canvassing for support, and your judicious counsel, the great success which attended that remarkable movement is very much to be attributed. In Bethnal Green your name has become a household word, and the Church of St. Thomas stands forth there a proof of your munificence, as the changed state of the parish, by God's blessing, does of your activity and zeal.

When again, some years later, the population of London was rapidly outgrowing the existing means of grace, and some permanent machinery was needed to keep the subject constantly before the attention of the public, our late venerated Bishop called you once more to his aid, and you have ever given to the Diocesan Church Building Society the same earnest and unremitting cure that you bestowed on its forerunner, the Metropolis Churches Fund. Indeed, to extend as widely as possible among others the blessing of the devout and Scriptural services of our Church, which you have learnt to value so highly for yourself, has ever been with you a labour of love, and your latest gift to the east of London, **the endowment of the district of St. Paul, and the building of a Church and Parsonage there**, prove that with increasing years the convictions of your youth have only deepened.

It is true, indeed, that in thus building a church on land of your own, where you are collecting a population for the improvement of your property, you proclaim that you are only fulfilling a plain duty, since landlords are bound to provide that the means of religious instruction are supplied for their tenants. The Committee trust that the weight of your name will give this most important principle wide circulation, and that many may be led by your example **to reflect whether it is right in the sight of God and man to derive large revenues from houses without taking steps to supply with the ordinances of the Church the inhabitants which those houses contain.**

Much more might be said as to the love which your personal friends feel for your generous and warm-hearted character, as to the respect which your sterling uprightness excites in all that are brought into intercourse with you, as to the benefits which have resulted from the example of your wide-spread munificence.

That it is sufficient to allude to these points, as they will be understood and appreciated wherever the name of WILLIAM COTTON is known. '

The Committee congratulates you upon having completed this additional work to your Master's glory; they express their earnest hopes that the success of St. Paul's Church under the ministry of your son may richly fulfil all your expectations, and they pray that many years may yet be granted to you for many additional labours of love to God and man.

On behalf of the Committee,

A. G. LONDON."

His very personal and even quite radical reply follows, revealing both about Bishop Blomfield and about himself:

Mr. COTTON 's REPLY.

"My LORD, I am very sensible of the kind feeling which dictated the address your Lordship has read to me, and I thank you and the gentlemen present for the favourable opinion they have formed of my humble services in promoting the great project which has associated us together - the glory of God, and the spiritual welfare of our fellow creatures.

I am strongly impressed with the opinion that I have come very short of what I might have been and might have done, considering the great advantages it has pleased God to afford me.

From early life, I was taught, by the precepts and example of a good father, that I was not sent into the world to labour only for myself and for temporal advantages, but for much higher objects, and I was happily associated with those who were acting on the same principles. Time was, my Lord, after I had commenced my life of business, when I was very desirous of offering myself as a candidate for Holy Orders, to become associated with those, who, with a true missionary spirit, devote themselves to our great Master's service, even in this country, without any adequate remuneration.

I was, however, convinced that it was my duty to continue in the station of life in which it had pleased God to place me and there to labour in His service whenever he gave me the opportunity.

The formation of the National Society associated me with the Rev. HENRY NORRIS, JOHN BOWDLER, JOSHUA WATSON, WILLIAM DAVIS, Lord KENYON, and many other active men, and the establishment of the present Incorporated Society for promoting the Building and enlarging of Churches and Chapels, in which Mr. JOHN BOWDLER took the lead, brought me into daily communication with those likely to guide a young man in the right way.

I considered it a high privilege, and cause for much thankfulness, that I was permitted to assist, with my humble services your Lordship's predecessor in the great objects he had so much at heart, and I always remember with gratitude, the unwearied kindness and friendship I experienced from him. The effort for the benefit of Bethnal Green was but a continuance of his unceasing labour for the other parts of this great Metropolis, and it was commenced under the hope that by giving to the poorest and most neglected parish in the Metropolis, then containing 70,000 souls, an additional number of clergymen, Churches and Schools, more in proportion to the population, it would not only benefit them, but would exemplify the great advantage of the subdivision of a large parish, and would be the best encouragement for future exertions.

Although much remains to be done by the missionary clergymen in Bethnal Green considerable progress is made every year, and those only who know the state of that parish before the commencement of the work can form a correct opinion of what has been already effected. '

Those most intimately acquainted with Bishop Blomfield can scarcely estimate the zeal, the time, and the money he devoted to this great object. By his letters he obtained donations to an amount which for many years had not been heard of, and his powerful eloquence effected a happy change in the habit of scanty giving which had previously disgraced our churches, and he had the pleasure of recording upon the back of one of his sermons, which he called his golden one, that it had raised £ 1,200.

Our late Bishop was blessed in his labours by being able to build, or assist in building, seventy-eight Churches in the Metropolis; but it is grievous to know that London, in consequence of the unprecedented increase of the population, is now in a worse state, both as to the number of churches and clergyman, than when he commenced his work.

I was strongly impressed by a sermon, preached for the Bethnal Green Fund, by the Rev. HENRY MELVILL, who took for his subject (19th Luke, the 41st verse), Our Lord weeping over Jerusalem. Surely when our blessed Lord now beholds this our Metropolis, we might expect a similar condemnation. The vast expenditure for our commerce, our enormous and costly public buildings, the palaces built by our nobility, country gentlemen, and merchants, as compared with their former residences, and the miserably small sums expended in erecting and endowing churches and in providing clergyman might make the Saviour weep

But in addition to the spiritual destitution arising from the increase of the population, the severance of classes has tended greatly to augment the wants of the poor.

Formerly some of the Nobility, many of the great and opulent merchants, lived amongst the poor, and became acquainted with their wants from their own observation. Now all those whom God has blessed with large means have removed to a distant part of the Metropolis, live in palaces, and know little of the state of their poorer brethren labouring for their daily bread. In consequence, I believe, it is quite true, for my own experience confirms the fact, that not a larger number than 2,000 individuals in this vast Metropolis can be applied to for Church or School Extension, with any hope of success. Surely this would not continue to be the case if the subject were strongly put before them. I consider what Bishop BLOMFIELD did as but the commencement of this work.

He was cheered by several donors, each contributing a sum sufficient for building a Church in a district inhabited by what are called the labouring classes, and I trust that many will be led to follow their example.

Your Lordship has alluded with commendation to my having built St. Thomas's, the tenth new Church in Bethnal Green. The spot where that Church was built was notorious as the resort of bad characters; and within a few yards of the site was the house where the Italian boy was murdered for sale to the anatomists; this spot is now hallowed by the building of a Church and schools, and there a Christian lady is expending a large sum of money for the improvement of the domestic and social condition of the poor. This tenth Church was not the gift of me alone, but was also from my wife and children; for about the time when funds were required, it pleased God to take to himself a dear and excellent son, and at their request, what he would have received for his outfit, was expended in a Church, as the best monument to a heavenly minded youth.

I should never have publicly mentioned this had it not been extracted from me by the Committee of the House of Lords; for I am sure that he

'Who builds a church to God and not to fame, Will never stain the marble with his name.'

In my seventy-third year, what might have been dangerous in my younger days - namely, the applause of my follow-men has now no attraction to me; and I have therefore not refused to receive the address your Lordship has so kindly presented to me. At first I declined to do so, until I was assured by your Honorary Secretary that it might do good to others; and it may be satisfactory to those whom God has endowed with a large proportion of this World's wealth to know that, with my limited means, I have found, (as I believe the excellent lady to whom I have alluded has found with her larger property) that the greatest real pleasure from wealth, is to be secured, not by accumulation, but by spending it to advance the glory of God, and the good of our fellow creatures. '

With reference to the building and endowing of the Church at Stepney, I have for so many years pressed on those who were letting their land for building, and thus bringing together a large population, that it was their duty to make some provision for the spiritual wants of their tenants, that I should have been very to blame if I had not acted on the principle I endeavoured throughout my life to enforce.

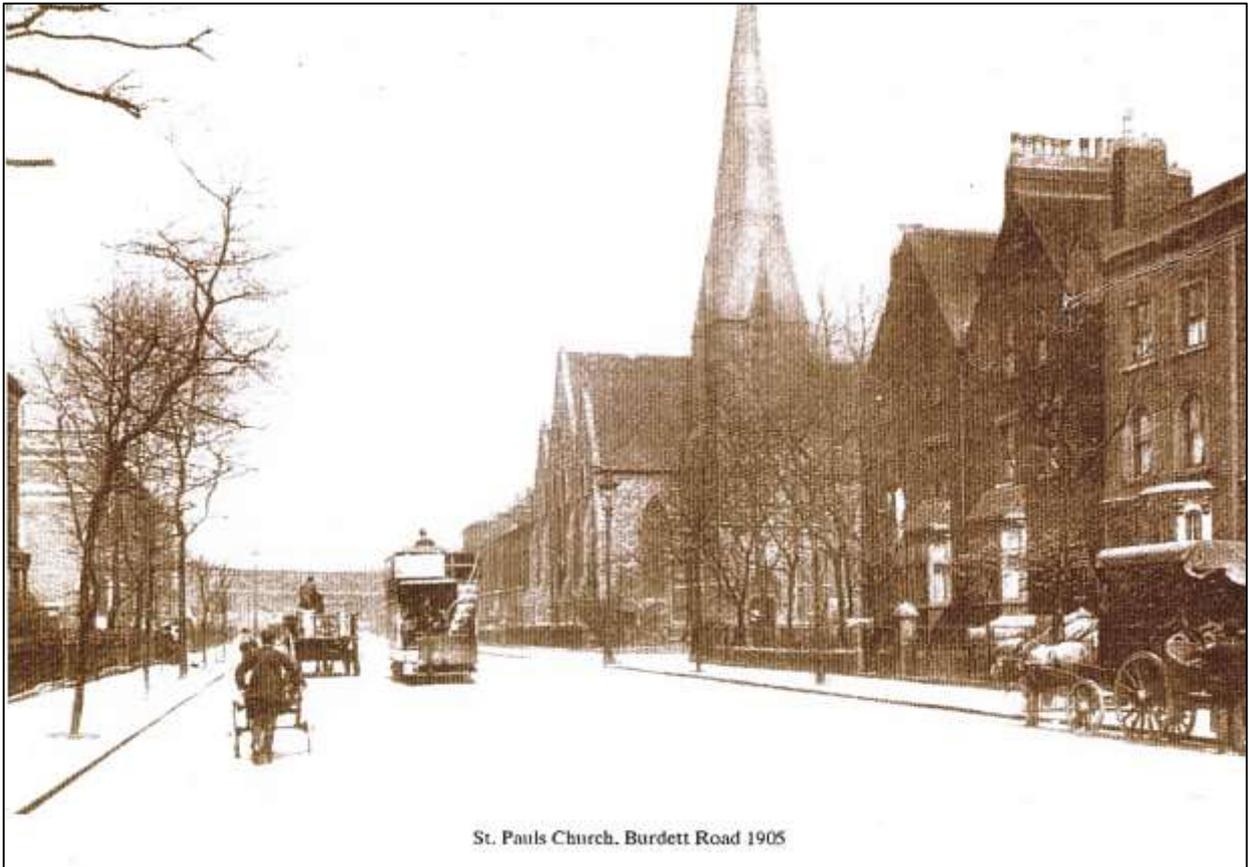
Before I commenced the work a dangerous illness, from which there was little prospect of my recovery, appeared to deprive me of all hope of seeing it accomplished. But. I have cause for much thankfulness that I have been restored to health, so as to be present at the consecration of the Church, and I shall greatly rejoice if others who have land to let for building are induced to follow my example.

I am thankful that my youngest son has become the first incumbent of St. Paul's, Stepney. I thank you for your good wishes for him, and it is my constant prayer that it will please God to strengthen and support him in the performance of his important duties."

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As can be seen in the views a few pages back from the early years of the 20th century, the church had become a large and imposing presence on Burdett Rd., surrounded by very decent housing enjoying comfortable conditions. For sure, poverty lay very nearby and there were chemical, gas and other works also present nearby but these give the impression of a settled community with an active church. Fifty years previously there was open land and noxious fumes in the air and fifty years hence the ruins of that church would stand amidst widespread destruction.

Who could have told any of that was in store ? Finally ...



St. Pauls Church. Burdett Road 1905

There is mention of Horace Kingston elsewhere in this account in the later history section. When I came to the church in 1995 he was the only church member who had known the old church before it was destroyed in the War. He had retired from being the caretaker for the church school, St. Paul with St. Luke, in Leopold St., and lived in the Caretaker's Cottage as my close neighbour and friend, also in Leopold Street. He made this sketch of the church plan below, from memory.

