

PAINTED ADVERTISEMENTS IN ISLINGTON

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SUMMARY

In Islington there are at least 50 old advertisements painted directly onto the sides or fronts of buildings. A listing is given here, together with a brief introduction to this form of advertising.

PAINTED ADVERTISEMENTS IN LONDON

The London Borough of Islington is second only to Hackney in the number of advertisements or commercial signs painted directly on to the brickwork or stone façades of commercial premises. Very recent examples of such work are occasionally to be seen – there is an exceptionally fine example, depicting a Jaguar XK 140, on the outer wall of an automobile repair business at No. 30–36 Bastwick Street EC 1 (see Fig 1) – but painted advertisements are more characteristic of the 1880–1940 period: the listing given below is of examples in Islington that date from a half-century or more ago.

Advertisements were usually painted up on buildings that were already quite old, perhaps even seedy and in need of a face-lift, and are therefore comparatively rare in areas of palatial department stores and well-built residential housing. There is an example very high up on a gable end on the south side of Oxford Street, visible from the pavement outside British Home Stores, but such advertisements are less usual in the City of Westminster than in Islington or Hackney, and are also relatively infrequent in Kensington and Chelsea. In the City of London there seem to be no more than a couple of examples. Even where they are still numerous

what one sees are only survivors of a once much more prevalent phenomenon, though a greater proportion have probably survived in the more neglected parts of London than elsewhere. Outside London examples may be seen in *eg* Bath, Bournemouth, Colchester, or Manchester but the more frequent face-lifting of commercial premises in smaller communities has probably eliminated the vast majority of examples that once existed in the country as a whole.¹

HISTORY OF THIS FORM OF ADVERTISING

In the 17th century, when most shops consisted of the ground floors of timber-framed buildings, elaborate signs projecting into the street were a common feature of the London scene. During the 18th century projecting trade signs, regarded as a fire hazard, went out of use, being altogether prohibited in Westminster and the City of London from 1762 onward, and the timber-framed buildings were either demolished and replaced by brick structures or else rebuilt with brick or plaster façades similar to those of the entirely brick-built premises that were going up at the same period.² The flat façades provided a perfect alternative to the newly-discarded projecting signs, though it is impossible to say who first had the bright idea of painting his wall with a sign advertising his business, or when. The first recorded example of a premises adorned in this fashion was the house of a razor manufacturer in Ludgate Hill, which was described by a German visitor in 1803 as 'daubed with large capitals three feet high acquainting the public



Fig 1. No. 30–36 Bastwick St. London EC1, early 1990s. During the past few decades businesses specialising in repairing cars have probably been the type of enterprise most likely to use painted advertisements, though in recent years they seem to have been overtaken by private nurseries

that “the most excellent and superb patent razors are sold here”.³

In 1904 the whole of the east side of Camden High Street was photographed in connection with a railway compensation case and some of the painted advertisements which appear, already distinctly tatty, in the photographs taken in 1904 are still faintly visible today. At No. 38 Camden High Street for example one can still read the word PLUMBER, all that is left of the slogan SHIRES/PLUMBER/PAINTER & DECORATOR.⁴ An examination of nineteenth-century editions of the Post Office directory indicates that Shires had been in business at this address since the 1860s and the lettering might conceivably date from the firm’s first installation in these premises; judging by the 1904 photograph they could hardly be more recent than the 1880s. In Islington the lettering on the side of No. 159 Essex Road and No. 129 Holloway Road is probably of a similar vintage; in all there may be seven or eight painted advertisements in Islington dating from the 19th Century.

ECONOMIC AND ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS

The vast majority of surviving painted signs and advertisements refer to the business carried out in the premises on which they appear but, from about 1920 onwards this form of advertising (sometimes utilising illustrations as well as lettering) began to be exploited to promote mass-marketed consumer products such as Brylcreem hair cream, Nestlé’s chocolate and Gillette razor blades. On the side of a building at the junction of Kilburn High Road and Messina Avenue in the London Borough of Camden there is a Gillette advertisement which has worn through to show what seems to be the mural painting of a matchbox. The name and address of a site agency – Harvey’s of Fleet Street – is still visible in small white lettering painted within a black rectangle, indicating that this particular wall was at one time actively exploited as a commercial proposition, like a modern advertisement hoarding. This is the only instance that has so far been

discovered in Greater London of a site agency being involved: but painted Gillette and Nestlé's advertisements are generally in somewhat inaccessible positions and there may be other instances of a site agency's name being appended to a painted advertisement, but not visible from the street. A number of Brymay advertisements are in sufficiently exposed positions for one to be able to judge that they were the first (and last) painted advertisements on their site, and that they have never been repainted subsequent to their first appearance; it seems likely therefore that the use of murals to promote mass-marketed consumer products belongs to a fairly short-lived phase of advertising history. Once it was appreciated that the impact of mass advertising was enhanced by regular variation of advertisements and slogans, the advertising poster, with its much lower unit cost, would have quickly supplanted the mural painting as a preferred medium.

In Hounslow, the end of a terrace in Montague Road adjacent to Hounslow Central Piccadilly Line station was operated for several years as a site for local advertisers by the builder who erected the terrace and occupied the end house; the wall has been left displaying four different advertisements alongside one another, including one for the builder himself, but older lettering that is now showing through indicates that the original layout was different. Active commercial exploitation of a suitable wall by its owner, with frequent changes of advertisements but without the assistance of a professional agent, may well also have occurred in Islington but no instances of it have so far been discovered.

Study of photographs taken in the late 19th century suggests that advertisements and signs painted directly on walls were always less common than those painted on boards, the latter of course being cheaper both to set up and to remove; but it is very noticeable that painted advertisements tend to form geographical clusters, as if a factor in their use was, quite simply, the local availability of a sign-writer undertaking this kind of work. In Greenland Street in the London Borough of Camden the facade of a former builder's merchants' premises with two superimposed sets of lettering also bears the address, in much smaller capitals, of the local tradesman who painted the sign: this is the only location known in London north of the river where the signwriter's name appears, so perhaps one should

not place too much significance on the fact that the signwriter's own business was located only a short walk away. In Islington, at the point where Lowman Road and Jackson Road run into Hornsey Road from the west there are three adjacent terrace ends which formerly bore painted advertisements but two of them are extremely worn and are barely visible; the most striking instance of adjacent premises with painted signs that is to be seen in London today is at Nos. 21-29 Clapham High Street SW4 where four out of five adjacent premises have fading slogans painted on the upper part of their frontages.⁵

PAINTED ADVERTISEMENTS AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

The lettering on No. 29 Clapham High Street says 'Gramophone Records/etc./Largest Stock/of/Second Hand/Music Rolls/in/London/The Music Roll/Exchange.' Without seeing this painted up in the street one might not have realized that music rolls (*ie* pianola rolls) could be bought second-hand or exchanged at various premises in London, or that the largest business specializing in second-hand pianola rolls was in Clapham: though one might well have obtained the same information from scanning small ads in a 70-year-old newspaper. Again, one might well have supposed that cheap eating places, two generations before Hamburger Bars, and a generation before the term *Café* came into fashion to describe a place where one was advised not to try the coffee, were called 'chop-houses' or some such term; but several locations in London, including No. 159 Essex Road and No. 129 Holloway Road in Islington bear traces of the words 'Dining Rooms' or 'Coffee & Dining Rooms', which appears to have been the customary designation: a piece of information one might well have failed to obtain from a close perusal of 'realist' novels of the 1890s.

A great deal of data relating to small-business culture in London fifty or a hundred years ago survives in commercial archives, local studies centres and private attics, in catalogues and trade cards, in manufacturers' labels attached to old appliances and in prized exhibits in industrial museums. In fact far more has survived than can be processed and analysed in any foreseeable future. Old advertisements painted on walls represent only a small percentage of what has

come down to us from the small businessmen of the Victorian and Edwardian era and the period during and between the two world wars; but they are as important as any other survival and one does not have to climb into an attic or make an appointment at an archive to see them.

PAINTED ADVERTISEMENTS AS HERITAGE

While this paper was in preparation two superimposed advertisements on the side of No. 246 Pentonville Road N1 – the words ‘Daily News’ and, lower down ‘... ge home’ were just visible – and an advertisement regarding Bicycles and Tandems on the side of No. 180 Stroud Green Road N4 were painted over in the course of renovating the buildings on which they were painted, and a Gillette advert on the side of No. 138 Holloway Road N1 was completely covered over by a hoarding for advertising posters. The letters SIG (which were all that remained of a sign-writer’s advertisement) on the side of 48 Blackstock Road N4 have also recently been covered over by a hoarding. There are several other painted advertisements in London wholly or partly concealed by hoardings. This is not necessarily a bad thing: it helps preserve the paint. Many other painted advertisements, already too faded to be easily noticeable, are deteriorating flake by flake, day by day, without anyone being even aware of them. Older painted advertisements are generally most easily seen just after it has been raining: the damp seems to accentuate the colour of the remaining paint, but in doing so probably makes it decompose more rapidly. The rate of deterioration will depend on the quality of the bricks, the quality of the paint, and the quality of the workmanship. Some 50-year-old advertisements are as decayed as others twice as old: but even the best preserved are disintegrating steadily as these words are being written. The list below of painted advertisements in Islington was compiled in the hope that some of those reading it might write in with additional locations not known to the compiler, and in the belief that painted advertisements in other parts of London would make a useful, educative and rewarding topic for those, whether private enthusiasts or history teachers in secondary schools, who are interested in setting up a local

history project that has not already been thoroughly explored.

NOTES

¹ Such advertisements were (and still are) common in France as well, though less so in Germany and Italy; they are also to be seen in India.

² For the prohibition of projecting signs see Jacob Larwood and John Camden Hotten *English Inn Signs* (London 1951: originally published as *History of Signboards*, 1866) p 17. Most of the timber-framed houses in London that were rebuilt with Georgian-style façades have subsequently been swept away though a number survive in provincial towns like Colchester.

³ Christian August Gottlieb Göde *A Foreigner’s Opinion of England* (3 vols London 1821) vol 1 p 68. Originally published as *England, Wales, Irland und Schottland: Erinnerungen an Natur und Kunst aus einer Reise in den Jahren 1802 und 1803* (5 vols Dresden 1806) cf vol 1 p 52 of the German edition.

⁴ See A. D. Harvey, ‘Slogans on Bricks: advertisements painted on buildings in Camden’, *Camden History Review* 22 (1998) p 22–3.

⁵ A more elaborate (and expensive) alternative to paint was a plaster surface with embossed, or more usually, impressed lettering or symbols. This form of sign-writing is frequently seen on Victorian public houses though the particularly fine late 19th-century example in Florence Street N1 relates to a veterinary partnership.

OLD ADVERTISEMENTS AND SIGNS PAINTED ON BRICKWORK IN ISLINGTON

1. 7 Alwyne Villas (N1.) (on side of building in Alwyne Lane)

JOHN C. MATHE ...

BUILDER & DECORATOR

This advertises the entrance to the yard of John C. Mather & Son, builders, whose office was at 38 Northampton St N1 c.1906–1941.

2. 92 Banner St (EC1)

-ALL ...

-ELDING

Callim Metallurgical Co, later trading as Callim Co Welding Engineers occupied these premises 1921–1980.

3. 48 Blackstock Rd. (now under hoarding)

SIG

Till 1938 Coleman & Sons, signwriters were at this address.

4. 60 Blackstock Rd
 — FURST
 ... MPS
 EST -.-
 CHEMIST

Isaac Furst had a chemist's shop here 1933-1964; he appears to have obtained his BSc degree in 1949 and this sign may date from that year; the second line probably originally read B.Sc. M.P.S. (*ie* Bachelor of Science, Member of the Pharmaceutical Society.)

The words *self service Cleaning Centre* on No. 58 next door date from the 1960s.

5. Branch Place (N1) Rosemary Works (visible from other side of the canal)

MANUFACTURERS OF
 FOLDING BOXES.
 DRAPERS' STOCK BOXES.
 COLLAPSIBLE Milliners BOXES.
 PARCELS POST BOXES.
 POSTAL TUBES.
 STATIONERY BOXES.
 CONFECTIONARY BOXES
 ROUND & OVAL BOXES

William Drew, fancy box maker, had a factory in this building 1899-1902, when it was taken over by Arundel & Marshall, also fancy box makers; the latter company moved out three or four years later

6. 1 Brecknock Rd. (N7) (very faint)

BRYANT & MAY (and illustration of a matchbox)

7. 2 Chapel Market (on side of building in Grant St, mostly covered by painted advert dating from 1970s; the latter was painted over in 1999)

KINNS

John Kinns, dealer in toys, was at this address 1949-1980.

- 8.a) 10 Charlton Place (N1) (on side of building in Camden Passage)

WITTICK-
 ELECTRIC MACHINE BAKERY
 MAKERS OF
 HOVIS
 WHICH
 BUILDS HEALTH

Bernard George Wittick, baker was at this address 1922-1939.

- 8.b) 5 City Garden Row (N1)

...
 ...
 FANCY
 BOXES

C. and C. H. Cordell, fancy box makers, were at this address 1896-1935.

9. Dingley Rd (EC1)

BLACK CAT (very faint)
 CIGARETTES
 EXTRA
 LARGE (and illustration of a black cat)
 10 for 6d

c.1947, this building was the Imperial Tobacco Co's York Road factory, 1904-1962.



Fig 2. Dingley Rd. London EC1. Imperial Tobacco's York Road factory. The advertisement, for Black Cat cigarettes, evidently dates from just after the Second World War

10. Duncan Terrace (N1) (on yard wall)

RAILWAT
PROPRIETORS

11. 63 Essex Rd (partly obscured by an illuminated shop sign)

BRUNO
B

John Bruno's hairdressing business was at this address 1912-1974.

12. 78 Essex Rd (on side of building in Popham St)

.. ZALIA
.. TARRH

(and more faintly and in smaller lettering, other words including INFLUENZA) This is presumably the name for a remedy for catarrh; this shop was a chemists for nearly a century, from late Victorian times onward.

13. 159 Essex Rd (at side)

BER YAR
C & M— CO
GLE
GROOMS
C
F
C

These premises were coffee and dining rooms from the 1860s till 1912. It never seems to have been a lumber or timber yard and the letters in the top row (in any case only faintly legible) may be the result of successive proprietors painting up their names over those of their predecessors.

14. 310 Essex Rd

BUTCHER

These premises were a butcher's from at least the 1880s till the 1980s.

15. 103 Fairbridge Rd (N19) (on side of building in Nicholay Rd)

A. H. FRYER ...
HOVIS
BEALES
FOR
WEDDING
CAKES
HOVIS

Arthur Henry Fryer took over an existing baker's shop at this address in 1934 and was succeeded by Beales in 1941. Beales sold the business in 1944 or 1945; an attempt seems to have been made by one of his successors to paint out his name.

16. Graham St (N1)

DIESPEKER & C^o L^{TD}

The name is repeated in larger, fainter lettering on the side of the factory building facing yard; Diespeker's, manufacturers of reconstituted stone, are still in business at this site; the fainter lettering on the side of the building probably dates from the establishment of their factory in 1927.

17. 125 Hanley Rd (N4)

J. T. TURNER
BAKER & CONFECTIONER
SHOPS AND SCHOOLS SUPPLIED
HOVIS
--- EACH
--- TO H.M. THE KING

J. T. Turner's baker's business was at this address till 1905: the painted sign presumably dates from 1901 when Edward VII succeeded Queen Victoria on the throne.

18. 123 Highbury Park (N5) (on side of building in Conewood St., lower section partly concealed by hoarding)

SUNLIG HT(?)
SOAP

These premises, originally designated No. 232 Blackstock Rd, were a grocers from 1909 or 1910.

19. 45 Holloway Rd

FRUIT & VEGETABLE MARKET
COALS
PHONE
3231
NORTH
&
COKE

(and other illegible words)

From 1893 till c.1906 there was a branch of Thomas Lea & Co, coal merchants at this address. The Fruit and Vegetable Market does not appear in Post Office directories and was presumably a side-line, perhaps occupying the forecourt.

20. 56 Holloway Rd (on side of house at right angles to street)

ARMY
CLUB (very faint)
CIGARETTES

21. 129 Holloway Rd. (on side of building overlooking the churchyard)

ROYAL
COFFEE & DINING

....

These premises were coffee and dining rooms from the 1870s onwards.

22. 138 Holloway Rd (now covered by hoarding)

GILLETTE

23. 174 Holloway Rd (letters just visible behind modern hoarding)

24. 185 Holloway Rd (at back, visible in Palmer Place)

CAFE
QUICK SERVICE SNACKS

(a previous painting up of QUICK SERVICE SNACKS is also visible, partly obscured by the letters of CAFE)

These premises were a snack bar from 1925 onward.

25. Holloway Rd, at side of Holloway Rd. Underground Station

GOODS RECEIVED AND

26. 268 Holloway Rd

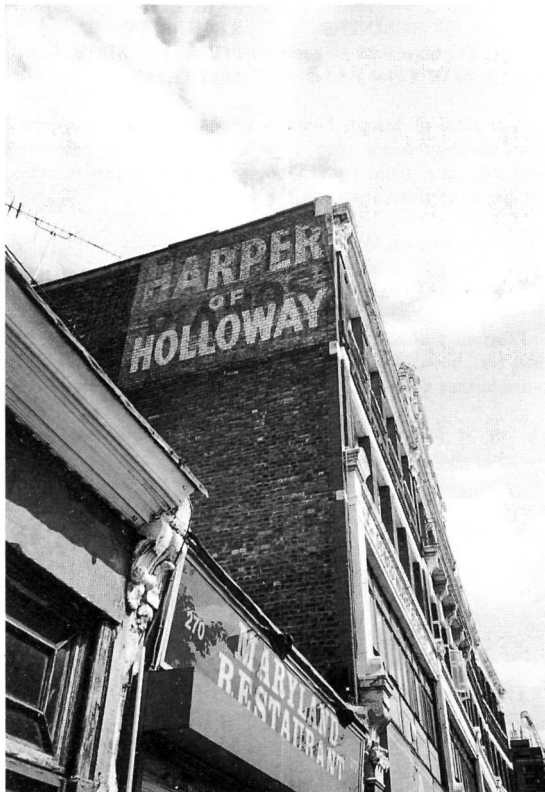


Fig 3. No. 268 Holloway Rd. London N7. The word PIANOS, dating probably from before the First World War, appears faintly through HARPER OF HOLLOWAY, which was painted over it perhaps thirty or forty years later

HARPER
OF
HOLLOWAY

superimposed over:

PIANOS

Harpers conducted a variety of activities, including the manufacture of diaries, at these premises 1904-1990; originally part of their business involved pianos. More lettering, including ADVERTISING CALENDARS DIARIES on the south side of this building is visible from the yard or from the adjacent railway line. The street numbering was altered in the mid 1970s; previously this building had been 258-262 Holloway Road.

27. 720 Holloway Rd (at side of the building overlooking railway line; mostly covered by modern hoarding)

BRYMAY

28. 49-51 Hornsey Rd (at side of building in Lowman Rd)

PIANOS
CARPETS

These premises were a pawnbrokers from the 1880s till 1918: the pianos and carpets advertised would have been second-hand.

29. 490 Hornsey Rd

P
I
A
N
O
S

These premises were Thomas Harper's piano factory 1911-1951; the street number was originally No. 498.

30. Hurlock St. (N5)

EH ELIZABETH HOUSE

SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND	THE FEDERATION OF
HEAD OFFICE	SOROPTOMISTS OF
29 QUEEN ANNE'S GATE	GREAT BRITAIN
LONDON S.W.1	AND IRELAND

This was a youth club, named after the new Queen and the soroptomist Elizabeth Hawes in 1952.

31. 27 Islington High St (on side of building in White Lion St)

—UNN
—CO'S
—ATS

G. A. Dunn & Co, hatters, were at this address 1924-1965.

32. 525 Liverpool Rd

W. FINNIMORE

William Finnimore had a piano key manufacturing business in these premises 1915-1943; till the late 1930s the house number was No. 511.

33. 11 Mallow St (EC1) (at side of building)

HARRY
SCHUMAN
LTD
WHOLESALE
CABINET
MAKERS

H. Schuman Ltd had their factory in these premises 1919-1954.

34. 52 Newington Green (partly covered by hoarding)

--- ENTS'
--- CE
--- GH!

3 & 9 AL- CHEMIST.

Presumably an advertisement for a cough cure

35. 90 Newington Green Rd

BRYMAY (very faint)

36. 4 Offord St (off Offord Rd N1; at side of building)

.. - Co
MOTORS
SALE HIRE
EXCHANGE
REPAIRS REWINDS
INSTALLATIONS

These premises were occupied by Industrial Electrical Co Ltd 1936-1958.

37. 88 Old St (at side of building)

illegible

38. 73 Pentonville Rd

METROPOLE

73

This house was a private hotel from the mid-1880s till 1901.

39. 246 Pentonville Rd. (at side of building; painted over December 1998 but already beginning to show through.)

DAILY
NEWS

--- GE

HOME

40. Poole St (N1) (visible from other side of canal)

GAINSBOROUGH
STUDIOS

This was a cinema film studio 1928-1950.

41. 94 Richmond Avenue N1 (at side of building in Cloudesley Road)

[C]HEMICAL[S]
[SU]NDRY REQU[ISITES]
[DEV]ELO[PING]
--- NT ---
ENLARG[I]NG
QUALITY QUICK SER[VICE]
WOOTTONS CASH CHEMIST
J HEARLE MPS

DISPENSING
CHEMIST
HOURS OF BUSINESS
9 A.M. TO 6.30 P.M.
THURSDAY TO 1 P.M.

TOILET
NURSERY
REQUISITES
PHOTOGRAPHIC
MATERIALS

A branch of Joseph Hearle's chemist's business operated from these premises 1927-1957 and most of the paintwork probably dates from 1957. Wootton Cash Chemists occupied the premises from 1958.

42. 81-82 Roman Way N7

ROMEO TRADING CO. LTD.

Previously in business under a variety of other names, this firm has been operating under this name since 1952: it is possible that the paintwork dates from some years later.

43. 25 St John's Villas (N19) (at side of building beside balcony) mainly illegible: ends in SO or 50

44. 254A Seven Sisters Rd (at side of jewellers, visible from St Thomas's Rd)

SAME
DAY
CLEANING

There was a Laundry here from c.1910.

45. Shepperton Rd (N1)

Warings
WILTON
FACTORIES

This was a textile factory 1921-c.1945.

46. Sheringham Rd. (N7)

PIONEER
ELECTRICAL WORKS
A.P. LUNDBERG & SONS LTD

A. P. Lundberg's factory was in Paradise Passage, off Sheringham Rd, 1907-1940. The word PIONEER presumably dates from 1957, when Pioneer Sales and Services took over this building.

47. 89-90 Turnmill St. (EC1) (at northern end)

RONSO --
AMAS --

Silvro Pyjamas manufacturers had premises here in the 1930s. The words NUCARD CO. LTD./TRADE/PRINTERS visible in the corresponding position at the other end of the building date from 1960.

48. 347 Upper Street

. . . .
--- BOXES
ELMES & C ---

A. Elmes & Co were in business at this address from the late 19th century till 1918. Till about 1909 they designated

themselves 'Ticket Writers' (*ie* makers of the notices giving descriptions and/or prices of goods displayed in shops); later they appeared in the Post Office directory as 'Exhibition Stand Fitters'.

49. 143 Whitecross St (EC2)

mostly illegible. 'AM' on viewer's left.

50. Widdenham Rd (N7)

2-16 Loraine Mansions (side of building visible from Caledonian Rd.)

KEY
FLATS

—
BRANCH OFFICE
NORTH 1202

BRANCH OFFICE and — have been painted up on two separate occasions: the first time c.1905

51. 14 York Way

REFRESHMENTS

These premises were Celestino Bertolini's refreshment rooms from 1916 till the 1960s.