DAIRY-FARMING IN ISLINGTON IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY—THE CAREER OF RICHARD LAYCOCK

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A white terraced house still stands a few yards south of Highbury Corner, with 'Sebbons Buildings 1806' inscribed on the front wall. Apart from cobbles which appear in surprising places, this is the only remnant of a great empire which was at its height a hundred-and-fifty years ago. By the mid-1830s Richard Laycock had built up a dairy enterprise claimed at auction to be 'the largest in the kingdom'[1]. It involved scores of men and milkmaids, hundreds of animals and acres, and thousands of customers throughout the Metropolis.

From Tudor times Islington had been known as 'Cow Town', a Parish of Dairy Farms and 'the place where groweth creame'. For 6d a gallon it had supplied the Cooks' livery feasts with 'creame for theyr custardes not frothed nor thykened with floour' and milk 'not yet pal'd nor chalked'. In the seventeenth century it was a lure for 'ladies tickled with hope of syllabub' and for apprentices on a day out from the City who were known as The Cream-and-Cake Boys. Many flocked to Islington to 'cram with cream and fools'[2] which were a local speciality made from gooseberries grown in the north of the village.

Some of the small grass farms continued in business into the nineteenth century, but the development of large-scale dairying steadily erased the rustic image of Islington, and the increasingly substantial figure of Richard Laycock began to overshadow the back-yard cowkeeper. He brought to this 'very land of cows'[3] a drive and professionalism which were probably only rivalled by two other competitors. One was from Kensington where the eminent surgeon John Hunter solved the constant problem of stabling when 'land is at a premium' by the 'excellent contrivance' of housing his cattle half underground[4]. The other rival concern was that of a locally based competitor, Samuel Rhodes. As well as farming several hundred acres inherited in St Pancras, Rhodes ran a proficient dairy farm for some six hundred cows in Islington, near the Angel. Of the seven thousand cows kept in London at the beginning of the nineteenth century, well over half were in the area bordered by Tottenham Court Road and the fields east of Islington, and it was reported that 'round Hackney, Islington, Paddington, the cowkeepers engross every inch they can procure'[5]. Indeed Rhodes procured especially lush pasturage on each side of the New River, land later to be cross-sectioned by that other major waterway, the Regents Canal. In the seventeenth century Islington had provided the capital with its water supply through the development of the New River Company, now it was to bring its other famous commodity to the kitchens of London. While Laycock's territory developed in the north of the parish, Rhodes took over the compact, well-established farm of Samuel Pul-

len near the turnpike. It had been a family concern for three generations and their cows may even have outnumbered the eight hundred assembled by either Rhodes or Laycock at any one time[6]. However, the rustic charm with which such farms were associated was soon overtaken by new methods in large-scale management. No longer did Londoners come out for their day trips and farmhouse teas, for the introduction of the delivery process brought milk in to their own doorsteps. In 1776, when Laycock was still a small boy, the author of the *Farmers' Director* wrote of milk that it was 'a liquid formed by Almighty Power, without art, for the benefit of thousands of the human race'[7]. It was, however, with a good deal of art, ambition and skill that Richard Laycock and his successors were to provide and present their product for the benefit of Londoners in the next one hundred years.

Richard Laycock's grandfather was Charles Laycock who started the goose farm opposite the old Angel Inn, at the junction of the New Road with St. John's Street. It was probably stocked with birds from the famous poultry grounds of Essex, and it must have been within sight and sound of Rhodes's property. On his mother's side of the family it is very probable that Richard was of Welsh stock. His grandfather's name was Griffiths and his grandmother was an Evans. In 1743 they were married at St James, Clerkenwell, a parish long associated with a substantial Welsh community[8]. Richard's mother was 'Ann Griffes' and at nineteen she was married in the same church to Richard's father, a second Charles Laycock[9]. In October 1777 he died prematurely at the age of thirty-four, and before Richard's grandfather, but by then he was already described as 'one of the greatest goose-feeders in the kingdom'[10]. He left three children, his eldest son Charles, a daughter Mary, and his youngest, Richard, who was born on January 21st 1771, and baptised at Clerkenwell[11]. From then on it appears that Richard's ties were with his mother's side of the family, certainly Welsh was the language spoken by the many milkers in his cowsheds[12] and within two years of his father's sudden death his mother Ann had married again. In August 1779 she was married for the second time in Clerkenwell Church to a local farmer called Daniel Sebbon[13]. It was to be an important liaison in the history of London's milk trade.

There was already an intricate network of family relationships between the Laycocks and Sebbons who were a very large family in the north of Islington[14]. 'Dan' Sebbon's father, Walter Sebbon, was an influential landowner, with much acreage between Upper Street and the Back Road, now Liverpool Road, as well as land in Holloway village and to the east. He also played an important part in St Mary's Vestry, and the stewards' ticket issued by him for the Churchwardens' Feast of 1738 invites guests to meet at the 'Angel & Crown', later the family public house which still stands on the corner by Sebbons Buildings[15]. He was remembered as a genial figure, riding a black pony over his land, and his son Daniel inherited his farm[16]. When he married the young widow, Ann Laycock, she moved to 4, Sebbons Buildings with her son Richard, then aged eight, and fifteen years later, in 1794, Richard took over much of his stepfather's land and the running of the Sebbons' farm[17].

In 1793 Thomas Baird wrote that though 'within a few miles of the capital, the land is as little improved by the labour of man as if they belonged to the Cherokees or any other tribe of American savages'[18]. In fact, the two major farmers of Islington were about to realise the potential that their fine grazing land afforded. That year of 1793 brought a

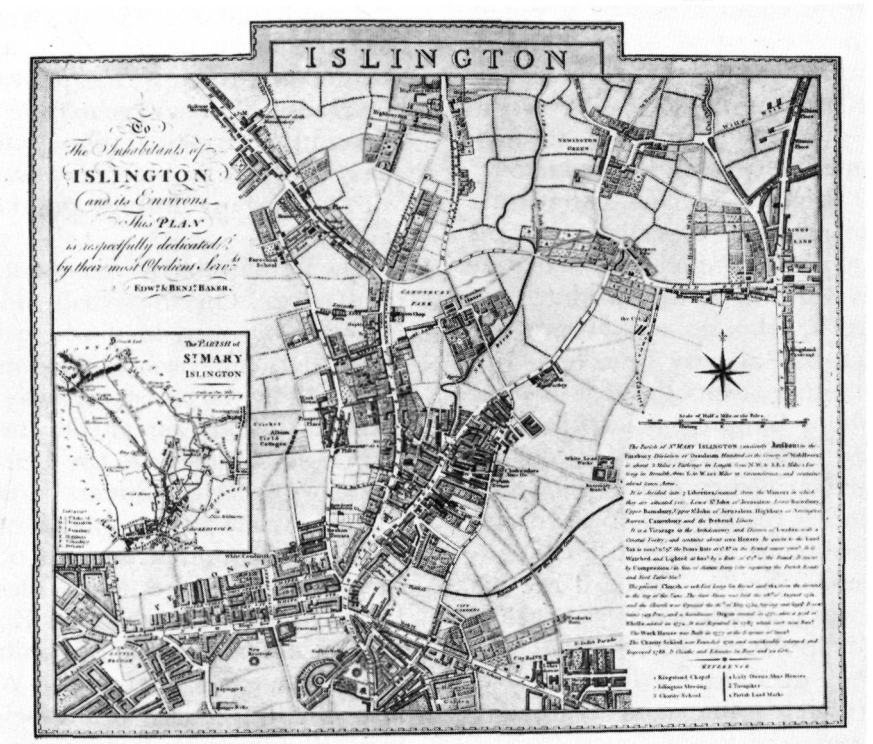

Fig. 1 Plan of Islington 1817 (Edward and Benjamin Baker) Laycock's Farm, Barnsbury Lane, and Rhodes's Farm are in the south.

particularly dry summer with an exceptional hay harvest, and an aerial view would have shown the prosperous pyramids below—Rhodes's stacks stretching away to the east along the City Road, Laycock's kingsize hayricks concentrated in the north-west. Some were built from over two hundred loads and in 1808 one celebrated stack measured 144 foot long[19]. By the following year hay was selling at the unusually high price of ten guineas a load, and both Rhodes and Laycock were concerned with a new development, that of extending their storage capacity for hay in order that their cows should produce milk throughout the winter. It was also important that the quality should be maintained throughout and by 1798 Middleton reports that dairy farmers were 'studious to procure their hay of a soft grassy quality, mowing it three or four weeks sooner than it would be advisable to do for the support of horses. This land lies near the town as at Islington and is usually mown the first in early May'[20]. On his huge threshing floors Laycock probably employed the unusual Middlesex technique of sloping strokes with the flail so as not to break the straw, which was itself a valuable commodity on the London market. It was in demand as chaff-feed for horses and litter for stables[21] as well as being needed in brick-making. However, the large scale of the hay harvest was not without its problems: the employment of hundreds of seasonal haymakers could lead to strikes[22]. In addition there was a constant risk of fire. Attempts

were made to counter this by a funnel with four pieces of wood, or by chimneys made from baskets, but these precautions could not prevent the firing of two of Laycock's giant stacks in 1812 'through the instrumentality of an incendiary'[23].

In 1810 Richard Laycock's stepfather died, 'universally respected' in the parish[24]. In his will Daniel Sebbon left the farm to his widow, and Richard inherited six of his freehold houses and several large fields which had already been leased to him. His mother seems to have lived at No. 2 Sebbons Buildings with Elizabeth Sebbon, her unmarried daughter from her second marriage. When Ann Sebbon died in 1818 she left the farm to Richard and the main farmhouse at No. 4 to her daughter Elizabeth[25]. Neither Richard nor his half-sister was married, however, and she continued to live at No. 2 all her life while Richard took over the big farmhouse at No. 4 from which he managed his growing dairy enterprise.

This 'capital residence situate in the preferable part of the High Street' was valued at nearly twice that of Rhodes at the other end of the High Street, in Duncan Terrace[26]. Indeed, since 1807 the Rate Books show Laycock to be by far the highest rate-payer in the Parish. The amenities of his house at the time of his death indicate, perhaps, something of the nature of its owner. It was 'of handsome elevation' on five floors, and behind the iron pallisades stood the front parlour, panelled in satin-wood, with a mahogany-railed staircase running up to the top floor. On the first floor the drawing-room was 'unfinished', not perhaps being a priority for a confirmed batchelor. On the other hand, Laycock's own apartments which lay behind it consisted of a west-facing bedroom and a dressing-room whose walls were painted 'in a superior manner'. In the dressing-room was a marble bath with 'apparatus for filling and discharging same', the window was decorated with stained glass, and below the dressing-room was a 'private Counting House'. There were marble chimney-pieces in the principal rooms, and stained glass adorned the door to a water closet with mahogany fittings on the ground floor[27].

The farm itself covered about five hundred acres. On the north side it was bounded by open land where for many years there had been brick kilns, and on the south by the parish highway of Kettle Lane, later Park Street. On the east the farm was bounded by the Upper Street stretch of the High Street, bordering the Manor of Canonbury where Laycock also leased a substantial amount of land on the Northampton estate[28]. The western boundary ran along the Back Road in the Manor of Barnsbury. Farm buildings ran behind the terraced houses of Wells Row near Highbury Corner, and behind Sebbons Buildings southwards to Hopkins and Trinity Row. At the south-west perimeter stood Park Place, a terrace built in 1790, which was destined to be the last stronghold of the Laycock empire a hundred years later[29]. A good deal of information is available about the farm in the 1830s and 1840s, so it is possible to plot in some detail the layout of Laycock's premises and therefore to reconstruct one of the premier dairy establishments in London of that time. Most of what follows comes from the plan of Laycock's property which was sold by auction in 1835 some months after his death, also from particulars of the sale, and from the *Penny Magazine*. This describes 'A Day in a London Dairy' and is based on a visit to the same premises six years later[30].

The main entrance was opposite the Union Chapel in Compton Terrace, through a gateway with the inscription 'Laycock's Dairy and Cattle Layers'. On the right hand side stood the 'Angel &

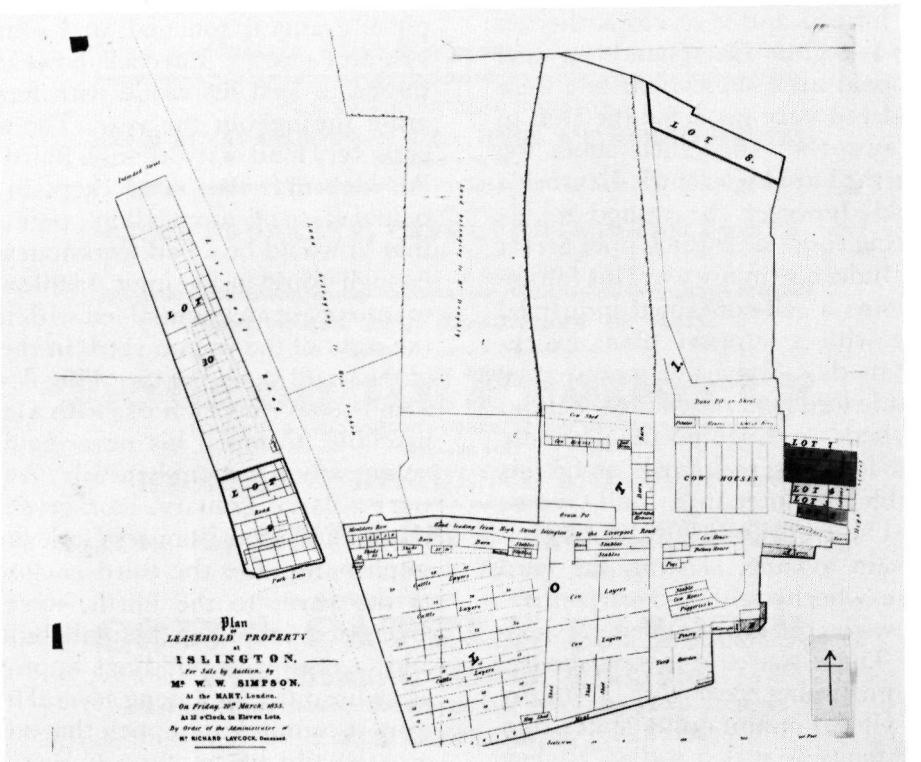

Fig. 2 Laycock's Dairy-Farm, Plan of the farm at the time of the auction of the property in 1835.

Crown' and on the left the 'housestead' at No. 4. Behind the inn were the immediate requirements of any Victorian landowner of the time, the coach-house and stables, with adjoining saddle and harness-rooms. A main avenue went due west through the centre of the property and immediately on the left was the farm administration block. Laycock's private office was attached to his house where coming and going through the gateway could be observed. Standing separately next door was the Measuring Room where the twice-daily export of milk was carefully checked and recorded. The surplus would be taken into the adjoining creamery, and next door were the foreman's premises with an office. Just beyond, on the same side of the avenue, was 'the fatting house'. This was for cattle whose yield fell below the required minimum and who were destined for Smithfield which still dealt in live stock. It is probable that Laycock's own slaughter-house close by was used for pigs and poultry. Certainly the hen-house and piggeries were only a few yards away. The hub of the dairy farm itself lay along the right hand side of the central avenue, in the six long milk-sheds not far from the main entrance. Supporting this elaborate operation Laycock also owned other farms outside London, including one at Hadley Highstone, a pocket of arable land a little north of Barnet on the edge of Enfield Chase. Here he employed carpenters, a blacksmith and wheelwright, as well as haybinders, gardeners and labourers[31]. Team oxen transported

potatoes, linseed and root crops the ten miles into Islington. Oxen had been used in the Enfield area since 1790 but were not considered very good for the trek to town because they shed their shoes too quickly on the hard high road[32]. Laycock's oxen could, however, be reshod in his own 'shoeing shop' near the Upper Street entrance. Indeed in many ways his Islington farm was a self-contained industrial enterprise with a support plant exceptional for its day. Extensive store-rooms for dry cattle feed lay immediately behind the milk-sheds, and behind the domestic farm-yard for pigs and fowls stood his considerable maintenance and repair complex. This was reached by turning left off the main avenue, skirting the yard wall. Here wheelwright and carpenters' sheds for wagon repairs adjoined the shoeing shop. There was also 'a sand house' and a large timber-yard with a smithy and saw-pit for maintaining gates and palings. Alongside was a walled kitchen garden with cold frames, and at one end a small piece of ground called the 'pinery'. Presumably efforts were made here to grow conifers for posts and fencing since there is mention of a 'kyanising tank' nearby[33].

About midway along the main avenue in the centre of the farm was a collection of buildings on the left which included stabling for seventy heavy dray horses, with 'capital racks and mangers'. Opposite, on the right, was a large yard for some fifty carts. The horses were used to bring brewers' waste up from the City where the Sebbons owned the 'Hope Inn' in Cowcross Street and the 'Porter Block' in St John's Street[34]. Great quantities of brewery refuse were stamped into four large grain pits alongside the avenue on the edge of the wagon yard. Here it was allowed to ferment into an all-season nutritious feed. It was said that it was 'not uncommon for two years to pass before a pit of grains is touched, and some have lain nine years'[35]. Laycock, however, continued to feed his cattle with fermented grain throughout the year. The animals grew very fond of it although Baird refutes the idea that they were 'kept in a perpetual state of intoxication', pointing out that 'it would be a bad workman who left enough spirit in his malt distillers' wash to intoxicate any animal fed with it'[36]. On the right of the wagon yard, in the centre of the farm, stood the threshing floors and a mill-room where a horse with a crushing machine 'tramped his never-ending circular path in a room beneath'. Adjoining were a large granary, storage sheds for chaff, and tool houses for threshing implements. On the third enclosed side of the yard, to the north, were 'other amenities' including a small bull house and 'a cluster of buildings appropriated as an hospital, for among several hundred cows it cannot but happen that some will occasionally be on the sick list'. These animals were isolated in about half-a-dozen separate boxes, each stall 'fitted up as comfortably as possible for the invalid'[37]. At another leading London dairy farm near Peckham there were similar arrangements. Here there were 'three hundred cows with a farm to supply them with fodder'. There was also 'a sort of quarantine-ground for newly-purchased cows where they were kept until their condition warranted their introduction to the company of the high-conditioned milkers'[38]. At Laycock's the quantity of root crops required for the whole herd amounted to several tons weight per day, for each cow would eat half-a-hundredweight of turnips or mangle-wurzels. Having unloaded these at the storage sheds near the main milking area, the ox-carts were then reloaded with manure from the very considerable dung-shoot immediately behind. 'This extensive plan of operations is productive of much

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SPACIOUS PAVED YARDS, GRAIN PITS, SHOOT FOR DUNG,

An extensive Garden and an Enclosure of rich Arable Land;

Forming altogether the most extensive and convenient Premises in the Kingdom for the purposes to which they have been appropriated during the last forty years, and with that distinguished success which their admirable construction and unrivalled situation must always command. Also

THE ANGEL & CROWN PUBLIC HOUSE,

SIX CAPITAL FAMILY RESIDENCES,

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And TWO PIECES of LAND at the back of Steyman's Row;

SEVERAL

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Arising from respectable DWELLING HOUSES in the LIVERPOOL ROAD and PARK LANE contiguous,

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Plot of valuable & desirable Building Land,

ADJOINING;

WHICH WILL BE SOLD BY AUCTION, BY

Mr. W. W. SIMPSON

AT THE AUCTION MART, LONDON,

On FRIDAY, the 20th day of MARCH, 1835,

AT TWELVE O'CLOCK, IN TEN LOTS,

By order of the Administrator of the late Mr. Richard Laycock.

The Property may be viewed by Cards, and Particulars with plans annexed, may be obtained on the Premises; of Messrs. Vandercom, Comyn, Cree and Law, Solicitors, Bush Lane, Cannon Street; at the Mart; and of Mr. W. W. SIMPSON, Bucklersbury.

Plate 1 Laycock's Dairy-Farm, Poster advertising house, farm, layers, public house and adjoining property for auction, 20 March 1835.

advantage—the farms supply food to the dairy, the dairy supplies manure to the farms'[39]. The dung-shoot was set well back from Sebbons Buildings and local horticulturalists were allowed access to it along a special path.

The production of consistently good milk lay at the heart of the Laycock operation, and the working of the farm centred on his meticulous dairying procedure. The seven hundred dairy cows were shorthorns, probably Holderness and Welsh Blacks. The latter were a cross-breed from Laycock's native Wales, combining the sturdiness of mountain cattle with reliability as milkers, who would also provide good meat at Smithfield when their milking days were over. Visiting Islington in 1793, Baird commented on the beautifully variegated colours of its cattle: 'the spotted cows sell for more by twenty shillings than cows of equal goodness but all of one colour. I could not help being pleased with a scene so near London at once so rich and rural'[40]. The cows were brought in at night to be tethered in double stalls down the six long milking sheds ranged under one roof. Each shed housed sixty-four cows and appears to have been similar to the much-admired Dutch dairies. It is not, however, recorded whether the Laycock cows wore 'the hempen jackets of Holland for spring wear to guard against the perpendicular dews and thereby increase the milk yield'[41]. With the first milking, at 3.0 a.m., the cows would receive three feeds—of grain, and turnips, and hay in winter. Then they would be turned out-of-doors and brought back at noon for a further three feeds and the afternoon milking. The 'afterings', the last-drawn milk of each session, was well-known to be the richest, especially in the summer when the root-crop menu was replaced by greens.

In 1841 the assembly of milkers was all female though by 1847 men were also among the number, but none was employed by the farm[42]. Indeed, Dodd notes that 'in the management of these large dairies such as Laycock's, the milkers were employed by the buyers, if they were not the buyers themselves; they brought their own vessels, milked the cows at stated hours, and paid so much a gallon'. He goes on to observe that 'there was a fair chance of being called upon to supply milk three hundred and sixty-five times a year and perhaps double that number'[43]. The 1841 census shows less than a dozen milk-women registered in the immediate vicinity of Laycock's, and unfortunately it does not indicate whether their birthplaces were in Wales[44]. However, the writer of the *Penny Magazine* concludes that 'their scarcely intelligible language indicates Wales to be their native country', and it may be assumed that these milk-women were drawn from the Welsh community around Clerkenwell[45]. As the bulk of Laycock's milk was sold wholesale until about 1845, the retailers would pay the women to go out to the farm, collect the milk and carry it back to be sold in town. It was a formidable routine but comparable with that in the market-gardening and fruit-growing areas of west London, where transport by foot from Brentford was equally heavy and arduous. In the early 1800s Nelson recalls some of the most familiar of Islington sounds: 'even in the most inclement weather, and in the depth of winter, they arrive here in parties from different parts of the Metropolis, laughing and singing to the music of their empty pails. It is amazing to witness the labour and fatigue these females will undergo, and the hilarity and cheerfulness that prevails amongst them'[46]. The writer visiting Laycock's dairy comments that their 'ruddy faces give evidence of the healthiness of their employment'[47]. Nearly fifty years earlier it had been discovered that a nat-

ural immunity to smallpox and the ensuing pock-scars was developed by girls whose hands were in daily contact with cows[48]. Moreover, the milk-women pictured in Laycock's milking-sheds forestalled modern rules of hygiene by tying up their hair with a kerchief 'somewhat in the fashion of the French singing-women occasionally seen in the London streets'[49].

Along with other large-scale 'lactaries', Laycock contracted with his retailers to supply a certain quantity of milk at a set price. The measuring unit employed between cowkeeper and distributor was the 'barn' gallon which measured seventeen pints, a quantity made up of an imperial gallon to which was traditionally added one gill to allow for spillage and wastage[50]. Strict conditions governed the milk that left Laycock's premises, and it all passed through the Measuring Room near the main gate. Here the milk for contract orders was measured and adjusted. If it was short, the amount was made up from the store-vessel, if there was a surplus it was drawn off and added to the store. The work was superintended by a clerk and a dairywoman[51]. In Laycock's case this was possibly his long-term resident housekeeper, Sarah Morris, since the housekeeper's work on a home farm sometimes included administrative work in the dairy[52]. By 1841 Laycock's milk was being distributed in several ways—in some instances it was transferred to 'tall metallic vessels' and taken away in carts, in others the stalwart army of women set off to walk the two or three miles, carrying new milk for 'the breakfast-tables of the Metropolis' on the traditional yokes, which sometimes weighed well over a hundred pounds. A third method concerned delivery to private families in Islington, when the milk was sent out 'in cans securely locked by the clerk, so that no adulteration can be effected by the carriers'[53].

However, the complex and continuing problem of the 'sophistication' of milk reared its head as much for Laycock and Rhodes as for the 'little dairymen who keep their half-a-dozen cows'. While Laycock could guarantee that the milk went from the yard of his great dairy into the possession of the itinerant dealers perfectly pure, 'what is done to it afterwards, and to what degree it is lowered and sophisticated, is known only to these retail merchants'[54]. Nelson states that 'in delivering it to the consumer, a vast increase takes place, not only in the price, but also in the quantity which is greatly adulterated with water and sometimes impregnated with still worse ingredients, to hide the cheat'. In fact retailers made open use of the 'Black Cow'. This term described a water pump painted black and installed in the retailers' milk-room for the express purpose of diluting their milk. Indeed this 'cow' was said to yield more than all the rest put together[55]. However, according to Middleton, 'where such a pump is not provided, things are much worse. They dip their pails in a common horse trough, and one cow-house happens to stand close to the edge of a stream into which runs most of the urine of the cows'. He continues: 'a remedy would be for every retail milk-dealer to be obliged to take out an annual licence from the magistrates, indicating good conduct and signed by the cow-keeper and a certain number of their customers'[56]. This proposal was not implemented for another seventy years. Meanwhile, concern for the good reputation of Laycock and Rhodes increased in proportion to the scale of their daily output. Moreover, the 'Black Cow's' activities proved primitive beside the imported ideas for 'improving' milk. From Holland came the technique of adding potash to prevent curdling, and starch to thicken, while from Paris came the recommendation of sugar and almond

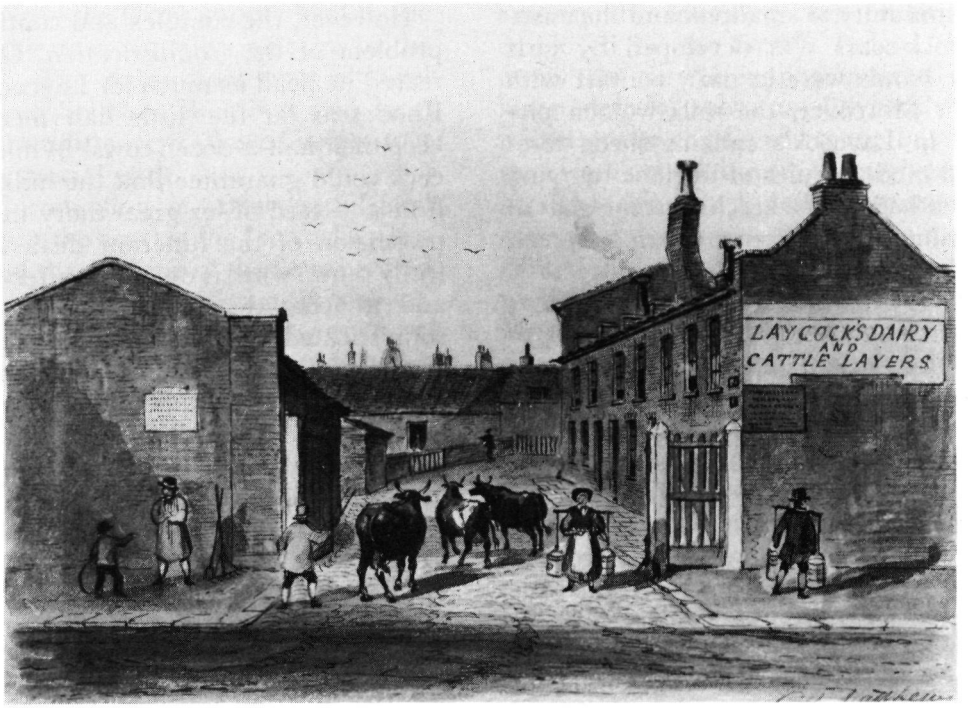

Plate 2 Laycock's Dairy-Farm, Watercolour of Barnsbury Lane by C. H. Matthews, circa 1840.

emulsion to replace the cream[57]. In America the *Veterinary Record* for 1850 talked of 'sophistication by the admixture of molasses with whiting and water'[58]. As the milk trade developed through the nineteenth century it came to involve a long chain of intermediaries—farmer/wholesaler/retailer/roundsman—and it became increasingly difficult to identify the point of adulteration, though it was the retailer who paid the fine when adulteration met with compulsory legal action in 1872. By then it was estimated that Londoners were paying at least £70,000 a year for 'water sold under the name of milk'[59].

At the Laycock establishment the farming enterprise was diversified and could take advantage of excess milk from the Measuring Room. Next door stood the Creamery and Butter Room, 'all, as may be supposed, scrupulously clean'. Here surplus milk was processed in shallow dishes, and buttermilk and skim transferred to the ten piggeries near the kitchen garden. In the first part of the nineteenth century pig-keeping was synonymous with dirt and, by extension, with overcrowded insanitary slum conditions. However, it was claimed that behind Laycock's walls 'the well-constructed piggeries present none of that dirty appearance which disfigures pig-sties in common farmyards'. Here pigswill was mixed in an adjoining mixing-room and distributed in large wooden vessels. Cream and butter were sold locally 'to the higher classes of families'[60].

It seems that Laycock had enough money and a large enough stock to be able to experiment with new systems of husbandry which offered the best econ-

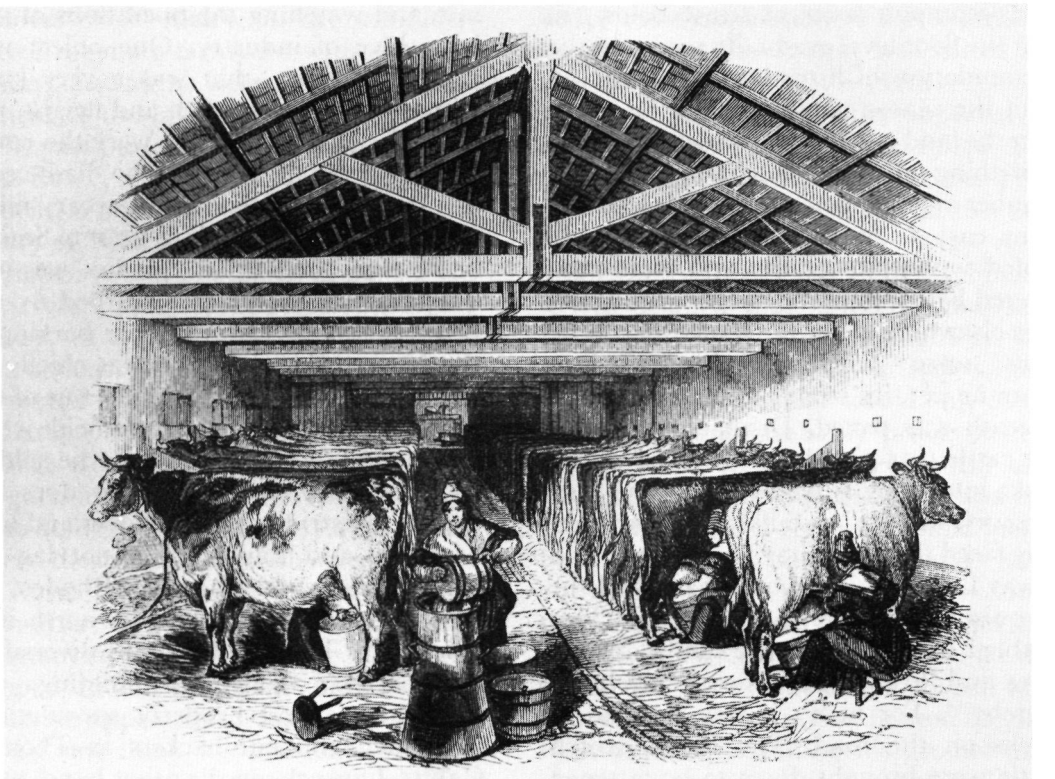

Plate 3 Laycock's Dairy-Farm, Interior of milking-shed with milkers from the *Penny Magazine* 1841.

omic return. He worked to a high level of efficiency and had a comparatively swift turnover. He might buy a cow for £20, yielding on average nine quarts a day, but those which produced the most milk did not usually sustain that high yield for more than three or four years. They would therefore find their way to Laycock's lofty fattening shed comparatively young, and any calves would probably fetch about thirty shillings when only a few days old[61]. Cows destined for market were housed on the west of the farm not far from the milking-sheds they had frequented, and were fed on a choice diet of oilcake, clover chaff and linseed but, though they had joined the prized dairy herd through the main gate on Upper Street, they were driven out to meet their final fate by the well-worn exit onto the Back Road.

With the dairy enterprise well established, Laycock embarked in about 1820 on a second major development to his land at Islington. He provided 'Layering and Protection of Cattle for the London Market'[62]. It must have produced a considerable income as there was accommodation for two thousand head of beasts, bullocks and oxen as well as cows, and there were pens for five thousand sheep on the opposite side of the Back Road. The word 'lair' or 'layers' had been associated with primitive custom in the Hebrides, where a farmer would bring his cows into his own cottage. His family slept in niches along the walls and the cattle were bedded

on layer upon layer of straw below, so that the floor level gradually rose, and the accumulation of litter was not removed until the season came for it to be raked over the land outside[63]. Laycock contrived something more sophisticated. He built a number of long open-sided sheds running from east to west. They were mostly roofed with slate or tile and were considered better than the open layers available elsewhere along the Back Road. The roofs were supported by cast-iron columns set in stone, and the ground beneath was paved. Drinking water for the cattle was piped from wall-mounted tanks into troughs below. For thousands of cows it was the last milking-place before they faced the abattoirs of Smithfield, and it was Laycock who would have had the perquisites of that last milking. This enabled him to assess the quality of the cows and 'to regulate his own purchases thereby'[64]. For many it was the end of weeks on the road. The Black Scotch cattle were brought down to be fattened in East Anglia some months before, and large numbers were driven down by stages from the Midlands. As the layers were in use sometime after Laycock's death it is probable that, after Smithfield closed for live cattle, the familiar set-up was patronised for cattle headed for the ill-fated Islington Cattle Market in the Lower Road until the Caledonian Market, with its own layers, was opened by Prince Albert in 1855. Indeed, over some fifty years, Laycock's would have been the last-night stand for millions of disorientated cattle. The layers proved unpopular with local residents, and the noise must have shattered the lives of those in the elegant terraced houses built recently near High Tree Field. In 1903 an old man recalled his boyhood in Islington just after the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837. He wrote: 'Not far was Laycock's dairy. Many a time have I stood looking into and watching the operations of this busy hive of industry. One object was very prominent—that was a very large elm tree of gigantic girth and height. On the other side of the way were the cattle layers. Here the cattle who had come along the North Road many weary miles had their last resting place prior to Smithfield, and often on a Sunday was the quietitude of the place disturbed by the bellowing of the cattle and the barking of the drovers' dogs, but this was chiefly on Sunday nights'[65]. Monday was one of the main market days at Smithfield when upwards of 2,000 cattle would be sold.

'Slowly but surely however does the baked clay stride over the clover and buttercup'[66], and Laycock did not lag far behind his contemporary, Rhodes, in turning his open land to the north into brickfields. The Rhodes family diversified from brick-making into building, tile manufacture and property speculation, with such eminent backers as Thomas Cubitt. Laycock, on the other hand, with no immediate heirs, seems to have been more concerned with supplying bricks to other property developers than with building new streets himself[67].

However, as the surrounding land was built over and more people moved into it, there was an increasing need for passage through Laycock's thriving premises. This led to a long-running feud known as the Barnsbury Lane dispute. It is fully documented in the Vestry minutes and what follows is a summary of the affair[68]. It illustrates clearly Laycock's influence in the area, and the tenacity with which he met obstacle and challenge. Since 1735 Barnsbury Lane had been marked as a public highway of the parish[69]. It ran from Upper Street through to the Back Road with Laycock's farm on both sides. Indeed, the thoroughfare must have been clogged with activity. At the Upper Street end it was narrow and carried all the

business of the dairy, in the middle it skirted the main farmyard with its many wagons, and to the west the recent development of the layers brought increasing traffic past the labourers' houses in Moulders Row[70]. Appointed by Act of Parliament, a board had been set up by the Vestry of St Mary, Islington as Trustees of Highways and Footpaths in the parish. Their work was to safeguard the rights of way, to name streets and to remove obstructions. Richard Laycock had been appointed a Trustee on the death of his stepfather. He had recently prevented passage along Barnsbury Lane by erecting gates and a 'No Thoroughfare' board. By so doing, he became the central figure, indeed the cause, of a parish investigation. In April 1822 the Vestry appointed a committee 'to enquire under what circumstances Barnsbury Lane had been stopped up and by whom'. Laycock was invited to appear but refused, saying that he did not think his attendance would 'afford any benefit or explanation'. The Committee produced its evidence from the parish map of 1735, supported by Roque's ground map of 1746, and by witnesses from both sides, including the old coachman of the Islington stage. Some declared it to be an open thoroughfare, with room for two carts to pass, and said that it provided an alternative to Park Street (formerly Kettle Lane) which was often impassable. Others regarded it as a private way, for farm traffic only, and the master of the workhouse declared he was charged half-a-crown to reach his own field. Evidence of physical assault by Laycock was given by Mrs Baxter, owner of the public house on the corner, who recalled that an old man who went through with hardware was 'once knocked down by Mr Laycock'. The Churchwardens put up parish highway notice boards, against strong opposition from the Trustees. Another influential body, the Commissioners for Watching and Lighting the Parish, was called in, and they ordered the Churchwardens to take down the notices. They appealed. A special Vestry meeting was called and Laycock appeared for the first time. Tension mounted. The next official meeting was a fiery occasion with many resolutions and as many amendments. Finally it was decided that, although the 'said Lane' was indeed a public highway, the situation did not warrant a legal contest with Mr Laycock which would only cause bad feeling and probably prove ineffective. A show of hands rejected this and advocated action, but this vote was declared invalid as several influential members, including Laycock, could have exercised multiple votes on paper. Some then demanded a secret ballot, and the result was very close: 207 votes to let the matter lie, 184 to take action against Mr. Laycock[71]. It appears that he won the day by obstinately standing his ground and exerting pressure in useful places. Although a Trustee he chose to ignore the safeguarding of a parish right of way, and clearly his influence in the Vestry was powerful enough to deter any legal action against him. He did, however, follow these events of 1822 with an ambiguous, back-dated gesture of appeasement. Placing a plaque on one of his layers, Laycock announced that he had donated a footpath to the parish in 1814. The affair was briefly revived, significantly soon after his death, but since then 'the matter has slept'[72].

Laycock's successor, Thomas Flight, also kept the Lane private for farm business only[73]. It was known by future generations as Flights Yard (1909), Flight Street (1914), and finally Laycock Street by which it is known today—a public highway marked ironically by the modern street sign: 'No Entry' from Liverpool Road and 'No Entry except for Access'

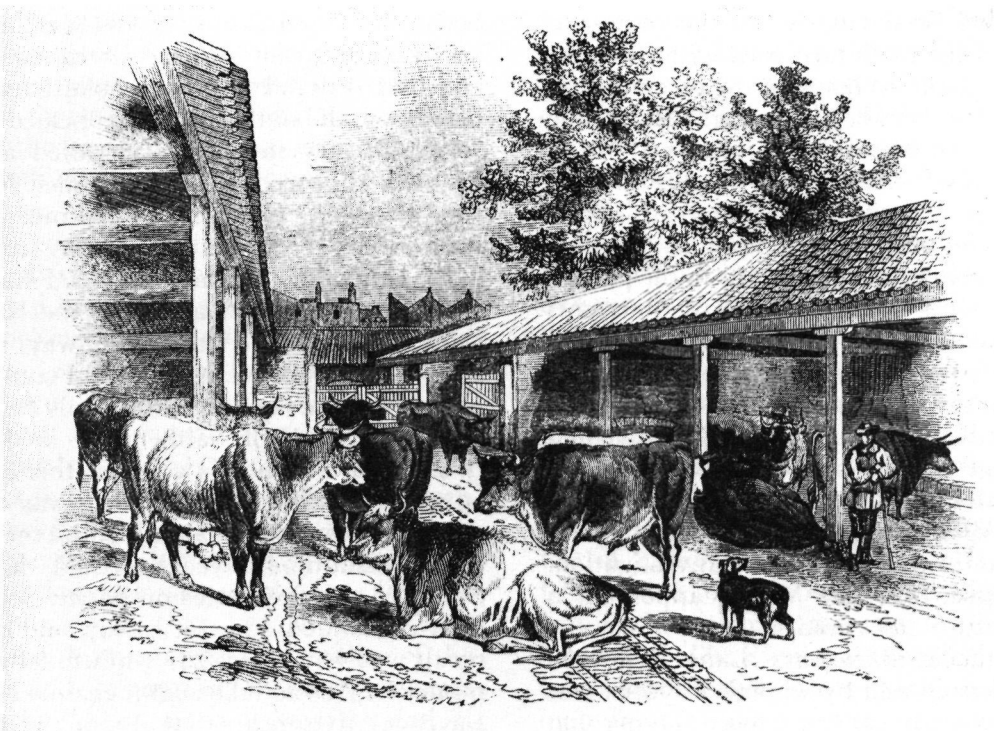

Plate 4 Laycock's Dairy-Farm, Cattle layers, from the *Penny Magazine* 1841.

from Upper Street. Laycock continued one of the sixty Trustees of the Parish despite the condition that 'a Trustee must not be a licensed victualler, nor hold any place of profit nor supply provisions'[74], and despite recognition that he was arguably the biggest supplier of dairy produce in North London.

Laycock died unmarried on the 11th May 1834 at the age of sixty-three. He left all his personal and household effects to Sarah Morris who had 'for many years resided with me in the capacity of Housekeeper'[75]. By then Sarah Morris was fifty-eight and she died less than two years later, having moved to a house nearby in Belinda Street, Canonbury[76]. There was one other major bequest: £1000 was to be invested for a young boy apprenticed to Laycock. He was Anthony John Richardson who also lived with him at No. 4[77]. He was said to be an orphan who had been born at Great Marlow in Buckinghamshire and bred in the workhouse there. 'Coming to town to improve his future' he did farm work for some time and was aged about sixteen when Laycock died. Somewhat enigmatically his money was tied up until he was twenty-four, apart from an annual grant of £20 for clothes and pocket money, and he was later known as John Richardson 'who travelled the country as the itinerant showman'[78]. The administration of Laycock's will was not straightforward. His two executors refused to act for reasons which are unclear and forfeited their legacies. Letters of Administration were then granted to one of Laycock's creditors, Edmund Calvert, a solicitor, but seven

years elapsed before Laycock's 'sister by the half blood' finally received the residue of his estate which was valued at under £30,000[79]. While this was a considerable sum it was far less than observers in Islington had imagined[80], and by comparison his half-sister left at least six times that amount. She lived on at No. 2 in considerable luxury until her death in 1851 at the age of seventy-one. She left the house and contents to her companion, Miss Isabella Benwell, together with £30,000, and as well as a number of personal bequests, she left £40,000 to charity[81].

With no-one to succeed to it, the entire business came up for sale at the London Auction Mart on 20th March 1835. Addressed to 'Capitalists, Cow-keepers, Graziers and others', the posters announced the disposal of the old-established trade together with the 'well-known and lucrative cattle layers'[82]. The family public house was also sold, and in the following years the house at No. 4 was occupied by a succession of doctors and surgeons, while the farm and the land at Enfield were bought up by an outsider, Thomas Flight. He continued to run things on the same lines until a young man called John Nicholls became proprietor around 1843[83]. He lived with his wife Ellen in one of Miss Sebbon's houses, and in 1845 he announced that 'Laycocks Dairy Farm, established in 1720, would now be entirely confined to retail business'. It was a radical development for a concern which 'for a century was known as one of the largest wholesale Milk establishments in the Kingdom'[84]. Other changes followed: In 1849 the new railway probed its way past the milking-sheds, and the Nicholls family moved Laycocks Dairy to 15, Park Place on the Liverpool Road which became its official address[85]. The business survived the influx of railway milk, however, and when John Nicholls died in the early 1860s his widow and son continued to run the dairy, enduring the dread discovery of cow pest which spread all over the country from 'a single fat cow' in their prestigious herd[86].

By the 1870s Laycock's layerage had been finally whittled away by the railway, by building, and by the opening of the Caledonian Market with its purpose-built amenities. However, in depleted form, the Dairy itself lived into the twentieth century. It changed hands several times, and until 1914 Hislop & Sons ran a small milk-shop, crammed between later and larger buildings on the Liverpool Road, still known locally as 'Laycocks Dairy'[87]. Some of the old farm buildings existed to the left of Barnesbury Lane. Mrs Elizabeth Wilson, proprietress of a coaching stable, had lived at 7, Sebbons Buildings in the 1850s, and it was her family concern, Wilsons Omnibus Company, which took over the southern part of the premises including Laycock's stables. Later they were used by the London General Omnibus Company, but photographs of 1922 show the barns and stables derelict[88]. The post-war age of the motor-car had finally brought down the empire which, for several generations, had flourished under the name of Laycock.

There is no known portrait or likeness of Richard Laycock himself. His half-sister owned a portrait of their mother but she left specific instructions that it should be 'forthwith destroyed'[89]. As well as being a vastly influential landowner, Laycock was clearly a forceful personality in the parish and, as well as a Trustee, he was a life Governor of the Parochial Schools. However, unlike his contemporary Rhodes, he played no part as surveyor, churchwarden or overseer in the parish, nor did he present freehold land for posterity as did Rhodes[90]. Unlike his step-father and his half-sister, he left no bequests to charity, endowed no philan-

thropic works. Indeed, from the oblique and impersonal sources available, he appears to have been very different from Rhodes, the family man, who died some twelve years earlier under mysterious circumstances in Tunbridge Wells[91]. Rhodes's elegant family house still stands, overlooking the legacy left by his sons in the surrounding streets and terraces, though ironically none of it is named after him.

The legacy of Laycock, however, lies in more than the strip of grass called Laycocks Green and antiquated school buildings where his Private Counting House once stood. He remains important, not only to the local historian, but to the economist and archaeologist. Laycock's development of an efficient support plant led to large-scale production, and this in turn laid the foundations for a sophisticated wholesaling system. In this the processes of production and delivery were effectively balanced. Moreover, quantity was matched with quality as Laycock demanded high standards of produce and hygiene at a time when Victorian London was about to tackle the problems of contamination and public health. A view of these vital formative steps between primitive cowkeeping and modern dairying techniques can supply a mass of valuable detail. It can also enable those concerned with archaeology and economic history to identify unifying strands across their respective fields of interest. Unlike its water, Islington could produce 'no reservoirs for its milk, no pipes through which it would ever flow into the houses of the capital'[92]. For the historian, however, Laycock was instrumental in enabling Islington to fulfil its rural potential as the traditional dairy of London, placing it in the forefront of the city's economy at a time when the milk trade seemed in danger of lagging behind[93]. In all, Laycock remains a major figure representing, in a sense, one of the last largescale farmers in North London, and showing how the career and drive of one man could actively impinge upon the Victorian economy of a capital city.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Michael Harris of the University of London for suggesting this research to me in the first place, for his invaluable advice and suggestions, and for his encouragement throughout.

I should also like to thank the Librarian and staff of Islington Libraries for their willing help, and for permission to publish the six illustrations which have been used.

NOTES

1. Particulars of leasehold estate of Richard Laycock for sale by auction at the London Mart, 20 March 1835. A number of details concerning the property are referred to below. Islington Local History Collection (I.L.H.C.) Y B430.834:14.
2. Quoted in J. Nelson, *The History of Islington* (1811), pp. 35, 38–40, 214.
3. Anon., 'A Day at a London Dairy', *The Penny Magazine*, (P.M.) x (1841), p. 297.
4. T. Baird, *General View of Agriculture of the County of Middlesex* (1793), p. 38. Cattle formed only part of the exotic zoological and 'farm menagerie'.
5. J. Middleton, *View of the Agriculture of Middlesex* (1798), p. 331.
6. Nelson, *Islington*, p. 214. 'A vulgar tradition' prevailed that Mr Pullen's ambition was to own a thousand cows but he could never count more than 999.
7. Thomas Bowden, *The Farmers' Director* (1776), p. 135.
8. Marriage Certificate, William Griffiths to Elizabeth Evans, 19 January 1743, Greater London Record Office (G.L.R.O.), R. 295.
9. Baptism Certificate, Ann, daugher of William and Elizabeth Griffis. b. 10 February 1744, G.L.R.O., R. 295. Marriage Certificate, Charles Laycock to Ann Griffes, 18 May 1763, G.L.R.O., R. 915.
10. Samuel Lewis, *The History and Topography of St. Mary Islington* (1842), p. 170.
11. Baptism Certificate, Richard Lacock (*sic*), b. 21 January 1771, G.L.R.O., R. 295.
12. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 297.
13. Marriage Certificate, Daniel Sebbon to Ann Laycock, 5 August 1779, G.L.R.O., R. 959.
14. Daniel Sebbon was sole executor in the will of Richard Laycock's paternal grandmother. Mary Laycock, 21 October 1789. Public Records Office (P.R.O.), Prob. 11/1177.
15. Lewis, *Islington*. Walter and James Sebbon signed the ticket inviting guests 'to meet many other natives of this place, with full dishes, good wine and good humour to improve and make lasting that harmony and friendship which has long reigned among us. N.B. The dinner will be on the table peremptorily at 2'.
16. Minutes of Vestry Meetings of the Parish of St Mary Islington, 1 April 1823, p. 366, I.L.H.C.
17. Rate Book of the Parish of St Mary Islington, Lady Day 1794, p. 16. I.L.H.C. 'Sebbon' is crossed out and 'Laycock' inserted. The total paid was £66.4s.0d. This was the highest rate levied in Islington, the next being that for the Drapers' Company, and the average being under £2.10s.0d.
18. Baird, *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 7.
19. Nelson, *Islington*, p. 107.
20. Middleton, *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 225.
21. Baird, *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 29.
22. From an unnamed newspaper report, 1775: 'Yesterday there was a great desertion of the haymakers from Islington, who insisted on having 1/6 a day instead of one shilling', I.L.H.C., Y 1016.
23. Baird, *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 27; Thomas Cromwell, *Walks through Islington* (1835), p. 294.
24. Lewis, *Islington*, p. 229, from an inscription on the family monument in old St Mary's Church. Also buried there were his wife, Ann, and his other step-son, Charles Laycock.
25. Will, Daniel Sebbon, 12 April 1810, P.R.O. Prob. 11/1513; Will, Ann Sebbon, 16 January 1812, P.R.O., Prob. 11/1611.
26. Vestry Minutes, 14 May 1816, p. 101, I.L.H.C.

27. Particulars of property at auction, 1835, I.L.H.C.
28. Rate Book, St. Mary's Islington 1807. I.L.H.C.
29. Plan of Islington and its environs by Edward and Benjamin Baker, 1817.
30. Particulars of property at auction, 1835, I.L.H.C.; Plan of leasehold property at Islington for sale by auction 20 March 1835, I.L.H.C., YB430. 8:14; *P.M.* pp. 297–302.
31. Census 1841. Enfield Local History Collection.
32. Baird, *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 41.
33. Kyanising was a process for treating timber, invented in 1837 by Mr J. H. Kyan. It must have been used on Laycock's farm soon after its introduction and would later have been replaced by creosote.
34. Will, Daniel Sebbon, P.R.O., Prob. 11/1513; Will, Elizabeth Sebbon, 25 August 1847, P.R.O., Prob. 11/2144; George Dodd. *The Food of London* (1856) p. 453. Porter was a blend of three threads of ale, 'deemed nutritious for porters and other labouring men' and very familiar round Smithfield.
35. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 301.
36. Baird, *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 33.
37. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 301.
38. Dodd, *Food of London*, p. 297.
39. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 300.
40. Baird, *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 12.
41. J. Tickell, from a letter quoted in full in Middleton's *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 542.
42. Illustration on reverse of Trade Card, 13 July 1847, I.L.H.C., Y 59 1060.
43. Dodd, *Food of London*, p. 297.
44. The Census of 1841 records only the birthplaces of those born in Scotland, Ireland and foreign parts.
45. By the seventeenth century, the Welsh community was well established round Clerkenwell as young men and women came to London looking for work in service, and later married and settled in the area. In 1733 the Welsh Charity School was founded under the patronage of the Prince of Wales, in premises on Clerkenwell Green. These now form the Karl Marx Memorial Library. As well as giving basic education to poor Welsh children, the school also ran an apprenticeship scheme to enable them to find work.
46. Nelson, *Islington*, p. 110.
47. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 302.
48. Edward Jenner's first vaccination in 1796 was on a boy of eight with 'cowpox matter from the hand of Sarah Nelms a dairymaid', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 13th edition, xv-xvi, p. 831.
49. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 302.
50. E. H. Whetham, 'The London Milk Trade 1860–1900', *Economic History Review* 2nd series, vol. xvii (1964), p. 370.
51. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 302.
52. Will, Richard Laycock, 10 July 1833, P.R.O. Prob. 11/1833; H. Stephens, *The Book of the Farm*, vol. i. (1844), p. 228.
53. *P.M.*, x (1841), pp. 302, 298, 302.
54. ibid, x, (1841), p. 302.
55. Another euphemism was 'the cow with the iron tail' which helped with 'the Milky Way'—this being the London milk walk, Dodd, *Food of London*, pp. 292–293.
56. Middleton, *Agriculture of Middlesex*, p. 337.
57. Stephens, *The Book of the Farm*, i. p. 899.
58. Dodd, *Food of London*, p. 299.
59. Whetham, 'London Milk Trade', p. 377.
60. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 303.
61. Nelson, *Islington*, p. 109.
62. Particulars of property at auction, I.L.H.C; an illustration in the *P.M.* x (1841), shows the open space in which cattle could roam, and the gates between one section and another. p. 304.
63. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 298.
64. Particulars of property at auction, I.L.H.C; *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 304.
65. Manuscript insertion (1903) unsigned, in Licrece edition, Nelson, *Islington*, vol. i. I.L.H.C.
66. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 302.
67. Thomas Cromwell, *Walks through Islington* (1835), p. 297; in 1821 Laycock agreed for houses to be built on his land in Canonbury, Victoria County History, *Middlesex*, viii, p. 19.
68. Vestry Minutes, 1812–1824, pp. 296, 353–383. I.L.H.C.
69. Survey and Admeasurement of all the Public Roads, Lanes and Footpaths in the Parish of St Mary, Islington, May 1735, by Henry Warner, Hatton Garden; T. E. Tomlins, *Perambulation of Islington* (1836), p. 12. map references.
70. Plan of property for sale. I.L.H.C.
71. Almost all those with multiple votes, including Laycock and Rhodes, supported the status quo.
72. Tomlins, *Perambulation*, pp. 13–14; Cromwell, *Walks*, p. 293; records that the constable for Upper Barnsbury presented Laycock's encroachment as 'a nuisance'. This is also indicated in Tomlins and others using the same sources. However, from the Vestry Minutes, it would appear that it was Laycock who accused the Churchwardens of being 'nuisances'. At this point Laycock was reported to be still obstructing the Lane, probably with gates, but possibly also with farm equipment.
73. The *P.M.* is careful to point out that access was through a gateway, 'supposing the permission of the proprietor to have been obtained', x (1841), p. 2.
74. Act relating to the Parish of St Mary Islington, 5. George IV. c. cxxv, sections iv and vi, 17th June, 1824.
75. Burial Certificate, Richard Laycock, d. 11 May 1834. I.L.H.C; Will, Richard Laycock, 10 July 1833, P.R.O., Prob. 11/1833.
76. Burial Certificate, Sarah Morris, 29 October 1836, I.L.H.C.
77. Will. Richard Laycock.
78. Manuscript note, undated and unsigned. I.L.H.C., Y XO36 RHO. This also mentions that Richardson worked 'in the cowhouse of Mr Rhodes of Islington at 1 shilling per day'. Perhaps this concerned a later date.
79. Certificate of Death Duty Registration, Richard Laycock, 11 June 1836, P.R.O., IR 26/1360.
80. Cromwell, *Walks*, p. 297.
81. Census 1841, 1851; Islington Directory 1852; Burial Certificate, Elizabeth Sebbon, 6 December 1851, I.L.H.C; Will, 25 August 1847, P.R.O. Prob. 11/2144.
82. Poster advertising the estate of the late Mr Laycock to be sold by auction on 20 March 1835. I.L.H.C., Y 1270.
83. Thomas Flight's name replaced by John Nicholls', Rate Book 1843. I.L.H.C.
84. Islington Directory 1852. Full page advertisement, p. 16; A Trade Card of 13 July 1847 warns customers to be ware of 'unprincipled persons' who imitate the pails and dresses of the Laycock carriers. I.L.H.C., Y 59 1060.
85. Rate Book 1849 shows the rate paid by J. Nicholls with the note 'part taken by East and West India Docks Junction Railway,' I.L.H.C.; an original printed bill-of-sale gives the new address and again warns customers to be ware of deception, extra-illustrated version of Lewis, *Islington* in 8 vols. held by the Museum of London, iii, opposite p. 170.
86. *The Times*, 10 June 1870.
87. Photograph 1907, I.L.H.C., Y 59 1060.
88. Photographs 1922, I.L.H.C., Y 59 1060/174, 176, 178.
89. Will, Elizabeth Sebbon.
90. Cromwell, *Walks*, p. 357. Gift of land for Parochial School buildings.
91. A handwritten note on a cutting from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1822 reads 'did Mr. R. die by his own hand?' I.L.H.C., Y X036 RHO.
92. *P.M.*, x (1841), p. 302.
93. Dodd, *Food of London*, pp. 78–79.