

# PAPERS READ AT THE LAMAS LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE HELD AT THE CITY OF LONDON SCHOOL FOR GIRLS IN NOVEMBER 2008: 'LONDON RECORDED'

## LONDON FROM WILLIAM FITZSTEPHEN TO JOHN STOW: THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

*Caroline Barron*

William FitzStephen was the first Londoner to write an account of his city: he wrote his encomium of London as a preface to his biography of Thomas Becket who had been murdered in 1170. FitzStephen's glowing account of his native city focused particularly on the education of boys, the supplies of ready-cooked food, horses and sports of all kinds. He has little to say about how the city was governed or about the economic life of London. His account was well-known in the medieval period and there are six medieval copies surviving, including one which belonged to the famous London chamberlain, Andrew Horn, in the early 14th century and another which was copied by a London embroiderer, Thomas Carleton, into his personal record book towards the end of that century. And at the end of the 16th century the famous antiquary, John Stow, printed FitzStephen's account in his *Survey of London* and intended to bring it up to date, although Stow soon found his 12th-century model too restricting.

But between the late 12th century and the late 16th century we have no surviving accounts of the city written by Londoners. There are, however, several descriptions by

foreign visitors. The earliest appears to be an account, written in Greek, by Laonikos Chalkokondyles, about the middle of the 15th century, probably derived from information supplied by someone who had accompanied the Emperor Manuel Palaeologos II on his visit to England in 1400. He wrote that, 'the city of London is the most important of all cities on the island. It is inferior to none of the western cities in wealth and prosperity. Its citizens are more brave and skilful in war than their neighbours and many other Westerners'. It is doubtful if the Londoners would have recognised themselves in this warlike description. But what interested Chalkokondyles particularly (or his informant) was the river Thames: 'A large and turbulent river flows by this city. It flows into the Ocean opposite Gaul ... At high tide ships go up to the city very easily. The river water which flows upriver is prevented from reaching the city because it barely checks the river current.' Few of the other visitors were as interested in the tidal peculiarities of the Thames as the Greeks.

Another distinguished visitor was Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, who came to England in 1463 and later recorded that he was glad to have seen 'the rich and populous city of London, the noble church of St Paul's and London Bridge itself, which resembles a city'. In fact most of the surviving accounts in the next hundred years were written by Italians. One of the most

informative of these was written by Domenic Mancini who visited England in 1482–3 and described the commercial topography of the city very accurately. Some of these Italian accounts were written as part of official reports (*relazione*) sent back by Venetian envoys to the Doge, and some, like that of the young Alessandro Magno in 1562, were written more as personal travel diaries.

But in the second half of the 16th century there was a change: the Italians were less dominant in English trade for a variety of reasons — wars in Italy, the distracting advances of the Turks into Venetian trading posts in the Eastern Mediterranean and the discovery of the New World which opened up wider commercial horizons. The break with Rome was also a disincentive to trade with Italy. The place of the merchant Italians was taken by a new class of northern Europeans, literate, well-educated, well-travelled, prosperous and curious: these men were knights, merchants, physicians and students and they wrote careful accounts (with some plagiarism) of their visits to England.

Like tourists then, as now, they wrote much of buildings: royal palaces, London Bridge, the Tower of London and St Paul's, and also about the structure and building techniques of ordinary houses. They wrote of the appearance (good), clothing (poor), copious food (bad), and beer (appalling) of Londoners, and they commented on social customs, apprenticeship and social mobility (they were astounded that a man could rise from being apprentice to Lord Mayor in a single life-time). They were surprised at the freedom that women in London enjoyed, and they appreciated the frequent kissing that took place. But they also noted the harsh punishments for immorality (this post-Reformation). Few describe the new playhouses, but they have much to say about bear baiting and the other 'blood sports', as well as human wrestling and racing. There is some interest in civic government and the various London ceremonies, but none of the visitors commented on the social problems such as poverty, exploding population and the plague which were of such concern to the rulers of London in the 16th century. Likewise the visitors were little interested in the city crafts and companies (although they admired the work of the London goldsmiths)

and they had nothing to say about the schools in London or about the legal system and the Inns of Court. But in spite of these lacunae, the continental visitors capture for us aspects of civic life which the Londoners themselves seem not to have thought it necessary to record.

Mario Savorgnano, the Venetian scholar and engineer, who came to England in 1531 concluded: 'In short, I am of the opinion, all things considered, that it is a very rich, populous and mercantile city, but not beautiful.'

***TO MAKE NOBLER AND MORE  
HUMANLY ENJOYABLE THE LIFE OF  
THE GREAT CITY: THE WORK OF THE  
SURVEY OF LONDON, 1894–2008***

*Colin Thom*

The *Survey of London* was founded in 1894 by the young Arts-and-Crafts architect, designer and social thinker Charles Robert Ashbee, as a volunteer project to record London's historic buildings.

At the time, Ashbee was running the Guild and School of Handicraft at Essex House in the East End of London. Like many, he was shocked by the degradation of the East End, and alarmed at the rapidity with which many ancient buildings in that part of London were being destroyed. He proposed that a detailed register of buildings of interest should be compiled and printed, and that buildings of particular interest (especially those threatened with destruction) should form the subject of individual monographs in which photographs, measured drawings and historical notes could be brought together. At first the scheme was to be confined to the East End of London but it was soon extended to include the whole County.

In 1894 these were very far-sighted ideas. This was a period when the capital's buildings were under increasing threat from commercial development as London became the heart of a vast British empire. Many hitherto characteristic types of City buildings, such as pre-Fire half-timbered houses and galleried inns, were being swept away for improvements, generally without any record being made of them. At the time

there was nothing in the way of statutory protection for London's building fabric, the only legislation in place being the Ancient Monuments Act of 1882, which covered only uninhabitable prehistoric monuments, such as Stonehenge.

Although the idea of a list or register of important and threatened structures was central to Ashbee's project, his vision was for something much more than simply a work of architectural history. He saw historic buildings, and our understanding of them, as part of a wider philosophy of 'social enlightenment': their survival would enhance the lives of ordinary Londoners, in much the same way as open spaces, libraries and museums; and they offered tremendous educational potential.

What stirred Ashbee into action and brought the *Survey of London* into being was the demolition of a well-preserved Jacobean hunting-lodge in Bromley-by-Bow to make way for a new board school. Ashbee later wrote of this experience with some bitterness:

We now have on the site of King James's Palace a well-built Board School... sanitary,

solid, grey, grim and commonplace. What we might have had with a little thought and no extra expense would have been an ideal Board School with a record of every period of English history from the time of Henry VIII, as a daily object lesson for the little citizens of Bromley...

When a similar fate threatened Trinity Hospital in the Mile End Road, a group of almshouses built in the 1690s, Ashbee and his band of volunteers were ready. They sprang into action, recording the building through sketches, measured plans and photographs, and researched its history. Ashbee also stirred up a campaign for its preservation, eliciting support from a number of public figures, including William Morris and W E Gladstone. The result was the first *Survey of London* monograph, on the almshouses, which also served as a manifesto for Ashbee's ideas. It not only helped save the buildings — one of London's first great conservation victories — but also encouraged the London County Council to offer its help, through funding the publication in 1900 of the *Survey of London's* first parish volume, on Bromley-by-Bow.

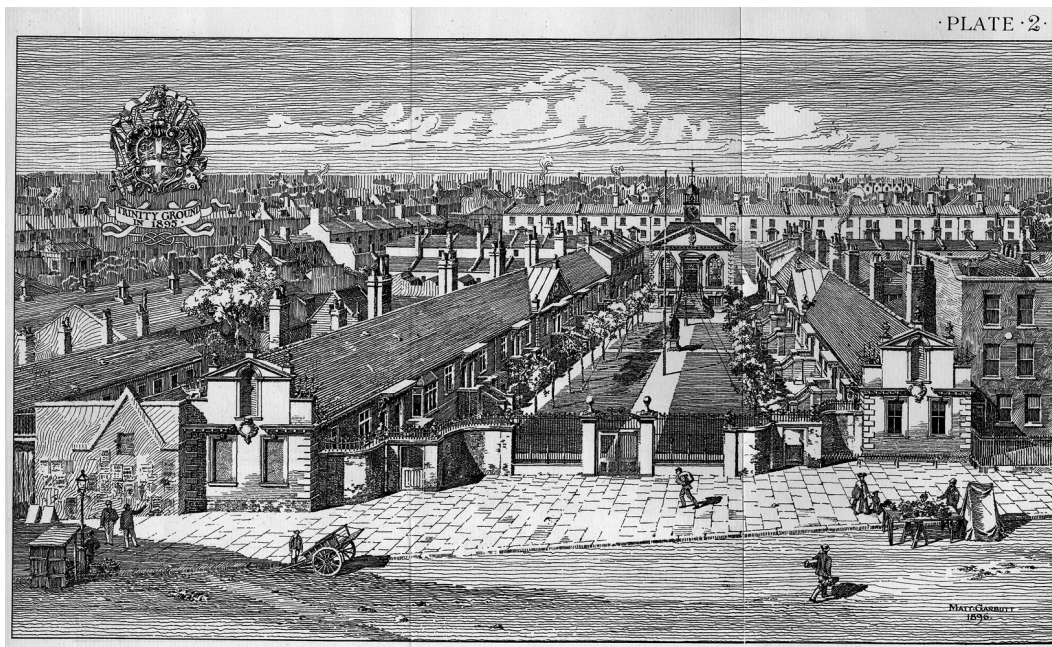


Fig 1. This engraving of Trinity Ground appeared as a fold-out in the first *Survey of London* publication, the *Trinity Hospital* monograph of 1896

### Early years of the Survey Committee

In their early years, Ashbee's band of volunteers on the *Survey* formed a watch committee to produce an 'emergency list' of buildings in immediate danger. The watch committee also had the task of compiling Ashbee's register of important historic buildings, which it was hoped would alert Londoners to their significance and help prevent their destruction. It was this register that was to form the backbone of the early *Survey of London* parish volumes.

Crucial to the early success of the *Survey*, and to its continued existence, was the support of the fledgling London County Council. Fortunately, the LCC was progressive and enlightened in its approach to the preservation of buildings and monuments in its area. It obtained powers to acquire buildings of interest, and took over from the Royal Society of Arts its scheme for marking the former homes of prominent citizens, which became the Blue Plaques Scheme, now, like the *Survey*, a part of English Heritage.

Eventually Ashbee found that his other projects took precedence, and he gradually withdrew from active involvement in the *Survey's* work. In 1907 he handed over its direction to Philip Norman, one of London's most eminent antiquarians; and when the second *Survey* volume appeared in 1909, on Chelsea, its more substantial scholarship was due largely to Walter Hindes Godfrey, with whom the Survey Committee was to be associated for more than 50 years. The Committee's partnership with the LCC was put on a more formal footing in 1910, when the Council undertook to research and write alternate volumes of the *Survey of London*; and, led by its antiquarian Clerk to the Council, Laurence Gomme, the LCC basically kept the series going, taking on an increasing share of writing and illustrating the books. After the Second World War the volunteer committee finally disbanded, and the LCC took over the whole thing on a professional basis.

### Post-War history

After the listing of buildings was introduced in 1947 — which was fundamentally the realisation of Ashbee's idea of a register

of worthwhile structures — the original campaigning element of the *Survey of London's* work receded; and, under the editorship of Francis Sheppard from 1954, it also dropped the strictly inventorying aspect of its work. Instead it took growing account of trends in modern architectural and urban history, in particular the evolution of estate development — a significant theme in London's history — best exemplified in the volumes of the 1970s and 80s covering Mayfair and Kensington. Having become part of the Greater London Council when local government was reorganised in the 1960s, the *Survey* passed to the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England in 1986 when the GLC was abolished by Margaret Thatcher. And when the Royal Commission was absorbed into English Heritage in 1999, responsibility for the work of the *Survey of London* went with it, and today the *Survey* is part of English Heritage's Research Department.

### Contents, production and house-style

How have the contents of the *Survey of London* volumes changed over the years? After Ashbee's campaigning beginnings, the *Survey* settled into a steady rhythm of documenting worthy buildings, with special emphasis on measured drawings, still one of its proud traditions. In the early years, the volumes were very selective in the buildings they covered, often with quite brief, inventory-style accounts of only the oldest, most historic structures. Gradually, they became more and more comprehensive, partly in response to the widening interest in local history and industrial archaeology, and partly because the old criteria of architectural taste and significance were becoming increasingly out of date. The *Survey* moved towards covering not just the most significant buildings in an area, but almost any building of any interest, while the content of the written texts moved away from formal architectural description in favour of more analysis, and financial and social detail.

Over the years, the books also became better designed, with more numerous and attractive illustrations, notably measured drawings. Traditionally, the *Survey* had only line drawings interspersed amongst the text,

with the black-&-white photographic plates grouped together separately at the back. In the most recent parish volumes on *Clerkenwell*, published earlier this year, for the first time the photographs are fully integrated with the text alongside the drawings, and there is also widespread use of colour images. The Clerkenwell volumes are also the first fruits of a new arrangement whereby the *Survey of London* volumes are being published for English Heritage by Yale University Press, with sponsorship from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, which has generously agreed to provide support for an initial five-year period.

### Where next?

With Clerkenwell completed, the *Survey* is now working on three new projects: a monograph study of the Charterhouse, a unique London monument of such interest and importance that it was not possible to do it justice as part of the parish survey of Clerkenwell; a parish volume on Woolwich, an area currently under considerable development pressures; and two volumes on Battersea, another riverside district offering particular challenges.

### Recent developments: how best to make use of the *Survey's* work

Thanks to a generous English Heritage grant, all the parish volumes prior to those on Clerkenwell are being made available online on the University of London's British History Online website. There are currently 37 of the volumes available on the site, and by January 2009 it should have all 45 parish volumes published between 1900 and 2000.

The benefits of this are considerable. As a multi-volume work, with no cumulative index, the *Survey* can be difficult to use when looking for a specific building or individual. Now quick, free text searches of the entire series can be made. Furthermore, the British History Online website also has volumes of the *VCH* and the *History of Parliament*, allowing joint searching across all three series. And, in preparing the text of the volumes for electronic publication, the *Survey* has been able, on occasion, and particularly with the earlier volumes, to insert corrections

and addenda, allowing us to incorporate important new findings and attributions that have come to light since publication.

### LONDON'S FORGOTTEN SURVEY: HUBERT LLEWELLYN SMITH'S NEW SURVEY OF LONDON 1928-34

*Cathy Ross*

I want to begin with a quote from 1985, about Hubert Llewellyn Smith's *New Survey of London Life and Labour* (NSLLL). 'The New Survey of London Life and Labour' said Martin Bulmer in his history of social research, 'was a dramatic proof of the proposition that the cost of social research is in no way related to its scholarly value. The study is nowadays largely forgotten, and left little residue.'<sup>1</sup> That dismissive verdict should perhaps be seen as reflecting the view from within the world of social science and practical social research. From the world of the historian, the survey looks a lot more interesting and is attracting increasing attention as a key source for understanding London between the Wars: an article by Sally Alexander in the *History Workshop Journal* for 2007 is a case in point.<sup>2</sup> I want to reinforce the view that the NSLLL should not be forgotten.

The man whose name is associated with the NSLLL is Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith (1864-1945), the Survey's Director. The other big name connected with the project is William Beveridge (1879-1963), Director of the London School of Economics from 1919. Beveridge and Llewellyn Smith were old friends, similar in outlook and experiences. Both had been to Oxford University and had acquired a fierce sense of social mission. Both had formative experiences in the East End settlements, notably Toynbee Hall. Both became civil servants and moved into politics. Hubert Llewellyn Smith had a strong interest in work and labour, and by the early years of the century was Permanent Secretary, later President, of the Board of Trade. He and Beveridge worked together on the pioneering social legislation which introduced labour exchanges in 1909 and a system of National Insurance in 1911.

Beveridge's arrival at the LSE in 1919 began

a period of rapid growth for the institution. He inaugurated new departments, multiplied the student intake and reinvigorated the institution's academic reputation. He was particularly adept at raising money, and indeed the NSLLL was made possible by an extremely large grant from the Laura Rockefeller Memorial Foundation, made in 1927 to investigate the 'natural basis for the social sciences'. The grant was divided into five strands, one of which was earmarked to investigate modern social conditions. This became the New Survey, and Beveridge brought his old friend Llewellyn Smith out of retirement to head it.

What was the NSLLL trying to do? Its big idea was a simple one: to carry out a follow up to Charles Booth's monumental study of *Life and Labour of the People of London*, which had surveyed London in the 1890s. The aim was to compare the two periods and see if the problem of poverty in the capital had changed over the intervening 40 years. To this end Llewellyn Smith defined the survey's main objective as twofold: firstly 'to ascertain the proportion between poverty and well-being in the London of today'; and secondly to explore the degree of change since the 1890s: 'To answer the insistent questions which are in all men's minds: in what direction are we moving? Is poverty diminishing or increasing? Are the conditions of life and labour in London becoming better or worse?'

By setting itself up as a 'then and now' exercise, the New Survey guaranteed that it would bring good news. Most observers would have concluded that social conditions in the 1930s were a lot better than they had been in the 1890s. The absolute poverty and deprivation that had blighted parts of London had disappeared. State help for the most vulnerable had begun in the form of old age pensions and national insurance. Local councils were getting into their stride with the provision of housing, bath houses and libraries. Standards of living had risen. Electric power had brought cleaner homes. Working conditions had improved.

But poverty had not disappeared completely. One of the things that took up a lot of space in the New Survey was a discussion of how to define poverty scientifically. The concept of 'the poverty line', an absolute measure of poverty, had been introduced

by Charles Booth who had taken household income as his main tool. Booth defined as poor, families of five with a weekly income less than 18–20 shillings a week. The figure had been calculated by assessing the rock-bottom costs of 'minimum needs', but 40 years on was this still the right approach?

In 1901 Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree's survey of poverty in York had set the poverty line higher at 21s 8d, recognising that minimum needs should include the costs of such things as leisure and union fees. In London, Maud Pember Reeves had investigated whether the poverty line of 20 shillings was in the right place. Her resulting book of 1908, *Round About a Pound a Week*, focused on diet, health and household management — *ie* what families did with the income. Another figure in the field was the mathematician A L Bowley who had carried out a survey of five northern towns in 1912–15. By the 1920s Bowley was a professor at the LSE and it was he who brought some statistical sophistication to the New Survey's work through introducing an element of sampling, involving 12,000 working-class households. Booth and other previous surveys had relied on observation so this was a significant methodological innovation.

Despite Bowley's more modern approach to social surveys, the NSLLL decided to stick with Booth's definition of the poverty line, because to introduce a new standard of measurement would invalidate the comparison. 'The standard of minimum needs that marks the poverty line shall be comparable with that employed by Charles Booth 40 years earlier' explained Hubert Llewellyn Smith. He set out the New Survey's 'directly comparable' poverty line at 39–40 shillings a week, which was a simple updating of Booth's poverty line to modern prices. This was criticised at the time for being far too low: in 1937 another study argued that if there was to be a line it should be drawn at 59 shillings for a family of five, given that new thinking about diet and nutrition cast doubt on the soundness of Booth's definition of 'minimum needs'. The New Survey was also criticised for not taking full account of relative poverty or of 'dynamic poverty' — the idea that families could move in and out of poverty over time.

With its backwards-facing outlook, the

New Survey thus confirmed that things had indeed improved in London over the last 40 years. The percentage of families in poverty had shrunk significantly, from the 30% that Booth's survey had found, to an average of 8% across London as a whole (10% in the East and 6% elsewhere). The headline news was all good.

This optimistic overview casts a rosy glow over the nine volumes that make up the Survey's published outputs. Like Booth, the NSLLL produced 'poverty maps' which communicated their message through colour. In the 1890s Booth's maps had created a picture of London as a fragmented mosaic of dark colours, whose dark blue and black patches expressed the extent of the city's problems. The New Survey's maps cast London as a city of harmonious purple, pink or red, signifying that most areas now sat well above the poverty line.

The seven volumes of text revisited the basic Booth categories of Social Conditions and Industry by area. The volume on Leisure was, the Survey explained, a venture into 'uncharted waters' justified by the increased importance of leisure in Londoners' lives. Within the volumes a number of 'special studies' chapters focused on subjects which merited more detailed analysis. These included old age, Jewish migration, housing, hopped-picking, street traders, and unemployment. It is these special studies that perhaps hold the most riches for the historian, containing, like the Booth original, a wealth of material not just about what is being surveyed but also the attitudes of the surveyors.

The old age chapter reflects the Survey's predisposition to optimism. Old people are generally seen as reflecting the happy consequence of new social legislation. The advent of old age pensions had made a real difference; and the spread of literacy was deemed to have brought more contentment to old people because reading combats loneliness. By contrast, the chapter on 'the feeble minded' reveals the attitudes of the 1930s in a less cheery way. Mental disability among Londoners was dealt with, the Survey explained, not because it was a source of poverty itself but because '... the conditions of slum life and degraded environment which encourage inter-breeding are an appreciable factor in fostering and perpetuating mental

deficiency'. To 21st-century eyes, there are some harsh conclusions about the need to institutionalise and 'isolate' Londoners deemed to have no potential as useful members of society. This was, after all, the age of eugenics and Cyril Burt, the LCC's influential educational psychologist, who had concluded as scientific fact that pauperism and mental deficiency were directly linked.

Despite this chapter, the survey overall should be seen as reflecting the growing tone of understanding for working-class life and experiences. One of the things that marks it out as different to Booth is its warmer tone towards the people it is surveying. Like its predecessor it was primarily a top-down survey, an exercise in experts looking at the poor and making judgements. But nevertheless, there is a feeling of common purpose, and a sense of sympathy which allows its subjects to have humanity and individuality: the fact that 'the lives of the poor, while often hard, narrow and stunted are not necessarily unhappy' is noted.

In conclusion: was the NSLLL really an exercise of no value leaving little residue and best forgotten? For anyone interested in 20th-century London between the Wars, the New Survey is increasingly seen as a gold mine of detail, facts, views and attitudes. Furthermore, Bowley's sampling of 12,000 households is finding a new lease of life thanks to computer technology. The basic data, which is still kept in the LSE, is apparently 'the only one of the social surveys conducted between 1900 and 1950 for which a significant number of the original record cards survive. It is therefore an unrivalled source for the analysis of economic and social conditions using modern computer methods.'<sup>3</sup> Econometric historians are starting to crunch the data in new ways, leading to yet more new insights into the period. The *New Survey of Life and Labour in London* has a long way to go before it is as familiar to historians as its pioneering predecessor but it should not be forgotten.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> M Bulmer *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research* (1985), 17–18.

<sup>2</sup> S Alexander 'A new civilization? London surveyed 1928–1940s' *History Workshop Journal* 64(1) (2007).

<sup>3</sup> See [www.data-archive.ac.uk/findingData/snDescription.asp?sn=3758](http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/findingData/snDescription.asp?sn=3758).

**RECORDING LONDON BY CAMERA:  
THE LONDON AND MIDDLESEX  
GLASS SLIDE COLLECTION AT  
BISHOPSGATE INSTITUTE**

*Stefan Dickens*

Bishopsgate Institute was opened in 1895 using funds from charitable endowments made to the parish of St Botolph's, Bishopsgate over 500 years, under a scheme agreed by the Charity Commissioners in 1891. The Institute's Library and Archives now consist of a variety of personal, organisational and other collections covering the history of co-operation, the labour movement, freethought and humanism, and the social, topographical and cultural history of London, particularly the East End, ranging from the early 19th century to the present day. Between 2006 and 2009, the Library undertook a project to digitise around 4,000 glass slides covering the social, cultural and architectural history of London, compiled and collected by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. This has made available a huge and invaluable online resource of visual material of early 20th-century London and this article explores the history of the project and some of the issues faced in its completion.

The library of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society was housed at Bishopsgate Institute from 1910, probably as a consequence of the energies of the Institute's second Librarian Charles Goss (1864–1946), a regular contributor to the Society's *Transactions*. When the Library was moved to the Museum of London in 1977, a huge selection of glass slides was left behind. The glass slides were cleaned and conserved in acid-free pockets and wallets in 2004 and in total comprised 52 boxes, each containing approximately 70 slides — a collection of approximately 3,640 images of London from the early to mid-1900s.

On my appointment as the Institute Archivist in May 2005, I was immediately struck by what a fascinating and invaluable resource this collection could provide for scholars and students of London's architecture and history. Initial investigations into the provenance of the collection proved frustrating and no mention of the glass slides could be found in the Institute's own archive

or the complete set of LAMAS *Transactions* that sit on the Library's shelves. It is perhaps safe to assume that the slides were gathered by the Society as a resource for lectures and talks regularly held for members and others, and for various publications.

The coverage of the collection is immense covering the social, cultural and architectural history of London. There are numerous images of London's most famous landmarks, including Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace, St Paul's Cathedral, museums, bridges and many more. The collection is also particularly strong on church architecture, with images of all of the City's churches, including internal and external images, photographs of chapels, tombs and specific architectural features. As a record of London's social and cultural life, the collection is also fascinating, including images of street scenes, markets, events (such as coronations, fairs and processions), recreational activities, and crowds gathered at famous landmarks. Additionally, there are also aerial and night views of London, street signs, statues, windows and doorways, pubs, shops, and the slightly unusual! Particular favourites amongst staff at Bishopsgate Library include a selection of slides illustrating waste disposal in the early 1900s, several documenting the Vintner's Company swan upping ceremony on the Thames in July 1920, and a rather frightening image of the giant grasshopper weathervane on the Royal Exchange in Lombard Street.

It was obvious that in their original form, the glass slides could not be consulted by researchers due to their fragility. Once an image was damaged, it was lost in its original form forever. Therefore, some form of digitisation project was needed. Precedents for a project of this kind were hard to come by and there was initial concern from other archival professionals regarding potential damage to the glass slides that could be caused by the process of digitisation. However, I felt the conservation risk was a worthwhile one and that the need for this collection to be accessible far outweighed the negligible risk of long-term damage. It was decided that the project would be undertaken in-house using volunteers to scan the slides on the Library's Epson Expression 1640XL scanner. Three copies of the image from each glass slide would





*Fig 2. Balloon festival in Crystal Palace Park, 1900 (Ref: LAMAS/A13)*

be saved. A high-quality .tiff file (scanned at 600 dpi) saved to gold DVD for long-term storage, a usable medium-quality .jpg file (scanned at 300 dpi) for day-to-day use, and a low quality image (scanned at 72 dpi) to be uploaded onto the Library's online catalogue. The digitised image would then be described and dated and placed on the Library's cataloguing software, along with the addition of subject, place and geographical keywords. Therefore, the images would be searchable, available to browse on the Library's online catalogue by researchers worldwide and the exact contents of the collection known and preserved for generations to come.

The project began in October 2006 and an enthusiastic response was received from adverts for volunteers placed in professional literature. An initial team of four volunteers started shortly after and began immediately to make excellent progress. However, it soon

became clear that there would be several problems to overcome on the project. Although most of the slides were labelled across the top of the image, giving information of the content and date, it soon became clear that many had no information at all. This often resulted in volunteers absorbed for hours in volumes in the Library's London collection trying to track down the contents of an image which, although easy and quick to process when showing the exterior of a building, could often take much longer when trying to track down an intricate architectural feature of a long disappeared City church or great hall. Similarly, where images were undated, volunteers were left to track down clues within the image to provide a suitable year, often relying on fashions of visible passers-by or transport appearing accidentally in the image. It was quickly established that most of the images within the collection

were taken between 1900 and 1920. Details of photographers or photographic studios were almost always also absent.

Problems were also encountered in deciding which side of the image should be scanned. This is normally indicated by which side of the slide is gloss and is observable by touch and sight, but most slides were encased and secured in thin glass slide cases of their own, leaving this form of identification unavailable. Therefore, once again the volunteers would rely on small details in the images, such as the writing on street signs and transportation or comparison with other published photographs, to make sure that images were positioned the right way. Some slides were also damaged or cracked and volunteers would have to show care in handling the images during the digitisation process. Many of the images had also become discoloured, seemingly through exposure to light during their existence. Although steps were taken to manipulate images to make them clearer during the digitisation process, some were beyond repair. Finally, many images were tinted with colour, either at the time or later. Many of the images are hugely impressive, showing detailed colouring which brings the scene to life; although some attempts were less successful, including a rather early slide of a proud elderly Beefeater tinted with a bright yellow face and lurid turquoise uniform.

The digitisation of the LAMAS Glass Slide collection will be completed in February 2009 and is the result of the hard work of the eight volunteers who have taken part in the project since it started in 2006. Along with digitisation work, the volunteers were given talks and demonstrations in the many aspects of library and archive work during their time at Bishopsgate Library and several have now gone on to pursue careers in the profession. The images are now available on Bishopsgate Library's online catalogue ([www.bishopsgate.org.uk/catalogue](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/catalogue)) and are all described, dated and subject indexed. This enables them to be searched and browsed via the catalogue. The Library also offers a full reprographics service and images can be emailed or printed for researchers at a small charge. Over 500 images from the glass slide collection have also been contributed to an online resource *Exploring 20th Century London*, co-funded by the Museums Hub and the Museum of London, which explores and documents the social and cultural history of London since 1900.

For more information on the LAMAS Glass Slide Collection or the digitisation project, please contact Stefan Dickers, Library Special Collections Manager at Bishopsgate Institute on:  
[stefan.dickers@bishopsgate.org.uk](mailto:stefan.dickers@bishopsgate.org.uk)  
 or 020 7392 9292.