

THE LONDON JOURNAL

A Review of Metropolitan Society Past and Present

Vol. 8 No. 1 Summer 1982 THE LONDON JOURNAL

The London Journal

Volume 8, No. 1, Summer 1982

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- C. T. HUSBANDS *East End Racism 1900-1980* 3
 PAUL COUSINS *The GLC Election, 1981* 27
 JEFF BARTLEY and IAN GORDON *London at the Polls: A Review of the 1981 GLC Election Results* 39
 PAT HUDSON and LYNETTE HUNTER, Editors *The Autobiography of William Hart, Cooper, 1776-1857, Part Two* 63
 STEPHEN PORTER *Death and Burial in a London Parish: St Mary Woolnoth, 1653-99* 76

VIEWPOINT

- DIANA GURNEY *The Death of London* 90

COMMUNICATION

- K. FAIRCLOUGH *A Tudor Canal Scheme for the River Lea: A Note*

REVIEW ARTICLES

- N. D. DEAKIN *'Lord Scarran's Bran-tub': An Episode in the Politics of Urban Disorder* 92
 CHRIS HAMNETT and BILL RANDOLPH *How Far Will London's Population Fall? A Commentary on the 1981 Census* 95

BOOK REVIEWS

- T. ALDOUS, *The Illustrated London News Book of London Villages*, together with S. JENKINS, *The Companion Guide to Outer London* John M. Hall 101
 E. LONGFORD, H. O'KEEFE and J. DITCHBURN, *Images of Chelsea* Tim Egan 103
 B. ANSON, *I'll Fight You for It! Behind the Struggle for Covent Garden* John M. Hall 105
 B. KNIGHT and R. HAYES, with G. TOMAS, *Self Help in the Inner City* John Eversley 106
 D. ACHESON, Chairman, *Primary Health Care in Inner London: Report of a Study Group* K. J. Woods 108

- SRI INTERNATIONAL, *Strategy for Stimulating Microelectronics-based Growth in the Greater London Area*, together with GENERAL TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS LTD, *Technological Innovation in London* Derek Smith 110

EXHIBITIONS

- Two Shows, Three Cities: Mantua, Tokyo, London: *Splendours of the Gonzaga and The Great Japan Exhibition* Peter Burke 111
 Vistas and Villas: *London Delimited 1750 to 1900 and The Regent's Park Villas* Victor Belcher 114

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M. H. Port 118

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Acknowledgements

The Trustees of the LONDON JOURNAL TRUST are pleased to acknowledge grants from the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths and the Aurelius Trust.

Dr Husband's research for 'East End Racism 1900–1980' was supported by a grant from the SSRC.

Editorial Note

The page size of the LONDON JOURNAL has been slightly enlarged in order to reduce costs. This change permits us to maintain the word-length of each volume on fewer pages.

East End Racism 1900–1980

Geographical Continuities in Vigilantist and Extreme Right-wing Political Behaviour

CHRISTOPHER T. HUSBANDS

THE social history of London's East End and of its working class is as fully documented as that of any district and population in Britain.¹ There are several reasons for this: the general significance of the metropolis, the availability of source materials, the special scrutiny given in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by social reformers such as Andrew Mearns² and Charles Booth to the problems of the East End and its inhabitants; and perhaps too the area's historic notoriety. Even so, there is one aspect of this focus that requires a correction. For, as numerous social historians of the metropolis have made clear,³ the industrial and political experiences of London and of its East End have in many respects been distinctive when compared with those of other parts of the country. Moreover, within the East End itself there have been, and still are, certain extremes of social and political heterogeneity that must be appreciated for any full understanding of the area's character. Different parts of the East End have given support to fascists and communists, to Enoch Powell and to George Lansbury; few other locations so homogeneous in social-class composition can lay claim to a history of such political variety within so circumscribed a geographical area.

Of course, the poverty and social degradation of the old East End need no elaborate documentation; they were so extreme as to be regarded by various reasonably objective foreign observers⁴ without parallel in Europe at the beginning of this century and Steedman Jones has described the casualism in the metropolitan economy and the predominance of small-scale manufacturing units there for a long time were factors disposing strongly against the development of autonomous working-class political organization.⁵

The whole of the East End in Charles Booth's maps of social characteristics and distribution of poverty in inner London in 1889 is liberally covered with black representing streets occupied by residents who were of the 'lowest class: vicious, semi-criminal' and dark blue representing 'very poor casual; chronic want';⁶ but there were particular concentrations of black and dark-blue colouring in parts of Bethnal Green, Shoreditch and Hoxton.⁷ In fact, 58.7 per cent of the population of We Bethnal Green were classified by Booth as being in poverty, compared with 31 per cent in the whole of London (an area approximating to the present understanding of inner London). In East Hoxton there were 48.4 per cent in poverty.⁸ The culture and economy of large sections of the local population were based not upon any form of industrial participation but upon pilfering and violence, a style of survival described vividly in Arthur Morrison's harrowing novel, *A Child of the Jago*.⁹ Morrison's 'Jago' was 'the Nichol',¹⁰ a notorious criminal slum on the site of the present Boundary Street Estate (Plate I, G3). The Nichol was one of the London County Council's first pieces of major slum clearance, a process already started by the time Morrison's novel was first published in 1896. As Booth's later map (updated to 1898 and 1899) show, and as Morrison's book makes explicit, the effect of this clearance of most Victorian slum clearances, was population removal and dispersal rather than social rehabilitation.¹¹

There is one particular aspect of the part of the old inner East End based on Hoxton, Shoreditch and Bethnal Green which was remarkable in the late nineteenth century and remains relatively so today. Although the East End has seen waves of foreign and immigrant settlement over several centuries, these areas have long had populations that were almost homogeneously native-born. This was the case in 1881, certainly with respect to the absence of the foreign-born population and even (though to a slightly lesser extent) of the native-but-non-London-born population, as has been remarked by Pfautz¹² and as Plate II shows. This plate is a simultaneous representation of two famous and separate maps included in Booth's work: the distribution of the foreign-born and of the native non-London-born populations in 1881.¹³ The categories in each distribution have been reduced to

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
NEWHAM									
Newham North-East	35.9	61.6	19.8	11.3	7.3	-0.7	18.9	11.6	Labour
Newham North-West	33.1	69.6	15.0	11.9	4.5	1.8	20.1	12.4	Labour
Newham South	30.7	70.6	11.9	11.2	6.3	-0.8	16.5	11.4	Labour
REDBRIDGE									
Ilford North	47.4	38.3	48.6	10.5	2.6	-7.1	10.7	2.0	Cons
Ilford South	47.1	45.8	40.1	11.8	2.3	0.3	16.0	5.6	Labour*
Wanstead & Woodford	42.1	19.9	55.7	19.2	5.2	-0.4	8.8	1.9	Cons
RICHMOND									
Richmond	63.2	7.8	45.3	45.6	1.3	-23.6	-5.0	-4.8	Liberal*
Twickenham	55.4	12.5	45.2	41.0	1.3	-25.7	-0.1	-2.5	Cons
SOUTHWARK									
Bermondsey	35.7	66.0	13.4	16.0	4.6	-7.7	8.1	11.2	Labour
Dulwich	45.2	46.7	36.0	12.6	4.7	-4.1	9.1	6.3	Labour*
Peckham	31.3	68.3	14.8	9.2	7.7	-4.3	15.2	14.1	Labour
SUTTON									
Carshalton	48.2	32.3	43.1	21.6	3.1	-8.0	11.1	5.0	Cons
Sutton & Cheam	54.6	10.4	45.8	42.9	0.9	-5.1	6.7	-1.3	Cons
TOWER HAMLETS									
Bethnal Green & Bow	38.4	47.3	6.3	39.1	7.3	-4.2	15.9	16.3	Labour
Stepney & Poplar	32.2	76.3	12.9	-	10.8	-8.8	7.9	10.6	Labour
WALTHAM FOREST									
Chingford	46.0	27.4	52.5	14.1	6.0	-8.8	7.9	1.1	Cons
Leyton	39.3	56.3	26.1	13.4	4.2	4.9	18.8	10.4	Labour*
Walthamstow	43.4	46.3	25.2	7.5	21.1	-3.7	13.6	7.7	Labour
WANDSWORTH									
Battersea North	44.0	62.6	26.8	5.5	5.1	-7.14	14.6	7.2	Labour
Battersea South	50.8	44.3	41.7	11.0	3.0	-6.14	13.8	-2.1	Labour*
Putney	54.2	42.3	40.1	11.1	6.5	-6.5	13.9	4.4	Labour*
Tooting	45.2	53.0	31.8	10.0	5.2	-3.1	16.3	4.4	Labour*
WESTMINSTER									
City of London & Westminster South	33.2	28.0	58.3	10.9	2.9	-2.9	8.9	2.8	Cons
Paddington South	43.8	50.2	35.8	4.8	9.3	-2.6	14.3	8.5	Labour*
St Marylebone	37.4	31.6	56.6	9.0	2.8	-2.7	10.8	5.2	Cons

* Refers to those constituencies gained by Labour since the 1977 GLC election.

** Based upon the number of votes cast.

The two-party swing has been used throughout this Appendix. It is defined as the change in the Conservative and Labour vote only. In this respect, it differs from the total vote swing which is defined as the mean of the change in the Conservative and Labour share of the total poll. For a further discussion see M. Steed, 'An Analysis of the Results' in D. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1964* (1965), 337.

The Autobiography of William Hart, Cooper, 1776-1857.

A Respectable Artisan in the Industrial Revolution. Part II

Edited by
PAT HUDSON and LYNETTE HUNTER

William Hart's autobiography lies in a tradition of British working-class religious autobiography dating from the seventeenth century. However, in several ways it differs not only from its predecessors but also from its contemporaries in the genre.

Autobiography tends to be thought of as a first-person account of a life, the original expression of an individual existence. But we should be aware that autobiography arose out of a growing sense of the importance of history, first in national, then familial, and only then in individual terms. The authors of early British autobiographies allied themselves with some identifiable group, rather than seeing themselves as isolated individuals. Working-class autobiographies, when they began to appear in the seventeenth century, were usually religious. The emphasis in seventeenth-century religion on personal faith and the process of conversion led to the writing of spiritual autobiography.¹ Contemporary religious belief, together with historical circumstances, allowed individuals from any class to rise to the prominence necessary to merit autobiography.² And probably most important, many of the working-class autobiographies from this period were published because they were intended for propaganda use by the religious sects during the Commonwealth.³

Because the surviving works had the ultimate aim of publication in mind, there must have been considerable pressure to identify with the group supporting one, despite the individual nature of autobiography. Probably to accommodate this pressure, writers often adopted the accepted form. Paul Delaney has described how a set pattern of sin, conversion and redemption was quickly established and maintained during the brief flowering of seventeenth-century working-class autobiography.⁴ A study of later works by David Vincent comments on the importance this pattern retained when working-class autobiographies began to re-emerge in the early nineteenth century.⁵ Not surprisingly, these have survived because they too were for the most part published. Only this time the market was widened to include not only religious works but those of political propaganda and, as Professor J. Burnett notes, the 'classic account of a rise from humble origins to a position of honour and respectability', or what is effectively economic propaganda.⁶ The demands of publishers often have a restrictive, even destructive, effect on literary expression. Since expression inextricably shapes the attitude to the world being put forward, autobiographies produced under these pressures must present at best a partial view.

William Hart's autobiography is of particular interest because it is one of the few not written for publication.⁷ It was written not for political reasons, nor because of an overwhelming religious experience although it is concerned with things spiritual, nor as an example of self-betterment and rise in social status. As a result there was no obligation for Hart to conform to conventional models. He does say that he has written in 'Book 3 (undiscovered) specific accounts of his religious and work experiences which he has chosen to keep out of this more personal, familial account of his life; and these may be more conventional. But this autobiography presents a genuine search for an identity. It indicates a clear attitude towards the individual which is defined by his spiritual beliefs. He clearly believes that he has a responsibility consciously to interact with religion and society, but unlike other religious autobiographies, the work does not conform to a sin, conversion and redemption pattern. Indeed it is based on a design of continuous reassessment similar to that of five major working-class political autobiographies studied by David Vincent,⁸ but Hart does not assume the concept of progress that those writers do. His reassessment is a process. To a modern reader the interaction he

insists on at times seems to generate touches of self-righteousness, but the process is entirely in keeping with the growing Evangelical mood of the time. Hart is a fairly ordinary man with a very ordinary ambition: survival. But the means for him, and probably for many others in practical terms, was not escape into group conformity but an attempt actively to maintain the values he believed to be important.

Because of their private nature, we can never know how many such autobiographies were written. But Hart is unusual in that he received an education (1781-87) before the period of the Sunday Schools. He also notes that he was 'passionately fond of reading', a fact borne out by continual allusions not only to the Bible but to Bunyan, Cowper, Young and others, and by references to books that he has bought. The man also appears to have been passionately fond of writing. He refers in his autobiography to Book 3, which implies books 1 and 2; he wrote hymns; and he notes the history of the Hart family that he compiled in 1824. It is perhaps to the unusual extent of his literary interests that we can attribute the sensitivity to literary form evidenced by his autobiography. His intent is to instruct, but the didacticism is embedded in an attention to expression. The result is a literary form that re-enacts his struggle as he recounts it.

The autobiography was discovered in typescript, probably typed from manuscript by his granddaughter Mary Anne Williams. Hence analysis of the handwriting is impossible. However, the autobiography appears to have been written in three sections, which on the basis of internal evidence (dates of events mentioned and textual changes) can tentatively be assigned to 1847, 1850, and 1851. Our Part II (sections two and three) includes more observation and less use of anecdotes and detail than the earlier portion of the narrative, while the sombre discursive notes of the final six paragraphs indicate a still later conclusion, written perhaps in 1851.

Part I (LONDON JOURNAL 7, ii, 149-59) proceeds by a series of disconnected statements and examples that are then followed by an explanation of their connection and a concluding reference to God's providential nature. It is interesting that the first three anecdotes combine incident and moral explanation, as if to teach the reader by example that the following stories will all also have a further explanation. But the consistent structure of the rest of the stories is to separate the details of the anecdotes from the interpretation. In describing his work as a journeyman (p. 151) and his suffering from smallpox (p. 152), for example, the writer at first presents no judgement on his conduct and does not by his emphases steer the reader towards any interpretation. Yet in a following passage Hart restates the incidents, this time indicating the hand of Providence and making explicit interpretations. Finally he returns to the story yet again, formally spelling out God's purpose as revealed in the events. The structure re-establishes the sense of discontinuity, fear and insecurity inherent in the immediate experience, while allowing the understanding of hindsight. It may be contrasted technically to the ensuing description of conditions in the London cooperages (p. 154), which incorporates explanation into the account immediately because it is concerned with temporal matters alone.

Although the recurrent pattern of Part I may appear sophisticated, the narrator is obviously naive, working within his own conventions. Paragraphs have little regularity, and are constructed to present single concepts, events or points of time. Hart finds it difficult to conclude sections and often does so with increasingly shorter single sentences, and tenses become confused as he gets absorbed into the genre of spiritual autobiography. Hart refers to the first 'answer to my prayers' in the third anecdote about his cat, recalling Bunyan's experience of conversion in *Grace Abounding* which occurs while he plays with his cat. There are also formulaic addresses to God at the end of each anecdote. However, Hart's incident with the cat is not presented as an instance of conversion, simply an anecdote. His formulaic invocations are often of his own making and acquire their sense of formality through repetition rather than by specific scriptural echoes; they act as *codas* which conclude an episode by indicating divine meanings which elude human understanding.

The second part of the autobiography (below) retains the design of the first but relaxes it, partly perhaps because it recounts a period in the narrator's life when simultaneously he enters his main employment at the West India Docks, marries, and seriously takes up his spiritual education. The narration becomes more varied and experimental, attempting a complicated structure of three

separate time schemes for the religious, work and family lives. The resulting confusion indicates Hart's own confusion about the interconnection of these aspects of his life.

The attention to detail in the first part of the autobiography suggests the use of a diary. The more relaxed second section is conversational and discursive, as if he remembers the circumstances around events more clearly and is paradoxically less able to be as definite about them. The confident tone of the first part gives way to discussion, conjecture and increasingly less explanation. He concludes each section with more and more reservation. The Lord keeps him from 'perplexity of mind' but the solutions are not too successful; He directs their path yet the family income remains small. The narrator comments on the final 'trial' of his life in bemused trust, 'This was one of the mysteries of Providence I cannot yet fathom, but what we know not now we shall know hereafter'. Emphasis on personal achievement and gaining of respect gives way to an emphasis on ignorance and the need for encouragement. As it does so the assertive explanations and invocations become incorporated into the anecdotes. There is no longer a definite interpretation provided by hindsight, but a need for present prayer simply to survive the events.

The movement of Part II from a series of positive examples to a series of 'trials' is interrupted by an almost mystical account of Hart's second religious experience, but the dominant note of the narrative as it concludes is of a patient search for God's purpose that must continually resist despair. It leads inevitably to the final six paragraphs which are very different from the jerky rhythms of the initial stories. Here the narrator is concerned to discuss the state of man and his blindness to the purpose of God. There are no anecdotes and no formulaic invocations, but a serious study of his present condition. He recounts his thoughts in a sombre tone, interspersed with quotations that are then personally interpreted and discussed. The emphasis on the need to resist bitterness and the absorption in temptation, rather than on the redemption that characterised the earlier sections, belies a personal anxiety that may lie at the root of his search for an identity.

The autobiographer's awareness of secular ignorance grows simultaneously with that of spiritual, for education in the one informs the other. On being taken on at the Docks in 1803 he says, 'I had much to learn . . . My mind was very narrow and my understanding very little informed'. This was during the period that he was attending the services of Abraham Booth as a 'poor ignorant lad' (of 25 to 30 years of age), and learning about his spiritual nature. Hart views both his religious and secular lives as temporal manifestations of God's purpose; yet in themselves they are featureless and undefinable. The tensions involved in this paradox are indicated throughout the work.⁹ His wish for self-definition and yet desire for guidance turn him towards men who are undogmatic but firm. Even the structure of the narrative indicates his perplexity. Good events are portrayed as a result of his personal enterprise and personal spiritual understanding, yet are always juxtaposed, sometimes somewhat hurriedly, with God's will. Bad events are seen as secular and spiritual ignorances, so that if God's purpose were understood the events would no longer be viewed as discouraging; hence there is a responsibility to learn and understand.

History neither controls the author nor is controlled by him. The author has only a residual belief in spiritual progress in that he discovers his formal 'depravity', and changes; just so he is slightly aware of a social progress in the working of the West India Docks Co. which allocates him a pension as it has not done in previous cases. But in practical terms he learns and reassesses from the very beginning of his life: he participates actively in social problems and familial incidents, starting life 'anew' at the age of 57. The participation is not due to progress and betterment, but to a conviction that the individual has a responsibility actively to engage in life's process. One may never fully understand or define one's identity, but one has to try to do so, to search for knowledge and definition.

Roy Pascal suggests that autobiography as a genre must be more than simply eccentric or informative; it must be a search. He comments that autobiographers reveal themselves not so much through self-analysis but through their encounters with the world.¹⁰ Hart's autobiography is not greatly informative, nor is the author eccentric. He is an ordinary man but for his love for reading and writing, and he reveals himself through the pattern of his words. As he says at one point in a general comment on his life, 'I had much writing to do, and other work to learn'. The movement from an early confidence in material achievements and personal respect to a profound knowledge of his ignorance

secular and spiritual matters is realised and brought to life by the increasing failure of his text to complete assertive explanations of God's will. Despite the temptations to accept the authoritarian air of current religious movements, Hart realised that he had to appraise himself honestly, no matter how painful and embittering the process.

NOTES

- 1 K. J. Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual* (1978), 259.
- 2 P. Delaney, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (1968), 18.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 174.
- 5 D. Vincent, *Testaments of Radicalism* (1977), 19.
- 6 J. Burnett, *Useful Toil* (Harmondsworth: 1977), 11.
- 7 D. Vincent, 'Love and death and the nineteenth-century working class', *Social History*, 5, 2, pp. 228-9.
- 8 D. Vincent, *Testaments of Radicalism*, 10.
- 9 This tension bears out Bernard Semmel's thesis in *The Methodist Revolution*, that Methodism and Evangelicalism were caught between the value of 'good works' and equal opportunity of salvation for all, during the period. The tension also calls into question E. P. Thomson's suggestion in *The Making of the English Working Class*, that such religions induced submissiveness.
- 0 R. Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960), 187.



AUTOBIOGRAPHY

About this time I got married to my present wife, on 9 August 1804. Here I could much enlarge were I to enter into minute particulars. I consider that entering into that engagement, that state of life, to be one of the greatest importance, as our future peace, comfort and happiness so much depend on it. I prayed to the Lord for some years that he would direct me, I think in these words 'Oh Lord direct me to a suitable partner for life; one that shall be a help meet to my soul'. Little did I think who would be that person. She was my first cousin, whom I had known from a child. Her religious knowledge was small and mine was not great.

The beginning of our marriage connection was as follows. She paid me an unexpected visit, when I felt my mind so impressed that I wrote her a letter expressive of my feelings (but I did not send it) which I have by me now in my possession, but I sent her an invitation to see me again. She came and I then opened my mind to her, when she consented to my wishes.

Years of experience have proved that I was not mistaken in the opinions and views I then had of her. I think that a more suitable help meet for me both in spiritual and temporal things could not be found in the Universe.

But what I wish to adore is the condescension of Him who had declared himself a prayer hearing and a prayer answering God. Oh the wisdom, the justice, the goodness displayed in this transaction strikes me with amazement: that Divine Being whose Omniscience is such that he knows all things from the beginning to the end - well may it be said, and repeated too, 'He over rules all mortal things and manages our mean (and unimportant) affairs'.

Thus when I entered on the matrimonial state I had a home partly furnished. I then worked in the West India Docks as an under foreman, in charge of the cellars where wines and rum were deposited. Here I was much exposed to drinking and some other bad practices (which I must pass over in silence) but the Lord preserved me and kept in me a clear conscience. I was in these circumstances about one year and four months sometimes very severely tried in my mind, but the Lord delivered me. While I was employed in this state I was led to join the Church under the Pastoral care of that dear

man of God, that venerable man, Abraham Booth.¹ Being a stranger in London I strolled about on the Sabbath day, sometimes in one place and sometimes another. On one occasion I went into his Chapel. There was a good old man, a Danl. Ross who noticed me and spoke to me and encouraged me. He recommended me to take a seat, which I did. This was on 1 February 1801. This good man (Dr Ross) introduced me to Mr Booth's company at his own house several times, and on the conversation of that dear man of God was such that I never wish to forget. The condescension, the humility, the kindness he manifested to me (a poor ignorant lad) was surprising.

I worked hard at the block at this time. He encouraged me in my work to sobriety, industry &c., and many familiar hints he gave me. He did not enter so much into the great doctrines of the Gospel, but led me like a child step by step. He used to appoint Thursday evenings for persons to come to his house for conversation, but he said to me 'you can come any evening it suits you'.

Several times I went to his house, but his health was declining and he was afflicted with the Astomach.

When I had been in the Docks some time a young man came there as a clerk, and to the same warehouse where I was. His name was John Denton from the Isle of Wight. He had been in the sea service as an officer in the Merchant Ships. I had seen him at Mr Booth's Chapel and we soon became acquainted. As he was about to join the Church I expressed a wish to become a member.

For this I had prayed some time to the Lord, 'That he would direct me to join his dear people'. Mr Denton mentioned it to Mr Wm. Gray, the assistant of Mr Booth, and he came to our house and conversed with me. He then went and stated it to Mr Booth.

I was then admitted after the usual forms, and was Baptized by Mr Gray. This was on 27 November 1805. The following Sabbath day I was received into the Church by the venerable Mr A. Booth giving me the right hand of fellowship, and sat down to the Lord's Supper.

I was the last person this man of God ever received into his Church. Mr Booth died on 27 January 1806 in the 72nd year of his age. (See an account of these transactions in a little book (I have by me) No. 3.)

About this time an alteration in the wine and spirit department took place at the West India Docks. It was an arrangement that the whole of them should be deposited on the South side in Warehouses built for the purpose. This took place in September 1806. Four Coopers who had the care of the cellars as under foremen were chosen to go there, and I was one. We were placed under one principal cooper who came from Lyeypool for that purpose. His name was Nathiel Parr, and he was a very clever man, making many very good and useful regulations.

Thus I was relieved from some sore temptations which often tried me much.

Mr Parr was a moral man, but not a religious character.

While I was in the cellar at No. 7 Warehouse, North side, I became acquainted with a man of the name of Charles Brassat. He had seen better days in younger life. He was then a foreman in the cotton department at our Warehouse and was a Godley man. He was a great help to me and our friendship continued till his death, near 25 years. He was Governor at the Trinity Almshouses, Brixton some years before he died, which part he performed with great credit till his decease, which occurred 1 October 1837 at the advanced age of 86 years. He was much of a gentleman in his manner, having been in superior life. I believe he bore me sincere friendship to the last and was a very warm hearted man. Thus we may see how the Glorious Redeemer can and does raise up instruments to do us good in Spiritual and Temporal affairs. Praise be his Holy Name.

In the Wine and Spirit Department I was placed in the West end of Warehouse No. 1 I termed the South Side. Here we had much work, having such great importations of wine and rum. One year we had 47,000 casks of rum, besides wine. I had 12,000 under my charge.

The West India Docks at that time had all the produce of the West India Islands which came to London deposited there, agreeable to their Charter, which was for 21 years, and it being during the middle of the French War almost all the Islands were in the possession of Great Britain.

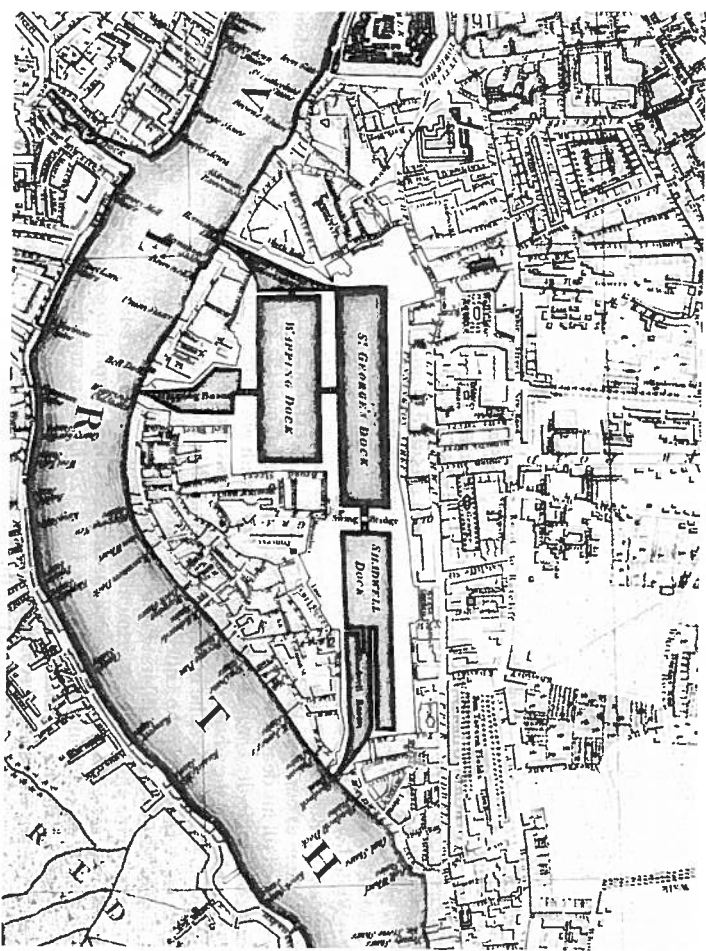
I had much writing to do, and other work to learn, and the Lord inclined Mr Parr to be very friendly to me, thus encouraging me to get on. I was taunted and jeered at on account of my religion, but Mr Parr defended me much and prevented me from being much injured, though some tried to do so.

We used at that time to have over time worked at the Company's cooperage, from 6 to 8 in the morning and from 4 to 8 in the evening. This only lasted several months in the year, but it helped me much, as I had an increasing family. My expenses were very great and provisions extraordinarily dear.² Bread sometimes at 1/6d or more the quartem loaf, Meat at 9d. or 10d. per lb. Moist sugar 1/2- or 1/2d a pound, and candles at 1/2d per lb, soap 1/- per lb, and the price of coals and everything else very high.

We left our little house in Shadwell to go into business, which we did. We took a house in Cannon Street, St Georges in the East, June 1808 with a view to go into the Haberdashery line and to sell women's and children's shoes, for my wife to try and get a little to help, but we soon found it impracticable, for my wife having young children to attend to had but little time for business. Here our third child was born. Our two first were born in Shadwell Market No. 6.

We got away from our house and business after one year's trial, and took a house in Walbridge Street No. 4 in the same Parish. We were not born to be shopkeepers. Here we had a great rent to pay, 20 a year, and taxes. We had a lodger who paid £12 a year for the two upper rooms. Then we had only two and the kitchens underground, which were very damp and dark, and as our family increased we found ourselves too much cramped for room.

My wife gave birth to her fourth child, and we afterwards let only one room. Finding the rent and taxes so high we were desirous of purchasing a house of our own.



Hart's London. A detail of Cary's *New and Accurate Plan of London* . . . (1803), showing the parish of St George in the East, where Hart lived in Cannon Street, Shadwell Market, Walbridge Street and John Street, while working at the West India Docks Company's cooperage. [By courtesy of the Guild Hall Library.]

We waited upon our Divine Lord for it, but he kept us a long time (as we thought) before he directed us to get one. At length one was offered us from a very unexpected quarter. It was almost a new house and well built, situated in a very decent street and neighbourhood. It was built by a Building Society and we bought it for £50 less than it cost. It is No. 29 John Street, St Georges East. This house I have now in my possession, August 1850. We went into it June 1815.

Here let me record the goodness of God, a God faithful to his promises. He will answer prayer according to his own wisdom.

'Depend on him, thou canst not fail
'Make all they wants and wishes known
'Fear not, His merits must prevail.
'Ask what thou wilt, it shall be done.'
Hart's hymn

We lived in Walbridge Street, about six years and had two children born.

But I must return again to notice my employment and circumstances at the Dock. After we had been at the South side about 3½ years, and having so much duty to perform, we began to think about an advance of wages, and as the foreman sugar coopers in each warehouse had been advanced to £100 a year, we thought we merited it too. But we were checked through envy and ill will by some superiors. However, we persevered in petitioning the Directors. When at length they granted our request they made us yearly servants at £100 per annum. This took place in January 1810. We were only weekly servants before and were subject to lose a day's pay at every public holiday, but the yearly servants were paid for their holidays.

The year following the Company raised us £5 a year more, this making us £105 per annum.

Here let me pause and wonder at the goodness of Providence to such an unworthy creature as I am - a poor man without earthly friends or connections, to be set over others and to have what is called a good income, but it required the greatest economy with our large family, provision and coals, rent, taxes, clothes and every article of life being so enormously high, I think nearly double (or more so) some things, especially bread, to what they are now (Aug. 1850), but I had a good partner, which is one of the greatest blessings of life. 'A good wife is from the Lord.' 'Tis worth praying for. Oh the wisdom and goodness of God, His tender mercies endureth for ever. He is a God hearing and answering prayer. Oh my dear children never cease to pray to him for all your temporal blessings as well as for your spiritual ones. The exhortation in His word is 'In everything by prayer make (or let) your request be made known unto God'. Phillisians 4-6.³ and though he may keep you waiting a long time (as we may think) (but his times are the best) let not the enemy of souls (satan) the enemy of prayer, nor the unbelief of your heart, hinder you. Satan is a liar and the father of lies is the declaration of God's word, and I have found him so by my own experience.

We experienced a great trial about February 1808. I was drawn for the Militia and many hundreds more at that in London. It being war time the Government allowed many of the Militiamen who had been embodied some years and well disciplined, to enter into the regular army, and then filled up their vacancies by drawing the Housekeepers.⁴

This caused great distress among many who though they kept a house or shop were very poor. Praised be God, I had the money without being distressed - it cost us £20. 3. 0. I had paid a man to ensure me £2. 0. 0 if drawn, but he absconded. I had therefore to find a substitute myself. I afterwards got some of the money back from the Parish.⁵

We were troubled with this affair three months or more: also I had been drawn for the Army of Reserve a few years before, which cost me £1. 1. 0 to be exempt.

Oh the horrors of War. May the Lord forbid I may ever see another in which England is concerned. These were fearful times, as the Ruler of France, Bonaparte, threatened to invade Great Britain with his numerous and powerful armies, which was seriously expected by most people, so that Volunteers were seen in all parts, especially in London, and the high price of all the necessaries of life

for many years excited great fears and apprehensions in most people's minds, but Oh what it must be where the seat of War was and what dismal accounts we used to read in the news papers.

However, the Lord enabled us to live tolerably comfortably, but troubles trials and sorrows attended us. 'This is not your rest' says God in Holy Word.⁶

Part of the year 1810 and 1811 I was much tried at the Docks. Our warehouses were so crammed with rum and wines that the leakages were very great and the Company were responsible for them, so that our principal officer Mr. P. seemed to be very sharp upon me, and at the end of 1811 he used threatening language. I replied in very few words that I had done the best I could etc.

'The prudent shall keep silence in that time
'for it is an evil time. Amos 5-13.

I found my mind much staid on God and I must add that I was more relieved from painful care and anxiety.

Things thus went on till about June 1812 when W. O. one of the foreman rum coopers who our principal officers reported as unfit for his place. He in retaliation disclosed such a series of iniquitous practices, and he said others did the same and that the principal officers were accessories to it. They were in great danger of losing their places.

Oh what peace did I feel in my mind to reflect that I was clear of all this

'The wicked is snared in the work of his own hand. Psalm 9-16.

'Thus didst hide me in Thy Pavillion in this
'iniquitous affair. See Book No. 3. Page 57.

Our principal officers did not lose their place but there were great alterations in the place. Our duty was not so trying and I was not so worried about leakages as before.

But about February 1817 my beloved wife who was in the family way was taken very ill, in labour pain, being as was supposed about five months advanced, when she was delivered of a false conception. This excited in my mind great fear and apprehension, having five small children and no friends to assist me. But God was better to me than my fears. My dear wife recovered her health and strength again in a few months. Oh the tender mercies of our Heavenly Father. 'Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.' Psalm 107-43. I was exercised with a sore trial. Reports were in circulation that there was much drinking in the Warehouses. The doors were kept fast and a strict search was made for rum etc. The Constable found some in several places. Some was found a few feet from my berth, buried in the ground, and also near the berths of the other foremen, as the men used to sit there to get their meals.

Four of us were suspended directly and kept waiting the result three days. We were had before the Directors when we told them that 'we could not hinder the men under us doing such things'. They replied 'then you must'.

However, they restored us to our situations saying our good characters had saved us, but we were stopped our three days' pay.

I consider I had a narrow escape - a very narrow escape.

If we are chastened of the Lord that we should
not be condemned with the world.

Some of the delivery foremen were discharged and lost their situations. What an affliction this would have been to me with a family of small children. Oh the tender mercies of a kind Father and God.

But here I must notice one of the greatest blessings that ever the Lord in his Providence bestowed upon me and for which I trust I shall praise him through all eternity. I think it was some time in the year 1817 I was led to hear and attend regularly on the Ministry of that eminent servant of the Lord Jesus Christ the Revd Watt Wilkinson.⁷ I had heard him some time before occasionally but I was

stimulated to attend his Ministry regularly by some striking occurrence. The Pastor of the Church to which I belonged appeared not to be acceptable to many and his ministry was not edifying to some that I met with. One man who was a Member said in conversation 'my wife is going to turn church woman and to take her Prayer book and go to hear Mr. Wilkinson'. Another friend said nearly the same words, complaining that the pure Gospel was but little set forth, but one circumstance more striking to me occurred. A female who sat in the same pew as I did, one Sabbath day walked out with me some distance, and in conversation she said 'I go to Church some times to hear Mr. Wilkinson in the Established Church in Bow Lane Cheapside, and he is such a nice man'.

It much arrested my attention. This woman was such a stranger to me, only sitting in the pew occasionally. She was a widow and had a little boy with her, but I never knew her name nor where she lived. I never had any conversation with her before or since.

How strongly does this show the superintendence of God in His Providence and that all hearts are in his hands, and how he can and does make use of such instruments to accomplish his designs as in his wisdom he sees fit.

Oh let us adore and trust him in all our concerns, both temporal and spiritual, for he has promised in his Holy Word to guide us in all our ways through this vain World and afterwards receive us to glory.

'Oh let us praise him continually'.

From this time I took to going to hear Mr. Wilkinson regularly at the Haberdashers Alms Houses, Hoxton, twice a day, where he preached twice a day regularly. My mind after a short time became teachable as a little child. The important glorious truths he set forth of a Covenant Salvation, a covenant Saviour, were new things to me.⁸ My blind eyes began to see; my self will was subdued and my understanding enlarged. I was enabled to rejoice in God my Saviour, my affections were sweetly drawn to love God and I was greatly relieved from that state of legal bondage I was before in.⁹

The sweet manner of his preaching, his venerable appearance (he was upwards of sixty years). He was mild like his Lord and master - nothing dogmatical, nothing censorious and saucy, though firm. He set forth the great truths of the Gospel, the awful disparity of all men by nature, the errors that abound in the world, the blindness of the human mind as it respects spiritual things, and the sweetness of a Saviour's love to poor lost sinners, the enlightening and sweet influence of the Holy Spirit, for no man can call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost and the everlasting and unchangeable love of God the Father towards his covenant people.

He was the instrument of drawing my heart with the cords of love. I was so affected with these things that I wrote down many scraps which I heard and which I have now by me, and I think I can say that I have never regretted it, for they have been my songs in the days of my pilgrimage.

(N.B. The Chapel at Hoxton was crowded with Christians of various Denominations.)

During all this I used to attend at our place once a day on the Sabbath and never omitted the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, but alas it was all formality, for I could never profit under such a Ministry, neither can I now to this day, for when the Glorious Redeemer of lost sinners is not set forth in his fullness and freeness as a Covenant Saviour I get nothing that feeds my soul, and I think that it is no easy matter to persuade a person that black is white nor that bitter is sweet. I continued to hear Mr. Wilkinson till his death, and I think if he were now living I should try to go miles to hear him at my advanced age (1850). Mr. Wilkinson died 1840. I have an account of his life by me.

Another trying dispensation happened to me. Some time in the summer of 1821 the journeyman coopers in the West India Docks struck for wages, claiming an advance. I think for near a fortnight the ships could not clear their cargoes. This was of great consequence in such a place of mercantile importance. These men were all discharged and lost their places. Some of them had been several year in the service.¹⁰

The Company prosecuted some of the ringleaders for conspiracy. One of them was a man who worked under me, of the name of John Smith, and was a very sober steady man and a good workman but rather of a busy temper. He had some property - the coopers at that time had a club which supported them when they struck for wages. Now this man (John Smith) brought some money down to the Docks one morning to pay the men, £20 in gold wrapped up in a small parcel and gave it to me to

I think that our trials are not always to be considered as chastisements for faults, for if that were the case we should always be under the chastening hand of our Heavenly Father, whose love to his children is such as cannot be conceived, for He says in Holy Word, Psalm 103, 8 to 14, 'He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever' etc. - see the whole of these verses, and the turbulence of our thoughts, sometimes under afflictions (especially at first) and the suggestions of Satan, causes great distress. For this great enemy will insinuate 'now does god love you?' and with many other suggestions this arch enemy of souls will try to harness, perplex and distress the poor christian at such times. We cannot judge of afflictions at the first, but afterwards. If they drive us to God in prayer (secret prayer) we may be assured they are sanctified to us and are intended for our good. Our Heavenly Father knows our frame, that we are but dust: besides one end of some afflictions (I think) is sometimes is to prevent a greater trial, hence we read in God's Word, Isaiah 57-1 that 'the righteous are taken away from the evil to come'.

Many family and relative trials I have been exercised with which I have not noticed here: they are common to all men in one shape or another. 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards',¹⁴ but I can say hitherto the Lord has helped me and I humbly trust He will carry me through. He has promised it, for he says in his Holy Word 'And even to your old age I am He, and even to hoary hairs will I carry you. I have made and I will bear even I will carry and I will deliver you.' Isaiah 46, 4. Oh that I may be enabled to rest upon his promises, for He is faithful to His Word, and when I look back and reflect what paths the Lord has led me through I am astonished - without friends, a poor weakly timid creature from my childhood, exposed to a wicked world filled with the instruments of Satan who is called in Scripture 'The God of this World' who is striving to injure and ruin all those who differ from them and whose mouth is filled with lies and whose whole time is engaged in the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

Oh what constant examples of these things have I been exercised with in all places where my calling has been and closely and intimately connected with such characters, especially the thirty years of my life at the West India Docks, where were persons of different callings in life, but the Lord kept me from destruction 'to His Holy name be all the praise'.

What other paths God may lead me in I must leave to his Wisdom, Power, Mercy and Goodness. My life cannot now be long: the great change is not far off, for I am now in the seventy sixth year of my age.

Oh may I be found of Him in peace in that all important time.

SEPTEMBER 1851

MEMORANDUM

The subject of the foregoing papers Mr Wm. Hart departed this life in peace and hope of a glorious immortality 3 April 1857 aged 79 years - was interred in the Burial Ground at Bethel Chappel, Chelsea, near Leighton Buzzard, Berks.

Also:-

Mrs Ann Hart - wife of the above - departed this life October 1854.

Also:-

John Jabez Hart, son of the above, Died February 1853.

NOTES

1 Abraham Booth (1734-1805): The life and theology of Abraham Booth illustrate religious changes in the late eighteenth century. He was baptised in 1755 into what became the General Baptist New Connection, well known for their evangelical zeal and a leaning towards Arminianism. In 1764 a group of Baptist churches from Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Buckinghamshire joined to form the Northamptonshire Association, a far more strictly Calvinist Particular Baptist society. Booth became much influenced towards Calvinism by this group but retained some of his early beliefs. The publication of *The Reign of Grace*, Booth's statement of

faith, was the cause of the Prescott Street chapel in London calling him to be their minister until he died in 1805. In it Booth states an assurance of salvation for all, unusual in a man considered by many of his contemporaries (e.g. historian Joseph Jimey) to be a 'High Calvinist'.

2 Rising costs and poor harvests continued from 1801 to 1806.

3 *Phillipians*, 4:6.

4 In 1808 Castlereagh created a large, conscript Local Militia in addition to the ordinary militia which became the army's main source of men. See J. R. Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century* (1965), 240.

5 *George III* (Oxford, 1960), 415n.

6 The Militia Acts of 1802 and 1805 both provided for the raising of large numbers of civilians by ballot for home defence. The substitute system made the army's shortage of men worse, for those who might have volunteered for active duty were paid premiums as substitutes in the home defence ranks, Watson, *Supra*, p. 455.

7 *Micah*, 2:10.

8 Watts Wilkinson (1756-1840): Wilkinson began preaching in 1779 at St Anne's Blackfriars, London as a deacon under William Romane, the London evangelical leader. In 1780 he was made an assistant at the Haberdasher's Alms Houses, Hoxton, where he eventually took over the chaplaincy, remaining there until 1825. From then until 1840 when he died, he acted as rector to the subsidiary parishes of St Mary Aldermary and St Thomas the Apostle.

9 Hart's implication that this is the first time he has heard preached the doctrine of a 'Covenant Saviour' with salvation for all, indicates probably that after Booth's death in 1806 the church he attended was taken over by a Baptist minister more in line with the usual Calvinist theology than Booth.

10 It is interesting to note that Hart is quite aware of the significance of salvation for all. It releases from the 'bondage' of the necessity for good works as proof of salvation.

11 As M. D. George pointed out in 'The Combination Laws reconsidered', *Economic History*, 1927, the Combination Laws were not as rigidly repressive as earlier historians had supposed. The London Coopers Society was a recognised body in 1813, able to uphold uniform price lists issued in 1813, 1816, and 1819. In 1825 the Society began a widespread agitation for more wages. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920), pp. 74-7, 104-5.

12 *Deuteronomy*, 33:27.

13 *Corinthians*, 1:11:32.

14 *Job*, 5:7.

15 *Corinthians*, II:4:4.

16 *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, hymn 409.

17 *Job*, 5:7.

18 *Corinthians*, II:4:4.