

STRAWS FROM CUMBERLAND MARKET

A Brief History of Cumberland Market

by Patrick Baty



About Patrick Baty

Patrick Baty has spent the last thirty years investigating the paints and colours employed in the decoration of historic buildings. He has carried out the technical analysis of the decoration of many hundreds of buildings, as can be seen on his website – www.colourman.com

He has advised on the redecoration of projects ranging from King Henry VIII's Royal Beasts and the Royal Festival Hall to Tower Bridge. Patrick also writes and lectures on the subject of historic decoration.

With his wife, Alex, he runs the family business, Papers and Paints, in Chelsea. They specialise in colour and are constantly developing new ranges, many of which are for other companies in the UK and Europe. Accurate colour measurement has been a focus, and Patrick has pioneered the making of colour surveys, dealing with many important public and private institutions.

‘STRAWS FROM CUMBERLAND MARKET’ⁱ

A Brief History of Cumberland Market



Cumberland Market - early twentieth century
Messrs. J. & A. Crew occupied the left hand of the two tall buildings

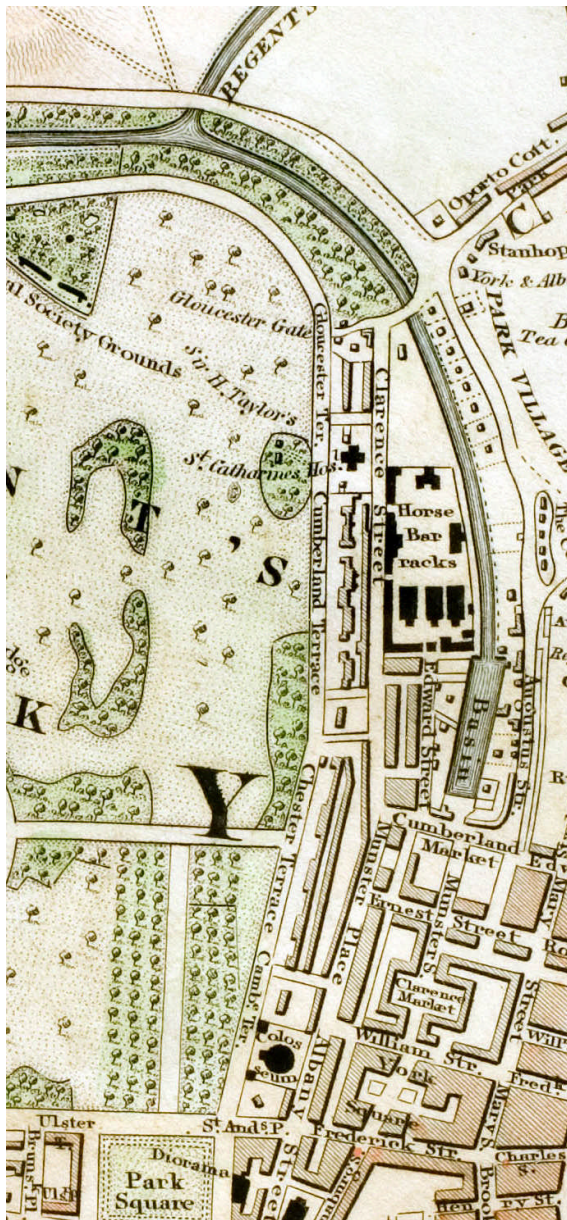
It is not near Piccadilly: it is a place of carts and the sky. Cabs and trains know nothing of it, and on the map you will find it very small, though it is more important than Piccadilly; it is in the real world...

...there is a horse-trough in the centre, cutting one of the two lines of black posts marking the road off from the great stretch of cobble-stones on either side; and one clean house with a pediment freshly painted, from which the pigeons fly. And there is the British Queen at one corner looking crossways at the King's Head at the other, and opposite the British Queen the Jolly Farmers...

The carts are always there: the hay-stacked carts with the empty shafts, standing like exiled ricks in a vast, strange yard; and the big two- or four-horsed drays loaded with coal sacks, meal sacks, beer casks; half asleep, pulling up mechanically at the horse-trough and the Jolly Farmers...ⁱⁱ

Charlotte Mew was describing a part of London that finally disappeared over fifty years ago, having been in steady decline since the early years of the twentieth century.

Cumberland Market clearly represented the “real world” to Robert Bevan and his fellow *Neo-Realists* Harold Gilman and Charles Ginner. It was there, in the months before the First World War, that Bevan took a studio and formed what was to be a short-lived successor to the Camden Town Group.



The land to the east of John Nash's Regent's Park development had originally been laid out as a service district with small houses for tradesmen and three large squares intended for the marketing of hay, vegetables and meat.ⁱⁱⁱ Only Cumberland Market, the northernmost square survived as a commercial area. London's hay market relocated here from Piccadilly in 1830 although it was never to prove a great success, being described in 1878 as "never [having] been very largely attended".^{iv}

The Regent's Canal was developed as a means of delivering goods into the North of London. It linked the Grand Junction Canal's Paddington Arm with the Thames at Limehouse.^v The Cumberland Arm was built as a spur off it and led between Nash's Park Village West and Park Village East to the Cumberland Basin which was lined by a collection of wharfs and warehouses. Hay and straw were brought in for sale at the Market and for the nearby Albany Street cavalry barracks.^{vi} Barges, each capable of carrying thirty tons, would also arrive with heavy goods such as stone and lime for building; coal and timber for the neighbouring coach-building and furniture trade. Ice, too, was brought in for the ice-merchant, William Leftwich, who had an icehouse that was eighty-two feet deep and with a capacity of 1,500 tons under the Market.^{vii} Vegetables and cattle were carried in as well, thus reducing the need for the latter to be driven into the city.

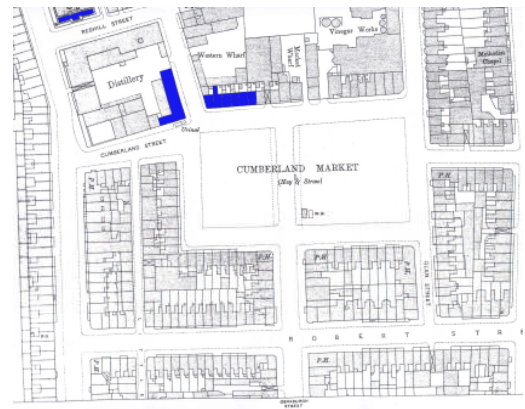
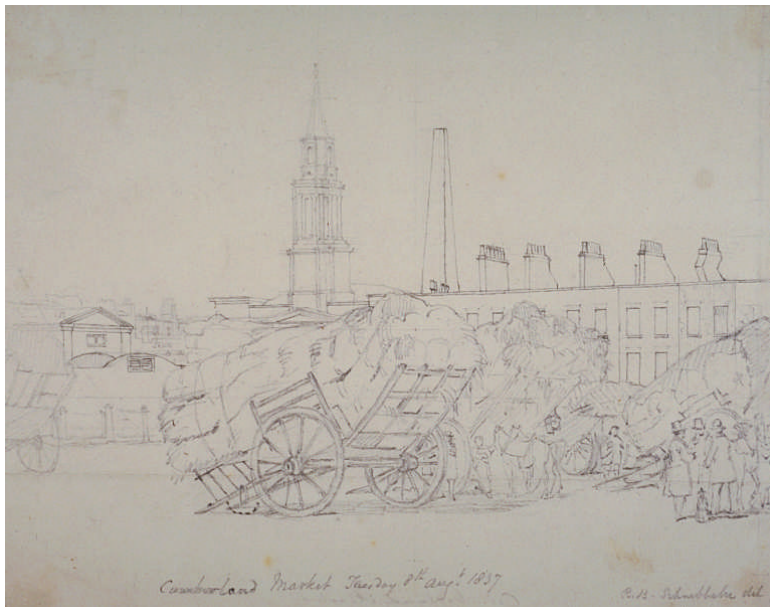
"Improved Map of London for 1833, from Actual Survey"
drawn and engraved by W.Schmollinger.

Clarence Market, the next square to the south, was intended to be a centre for the distribution of fresh vegetables brought in from the market gardens of Middlesex. It was later cultivated as a nursery garden and became Clarence Gardens.^{viii} The houses in Clarence and Cumberland Markets were modest and the work of speculative builders who put up "run-of-the-mill products without the slightest obligation to make architecture."^{ix} The southernmost square began as York Market but it never found use as a trading place and the name was later changed to Munster Square. Although its houses were tiny, with a single window on each of their three storeys, they were well-designed and perfectly proportioned.^x

"I saw [Munster Square] in the Blitz, and in the black-out: in rain and snow, in sunshine and in the shade of street-lighting. Maybe it is not an architectural jewel . . . but I loved its square entity, the harmony of its small fronts, the delicate ironwork of its balconies . . . and it gives the peculiar feeling of an immense room, with the skies as the roof: the same feeling you have in evenings on the Piazza San Marco in Venice: a ballroom."^{xi}

In the NW corner of Cumberland Market, in Albany Street, John Nash had built the Ophthalmic Hospital for Sir William Adams, George IV's oculist. For several years Adams gave his services free to soldiers whose eyesight had been affected in the military campaigns in Egypt. The hospital was closed in 1822 and for a time it was used as a factory for manufacturing Bacon's and Perkin's 'steam guns'. In 1826 it was purchased by Sir Goldsworthy Gurney for the construction of his famed 'steam carriages', one of which made the journey from London to Bath and back, in July 1829. However, unable to market these vehicles Gurney was forced to sell the premises in 1832. Bought by Sir Felix Booth, the gin distiller the building survived as a landmark, although badly bombed, until demolition in 1968.

Beside the Ophthalmic Hospital was Christ Church, built by Nash's assistant, Sir James Pennethorne in 1837 to serve the largely working class district.^{xii} However, a series of later alterations gradually made the church more appropriate for high-church worship, and in time the windows were filled with stained glass, including a panel by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose family worshipped there.^{xiii}



View of horse-drawn vehicles at Cumberland Market, King's Cross 1837
Robert Blemmell Schnebbelie (1792-1849)

Note the steeple of Christ Church and the gin distillery chimney. The buildings that can be seen in the drawing are marked in blue on the map. Reproduced with the permission of the Guildhall Library, City of London

The steeple of Christ Church dominated Cumberland Market as did the nearby chimney of William Grimble's gin distillery, also in Albany Street. In 1840 Grimble decided to embark on producing vinegar from spirit left over from his distillery. He went into partnership with Sir Felix Booth, and they set up premises in the North East corner of the Market. The venture was unsuccessful so they turned to the more conventional method of vinegar brewing. The brewery burnt down in 1864 and was rebuilt and extended soon after.^{xiv}

The growth of the railway network and the opening of Euston Station in 1837 caused enormous upheaval and was one of the factors that led to the rapid decline of the area. Bringing in “noise, dirt, Irish navvies, and semi-itinerant railway workers”^{xv} Charles Dickens likened the railway works cutting their way through Camden Town to a “great earthquake”.^{xvi} More industry developed in the area than was originally planned as factories began to spring up near the canal and railway and this put even more pressure on land for housing. Houses that were originally built for middle class families were taken over by incomers. The terraces of Mornington Crescent and Arlington Road, for example, were ideal for multi occupation for as many as nine or ten people could be accommodated in each.^{xvii}

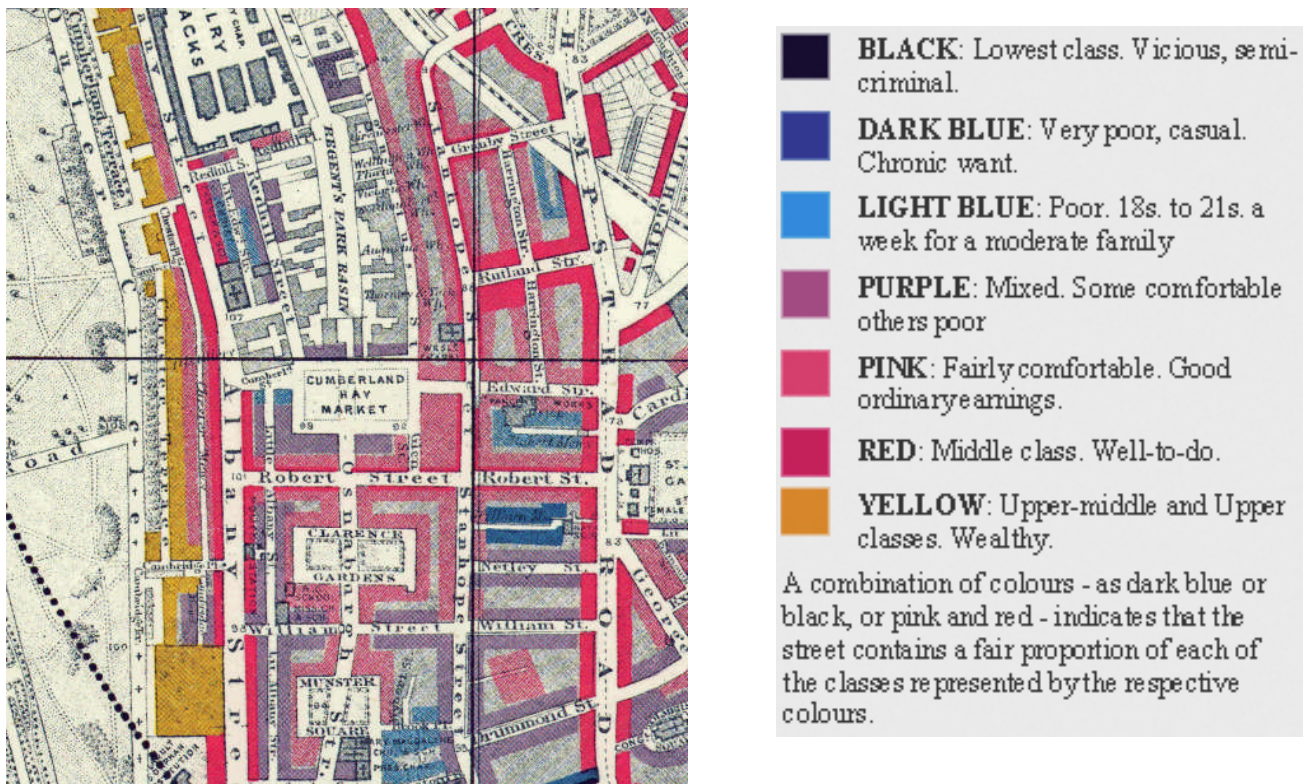


The Rear of Park Village East from the Cumberland Arm of the Regent's Canal
 From an original study by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd (1793-1864), pub 1831.
 Produced from Shepherd's series "Metropolitan Improvements; or London in the
 Nineteenth Century".

This view is looking south towards Cumberland Market

By 1852 the Midland Railway was transporting around a fifth of the total coal to London through Euston and King's Cross.^{xviii} Although still in use the Regent's Park Canal carried less and less until by the 1850s the Cumberland Basin was described as "no better than a stagnant putrid ditch".^{xix} Cholera spread through the families of men who were employed on the barges and in the wharves around it and took hold in the overcrowded neighbourhood.

The housing situation was to become worse in the following decade. Some 4,000 houses were demolished in the area to the east of Cumberland Market to make way for the new St Pancras Station in 1868. As many as 32,000 people were displaced, most with no form of compensation.^{xx} By the late nineteenth century a dramatic social divide had developed in this part of London with Cumberland Market in the middle. Just over one hundred metres to the west were the wealthy occupants of Nash's Chester Terrace while a short distance to the east were areas characterised by Charles Booth, the social commentator, as being occupied by the very poor, of those in "chronic want".



Charles Booth's *Descriptive Map of London Poverty* 1889.
London Topographical Society publication No. 130. 1984.
Reproduced with the kind permission of the LTS

Throughout its existence the hay market operated for three days a week alongside a general produce market. The central cobbled market place, enclosed by cast-iron posts linked with chains, was surrounded by modest houses of varying styles. Most of the houses were of three storeys, some with a basement. Although originally they do not

appear to have had shops the lower floors of many were subsequently converted to business.^{xxi} Twenty-one separate businesses are recorded in Cumberland Market at the beginning of the twentieth century together with four pubs.

The canal had proved to be a very efficient means of bringing in stone to the Cumberland Basin and a number of monumental masonry and statuary businesses had sprung up in the Euston Road to take advantage of this - so much so that...

It is just possible...that more lions' and stags' heads, and other heraldic devices for decorating the park-gates of noble lords and "county families" in the country, have proceeded of late years from the various statuary yards which adorn the southern side of the Euston Road than from all the rest of the metropolis put together.^{xxii}

Messrs. J. & A. Crew, stone merchant, occupied Market Wharf on the north side of Cumberland Market. It is their premises which appear in many of Robert Bevan's views of the time, being to the left of the distinctive pedimented stables of Grimble's Vinegar Factory.^{xxiii}



North Side of Cumberland Market - NE end 1929

The distinctive pedimented stables of Grimble's Vinegar Factory, as described by Charlotte Mew, can be seen to the left. To its left are the premises of J. & A. Crew, stone merchants. Glidden's, the saddlers, original London premises can be seen to the right of centre and A.C. Savage, the chandlers, on the far right.

London Metropolitan Archive A5837

As well as monumental statuary the availability of stone, combined with cheap rents and its proximity to the centre of town had attracted a number of sculptors and artists to set up studios in the Cumberland Market area. Amongst the former were Mario Raggi; John Henry Foley and Sir Thomas Brock.^{xxiv} Sir Frederic (later Lord) Leighton also had his sculptor's studio in Osnaburgh Street. Fred Winter, the treasurer of the New English Art Club, sculpted at No 13 Robert Street and Walter Sickert painted in the next door studio in 1894 sharing it for a while with his former master Whistler. Some years later C.R.W. Nevinson rented the same studio and it was there that he painted his works for his second exhibition of War Paintings at the Leicester Galleries of 1918.^{xxv}

In 1909-10 Sickert had taken a studio at No 21 Augustus Street, which he called the "Vinegar Factory" as it had been part of Grimble's Factory.^{xxvi} Here he taught etching. His "Cumberland Market" painting of ca.1910 which was made at the south end of Augustus Street shows the side window of Charles Chase's bakers shop at No 24 Cumberland Market.^{xxvii} In 1929 this was the premises of A.C. Savage, chandlers, and is shown on the far R/H side of the photograph of the North side of the Market.



Harold Gilman - Cumberland Market ca.1915.

A view from the centre of the north of the Market looking SE.
The tall building is the King's Head public house. The
buildings seen in the drawing are marked in blue on the map.

Whilst the boot repairer, house decorator and tailor might no longer have found it profitable to trade in the Market, by the beginning of the First World War there was clearly enough business for two artists' colourmen to join the one that had already been supplying artists' materials for many years.

Amongst the artists with studios in the Market was William Roberts, who was to become a founder member of the Vorticists. He lived there briefly in 1913.

In the old Cumberland Market I did the two paintings, *The Dancers* and *The Parting*, together with the drawings *Religion* and *Dancers*. At that time there was a small colony of artists quartered around this spacious cobbled-stoned hay market, sufficient to have formed a Market Group; however, I doubt if the Camden Town Group would have tolerated a rival coterie within the limits of their territory. Among others I had as neighbours Bernard Meninsky, John Flanagan, Colin Gill, and Geoffrey Nelson.^{xxviii} It was in John Flanagan's rooms across the Market that Sickert with his Camden Town crowd met a number of other artists to make arrangements for promoting a larger organisation The London Group. In Flanagan's balconied rooms were held many an all-nightly revel to the Jazz-music of a gramophone; our full-throated singing of 'Way down on the Levee' and 'Hold your hand out, you naughty boy', if too long sustained in the still small hours, brought visits from constables disturbed on their beats. But Flanagan, by the judicious use of a little blarney, knew how to quieten the apprehensions of these uniformed intruders solicitous for the peace of the neighbourhood.^{xxix}

A trawl through the St Pancras ratebooks has revealed no evidence of the addresses occupied by Roberts or his artist neighbours although they may well have sublet rooms. Roberts might equally have been referring to Robert Bevan and his banjo-playing friends Frank Rutter and Ethelbert White,^{xxx} for it was in his balconied rooms at No 49 that many of the initial London Group discussions took place. It was at this time that Bevan had also formed the Cumberland Market Group with Harold Gilman, Charles Ginner and the young John Nash in 1914. The Group can be seen posing for their publicity photographs which were taken by the American “Vortographer” (Vorticist photographer) Alvin Langdon Coburn. One of Coburn’s views of the Market, which was taken at the same time, is startlingly similar to a painting that Bevan made from his studio window. This same work could almost have been painted to illustrate the following scene observed by Charlotte Mew in the Market:^{xxxi}



Photograph taken of the East side of the Market in 1915. Alvin Langdon Coburn. The small brick structure to the right is the Weigh House. The horse trough described by Charlotte Mew can be seen to the left of centre. On the map Bevan's studio is marked in red and the buildings illustrated in blue. George Eastman House, Rochester NY (76:0154:0854 strip 20 series)

A tall, stout woman and a tiny child holding on to her skirt, trying to keep up with her and chattering in a rather tired treble, like a chirpy little sparrow, as they went along. Suddenly the woman stopped and struck the child, with a thickly spoken “Now go and make yer bloody ‘appy life miserable and stop yer bloody jaw”.



Another writer attracted to the area was the American “Tramp Poet” Harry Kemp, who rented two rooms in the Market in late 1913.^{xxxii} It was there one morning, woken from an absinthe-induced hangover by the tap-tapping of a blind man in the Market below, that he wrote “Blind”.

A few years beforehand, concerned by the poor conditions in which many were living Mary Neal, a philanthropist, set out to help girls working in the dressmaking trade. With Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence she established the Espérance Girls’ Club at No 50 Cumberland Market. This was open nearly every night of the week from 8 to 10 o’clock. One evening every week was set apart for a singing class, another for musical drill, another for games, or sewing or cooking.^{xxxiii} Having heard of Cecil Sharp’s collection of folk songs in 1905 she asked him for suitable ones that might be taught to the girls. This proved to be such a success that he was asked to recommend dances to go with the songs. Within a short time the Espérance girls were putting on demonstrations around the country.^{xxxiv} Sharp collaborated with Herbert MacIlwaine, the musical director of the club, to produce the first of the Morris books.

Mary Neal had been an early supporter of the Women's Social and Political Union and the Espérance Club danced at many of their events. This proved to be one of the reasons for Sharp and Neal to fall out and although she went on to publish two Espérance Morris books, the Club closed during the First World War. Robert Bevan was to be the Club's neighbour at No 49 during its last year and it is possible that his suffragette sister, Edith, was acquainted with it.



West Side of Cumberland Market - SW corner 1929

The tall building in the middle is No 50, which had housed the Espérance Club until 1916. Bevan's studio was on the first floor of No 49 the building to the right of it. Most of his Cumberland Market images were made from the balcony. London Metropolitan Archive A5840

The theme of social change remained strong in Cumberland Market, for in 1916 Miss M.M. Jeffery, who had been the reformer Octavia Hill's secretary, took over three rooms at No 42. She had been appointed to manage the Cumberland Market (London) Estate of the Commissioner's of Crown Lands (later the Crown Estate Commissioners). This was an estate 'of about 850 houses divided into about 2,000 tenancies, occupied by a population of about 7,000'.^{xxxv}

A market continued on the site right up until the late 1920s, and the last trading barges ceased sometime in 1930. Local businesses were in terminal decline and by 1931 only five remained and the King's Head was the sole surviving pub.^{xxxvi} In the same year the buildings on the north side of the Market were demolished, including Grimble's Vinegar Factory, and replaced by council housing.

In August 1938 the Cumberland Basin was dammed off and drained and in the next two years it was formally abandoned. By 15th January 1941 the Basin had been filled in with rubble from London's bombing and in the years following the War the site was covered with topsoil and turned into allotments.^{xxxvii}

Being so close to Euston and King's Cross stations it was inevitable that the area would have been so heavily bombed during the Second World War. A V1 rocket landed on the NE corner in 1944 and the buildings on the SE corner were damaged beyond repair. General blast damage was also sustained in the SW corner.^{xxxviii}

The remaining buildings were demolished in 1950 and in 1951 the Crown Commissioners sold the 32 acres on which Munster Square, Clarence Gardens and Cumberland Market stood to St Pancras Borough Council for the building of a housing estate.

Patrick Baty

NOTES

All maps are reproduced from 1893 Ordnance Survey map with the kind permission of the Ordnance Survey

ⁱ The title of an article by Walter Sickert in *Art News* 20th January 1910. Sickert also delivered a lecture with this title in Edinburgh in January 1923 and later in 1924 in Hanley, London, Manchester and Southport (Anna Gruetzner Robins. Walter Sickert. *The Complete Writings on Art*. Oxford 2000. 189-190.

ⁱⁱ "The Hay-Market." *The New Statesman* 14 February 1914. 595-597.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ann Saunders. *Regent's Park. A Study of the Development of the Area from 1086 to the Present Day*. David & Charles. 1969. 83.

^{iv} Edward Walford. *Old and New London*. 1878. 299.

^v Malcolm Holmes. *Euston & Regent's Park 1870*. Old Ordnance Survey Maps. Sheet 49. Consett. Alan Godfrey. 2000.

^{vi} The canal was also used to take away manure.

^{vii} This was replaced by a ship constantly engaged in bringing ice from Norway to the Thames, where it was transferred to Regent's Canal barges. This was eventually filled in with clay from the work on the Cockfosters underground railway extension in the early 1930s.

^{viii} John Summerson. *Georgian London*. Pleiades Books. 1945. 167. Clarence Gardens was the subject of a painting made by William Ratcliffe, a fellow Camden Town artist, in 1912. It is now in the collection of Tate Britain.

^{ix} John Summerson. *The Life and Works of John Nash Architect*. George Allen & Unwin. 1980. 128.

^x See photograph of 1936 in Michael Mansbridge. *John Nash. A Complete Catalogue*. Phaidon. 1991. 183.

^{xi} Written 19th June, 1946, by Capt. S. Reychan to Mr. John Summerson and quoted in 'Munster Square', *Survey of London: The parish of St Pancras part 3: Tottenham Court Road & neighbourhood*. Volume 21. 1949. 139.

^{xii} The church was built in a severe Greek Revival style and is now St. George's Greek Orthodox Cathedral. George Orwell's funeral was held here in 1950.

^{xiii} Geoffrey Tyack. *Sir James Pennethorne and the making of Victorian London*. Cambridge University Press. 1992. 35-36.

^{xiv} <http://www.archives.gla.ac.uk/sba/sbacolls/g.html>.

^{xv} Matthew Sturgis. *Walter Sickert. A Life*. Harper Collins. 2005. 221.

^{xvi} Charles Dickens. *Dombey and Son*. 1848. Chapter 6.

^{xvii} John Yeates. *NW1. The Camden Town Artists*. Heale Gallery. 2007. 8.

^{xviii} <http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/st-pancras-railway-station/history.html>. Ironically the canal proved useful in the construction of both King's Cross and St Pancras in terms of getting the building materials to the site.

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- ^{xix} 'The Cholera'. *The Medical Times and Gazette*. New Series, Volume Seven. July 2 to December 31 1853. 429. In 1847 Pickfords transferred their entire freight business from the canals to the railways.
- ^{xx} Steven P. Swensen. *Mapping Poverty in Agar Town: Economic Conditions Prior to the Development of St. Pancras Station in 1866*. LSE. June 2006 (p.10) quoting *Working Man*, II (8 Sept. 1866), 110-11.
- ^{xxi} (*Survey of London* 1949, 143).
- ^{xxii} (Walford 1878, 301-309).
- ^{xxiii} J. & A. Crew were the sole agents in England for Craigleith Stone. This stone was used extensively in the New Town, in Edinburgh, and also in the construction of Euston Station.
- ^{xxiv} Raggi is perhaps best known for his statue of William Gladstone in Albert Square, Manchester. Foley is known for his statue of Prince Albert on the Albert Memorial. The latter was finished off by his pupil Sir Thomas Brock, who was knighted for his Victoria Memorial, in front of Buckingham Palace.
- ^{xxv} C.R.W. Nevinson. *Paint and Prejudice*. Methuen. 1937. 106.
- ^{xxvi} (Sturgis 2005, 402).
- ^{xxvii} Now in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada.
- ^{xxviii} Geoffrey Nelson appears in photographs of 1919 with Ottoline Morrell, Dorothy Brett and Mark Gertler. He had an exhibition of paintings at W.B. Paterson in 1929 and one of paintings and drawings of the South of France at the same gallery in 1930. In another of his reminiscences Roberts mentioned Christopher Perkins as having had rooms in the area. Perkins (1891-1968) was at the Slade with Dora Carrington, Mark Gertler, Stanley Spencer and C.R.W. Nevinson.
- ^{xxix} This first appeared as part of the preface to *Some Early Abstract and Cubist Work 1913-1920* (London, 1957); the present text is that reprinted as 'William Roberts and Vorticism's Year' in William Roberts, *Five Posthumous Essays and Other Writings* (Valencia, 1990). © The Estate of John David Roberts. Reproduced with the permission of the William Roberts Society.
- ^{xxx} Frank Rutter (1876-1937) art critic and Ethelbert White (1891-1972) artist (Yeates 2007, 152).
- ^{xxxi} It is not known if Bevan ever met Charlotte Mew although both attended meetings of the Imagist poets arranged by Ezra Pound and Richard Aldington (see Steven Foster. "Eidetic Imagery and Imagiste Perception". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 28. No. 2 (Winter, 1969), 133-145). Bevan and Mew were third cousins, though they were probably not aware of it.
- ^{xxxii} William Brevda. *Harry Kemp: The Last Bohemian*. Bucknell University Press. 1986. 94. His name cannot be found in the St Pancras ratebooks for the half year ending 30th September 1913.
- ^{xxxiii} Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. "Working Girls' Clubs" in W. Reason (ed.) *University and Social Settlements*. Methuen. 1898. 104.
- ^{xxxiv} Janet Dowling. "Revival of Morris dance in early twentieth century". *Morris Federation Newsletter*. Summer 2007. 17-19.
- ^{xxxv} Marion Brion. *Women in the Housing Service*. Routledge. 1995.
- ^{xxxvi} See Kelly's Post Office Directories for the first thirty years of the twentieth century. I am grateful to Mark Aston and his colleagues at Holborn Library for their help in researching Cumberland Market.
- ^{xxxvii} "Hugh Compton & Alan Faulkner. "The Cumberland Market Branch of the Regent's Canal". *Journal of the Railway and Canal Historical Society*. 2006. No.194, 254-261.
- ^{xxxviii} *The London County Council Bomb Damage Maps 1939-1945*. London Topographical Society. *LTS Publication No. 164*. 2005. Map 49.