

**An Anatomy of a 'Disorderly'
Neighbourhood: Rosemary Lane
and Rag Fair c. 1690-1765.**

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the experiences of the 'disorderly' neighbourhood of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair in the eastern suburbs of London in c.1690 to 1765. Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair possessed one of the most powerfully articulated reputations for disorder of any London street. In the imagination of both novelists and social investigators it was thought to be squalid, dangerous, dirty - the stereotypical 'den of iniquity'. Using a wide range of material including parish records, Middlesex session papers, eighteenth century newspapers, and digital sources such as the Old Bailey On-Line and London Lives this thesis will explore the streets and alleyways of Rag Fair. It will go beyond the simple perception of a disorderly neighbourhood, to describe the individual communities and forces which created that disorder. It will show that the poor of Rosemary Lane, generally, did not see themselves as a problem waiting to be solved, they were resourceful and they had their own way of surviving - they were active players in a changing City that was shaking off its medieval roots and embracing the modern. By looking in detail at this community; at its structures and divisions, and at its power relations, its self-identity will be revealed.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
ECCO	Eighteenth Century Collection On-Line
LL	London Lives
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
OBP	Old Bailey Proceedings Online

Place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

The term 'City' is taken to mean the City of London, the geographical area under the authority of the Corporation of London.

Spellings, capitalization and punctuation have been left as they were in the original documents.

Contents

	Pages
Abstract	i
Abbreviations	ii
Contents	iii
Illustrations	v
Tables	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
1. Introduction	1
Rosemary Lane	9
Local Government	20
The Rag Fair	28
Thief-takers	34
Rag Fair Women	36
2. Local Government: Administration of a Disorderly Neighbourhood, 1690-1765	40
Boundaries	49
Structure of Local Government	50
The Work of Parish and Ward Officers	65
The Watch	74
When Governance fails	81
3. The Social Geography of an east London Community	90
Population Growth	96
Taxes	102
Precincts	105
The Neighbourhood	135
Women Householders	138

4. Rag Fair: Clothes, Pawn Shops, Complaints and Crime	143
Complaints	148
Shopping on Rosemary Lane	154
Buying and Selling Stolen Goods	160
Pawnbrokers	164
Crime on Rosemary Lane	180
5. The Thief-Takers of Rosemary Lane	199
Early Private Law Enforcement	205
Rewards	207
Local Judiciary	211
Nathaniel Harris and the Thief-takers	222
Decline and Fall	236
6. 'Ill Favoured Sluts': The Women of Rosemary Lane	250
Women at the Margins	255
Rosemary Lane Women in Literature	264
Reformation of Manners	267
Prostitution and Crime	278
Rag Fair Women and the thief-takers	281
7. Conclusion	299
Bibliography	311

List of Illustrations

		PAGE
Figure 1.1	Chapter 1: Map of east London showing Rosemary Lane	1
Figure 2.1:	Chapter 2: Map showing Portsoken ward and surrounding parishes.	40
Figure 2.2:	Map of the Tower Liberties	43
Figure 2.3:	Disbursements to the poor of St Botolph Aldgate	69
Figure 2.4:	St Botolph Aldgate Pauper Settlement	71
Figure 3.1:	Chapter 3: Map showing St Botolph Aldgate Precincts	90
Figure 3.2:	John Strype's Map of Portsoken ward	106
Figure 3.3:	Plan of Houses in Houndsditch	108
Figure 3.4:	Map showing Tower Hill Precinct	113
Figure 3.5:	View of St Botolph Church from the Minories	115
Figure 3.6	Chapter 3: Map of east London showing Rosemary Lane	119
Figure 3.7:	Sharp's Buildings Rosemary Lane	120
Figure 3.8	Map showing Well Close Square	123
Figure 3.9:	Drawing of Well Close Square	124
Figure 3.10	East Smithfield and St Katherine's by the Tower	127
Figure 3.11:	Receipt from Joshua Harle's shop	132
Figure 4.1	Chapter 4: Map of East London showing Rosemary Lane	143
Figure 4.2	Map showing the location of Rag Fair on Rosemary Lane	146
Figure 4.3	Petition from Thomas Wilkes, St Mary Whitechapel Vestry	149
Figure 4.4	Drawing of High Change, Rag Fair, 1782	159
Figure 4.5	Map showing location of Pawnbrokers and Goldsmiths	168
Figure 5.1	Chapter 5: Map of east London showing Rosemary Lane	199
Figure 5.2	Map showing location of prominent Thief-takers and JPs	211
Figure 5.3	Drawing Stephen MacDaniel by Charles Leigh 1756.	246
Figure 6.1	Chapter 6: Map of east London showing Rosemary Lane.	250
Figure 6.2	Thomas Rowlandson's Misereries of London.	264
Figure 6.3	Map showing location of Women Receivers, Thief-takers and JPs.	282

List of Tables

PAGE

Table 2.1	Rates collected from St Botolph Aldgate and St Mary Whitechapel in 1727	67
Table 3.1	Households in St Botolph Aldgate 1693-1801	100
Table 3.2	Property Rental Values in St Botolph Aldgate Precincts	111
Table 3.3	A Selection of Tower Hill Rate Payers	116
Table 3.4	A Comparison of Neighbourhood Property Rental Values	136
Table 3.5	Women Householders 1692- 1694	139
Table 3.6	Women Householders 1744-1745	140
Table 4.1	A Comparison of thefts recorded in the <i>Old Bailey Proceedings</i> 1674-1760	185

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This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful daughter Britt Turner.

Chapter 1 Introduction

An Anatomy of a 'Disorderly' Neighbourhood: Rosemary Lane and Rag

Fair c.1690-1765.

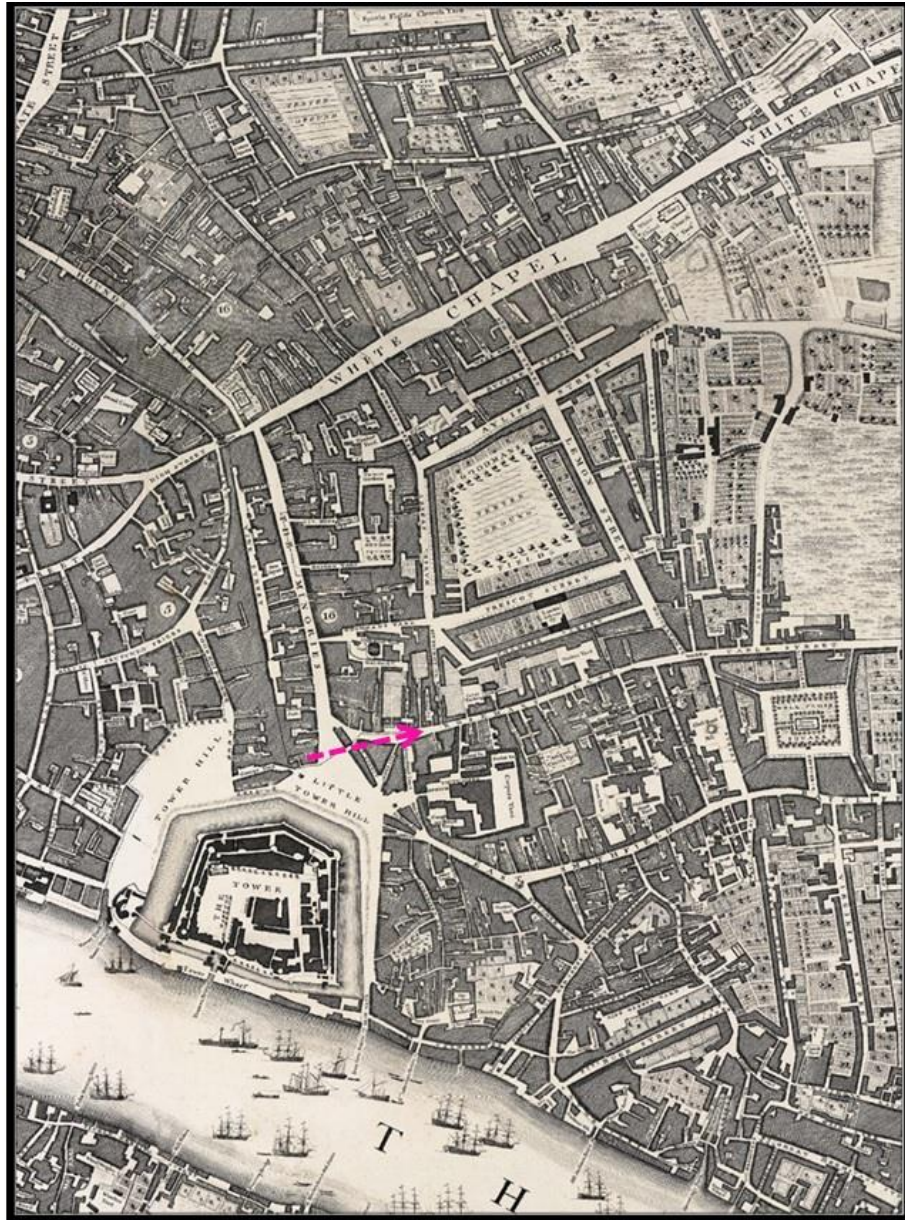


Fig. 1.1: Map showing Rosemary Lane.

A Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark; with the Contiguous Buildings; From an actual Survey taken by John Rocque Land-Surveyor, and Engraved by John Pine, Bluemantle Pursuivant at Arms and Chief Engraver of Seals, &c. to His Majesty. This section of the map showing east London and Rosemary Lane. Courtesy of © Motco Enterprises Limited, Ref: www.motco.com

Key: Pink dotted line identifying Rosemary Lane as it proceeds east towards Cable Street.

Rosemary Lane, Seven Stars Alehouse

'Near to the Place where Frippery-Women stand
with Stays, Coats, Suits, and Breeches second hand,
Where rags of every sort and size are sold and
Thieves their daily correspondence hold,
There stands a House, Wherein if fame not lies
The Stars at Noon-day to Men's sight arise,'¹

Ned Ward's *A vade mecum for malt-worms: or, A guide to good fellows*, a tome describing some of London's alehouses in the early eighteenth century provides a fitting short description of the street that will form the subject of this dissertation. Rosemary Lane was the home of Rag Fair, of Frippery-Women and the thieves and thief-takers who haunted the street on a daily basis.

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Rosemary Lane, a street just east of the City wall and the Tower of London had an impressive reputation for being a 'disorderly' neighbourhood. However, we know little about it or the people who lived there.

Furthermore, while many historical accounts have been written regarding east London in the nineteenth century - dark tales of life in slums of Whitechapel abound; the eighteenth century remains a terra incognita.² In consequence, we know little about the infrastructure of this neighbourhood. How did it appear to early modern eyes - was it a slum, a rookery full of thieves or just an early-modern London neighbourhood with

¹ Place of publication is London unless otherwise noted; Edward Ward, *A vade mecum for malt-worms: or, A guide to good fellows*, (1715), Rosemary Lane, Seven Stars Alehouse, p.16.

² H. J. Dyos, 'The slums of Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, 11, (1967), pp. 5-40; H. J. Dyos 'Urban transformation: a note on the objects of street improvement in Regency and early Victorian London', *International Review of Social History*, 2, (1957), pp. 259-265; David R. Green, *From Artisans To Paupers*, (1995); Seth Koven, *Slumming - Sexual And Social Politics In Victorian London*, (Princeton, 2004); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (Chicago, 1992); Charles Dickens, *Sketches of Boz*, (1836); Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, (1837-1839); Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Vol. 2, (1851); Thomas Pennant, *Some Account of London*, (The Fifth Edition, with Considerable Additions, 1813).

good and bad housing and good and bad people? This thesis will hopefully dispel the gloomy nineteenth century image of the 'East End' and reveal how some of London's citizens lived and worked in London's eastern suburb.

This introduction will define the chapters that will make up the body of this study. In the process, however, it also seeks to relate the history of the Lane to a bigger picture of the metropolis itself. In the context of a micro-history and neighbourhood study, this dissertation will be organised into five substantial chapters structured to address the major topics of local government, social organisation, street life, of crime, of ordinary working men and more specifically women. To enhance our knowledge of this reputedly disorderly neighbourhood and perhaps to humanise the people who lived there, this thesis will examine a wide selection of source material including, the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, Middlesex session papers, parochial records, land tax records, licensed victuallers records, newspapers, poetry and ballads.

It will cover the period c. 1690 -1765 and deliver a new micro-history of an east London neighbourhood. This period of time was selected because from the 1690s a set of detailed tax records for London exist which make it possible for us to examine in detail the social geography of London's neighbourhoods.³ It encompasses a period of time when Rag Fair was at its height on this street and women were the predominate sellers of old clothing. It finishes in 1765 when the main activities of thief-takers in this neighbourhood had come to an end and a new era with new immigrants from Eastern Europe was approaching. What is more, the new Jewish settlers would transform Rag

³ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, p. 5.

Fair and this neighbourhood into their own. Additionally, this time span of seventy-five years allows us to examine a poor and expanding neighbourhood that was subject to the fading power of Inquest wards, Leet courts and citizen constables at a time when crime and disorder were associated with the Rag Fair and the thieves and thief-takers who gravitated to the area. Its principal purpose will be to further our knowledge of London's poorer citizens especially those deemed accountable for the rise in criminality.

There are also several excellent studies of the metropolis as a whole including Roy Porter's, *London: A Social History*, and Jerry White's, *London in the Eighteenth Century, A Great and Monstrous Thing*.⁴ However, comprehensive studies of London by their very nature leave little room for detailed studies of individual parishes and neighbourhoods. To date the foremost early modern micro-history of a London suburb remains Jeremy Boulton's, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century*. However, considering its size and magnitude, London and its suburbs continue to be understudied in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵ Two recent doctoral theses including Francis Boorman's *The Political Space of Chancery Lane, c.1760 – 1815* and Mark Latham's study of *The London Bridge Improvement Act of 1756: A Study of Early Modern Urban Finance and Administration* have gone a little way to remedy this neglect. However, there remains so much more to learn about the lives of early modern Londoners that can only be achieved with comprehensive in-depth studies of London's

⁴ White, *London in the Eighteenth Century*; Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750*, (1994), p. 117; Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London*, (Cambridge, 1991); A.L. Beier and R. Finlay, (eds.), *The Making of the Metropolis, London 1500-1700*, (1986); Roy Porter, *London, A Social History*, (1994); Jeremy Black, *London: A History*, (2009).

⁵ Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 4-6.

suburbs.⁶ There are ample local studies of rural villages and towns across England, such as Keith Wrightson and David Levine's *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525-170* or David Underdown's *Fire From Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* based on Dorchester in Dorset.⁷ Nevertheless, despite London's place as one of the major world cities we know little about its social structure. As Boulton commented 1987, 'metropolitan society has been neglected by social historians'.⁸ It remains so in 2014.

Yet, the metropolis contained many neighbourhoods that were similar in size to villages and small towns around the country. Every locality in London had its own peculiarities whether it was wealthy or poor, law abiding or lawless they all have stories to tell. Cheapside was socially and geographically different from Rosemary Lane as was Cornhill Ward and St Katherine's Precinct by the Tower. It is the sheer diversity of

⁶ Tim Hitchcock, *Down And Out in Eighteenth Century London*, (2004); Jeremy Boulton, 'Double deterrence: settlement and practice in London's West End, 1725-1824', in Anne Winter and Steve King, (eds.), *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe, 1500-1930s: Comparative Perspectives*. (New York, 2013), pp. 54-80; Steve Hindle, 'Without the cry of any neighbours': A Cumbrian family and the poor law authorities, c. 1690-1730, in Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, (eds.), *The Family in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 126-157; Jeremy Boulton and Leonard D, Schwarz, "'The comforts of a private fireside': the workhouse, the elderly and the poor law in Georgian Westminster: St Martin-in-the-fields, 1725-1824' in Joanna McEwan and Pamela Sharpe, (eds.), *Accommodating poverty: the housing and living arrangements of the English Poor, c.1600-1850*, (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 221-245; Francis Calvert Boorman, *The Political Space of Chancery Lane, c.1760 - 1815*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2013). See also Mark Latham, *The London Bridge Improvement Act of 1756: A Study of Early Modern Urban Finance and Administration*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2009); P. Clark and J. Clark, 'The social economy of the Canterbury suburbs: the evidence of the census of 1563', in A. Detsicas and N. Yates, (eds.), *Studies in Modern Kentish History*, (Maidstone, 1983), pp. 65-86. For an earlier account of St Botolph Aldgate, see Derek Keene, "The Poor and their Neighbours: The London parish of St Botolph outside Aldgate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," Unpublished working paper available from the Centre for Metropolitan History, (1995), 1; For sixteenth and seventeenth century St Botolph Aldgate see also 'People in Place: families, households and housing in early modern London, 1550-1720', (<http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/pip/project.html>) and Life in the suburbs: health, domesticity and status in early modern London, (<http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/LITS/index.html>) directed by Professor Matthew Davies and Professor Vanessa Harding. For a twentieth century micro-history of a London Street see Jerry White, *The Worst Street in London: Campbell Bunk, Islington Between the Wars*, (1986). For an excellent account of space and eighteenth century life in Paris, see Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in eighteenth Century Paris*, (Cambridge, USA, 1993).

⁷ Wrightson Keith, and Levine, David, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525-1700*, (Oxford, 1995).

⁸ Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp. 4-6.

London during this period that makes it interesting to study. It is also difficult to understand why there are so few social histories written about London's many localities when the London archives have an abundance of available material alongside a cornucopia of newly digitised resources relating to its many parishes and wards.

Micro-histories can provide in-depth explorations of towns, villages, neighbourhoods, individuals, specific events and everyday life. Micro-historical analysis adds - for instance, the ability to identify how culture is translated into individual actions. Close historical investigation that can be neglected in many macro-histories.⁹ This is the first micro-history to be written about an east London community at a time of population growth when new houses, new shops and new churches were built to cope with that rise in population. Furthermore, this thesis based on Rosemary Lane is also the first study of its kind that examines in detail an early modern London Street with an almost daily Rag Fair sustaining its reputation for crime and disorder. To that end this thesis will embrace and significantly add to a clutch of histories including the political history of London, social and economic history and the histories of policing, crime and gender.

The majority of London's population at this time were poor working people and this study of a London street will be the first to reflect that. Looking at history from the perspective of the poor is no longer a new concept. Edward Thompson's first published essay on 'History from Below' appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, in 1966. This

⁹ See Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life, Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century*, (Berkeley, 1992); Edward Muir, 'Introduction: Observing trifles' in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost peoples of Europe: Selections from Quaderni Storici*, (Baltimore, 1991), pp. vii-xxviii; John Brewer 'Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life', *Cultural and Social History*, Volume 7, Number 1, March 2010, pp. 87-109; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, (New York, 1984); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, (Cambridge, MA, 1975); Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, (trans. Barbara Bray), (New York, 1978).

was followed by his ground breaking social history, *The Making of the English Working Class* based on the study of the poorest members of society as opposed to elites, concentrating on their experiences and perspectives.¹⁰

As Tim Hitchcock has argued in *Down and Out in Eighteenth Century London...* 'there is no lack of sources for the lives of the poor... their most personal and internal worlds can be recovered'.¹¹ The diaries and letters of elite Londoners have long been used by historians. However, the poor have their own records that we can use; criminal records, pauper letters and poor law statements that can tell us about their lives. There are recent examples of this 'new history from below' written about the experiences of the poor from the perspective of the poor. Examples of this genre can be found in Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Disordered Lives: Eighteenth-Century Families and Their Unruly Relatives*, in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling poverty: the voices and strategies of the English poor, 1640-1840*, (1997), in Steven King and Alannah Tompkins (eds.) *The Poor in England 1700-1850, An Economy of Makeshifts*.¹²

Overall, this thesis will contribute considerably to our knowledge of London and Londoners in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Moreover, learning more about the attitudes of poor Londoners, their occupations and their 'agency' can only add

¹⁰ E. P. Thompson, 'History from Below,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966, pp. 279-80; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (1963).

¹¹ Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, pp. 238-240; See also Tim Hitchcock, 'A New History from Below,' *History Workshop Journal*, 57, (2004), pp. 294-298.

¹² Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Disordered Lives: Eighteenth-Century Families and their Unruly Relatives*, (Cambridge, 1996); Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling poverty: the voices and strategies of the English poor, 1640-1840*, (1997); Steven King and Alannah Tompkins (eds.), *The Poor in England 1700-1850, An economy of makeshifts*, (Manchester, 2003). See also Heather Shore, 'The Reckoning': disorderly women, informing constables and the Westminster justices, 1727-33', *Social History*, 34: 4, pp. 409-427; Mary Clayton, 'The lives and crimes of Charlotte Walker, prostitute and pickpocket', *London Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (March, 2008), pp. 3-19; Thomas Sokoll, (ed.), *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837*, (2006).

to our knowledge of this city and how it functioned in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Agency can be a problematic term and it is used here to describe the strategies and intentions that some of the poor used to make their way in situations that were culturally or morally against the norm. It is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the 'ability or capacity to act or exert power; active working or operation; action, activity'.¹³

For some historians 'agency' is used to describe how the poor negotiated and demanded better service from their parish whether in respect of pensions or decent pauper burials.¹⁴ Alternatively, Anna Clarke has described the women in nineteenth century Irish workhouses who tried to exercise some control over their situation as 'active agents'. This was not because they were actively seeking power or control but that they used what abilities they had to improve their situation.¹⁵ 'Agency' may have slightly differing meanings to historians but its context remains the same. As Megan Webber has contended, 'the power of the poor did not always express itself in one particular manner, but adapted to distinct contexts...it may [therefore] be better to think in terms of multiple agencies rather than a single agency'.¹⁶

¹³ Henry French and Jonathan Barry, (eds.), *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800*, (New York, 2004); Lynn MacKay, *Respectability and the London Poor, 1780-1870*, (2013).

¹⁴ Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, describes Paul Patrick Kearney a beggar who uses his knowledge of the parish system to garner a better pension, pp. 125-149; See also Hitchcock, 'A New History from Below,' p. 297; Elizabeth Hurren and Steven King, "'Begging for a Burial': Form, Function and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Pauper Burial," *Social History*, 3, no. 3, (2005), p. 325.

¹⁵ Anna Clark, 'Wild Workhouse Girls and the Liberal Imperial State in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ireland,' *Journal of Social History*, 39, no. 2, (2005), p. 392. For further thoughts on paupers using agency as a strategy, see Jonathan White, "A World of Goods?: The 'Consumption Turn' and Eighteenth-Century British History," *Cultural and Social History* 3, no. 1, (2006), p. 99.

¹⁶ Many thanks to Megan Webber for sharing her thoughts on 'agency'. Megan Webber, 'The Agency of the Poor in the Historiography of Charity and Welfare', Unpublished paper, University of Hertfordshire, 2014.

The poor were not without power many knew how to negotiate their way around the poor law system to get what they felt was owed to them. They made deliberate decisions and performed actions performed in order to exist or better themselves. Some of the men and women that will be discussed in this thesis had 'agency' which they used to make a living, it may not always have been within the realm of the law but they were as Clark notes 'active agents' in their own lives.¹⁷

ROSEMARY LANE

Our initial starting point must be an imaginative engagement with the specific place; with what Rosemary Lane looked and sounded and smelled like to contemporaries. This is, of course, a difficult task. We simply cannot know how the Lane was experienced, but even in the attempt, the foundations for a micro-history can be laid. It may have felt like this: passing by the old Iron Gate adjacent to the Tower of London, you might have heard the captive lions roar and the tigers growling as they paced behind the thick stone walls that surrounded the Tower. A few yards on you would walk up Little Tower Hill, passing the Navy Victualling Office on the right and King Street on the left, where you would have found the beginning of Rosemary Lane, just at the junction with the Minories in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate. And there every afternoon, barring the Sundays, a Rag Fair was held in the street.

Strolling past Sparrow Corner down the lane, passing Sharpe's Buildings on your left, the first thing you might have noticed was the smell - the flat, stale odour of old clothes and wet wool. Most days, you would also be confronted by an equally odiferous throng

¹⁷ Clark, 'Wild Workhouse Girls', p. 392.

of people – hawkers, servants, sailors, prostitutes, housewives and merchants all lining a cobbled street that stretched for half a mile to Cable street and Well Close square. A sea of people obscuring the shops with their painted signs and varied wares on sale - this was London's Rag Fair.

Rag Fair drew Londoners from across the City to its shops and stalls; it was the foremost place to find second-hand clothes. It was written about and sung about in contemporary prose and ballads and it was immortalised by Alexander Pope in 1728 in *The Dunciad*. Pope was to use the plebeian and disorderly Rag Fair as a metaphor for the bad writing and second hand prose that was printed by Grub Street writers.

Where wave the tatter'd ensigns of Rag-Fair,
A yawning ruin hangs and nods in air;
Keen, hollow winds howl thro' the bleak recess,
Emblem of Music caus'd by Emptiness:
Here in one bed the shiv'ring sisters lye,
The cave of Poverty and Poet.¹⁸

Pope's words encapsulate the flags made from tattered clothing, fluttering handkerchiefs, made from silk, cotton and linen of every size and every colour that were for sale in Rag Fair, suspended from long poles, a rainbow of promotion.¹⁹ This is where the poor of the City shopped and where the victims of crime looked for their lost property; in the basket of a rag seller, hanging on a stall, or for sale in the shop window, or on the back of a serving girl walking quickly down the street. The epitome of a neighbourhood where clothes and other goods could be pawned, bought and sold with no questions asked.

¹⁸ Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad Variorum*, (Book 4, 1729), Lines 37- 42. Jonathan Pritchard suggests that there was a 'material connection' between cast off clothing at Rag Fair 'and the paper on which dunces scribbled their work' as the oldest rags at Rag Fair eventually became paper. Jonathan Pritchard, 'Social Topography in *The Dunciad, Variorum*', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 75, 4, (2012), pp. 551-552.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Among the shops retailing old clothes, there were others that sold ships rigging; there were boiling cook shops, pawnshops and oyster stands. The bakers cry of 'diddle, diddle, dumplings ho!' competed with the rag woman's reply "'Old clo ! Old clo !'".²⁰ In 1721 you might have paused at Elizabeth Compton's shop with its lace and dress making materials, or in 1751 visit Charles Boyce's Hat shop, or in 1767, browse at John Holford's clothes shop for women. In 1738 you might have walked quickly past the thief-taker, Nathaniel Harris ensconced in the doorway of his hat shop, on the lookout for thieves.²¹ In the middle of the street, in 1729, you may have procured some second hand silk stockings from Elizabeth Ludgate, and in 1739 you could purchase some old whale bone for a corset from dealer, Simon Manghant.²² Lost in the jostling crowd, you could buy fish from the Billingsgate fishwives in their scaly aprons or in 1738 a second hand stolen petticoat from thief, Irish Peg.²³

All sorts could be found at Rag Fair, and not just plebeian Londoners. This is where James Lackington, bookseller, was directed by his reasonably well-to-do landlord, who had recently purchased a 'great-coat' in a shop on Rosemary Lane for only ten shillings. Lackington on a quest to find a similar bargain was hauled into a shop on Rosemary Lane by 'a fellow who was walking up and down before the door of a Shopseller'.²⁴ He

²⁰ Ned Ward, *The London Spy, The Vanities and Vices Of The Town Exposed To View*, (1703), edited with notes by A. L. Hayward, (1927), p. 250.

²¹ *OBP*, Elizabeth Compton appears in the *OBP* trial of Elizabeth Pain, 1 March 1721, t17210301-51 and Dorothy Wood, 9 September 1742, t17420909-26; Charles Boyce appears in the *OBP* trial of Ann Bready, 4 December 1751, t17511204-6; John Holford appears in the *OBP* trial of Mary Stevens, 9 December 1767, t17671209-16.

²² *OBP*, Elizabeth Ludgate, 16 January 1729, t17290116-12; *OBP*, Simon Manghant appears in the trial of Susannah Broom, 5 December 1739, t17391205-2.

²³ *OBP*, Margaret Poland, of St. Mary, Whitechapel, otherwise Margaret the Wife of James Mayfield, otherwise Margaret the Wife of James Tweed, otherwise Irish Peg, otherwise Margaret the Wife of John Fosset, otherwise Margaret the Wife of Charles Poland, 28 June 1738, t17380628-14.

²⁴ James Lackington, *Memoirs of The First Fort-Five Years of The Life of James Lackington, The Present Bookseller in Chiswell Street, Moorfields, London*, (1798, reprinted 1996), p. 126.

recalled that once in the shop, 'I was soon fitted with a great-coat of the same sort of that of my Landlord'.²⁵ However, much to Lackington's horror the shop seller asked for 'five and twenty shillings' for the coat. Lackington, unable to spend so large a sum was then restrained from leaving the shop by the oral skill of the 'honest' shop seller. After much haggling the shop seller eventually agreed to let him have it for the 'bargain' price of half a guinea, six pence more than his landlord had paid. This was also the sum total of what Lackington had to spend in any case.²⁶

Some parts of Rosemary Lane were unexpectedly wide and airy. Wood clad houses, some quite tall stood on either side as the Lane bent and stumbled its way into narrow courts and dark passages – into Glass-house Yard, Russell-court, Peter's court and the only ever half built Blue Anchor Yard. Just beside the watch-house that marked the transition from the Lane to Cable Street, stood Well Street with Reynolds' Brandy shop and the Sugar Bakers close by. From stalls, baskets, or from simple blankets spread on the pavement, everything was for sale. And while the local authorities viewed Rag Fair as the centre of disorder for visitors it was simply vibrant. It had colour and it was entertaining. On his perambulation around Rag Fair in 1703, Ned Ward commented on the happy faces of the 'despicable paupers' that he met: 'amongst all that I beheld as I passed through 'em, I saw not one melancholy or dejected countenance amongst 'em, but all showing in their looks more content and cheerfulness than you shall find in an assembly of great and rich men on a public festival'.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 126-128.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ned Ward, *The London Spy, The Vanities and Vices Of The Town Exposed To View*, (1703), edited with notes by A. L. Hayward, (1927), pp. 249-251.

London Neighbourhoods

But while this neighbourhood was in part peopled by the poor and the criminal-thieves such as Daniel Malden and Jack Sheppard who were both finally caught on Rosemary Lane - it was also home to better off Londoners.²⁸ From Aldermen to wealthy shopkeepers and merchants such as Edward Holloway Esq, Governor of Bridewell and Bethlem Hospital, and Robert Pyecroft, City of London Deputy of the Common Council. They were residents here and they typified a collection of influential and politically active citizens who in theory could live where they chose to.²⁹ We can only surmise that they did so because it was fairly amenable.

Moreover, ordinary men and women, citizens and parishioners chose to live here because it was a hub of commercial activity outside of the City. In part, Rosemary Lane is important precisely because of its mixture of disorderly and law abiding inhabitants, but it also exemplifies the structures of a single neighbourhood, in what was in the eighteenth-century, the largest, and most important City in Britain, if not in Europe. The section that follows provides a brief historiographical synopsis of the metropolis, and the backdrop to the themes that will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

The Metropolis

In the title of his comprehensive account of London in the Eighteenth Century, Jerry White uses Defoe's compelling words to describe the metropolis as 'A Great and

²⁸ Heather Shore, 'Malden, Daniel (d. 1736)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, [accessed, 30 Sept 2010]; P. Sugden, 'Sheppard, John [Jack] (1702-1724)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [accessed, 30 Sept 2010]; Gerald Howson, *Thief-Taker General: The rise and fall of Jonathan Wild*, (1970).

²⁹ LMA, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate Collection, 1744-5, MS 2545/3. Holloway lived on Tower Hill his property was assessed as having a rental value of £50 per annum. Deputy Pyecroft kept a property on the Minories valued at £135 per annum.

Monstrous Thing'.³⁰ This is a fitting description for a city that was growing at a rate contemporaries found hard to encompass. Moreover, as E.A. Wrigley has observed, one-in-six of England's population lived in London at some point in their lives. In his words, London was; "a powerful place that enticed rich and poor, men and women to live within its walls and peripheries".³¹ In their 1986 study of London's suburban growth, Roger Finlay and Beatrice Shearer argued that the population of London quadrupled from 120,000 to 490,000 between the years 1550-1700, with a full 10 per cent of the population of England living in London at any one time.³² Of course, population estimates for early modern London remain controversial, and as White has noted, they are all based on an 'unknowable' approximation. But, at the same time, most historians now agree that by 1700 there were roughly 575,000 people in London, making it Europe's largest city.³³

Besides simply being large, London's population was also markedly young and foot loose. Craig Spence estimates that around 1690 as many as 10,000 migrants came to live in London per year. Most came from the counties surrounding the capital, but significant numbers were also recruited from the wider archipelago and from Europe.³⁴ What's more, immigration into the capital and the suburbs was largely made up of

³⁰ Jerry White, *London in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 3.

³¹E. A. Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change: England and the continent in the early modern period', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 15, (1985) pp. 683-728.

³² R. Finlay and B. Shearer, 'Population growth and suburban expansion', in Beier and Finlay, eds., *The Making of the Metropolis*, pp. 37-59.

³³ Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp. 1-5; See also Wrigley, E.A., and Schofield, R.S., (eds.), *The Population History of England 1541-1871*, (1981); For an earlier and useful comparison see D.V. Glass, 'Notes on the Demography of London at the end of the Seventeenth Century', *Daedalus*, 97, (1968), pp. 584-586.

³⁴ Craig Spence, *London in the 1690s, A Social Atlas*, (2000), p. 2.

young working adults, who, as Jeremy Boulton argues, 'were a key factor in the dynamism and growth of the metropolis'.³⁵

This growth in population ensured that the city spread in all directions, but most conspicuously to the west and east of the metropolis and beyond the City walls. In addition, as Vanessa Harding has observed, "because of its importance to general histories of the period, it is difficult to evade the impact of the metropolis".³⁶ But, in a city so big, it is also difficult to understand the experience of men and women whose lives were more fully lived in individual parishes or wards.

On the other hand, this area is worthy of further study not only because of its reputation for disorder, but to learn more about the people who were said to cause that disorder.

As George Rudé notes, eighteenth-century London was a city where 'order was surrounded by disorder', 'wealth and squalor rubbed shoulders, in uneasy association in the same street or alley'. Rudé's words are compounded by M. Dorothy George's assertion that the early modern metropolis 'combined turbulence with fundamental orderliness'.³⁷ This was also true of Rosemary Lane yet sometimes the disorder outshone the order. This neighbourhood is just one of the hundreds that made up the metropolis at this time, but it has one of the most interesting stories.

A close study of just a single neighbourhood allows us to observe close at hand how at least some Londoners lived their lives. They are perhaps not entirely typical, but they

³⁵ Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp. 1-5.

³⁶ Vanessa Harding, 'The population of London 1550-1700', *London Journal*, 15, 2, (1990), pp. 111-128.

³⁷ George Rudé, *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808*, (1971), p. 86; M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (Peregrine reprint, 1987 [1925]), pp. 9-10.

nevertheless exemplify how many Londoners experienced this 'great and monstrous' city.

Rosemary Lane's reputation for disorder multiplied when the Rag Fair started there in c.1700. It was by far the largest used clothing market in London and it existed on this street for over one hundred years - purely because it served a real need for the people who used it. However, the Rag Fair brought with it crime and disorder, civil disobedience, crowds gathering and blocking the street, and fears of thieves and robbers running amok among honest residents and traders. The response from the City and Middlesex authorities was to issue countless warnings and proclamations warning of the dangers that could be encountered at Rag Fair by the,

... buying and selling of old Raggs and Cloths... **by Idle, vagrant, Loose, and Disorderly Persons**...who continue to assemble together...in or near Little-Tower-Hill, leading towards Rosemary-Lane; And in a tumultuous Manner , without any lawful Authority, continue a sort of Market or Fair for the buying and selling of Old Rags and Cloths...³⁸

Marshalls were employed by the City Aldermen to police it, warning proclamations were pasted to walls. Nevertheless, as the parish and ward tried in vain to have it stopped, more of London's citizens used it. Moreover, this area was more difficult to regulate because half of Rosemary Lane came under the jurisdiction of the City and half belonged to Middlesex. Half of the street was based in St Botolph Aldgate and half in St Mary Whitechapel. In addition, part of Rosemary Lane belonged to the Liberties of the

³⁸ LMA, CLA/048/PS/01/065, Proclamation issued by Mayor Thomas Barnard, January 1737, Rep 142, fo. 153; See also London Metropolitan Archive, (hereafter LMA), MJ/SP/1701/01/001 (Inhabitants of Rosemary Lane, Whitechapel ask for the Rag Fair to be suppressed); LMA, CLA/048/PS/01/065 Proclamation to suppress Rag Fair issued by Mayor Daniel Lambert, 1741; LMA, CLA/048/PS/01/066 Proclamation issued by Mayor Richard Clark, 1785.

Tower which was known for its lack of regulation. Unsurprisingly, the measure of the boundaries of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair can be linked directly to many of the crimes committed in the neighbourhood.

For example would-be criminals were also extremely aware of the jurisdiction boundaries and used them to their own advantage on occasion. In 1733 Dorothy Carter, whose husband was a soldier at the Tower, was accused of stealing 22 yards of lace from one John Connor on Tower Wharf. Carter, when shown the warrant for her arrest screamed, 'Damn you and your Warrant too, The ground is the King's, and - is my own'. Carter was taken up and pleaded not guilty before the justice of the Tower Liberty. Carter had been apprehended on the 'King's ground' (the Liberties) and she did win her jurisdiction plea in a way as she was tried before a London jury rather than a Middlesex jury at the Old Bailey. However, a differing jurisdiction did not save Carter's life. She was found guilty of the theft by a London jury and was sentenced to death.³⁹

Religious Legacy

One significant context that helped shape the eighteenth-century character of Rosemary Lane was the legacy of seventeenth-century religious dissent. Generally speaking the eastern environs of the City enjoyed more freedom in religious worship than did the areas within the Walls. Rosemary Lane's expansion in the seventeenth century was directly linked to this phenomenon, and it is very likely that the neighbourhood's reputation for disorder in part derived from this legacy. Moreover, London as a whole was continually at the centre of religious change from the Reformation to the

³⁹ *OBP*, Dorothy Carter, 10 October 1733, t17331010-19.

Restoration and beyond. It encompassed, as Tai Lau argues, 'Conservative Anglicanism through Presbyterianism to moderate and radical independence', but this continuum of religious opinions, was not evenly distributed geographically.⁴⁰

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the numbers of 'Stranger' churches in London grow to accommodate the raft of protestant refugees from France and the Low countries. They may not have all received a warm welcome; however, many of the refugees settled in the Liberties and suburbs around Spitalfields and in the Tower Hamlets area, adjacent to Rosemary Lane. Stepney for example was the home of several eminent Huguenot refugees. In addition, as Keith Lindley argues the existence of a well-known Independent church at Stepney, presided over by William Greenhill, 'created an association in the minds of Londoners, between the eastern suburbs generally and religious and political radicalism, particularly in the 1640s'.⁴¹ Moreover, Stepney was not alone; Lindley demonstrates how Stepney's neighbouring parish, St Mary Whitechapel also accommodated an Independent church led by Thomas Walley [or Whalley] during the decades of the civil war and inter-regnum.⁴²

The eastern outskirts gained even more notoriety when London's General Baptists held a meeting in a Whitechapel house in January 1641. By 1643 a number of Whitechapel Independents had secured local offices and were to be found 'working energetically throughout the war years in support of the parliamentary cause'.⁴³ Several houses in

⁴⁰ T. Lau, *Puritan London, A Study of Religion and Society in the City Parishes*, (Delaware, London and Toronto, 1986), for a critique of this work see J.D. Alsop 'Revolutionary Puritanism in the parishes? The case of St Olave Old Jewry', *London Journal*, 15, (1990), pp. 29-37.

⁴¹ Keith Lindley, 'Whitechapel Independents and the English Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 41, No.1. (March, 1998), pp. 283-284.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

this area also became local places of worship for dissenters of a variety of stamps and enthusiasms, with a clear legacy lasting well into the eighteenth century. Richard Collyer and Thomas Poynton certified in 1693 that Collyer's house in Whitechapel was to be used as meeting house for local Anabaptists. And in 1689-90, a Mr Honor Godchild certified to Whitechapel vestry that his house was a Baptist meeting house, served by Mr Benjamin Parkins as speaker. In 1709 in Mill Yard, Goodman's Fields just minutes away from Rosemary Lane, Widow Atkins house was used for meetings led by Independents, Thomas Slater, John Savage and Thomas Lowe.⁴⁴ The vestry minutes show that dozens of these small meeting houses could be found in the neighbourhood between the 1690s and the 1720s. As a result, this area became a byword for dissent, with religious non-conformity bleeding into more secular forms.

Then again, Rosemary Lane's foremost established parish church, St Botolph Aldgate, was well known as a home for radical puritan lecturers and preachers. Dorothy Ann Williams clearly identifies an enduring Puritan tradition associated with St Botolph Aldgate, surviving to at least the late seventeenth century.⁴⁵ This legacy is also evident in the work of the first Societies for the Reformation of Manners founded in Tower Hamlets in the 1690s it espoused the suppression bawdy houses, profanity, immorality, lewd activities and street the loose women of this area. What is more, Roy Porter has shown London's Puritan legacy proved a lasting one. He observed that, by 1711 there were some '23 Baptist, 14 Quaker, 12 Independent and 26 Presbyterian meeting-houses in London and its suburbs'. This was a conservative estimate for London as a whole but

⁴⁴ LMA, St Mary Whitechapel, P93/MRY/90, MS 09579/01.

⁴⁵ Dorothy A. Williams, 'London Puritanism: the parish of St. Botolph without Aldgate', *Guildhall Miscellany*, 2:1, (1960), p. 38.

more importantly, as Porter pointed out, 'Londoners were determining their religious affiliation in a way that was unimaginable one hundred years earlier'.⁴⁶

It is evident from the number of dissenting churches that remained in this part of London into the eighteenth century that this legacy of religious and political radicalism remained intact, if not unchanging. As John Bossy notes, the eighteenth century saw the bedrock of England's religious beliefs change in character, as: 'the older sense of religion was being supplanted by the idea of rival religions, hard-edged entities competing with each other for followers and for dominance'.⁴⁷ The religious communities of Rosemary Lane were not immune from this evolution.

Furthermore, religious evolution matched with religious immigration by the end of our period. This suburb east of the City would sustain a rise in the numbers of Jewish settlers forcing the religious and cultural influences of the neighbourhood to adapt and change again. Many of these new settlers would find work as tailors and as street vendors, hawking second-hand goods, especially clothes. By the end of the century the image of the old Jewish clothes seller had become almost synonymous with Rag Fair itself, in the process converting Rag Fair from being a female dominated market, to one dominated by male traders.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Porter, *London*, p. 97.

⁴⁷ J. Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation*, (Cambridge, 1998), p. 479.

⁴⁸ For an introduction to Jewish settlers in London see the article on *Jewish Communities* at <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Jewish.jsp>; for further reading see Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society*, (Philadelphia, 2nd edn, 1999); David Englander, (ed.) *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain, 1840-1920*, (Leicester, 1993); Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914*, (3rd edn, London, 2001); *The Jew as Other: A Century of English Caricature, 1730-1830*, (The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1995).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The people deemed responsible for the ever changing residents of this community will be discussed in chapter 2. This chapter provides the detailed context that will allow us to explore the systems of administration that kept this neighbourhood ticking over; and along the way, will allow us to examine the limits of the sources that will be used to evidence further discussion. Local government and poor relief form another legacy of seventeenth-century practice that would continue to influence the eighteenth-century history of the Lane. The majority of east London's parishes were poor and also heavily populated. This meant that parishes such as St Botolph Aldgate and St Mary Whitechapel carried a heavier burden when it came to the doling out of parish aid. Arguments concerning the cost of poor relief abound. Some historians have argued that for London the poor law was used as a means of controlling and regulating the capital's poor. Ian Archer insists that the operation of the late sixteenth-century poor law 'served to emphasise the dependence of the poorer members of the community to the wealthy'.⁴⁹ While, Keith Wrightson has similarly suggested that in the later seventeenth century, the combination of relief and control represented by the poor law provided a balance 'of communal identification and social differentiation that was a powerful reinforcement of habits and subordination'.⁵⁰

At the same time, Stephen Macfarlane has found that vestrymen and churchwardens administered relief with 'considerable independence from higher authorities', whilst overseers of the poor in City parishes were seemingly 'seldom more than collectors of

⁴⁹ Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, p. 96.

⁵⁰ Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic and Social History of Britain, 1700-1850*, (Oxford, 1995); Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680*, (1982), p. 154.

the poor rates with real decision making being left to churchwardens'.⁵¹ Then again, Paul Slack has also found little evidence that overseers had power to cut or reduce pensions.⁵² In other words, while poor relief may have substantially informed social relations on the ground and in the neighbourhoods, it is much less clear who had the authority to control expenditure, or how the distribution of funds to the most needy shaped those relationships.

Regardless of who was in overall control, Peter Earle argues that by the later seventeenth and eighteenth century the poor relief system administered by the parishes in London was remarkably effective. Payments made to the poor increased 'and the treatment of those deemed truly "deserving" - the sick, the aged and orphans was relatively humane'.⁵³ Thus, as Slack acknowledges, 'the growth of social welfare... in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was a general phenomenon of major importance'.⁵⁴ Additionally, the 1720s saw a boom in the number of workhouses being built around the capital. As Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker have written, 'outdoor relief', in the form of 'parish support for paupers had become more diverse'.⁵⁵ Moreover, Hitchcock reminds us of the wide range of institutions in London available to the destitute poor, and to unmarried mothers in particular. They included almost 70

⁵¹ S. Macfarlane, 'Social policy and the poor in the later seventeenth century' in A.L. Beier and R. Finlay, (eds.), *The Making of the Metropolis, London 1500-1700*, (1986), pp. 255-272.

⁵² Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*, (1988), p. 19; Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England*, (Oxford, 1998), pp.190-205; See also Martin J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1700-1850*, (Oxford, 1995), pp. 451-452.

⁵³ Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750*, (1994), p. 17.

⁵⁴ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, p. 19; Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement*, pp. 190-205.

⁵⁵ Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker (eds.), *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800*, (Cambridge, forthcoming). Many thanks to both authors for early access to their material; See also Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporation Act*, 9 vols, (1906-1929); vol. I, *The Parish and the County*, (1906, reprinted 1963); *The Manor and the Borough*, vol. 3, (parts 1-2), (1908, reprinted 1963).

parish workhouses by the time of the first Parliamentary survey in 1776, the Foundling hospital; several lying-in hospitals, the Magdalen hospital for penitent prostitutes and the Lock hospital for venereal disease.⁵⁶

On the other hand, as Hitchcock points out 'while poor relief in eighteenth century London was wide-ranging it was difficult for many parishes to bear the cost.'⁵⁷ In addition, as Kevin Siena argues, this revolution in the care of the poor was driven by the 'London poor simply ... turning up at the parish door, exercising... what they believed were legitimate demands for medical care.'⁵⁸ In consequence, the cost of relief was carried by the individual parishes, which led to some parishes seeking to limit the claims of relief exclusively to settled parishioners. This was carried out by the enforcing of a strict application of the laws of settlement, or else through the imposition of a workhouse test.

Chapter 2 will also explore the organization of the wards and parishes and the services that they provided to their residents. It will discuss the nature and formation of policing arrangements and local jurisdictional issues. Moreover, it will analyse the roles that the ward inquest committees and Leet courts had to play in the governing of the City and Middlesex sections of this neighbourhood. The dealers at Rag Fair were well aware that they had only to move a few yards in any direction to find a different jurisdiction and a different set of magistrates. This thesis will suggest that maintaining order in this

⁵⁶ Tim Hitchcock, 'Unlawfully begotten on her body', in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King, and Pamela Sharpe, (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: the voices and strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*, (1997), p. 75; See also Sarah Lloyd, '“Pleasure's golden bait”: prostitution, poverty and Magdalen Hospital in eighteenth century London', *History Workshop Journal*, 41, pp. 50-70.

⁵⁷ Tim Hitchcock, *Down And Out*, p. 132.

⁵⁸ Kevin. P. Siena, *Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor: London's 'foul wards', 1600-1800*, (Rochester, [NY], 2004, p. 142.

neighbourhood was as much about the policing of the boundary lines, the weight of a loaf of bread, and keeping the streets swept and clear, as it was about trying to prevent crime.

General Perceptions of Crime

Rosemary Lane was constantly described as being 'disorderly' it was a much overused phrase in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was used in proclamations as we have seen above and it was part of a template of language used in court orders to emphasise and describe those accused of usually petty crimes: lewd disorderly persons, disorderly women, disorderly, loose and idle persons, disorderly houses, disorderly ill governed house, disorderly public houses, and disorderly riots. However, it had a strong linguistic purpose because it was noting behaviour that was not tolerated.⁵⁹ In a society that did not have a professional police force, disorder was seen as one step away from insurrection and a breakdown in society. Londoners widely believed they had a serious crime problem in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁶⁰ London had always been both orderly and disorderly at the same moment, and the problem was not necessarily getting worse over the course of the eighteenth century. However, a growth in population meant that it became more difficult to police. Crime and worries concerning the gathering of the mob increasingly taxed the authorities, who wholly depended on the local militia in times of trouble.

⁵⁹ Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *London Lives, 1690-1800* (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 24 April 2012), (hereafter LL), Middlesex Sessions General Orders of Court.

⁶⁰ J.M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror*, (Oxford, 2001), p. 1.

Tim Harris calculates that for the Restoration period, 1661-1678, there were at least 62 riots. Moreover, Harris comments that in the volatile 1680s 'a highly explosive situation' could develop speedily. This was the case in 1686, when a local constable refused to let a troop of soldiers belonging to James II have quarters on the City side of St Botolph Aldgate, because they did not have a City warrant but a warrant issued in Middlesex. This in turn sparked a riotous situation between a crowd of local butchers and sailors from the Minories, who defended the constable 'with meat cleavers and other hand-held weapons' against the army. As a result, a new warrant would have to be issued by the City to address the situation. This reflects both the importance attached to jurisdiction between borders and boundaries in London's main districts, and the heightened awareness of those boundaries in the minds of local residents. On this occasion a riot, Harris notes, 'was only avoided by the negotiating skills of the Lord Mayor and aldermen'.⁶¹

Rioters were also often well versed on boundaries and jurisdiction. The Wilkes and Gordon Riots were thought to have been deliberately started in Moorgate where the City boundary cut through the street, making it harder for the authorities on either side to catch the offenders.⁶² Moreover, the authority's fears surrounding riots and the gathering of disorderly mobs did not diminish in the eighteenth century. In fact, Robert Shoemaker argues that the eighteenth century was "the most riotous century in

⁶¹ Tim Harris, 'Perceptions of the crowd in later Stuart London' in Julia F. Merritt, (ed.), *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions & Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720*, (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 254-255; Tim Harris, 'The bawdy house riots of 1668', *The Historical Journal*, 29, 3, (1986), pp. 537-536.

⁶² Ruth Paley, 'An imperfect, inadequate and wretched system? policing London before Peel', *Criminal Justice History*, 10, (1989), p. 100.

London's history".⁶³ On the other hand, George Rudé suggests that the riots that occurred in eighteenth century London were usually quite spontaneous, as we have seen above.⁶⁴ This is evident in the anti – Irish riot that took place in Rag Fair in July 1736 and which will be deliberated upon in chapter 2.

Residential Patterns

Chapter 3 will consider the social setting, the housing, space and geography of a new and developing London suburb. To do this it will look at five parishes in this area in detail and map the geographical distribution of poverty and wealth.⁶⁵ Moreover, using a combination of parish and land tax data from 1745 this chapter will discuss the residents who lived in this neighbourhood, from Aldermen and Lorimers to alehouse keepers and bakers.⁶⁶ Chapter 3 will also allow us to map this exponential and apparently uncontrolled growth, onto a complex landscape that housed both rich and poor, new comers, and long stayers.

⁶³ R.B. Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder In Eighteenth Century England*, (2004), p. 111.

⁶⁴ George Rudé, *Paris and London in the 18th Century*, (1974), pp. 202-11; George Rudé, "Mother Gin" and the London riots of 1736', *The Guildhall Miscellany*, September, No. 10, (1959), pp. 53-63; Peter Clark, 'The 'Mother Gin' controversy in the early eighteenth century', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 38, (1988), pp. 63-84; Shoemaker, *The London Mob*, p. 119. See also Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 1674-1913, (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 24 March 2012), (Hereafter, OBP), Mary Connelly, 13 October 1736, t17361013-5, OB t17361013-6.

⁶⁵ Julie Schlarman, 'The social geography of Grosvenor Square: mapping gender and politics, 1720-1760', *London Journal*, 28, 1, (2003); Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity, London's Geographies 1680-1780*, (1998); See also Frank Mort and Miles Ogborn, 'Transforming metropolitan London, 1750-1960', *Journal of British Studies*, 43: 1, (January, 2004), pp. 1-14. For a poststructuralist view on space and geography see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicolson-Smith, (Oxford, 1991).

⁶⁶ Alan Mayne and Tim Murray, (eds.), *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes Explorations in Slumland*, (Cambridge, 2001); Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspapers Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914*, (Leicester, 1993); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, (1971); David. R. Green, *From Artisans to Paupers, Economic Change and Poverty in London, 1790-1870*, (1995); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, (Princeton, New Jersey, 2004).

By 1700 population growth demanded, as Peter Guillery acknowledges ‘tens of thousands of new houses’.⁶⁷ On the other hand, not everyone was in favour of this growth. A hundred and fifty years before the period covered by this dissertation, for example, John Stow reflected his dislike of the development of Whitechapel when he noted that the building of “a continual street or filthy straight passages with alleys of small tenements or cottages, inhabited by sailor’s victuallers”.⁶⁸ Even in the eighteenth century many would have agreed with this rather jaundiced view. Between 1580 and 1671 there were 17 royal proclamations issued prohibiting new building, and three parliamentary statutes, suggesting both alarm at the amount of continued new illegal building, and comparative powerlessness to do much about it, save to fine offenders.⁶⁹

Moreover, as Peter Earle notes, Goodman’s Fields, just north of Rosemary Lane, a ‘frontier’ in 1650, was rapidly engulfed with building after the Great Fire. Spitalfields also sustained massive growth ‘becoming as large as a ‘town’ pushing east into Bethnal Green and south into Whitechapel’.⁷⁰ As M. Dorothy George notes, ‘by the early eighteenth century, any one of the twelve of the Tower hamlets were by non-

⁶⁷ Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth Century London*, (2004), p. 21.

⁶⁸ John Stow, *A survey of the cities of London and Westminster: containing the original, antiquity, increase, modern estate and government of those cities. Written at first in the year MDXCVIII, by John Stow, citizen and native of London. Since reprinted and augmented by A.M. H.D. and other. Now lastly, corrected, improved, and very much enlarged: and the survey and history brought down from the year 1633, (being near fourscore years since it was last printed) to the present time; by John Strype, M.A. a native also of the said city. Illustrated with exact maps of the city and suburbs, and of all the wards; and likewise of the out-parishes of London and Westminster: together with many other fair draughts of the more eminent and publick edifices and monuments. by John Strype in six books, (1720), Vol 1, Book. II, pp. 20-28.*

⁶⁹ W.C. Baer, ‘Housing the poor and mechanic class in seventeenth-century London’, *London Journal*, 25, (2), (2000), p. 16. See also R. Malcolm Smuts, ‘The court and its neighbourhood in the early Stuart West End’, *Journal of British Studies*, xxx, 2, (April, 1991), pp. 117-149; Jeremy Boulton, ‘The poor among the rich: paupers and the parish in the West End, 1660-1724’, in Paul Griffiths, and Mark. S. R. Jenner, (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social history of Early Modern London*, (Manchester, 2000), pp. 197-215; Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity and Change in Early Modern London*, (Stanford, 1997).

⁷⁰ Earle, *A City Full of People*, p. 8.

metropolitan standards large towns, each 'hamlet' having a population in the range of 5,000 to 22,000'.⁷¹ Thus, this chapter will show the social make-up of Rosemary Lane and the surrounding neighbourhood. It will detail the extent of poverty in the area using maps and information gathered from parochial and tax records of the period. While this data does not encompass every single resident in the area it does provide us with a general street by street picture of wealth and poverty in the first half of the eighteenth century. In essence, it provides us with a more detailed and accurate view of a much maligned suburb. Moreover, it will allow us to see the higher than average number of women householders in this area and who form a crucial element in the history of this neighbourhood. Overall it will demonstrate how the eastern suburbs expanded quickly to accommodate the growth in population and despite regulation and the proclamations; the City's spread east of the wall was an unstoppable one.

THE RAG FAIR

Rag Fair was by far the largest old clothes market in London in the first half of the eighteenth century and it was based on Rosemary Lane. As we have seen the shops selling second hand clothes abounded; however, the moveable fair, the hawkers, the stall holders the people selling goods from a basket who blocked the pavements proved hard to control. Crime was endemic on this street and the Fair was thought to have been the prime cause. One of the first of many references to be found regarding a Rag Fair on Rosemary Lane appears in the printed *Old Bailey Proceedings* in 1700.

'John Tackerberry , of the Parish of St. Pancras , was Indicted for Robbing one Gabriel Baily on the 4th of August last, and taking from him a pair of Shoes, and a pair of Iron Shoe Buckles, a Muslin Cravat, a strip'd Handkerchief, and 1 s. 4 d. in Money numbred...the Prisoner utterly denied the Fact, saying that he bought the Shoes at the

⁷¹ George, *London Life*, p. 413.

Rag Market in Rosemary-lane, but could not prove it, or call any to his Reputation, the Jury found him Guilty .' ⁷²

The Rag Fair's effect on this area was to be all encompassing and as a result there existed here a complicated underlying web of criminal activity that was seen as a normal way of life by many inhabitants.

Nonetheless, the vast majority of people who lived in this neighbourhood were orderly and decent; however, this is an account of the disorderly and possibly not so decent residents and visitors. A study of the criminal activities that occurred in this neighbourhood will not only show the profound effect crime had on this community, but will also reveal how some activities in this neighbourhood influenced the future of policing in London as a whole. Moreover, a detailed study of this neighbourhood will also lead us to consider and engage more fully with local issues surrounding women and their place in the centre of neighbourhood life. ⁷³

Chapter 4 will then move on to discuss Rag Fair as a centre for theft and crime and it will establish that while both men and women stole clothing, women were the most prolific of clothes thieves on this street. Additionally, while most thefts were of an opportunistic nature, this chapter will suggest that some clothes theft was part and parcel of a more normalised and organised 'economy of makeshift', a way of juggling differing sources of income, desperate tactics that were employed by men but mainly by women, as part of a strategy of family survival. The phrase 'an economy of makeshifts'

⁷² OBP, John Tackerberry, 28 August 1700, t17000828-11.

⁷³ See Garthine Walker, 'Women, theft and the world of stolen goods' in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, J. Kermode and G. Walker, (eds.), (1994), pp. 97-98. For early modern London women see Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London*, (Oxford, 1996). For East London women see Margaret R. Hunt, 'Women and the fiscal-imperial state in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London' in Wilson, Kathleen, (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge and New York, 2004).

or 'a makeshift economy', has been used by historians such as Olwen Hufton, Sara Mendelson, Patricia Crawford, Alannah Tompkins and Steven King among others to describe the way that plebeian women managed the household budget on poor wages and little family income. As Tompkins and King argue that the increased use of this phrase over the last twenty five years is attributed to 'the increasing interest shown by historians in the experiences of poor people rather than accounts that deal exclusively with...policy, elite...or the administrative machinery built up to deliver welfare'.⁷⁴ They included women who worked as servants who get caught pawning their mistresses' clothes and the women who 'borrowed' clothes to pawn as a means of getting a short term loan to make ends meet for their families for another week.⁷⁵ Some of these desperate measures taken in order to survive could possibly be labelled as 'social crime'. This is a problematic phrase which still causes division among historians to date. It was first used by Eric Hobsbawm in 1959 and he defined it as,

a conscious, almost a political, challenge to the prevailing social and political order and its values... [which]... occurs when there is a conflict of laws, e.g. between an official and an unofficial system, or when acts of law-breaking have a distinct element of social protest in them, or when they are closely linked with the development of social and political unrest.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France*, (Oxford, 1974), pp. 69 -127; Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720*, see chapter 5, 'The Makeshift Economy', (Oxford, 1998). See also King and Tompkins, (eds.), *The Poor in England*, p. 1.

⁷⁵ John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth Century England*, (2007), pp. 168, 176, 312; Beverly Lemire, 'The theft of clothes and popular consumerism in early modern England', *Journal of Social History*, 24, 1990, pp. 258 - 260; Beverly Lemire, 'Peddling fashion: salesmen, pawnbrokers, tailors, thieves and the second-hand clothes trade in England, c. 1700-1800', *Textile History*, 22 (1991), p. 71, pp. 77-78. See also Beverly Lemire, 'A good stock of cloaths: the changing market for cotton clothing in Britain, 1750-1800', *Textile History*, 22, (2), 1991, pp. 311-328; Beverly Lemire 'Consumerism in pre-industrial and early industrial England: the trade in second hand clothes', *Journal of British Studies*, 27, (January 1988), pp. 12-15; Walker, 'Women, theft and the world of stolen goods', p.89. Lynn MacKay, 'Why they stole: women in the old bailey, 1779-1789', *Journal of Social History*, 32.3, (1999), pp. 623-639.

⁷⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Social Criminality: distinctions between socio-political and other forms of crime', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* (25), (1972), pp. 5-6.

However, this interpretation would infer that people actually planned and thought about getting back at the authorities. John Rule has added to this debate when he argued 'the most important characteristic of "social crimes" lies in positive popular sanction, not in the often present element of protest'.⁷⁷ If there was an element of 'social crime' as part of the 'economy of makeshift' as practiced in eighteenth century London it is more likely that it was without any element of political thought or protest but more of an unconscious desperate way of making money fast. For some historians including James Sharpe the major problem with this theory is 'determining exactly where social crime ends and normal crime begins'.⁷⁸ It would seem that the 'social crime' hat does not fit all of the thieves and receivers in this thesis but it does allow for a better understanding of some of the crimes of theft and receiving that took place on Rosemary Lane and in London as a whole.

The majority of theft cases highlighted in this chapter are recorded in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* which enables a wider analysis of theft. This is no longer a novel methodology, and this dissertation seeks to build on well-established precedents, but to employ it, we first need to understand how the law worked in the eighteenth century, and how its workings impacted on the evidence produced.

A further section of this chapter will be based largely on cases of theft that involved the use of pawnbrokers. While the majority of shopkeepers dealing in second hand and ready-made clothes shops on this street were legitimate this chapter will particularly consider the pawnbrokers and second hand shops used to pass on stolen or borrowed

⁷⁷ J.G. Rule, 'Social crime in the rural south in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Southern History*, 1, (1979), pp. 35-53. For a more recent exploration of 'social crime' see, John Lea, 'Social crime revisited', *Theoretical Criminology*, vol.3, no.3, (1999), pp. 307-311.

⁷⁸ James Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550 - 1750*, (1984), p. 140.

goods that assisted in this activity. Unsurprisingly, pawnbrokers and receivers of stolen goods are shown to be a crucial component in cases of theft. It will discuss the role that both formal and informal pawnbrokers played in second hand clothes dealing and their involvement in the criminal networks of the neighbourhood.

The Fair caused an immense headache for the authorities both local and central and from both the City and Middlesex parishes. The second half of Chapter 4 will include a detailed examination of local government's perception of disorder and its intolerance of Rag Fair and the long fight to have it stopped. It will then analysis the methods employed by the City authorities to curb the crime and social disorder clearly evident on the streets.

Moreover, in an attempt to understand the authorities' perceptions regarding disorder at Rag Fair a comparison will be made with other London neighbourhoods deemed to be disorderly. Rag Fair was not the only venue for the selling of second hand clothing this chapter will also compare Rag Fair with other streets renowned for buying and selling second hand goods.

The Bloody Code

As Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh and E.P. Thompson revealed in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England* written in the mid-1970s, historical criminology can be 'central to unlocking the meanings of...social history'.⁷⁹ However,

⁷⁹ Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, (eds.), *Albion's Fatal Tree*, (1975), preface, p. 13; Peter King, "'Decision-makers and decision-making in the English criminal law, 1750-1800)', *The Historical Journal*, 27, (1984), pp. 25-28; Norma Landau, (ed.), *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660-1830*, (Cambridge, 2002); J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750* (1984); Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900*, 2nd edn, (London and New York, 1996); Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge, 2000); See also J. Styles,

Hay's argument that the law was a purely a flexible tool to be used by the upper classes to keep the lower orders in line 'through a mixture of ceremony, terror and mercy' has been countered by historians and legal historians alike, implying that a more nuanced use of these records is required.⁸⁰ John Brewer and John Styles have also argued that the levels of violence and disorder evident during this period almost "invariably corresponded to the lack of responsiveness of those in authority... when first aired, a grievance was more likely to be taken through legal or political channels; it was only when authorities declined to act that hostilities escalated".⁸¹

In addition, Robert Shoemaker's ground breaking book on the criminal justice system in Middlesex, clearly illustrates how differing social classes used the law, and how they prosecuted widely at petty sessions. Shoemaker argues that many historians would now describe the law as a "multiple-use right", which 'depended on the participation of all social classes with the exception of the poor'.⁸² However, it is clear that some poor people used the Law to the best of their ability; the victims of crime on Rosemary Lane who managed to get their cases to court were certainly not wealthy. Shoemaker's work provides a powerful context through which to critique the descriptions of crime (and everyday behaviour) found in the records produced by the criminal justice system.

John Beattie argues that it was a commonly held belief by Londoners in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that 'property crime in particular was a

'Crime in 18th-century England', *History Today*, 38:3 (1988), pp. 36-42; Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals*, (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 49-50; Tim Wales, 'Thief-takers and their clients', in *Londinopolis*, (eds.), Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner.

⁸⁰ Douglas Hay, 'Property, authority and the criminal law', in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh et al (eds.), *Albion's Fatal Tree*, (1975), p. 51.

⁸¹ John Brewer and John Styles, (eds.), *Ungovernable People?: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (1980), p. 17.

⁸² Robert B. Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in Rural Middlesex*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 4.

serious problem, and that harsher sentencing and rewards were necessary'.⁸³ Beattie's magisterial study of the criminal justice system in the City of London in the century after the Restoration, exposes how and why changes emerged in legislation and in particular the policing of criminal law and its administration in the eighteenth century.⁸⁴ The unique confluence of marginal disorder, and a localised culture of 'thief-taking' (discussed in Chapter 5) makes Beattie's analysis important for understanding the lived experience of the Lane.

THIEF-TAKERS

Chapter 5 will build on the preceding chapter, to highlight the very localised culture of thief-takers that resulted in an orchestrated system of convictions for profit. It will examine some of the cases that would eventually lead to the downfall of the thief-takers in the 1750s, and will suggest that the behaviour of the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane had a direct impact on policing in London as a whole.

Historians of crime have written extensively about London and the criminal justice system of the eighteenth century; but these studies have largely concerned themselves with London as a whole, or individual jurisdictions such as Middlesex (Shoemaker), and the City of London (Beattie). This chapter, in combination with chapter 6, will explore crime and criminal behaviour in a neighbourhood, defined by its lack of jurisdictional coherence. To do this it will use the published *Old Bailey Proceedings*, along with the records from London and Middlesex sessions, vestry minutes, insurance records, tax records and early newspapers.

⁸³ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-5.

In the process, it will provide a sustained study of criminality and enforcement in a single neighbourhood identified as problematic by contemporaries. There is a need for a history that encompasses individual neighbourhoods, its constituent communities, and the crime that took place there. A neighbourhood study that recognises that communities are made up of people, rather than jurisdictions, will provide a better understanding of local crime and its effect on inhabitants.

John McMullan and G. Salgado have both written about crime in general in early modern London and both are convinced of the existence of a criminal underworld, however, their evidence relies heavily on literary sources.⁸⁵ On the other hand, while London has been found to have had an 'exceptional environment for organised crime'; Beattie has found little evidence of a 'criminal underworld' as such.⁸⁶ Early policing and the evolution of the system of 'thief-takers', which characterised much of the criminal justice system in early modern London, has attracted substantial attention from historians.⁸⁷ The infamous Jonathan Wild, who crowned himself 'Thief-Taker General' in the first quarter of the century, set himself up in an 'Office for the Recovery of Lost and Stolen Property' at the Old Bailey.⁸⁸ It was a lucrative business - as Tim Wales notes, from 1692 a London thief-taker could claim £40 for the successful prosecution of highwaymen. Consequently, offering rewards had a major impact on the policing of

⁸⁵ John L. McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld 1500-1700*, (Rutgers, New Jersey, 1984); G. Salgado, *Cony Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, (1972).

⁸⁶ J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp. 254-255.

⁸⁷ Joseph Cox, *A Faithful Narrative of the most Wicked and Inhuman Transactions of that Bloody Minded Gang of Thieftakers, alias Thiefmakers, MacDaniel, Berry, Salmon, Eagan alias Gahagan....(1756)*, passim. British Library 1416.9.12 (2); Patrick Pringle, *The Thief-takers*, (1958); Gerald Howson, *Thief-Taker General: The Rise and Fall of Jonathan Wild*, (1970); Beattie, 'Detection and prosecution: thief-takers, 1690-1720', in Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 226-256; Ruth Paley, 'Thief-takers in London in the age of the MacDaniel gang, c. 1745-1754', in D. Hay and F. Snyder, (eds.), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750-1850*, (Oxford, 1989), pp. 310-334.

⁸⁸ Howson, *Thief-Taker General*, p. 5.

London and the subsequent profits to be made by thief-taking, especially from the later seventeenth century.⁸⁹

The corrupt practices of the thief-takers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been frequently noted and debated. What has attracted much less attention is the geographical centralisation of many 'thief-takers' in just a few disorderly neighbourhoods. In fact, the majority of the London thief-takers were based in the single neighbourhood of Rosemary Lane in East London. Thief-takers Stephen MacDaniel, Nathaniel Harris and Ralph Mitchell lived or worked in this neighbourhood using it as a base for their exploits in the area and across the metropolis. This connection and its implications for the neighbourhood have never been discussed. Chapter 5 charts the rise and fall of this community of corrupt policing; providing a counterpoint to the perhaps criminal, but certainly functional community described in chapter 4.

RAG FAIR WOMEN

Following on from chapter 5, chapter 6 will discuss the women who lived and worked around Rosemary Lane, and in particular, the Lane's prostitutes, thieves and receivers: resourceful women with agency who were unafraid of authority in any guise. It is intrinsically linked to the last chapter and in particular to the relationship between the thief-takers and women receivers. As noted above women were a considerable force in this neighbourhood their numbers indicating that they had an unusual amount of freedom in a male governed society. They were particularly visible working at Rag Fair

⁸⁹ Wales, 'Thief-takers and their clients', pp. 70-71.

selling from baskets and stalls and in the clothes shops that line the street.⁹⁰ In the process, the detailed examination of women studied in their own neighbourhood and within spaces of their own choosing, will bring an additional nuance to the study of gender relations.

Despite the powerful presence of male thief-takers, Rosemary Lane, and the records of the crimes committed there, was dominated by women. However, to date there remains relatively little work on women's participation in crime for the eighteenth century.⁹¹ A few recent exceptions have helped to alter this gendered skew, including Jennine Hurl-Eamon's recent book *Gender and Petty Violence in London, 1680-1720*, which has expanded our knowledge of women and their involvement with petty crime in London.⁹²

A fresh perspective of women, crime and the criminal justice system is provided by both Heather Shore and Mary Clayton and will be discussed in chapter 6. These works reveal an image of the women behind the statistics. In addition, they also reveal the extent of agency that eighteenth-century women could exercise when the occasion demanded it.⁹³ Thus this chapter will discuss a range of diverse women such as Jane Johnson who

⁹⁰ Tim Reinke-Williams, *Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London*, (2014). For a good account of early modern women's work in London see chapter 4 'Retailing', pp. 104-125.

⁹¹ For the Seventeenth century, Garthine Walker, 'Women, theft and the world of stolen goods', in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, (eds.) J. Kermode and G. Walker, (1994) remains pivotal as does Garthine Melissa Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in early Modern Cheshire*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, June 1994) and also Lynn MacKay, 'Why they stole: Women in the Old Bailey, 1779-1789', *Journal of Social History*, 32.3 (1999), pp. 623-639.

⁹² Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Gender and Petty Violence in London, 1680-1720*, (Ohio, 2005).

⁹³ Shore, 'The Reckoning', pp. 409-427; Clayton, 'The lives and crimes of Charlotte Walker', pp. 3-19. See also Janice Turner, 'Ill-Favoured sluts'? - The disorderly women of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair', *London Journal*, vol. 38, No. 2, (July, 2013), pp. 95-109.

found herself at odds with the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane. And Sarah Birk a street prostitute who robbed and assaulted her clients, terrifying them in the process.⁹⁴

Moreover, these independent women and their companions were less singular than most historians have supposed, and formed just a small fragment of a wider community that survived generation to generation, and that justified some of the authorities' anxiety about the neighbourhood. Paul Griffiths, for instance, acknowledges that apart from the 'occasional spectacular purge' London's prostitutes survived all attempts at suppression, which he believes signifies 'a measure of toleration or resignation in the Guildhall and Bridewell'.⁹⁵ Chapter 6 will show that prostitutes were not always society outcasts. Indeed, while they may not have been accepted they were, despite the rhetoric, given a measure of toleration.⁹⁶ And while campaigns against prostitutes continued, including the independent and non-governmental movement the Society for the Reformation of Manners in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this chapter will illustrate how little organised governmental effort was directed at the control of prostitution.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *OBP*, Jane Johnson, 19 May 1743, t17430519-18; *OBP*, Sarah Birk, 28 Apr 1742, 17+53, t17420428-15; Paul Griffiths, 'The structure of prostitution in Elizabethan England', *Continuity and Change*, 8, (1993), p. 40; See also Paul Griffiths, 'Secrecy and authority in late sixteenth and seventeenth century London', *The Historical Journal*, 40, (1997), pp. 25-51; Paul Griffiths, 'Meanings of night-walking in early modern England', *The Seventeenth Century*, 13, (1998) pp. 212-238.

⁹⁵ Paul Griffiths, 'The structure of prostitution in Elizabethan England', p. 40.

⁹⁶ Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the metropolis, 1730-1830*. (1999), p. 44. See also E.J. Burford and J.Wotton (eds.), *Public Vices – Public Virtues, Bawdry in London from Elizabethan Times to the Regency*, (1995).

⁹⁷ Robert Shoemaker, 'Reforming the City: the reformation of manners campaign in London, 1690-1738', in Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Keirn, and Robert Shoemaker, (eds.), *Stilling The Grumbling Hive, The Response To Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750*, (Stroud, 1992), pp. 99-120. See also Martin Ingram, 'Reformation of manners in early modern England', in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, Steven Hindle, (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in early modern England*, (Basingstoke, 1996); T.C. Curtis and W. A. Speck, 'The societies for the reformation of manners: a case study, the theory and practice of moral reform', *Literature & History*, 1976, 3, pp. 45-64; A. Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, (Cambridge, 1999), p. 28; T. Isaacs, 'The Anglican hierarchy and the reformation of manners, 1688-1738', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 33, No. 3, July, 1982, pp. 393-394.

Typically, given the London-wide character of most of the literature on the eighteenth-century metropolis, while these writers provide a wide and varied look at prostitution on the streets in early modern London they do not discuss Rosemary Lane in any great detail. And yet, contemporaries were very aware of its reputation as a place synonymous with bawdy houses and prostitution. A reputation aided by the many sailors who thronged these streets when their ships were tied up along the nearby Thames.⁹⁸ Surpassed only by Covent Garden, Rosemary Lane was East London's Red Light District.

But this chapter is not just about prostitution. Beyond nightwalkers, there were simply more women in Rag Fair and Rosemary Lane, than in most other neighbourhoods in London. Moreover, this chapter will discuss a group of Rag Fair women who were essentially part of a criminal network involving theft, receiving and gangs of child thieves. It will reveal that the thief-takers and a group of women receivers were rivals in a network of criminality that was evolving on Rosemary Lane.

CONCLUSION

This introduction has sought to demonstrate that the community of Rosemary Lane with its position on the border of the City and the Liberties is worth our discussion. Rosemary Lane has a compelling history; a narrative which will considerably add to our understanding of London in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, a history that is not based on the lives of the rich and powerful but on the lives of ordinary every day Londoners who also have a story to tell.

⁹⁸ For the Bristol portside see Steve Poole (ed.), *A City Built on Water, Maritime Bristol 1750-1900*, (2013); in particular the introduction and 'More like savages than men': foreign sailors and knife crime in nineteenth century Bristol' by Steve Poole and 'Crime and the maritime trade in Bristol, 1770-1800', by Matt Neale.

Chapter 2

Local Government: Administration of a Disorderly Neighbourhood

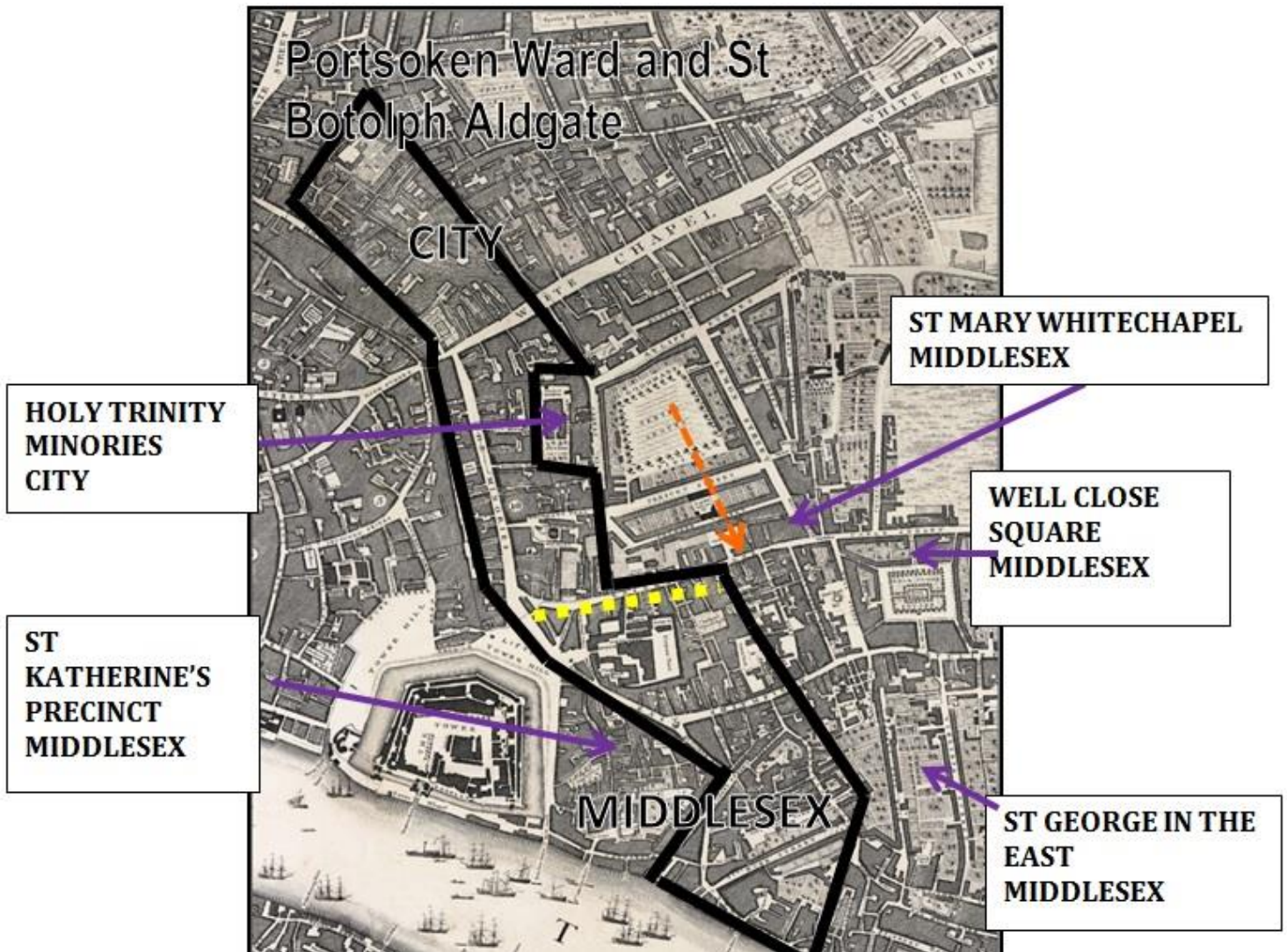


Fig. 2.1: Map showing Portsoken ward.

A Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark; with the Contiguous Buildings; From an actual Survey taken by John Rocque Land-Surveyor, and Engraved by John Pine, Bluemantle Pursuivant at Arms and Chief Engraver of Seals, &c. to His Majesty. Courtesy of © Motco Enterprises Limited, Ref: www.motco.com

Key: A section of the map showing Portsoken ward and the parish of St Botolph Aldgate outlined in **Black**. Text boxes mark nearby parishes and precincts. Rosemary Lane is identified by an orange arrow.

INTRODUCTION

Rosemary Lane was just east of the Tower of London. It started life as a small thoroughfare known as Hachestreet and it is thought to have been created when a postern gate was built into the north side wall of the Tower of London forming one of two roads which ran eastwards. By the fourteenth century Hachestreet had become Heggstreet or Hoggstreet and by 1542 was known locally as Hog Street. By the early seventeenth century it was renamed Rosemary Lane, probably in order to distance the neighbourhood from its already odorous reputation.¹ Consequently, and keeping that in mind, the neighbourhood under discussion is defined as an area ranging roughly a mile north and south of Rosemary Lane, from the City Wall to Cable Street.

This chapter will discuss the origins of Rosemary Lane, before going on to describe the boundaries and jurisdictions of the parishes and precincts that are included in this neighbourhood. It will then discuss the structure of local government and its key responsibilities to its residents in the form of poor relief and the keeping of order.

The neighbourhood is taken to have included Houndsditch, Aldgate, Whitechapel High Street, Ayliff Street, Red Lyon Street, Somerset Street just north of Goodman's Yard, Glass House Yard and the Minories. It extended to Well Close Square, Cable Street as far as East Smithfield and the May Pole by the Tower, down to St Catherine's precinct at the river, to King Harry's yard and Ratcliff Highway.

At the eastern end of Rosemary Lane, Well Close Square was a geographically separate, but nevertheless integral part of the Tower Liberties, (Fig. 2.2) taken from Strype's 1720 version of Stow's work, and as such remained a bone of contention with the parish of

¹ 'Stepney: Communications', A history of the County of Middlesex: Volume 11: Stepney, Bethnal Green (1998), pp. 7-13, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk> accessed: 29 June 2011.

Whitechapel over its administration.² The western end of Rosemary Lane was described by John Stow as being part of the Liberties (pieces of land said to be owned by The City and the monarch) which included Little Minories on Tower Hill, a section in Spitalfields, Little Tower Hill, Rosemary Lane, East Smithfield, St Catherine's precinct and Well Close Square.³ Disputes and controversy over these sections of land date back to the twelfth century and perhaps before. Fig. 2.2 also shows the Tower Liberties in relation to Rosemary Lane and East Smithfield. The majority of land east of the Tower and of the City Wall belonged to Middlesex; however, the inhabitants of these small peculiars, enclaves or Liberties remained inhabitants of the City with all the rights that implied.

² Daniel Lysons, *The environs of London: Being an Historical Account of the Towns, Villages, and Hamlets, within twelve miles of that Capital interspersed with Biographical Anecdotes*, (1792), pp. 425-436.

³ Stow, John, *A survey of the cities of London and Westminster: containing the original, antiquity, increase, modern estate and government of those cities. Written at first in the year MDXCVIII, by John Stow, citizen and native of London. Since reprinted and augmented by A.M. H.D. and other. Now lastly, corrected, improved, and very much enlarged: and the survey and history brought down from the year 1633, (being near fourscore years since it was last printed) to the present time; by John Strype, M.A. a native also of the said city. Illustrated with exact maps of the city and suburbs, and of all the wards; and likewise of the out-parishes of London and Westminster: together with many other fair draughts of the more eminent and publick edifices and monuments by John Strype in six books*, (1720), Vol.1, Book 2, pp. 26-28, p. 64.

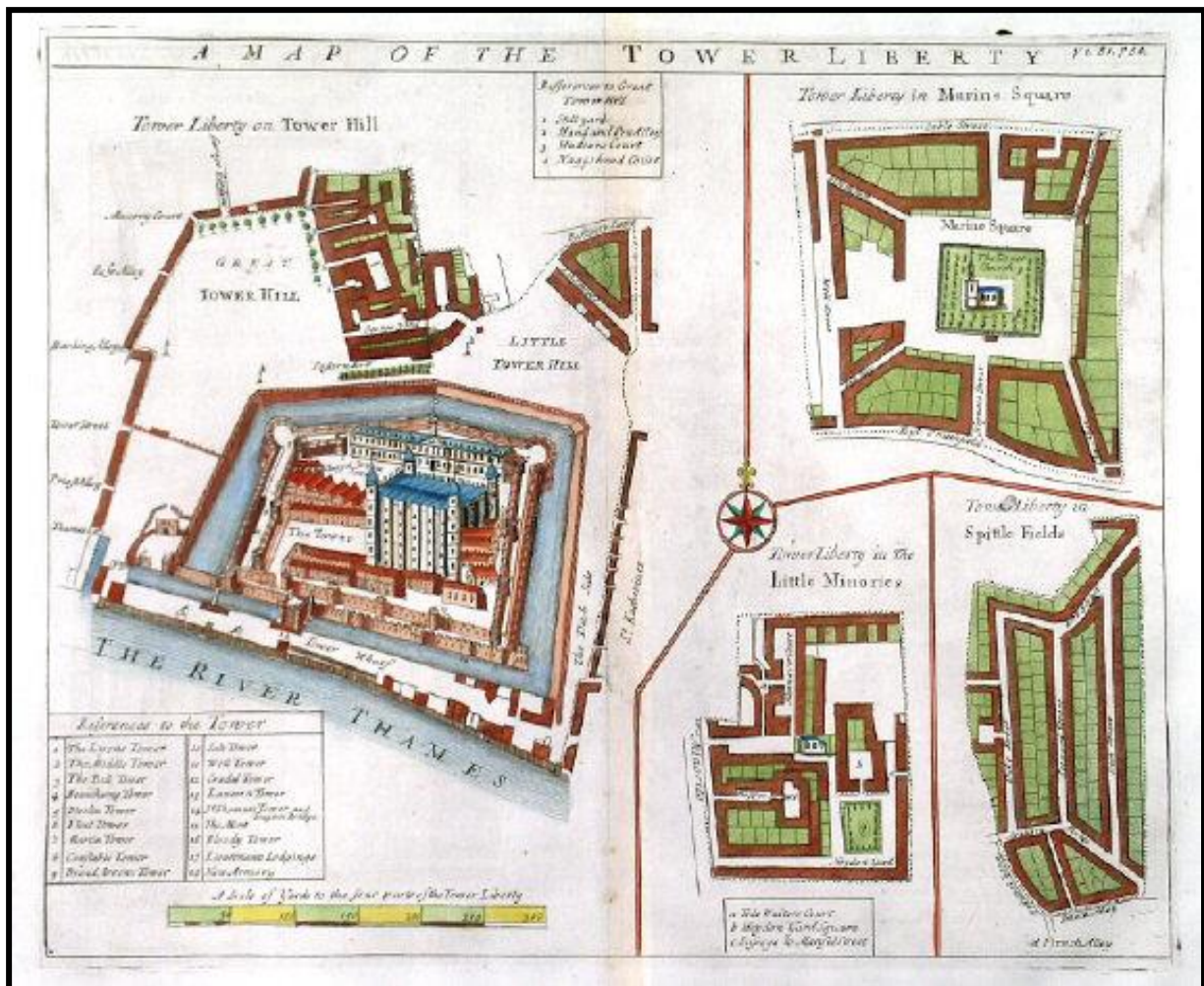


Fig. 2.2: Map of the Tower Liberties

Source: 'A MAP OF THE TOWER LIBERTY...'. 4 plans on one sheet, showing the Tower, Marine (Well close) Square, Little Minories, and Spitalfields with Steward, Artillery and Duke Street', Strype, Survey of London, (1720),Eighteenth Century Collections On-Line, (ECCO), *Eighteenth Century Collections On-line*, www.gale.cengage.com accessed, 11 December 2010, p. 26.

In addition, by the eighteenth century, two other main eastern roads - East Smithfield, Ratcliff Highway and Whitechapel High Street – had grown up parallel to the Lane itself.⁴

⁴ While a little dated, Norman Brett-James still provides one of the best depictions of the development of London in the seventeenth century. Norman Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London*, (1935). For the growth of the eastern riverside parishes see Michael Power, 'Shadwell: the development of a London suburban community in the seventeenth century,' *London Journal* 4, no.1 (1978), pp. 29-46. For Southwark see Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 194-205. For the development of the contrasting topography of east and west London see: Vanessa Harding, 'City, capital, and metropolis: the changing shape of seventeenth-century London,' in *Imaging Early Modern London: Perceptions & Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720* (ed.) Julia Merritt, (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 123-131; Michael Power, 'The east and west in early-

The neighbourhood was also peppered with other types of institutions and jurisdictions, creating a remarkably complex pattern of authority and belonging. The extra-parochial Danish Church in Well Close Square was built by Caius Gabriel Cibber the sculptor and father of playwright and actor Colley Cibber. It was paid for by Christian V, King of Denmark and it became a place of worship for visiting Danish sailors. Whitechapel had at least one Anabaptist meeting house and by the 1740s two charity schools, one for boys and one for girls, established by a legacy from Reverend Ralph Davenant in the late seventeenth century.⁵ The parish also had two almshouses, a workhouse, a court of record, a prison and a hay market. Maitland includes Rag Fair as one of his 'observable' places in Whitechapel. It was, he said 'a place denominated Rag-Fair wherein great Sums of Money are return'd in old Apparel &c. and in which is a large Building call'd the Exchange'.⁶

Despite, or perhaps because of these complex and overlapping jurisdictions and institutions, the neighbourhood also had the character of an 'under-governed' suburban area of the sort shared with neighbourhoods such as Covent Garden and St Andrew Holborn. John Stow writing at the turn of the seventeenth century expressed his dislike of the development of London's suburbs when he noted the building of 'a continual street or filthy straight passages with alleys of small tenements or cottages, inhabited by sailor's victuallers'. He deplored the:

modern London,' in *Wealth and Power in Tudor England: Essays Presented to S.T. Bindoff*, Eric Ives, R.J. Knecht, and John Scarisbrick, (eds.), (1978), pp. 167-185; Derek Keene, *A Social and Economic Study of Medieval London: Final Project Report to the Economic and Social Research Council on the Aldgate Project* (1987); For the development of the west end see: Lawrence Stone, 'The residential development of the west end of London in the seventeenth century,' in *After the Reformation: Essays in Honour of J.H. Hexter*, (ed.) B.C. Malament, (Manchester, 1980), pp. 196-208; Jules Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain, 1550-1960* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1995), especially chapter 1.

⁵ History of Davenant School Whitechapel, <http://www.davenantschool.co.uk/>

⁶ William Maitland, *The History of London from its foundation by the Romans to the present time...With several accounts of Westminster, Middlesex, Southwark, and other parts within the Bill of Mortality*, vol. II, (1756), pp. 779-781.

pestering of the common field beyond Aldgate and Whitechapel with filthy cottages and with other purprestures, inclosures and laystalls... which is no small blemish to so famous a city to have so unsavoury and unseemly an entrance or passage thereunto.

However, even the rather scathing Stow acknowledged the existence of some better housing and the 'mixed' character of the population. This is noted in his description of the entrance to Rosemary Lane, 'near the Tower at Hog Street (Rosemary Lane) was in 1593, beautified by certain faire Almshouses, strongly built of Bricke and timber and covered with slate for the poore'.⁷ The Rosemary Lane Almshouses were built by the Merchant-Tailors Company of London. They housed poor widows of the employees of the company.⁸ In other words, despite Rosemary Lane forming one of Stow's 'straight passages' into the City; the existence of newly built houses – even houses built in defiance of many sixteenth-century building regulations - would suggest that it was neither completely ramshackle or a slum at this point.

As Peter Earle argues, London as a whole was a city of profound contrasts between 'immense wealth and startling poverty, between elegance and squalor'.⁹ Even apparently wealthy areas such as Westminster were, by the eighteenth century, populated by rich and poor, living in close proximity. In Covent Garden, for instance, paupers and some of London's poorest citizens, lived in a labyrinth of streets and alleys surrounding Covent Garden and Drury Lane, cheek by jowl with London's most fashionable inhabitants.¹⁰ Rosemary Lane mirrored this pattern on the City's eastern boundary.

⁷ Strype, *Survey of London (1720)*, p. 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750*, (1994), p. 6.

¹⁰ M. Dorothy, George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (1925, reprint, 1983), p. 93.

The streets of London and the citizens who lived there are the key to this story. In the 1690s Londoners more than anyone else had to bear the brunt of tax collection to fund foreign wars. Fortunately for us the resulting documentation relating to the Poll Tax Acts, Marriage Duty Acts and Tax Aid collections of the 1690s have meant that we know a great deal about the people who lived in this part of London. While we cannot identify every resident, historians such as Craig Spence have used these records extensively to map the location of London's poor and wealthy. His findings show that the large and crowded wards that spilled over the City boundary, but remain under the jurisdiction of the City, contained a higher percentage of the poor when compared to the wealthier central City wards. He notes that while some wealthy citizens were residents among the outer parishes, 80 per cent of those who paid the rate, paid at the most basic rate. Moreover, while pockets of wealth were to be found in the parishes east of the City wall the study confirms that rents were substantially lower and people were generally poorer in the eastern side of the City and its adjacent suburbs.¹¹

Apart from cheaper rents, some of London's artisans chose to live in the suburbs to avoid the control of the City Guilds. However, some guilds also had members in Middlesex including the Goldsmiths whose messengers walked as far as Shadwell to carry warnings of stolen goods.¹² Nonetheless, as Lawrence Manley writes, the suburbs were home to a fast growing population of non-guild artisans, immigrants and casual labourers.¹³ French historian Ferdinand Braudel argued that over half of London's population lived in 'Defoe's out-parts', meaning the outskirts of London, 'made up of

¹¹ Spence, *London in the 1690s, A Social Atlas*, (2000), pp. 107-117, p. 155; Gary De Frey, *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London in the First Age of Party, 1688-1715*, (Oxford, 1985), pp. 171-173.

¹² Judy Jowett, *The Warning Carriers: How Messengers of the Goldsmiths' Company warned the Luxury Trades of Criminal Activities in Eighteenth-Century London*, (Silver Studies, Number 18. 2005), pp. 13-16.

¹³ Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London*, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 16.

domestic industry and where characteristically the poor and transient lived, and where work was put *out* to avoid the regulation of the City's guilds'.¹⁴ Nonetheless, Joseph P. Ward, in his study of the City of London guilds, dismisses the assumption that there was a hostile relationship between the City and its suburbs and Liberties. This was, he says, in large part because the guild members, many of whom had a financial interest in the suburbs, were not hostile to their growth.¹⁵ Many guild members including Lord Mayors Sir Samuel Sterling, Crisp Gascoyne, John Parsons and Humphrey Parsons all lived in the east London periphery of St Botolph Aldgate.

Despite this smattering of City aldermen both Pearl and Beier have accentuated the social differentiation of the City of London from its suburbs and Liberties. Pearl found that the expanding, turbulent liberties and suburbs were 'often radical and socially inferior' to the City of London, and Beier has asserted that suburban London was 'another world' that 'presented a sharp contrast to the well-ordered world of merchants and professional men within the City'.¹⁶ Moreover, historians of drama in Renaissance London have embraced these findings. Jean-Christophe Agnew in his study of the markets and the theatre in early modern London has observed that playhouses were also located in the suburbs and liberties of London; places that constituted a 'new extraterritorial zone of production and exchange ...outside London's ancient market

¹⁴ Ferdinand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life 1400-1800*, [1967] trans. Miriam Kochan, (1973), p. 391.

¹⁵ Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity and Change in Early Modern London*, (Stanford, California, 1997), p. 7.

¹⁶ Valerie Pearl, *London at the outbreak of the Puritan revolution: city government and national politics 1625-1643*, (Oxford, 1961), p. 43; Beier, 'Engines of manufacture', in A.L. Beier and R. Finlay, (eds.), *The Making of the Metropolis, London 1500-1700*, (1986), p. 153.

places and thus out of reach of their juridical, ceremonial and talismanic protection and restrictions'.¹⁷

Despite the clear and extensive sense of a coherent 'neighbourhood' found in contemporary descriptions, most modern historical analysis is based on unified jurisdictional boundaries, such as parishes and wards. But even in this administrative context, little is known about the local government on the eastern fringes of the City between the years c. 1690- 1765. Noted historians Peter Clark and Paul Slack have suggested that in the seventeenth century 'London was ruled by an impotent alliance of parish, manorial and county authorities' and that 'the government of outer London steadily disintegrated making it vulnerable to political agitation'.¹⁸ Conversely, Jeremy Boulton notes for Southwark, a large parish similar in many respects to that of St Botolph Aldgate, that 'local government remained an important ubiquitous force... a significant institution in neighbourhood life which lent structure and coherence to society'.¹⁹ With these thoughts in mind this chapter will discuss just how effective the ward and parish were in administering local government in this period and in this neighbourhood. In the process, it will argue that Rosemary Lane forms an important test case, as it sat astride a variety of administrative districts, at parish, ward and county levels. Located just on the edge of the City without the bars, the neighbourhood of Rosemary Lane was partly in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate and partly in that of St Mary Whitechapel, as shown in Fig. 2.1.

¹⁷ J. Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 50.

¹⁸ Peter Clark and Paul Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700*, (Oxford, 1976), p. 71, cited in Boulton, *Neighbourhood*, p. 263.

¹⁹ Boulton, *Neighbourhood*, p. 263.

BOUNDARIES

Clearly boundaries were extremely important. In part this was because they denoted who was entitled to receive parish relief, but also because they defined a community of practice and obligation. Perambulating the parish boundaries was an important event in the church calendar.²⁰ But, for the communities of East London, despite their importance, and the annual ritual of 'beating the bounds', there remained some anomalies. Originally a part of St Botolph Aldgate the tiny parish of Holy Trinity the Minories was considered to be part of the Liberty of the Tower of London from the late 1680s. According to Stow, St Katherine's by the Tower was traditionally a precinct belonging to Portsoken Ward and therefore a section of St Botolph Aldgate (the parish of the ward), part of the Tower Liberties, and a Royal peculiar. Nonetheless, to all extent and purposes by the eighteenth century St Katherine's by the Tower was treated as a separate parish with its own vestry and administrative system. However, just to complicate matters further, occasionally these eighteenth-century parish records imply the opposite.²¹

This complexity did not stop at the normal City boundaries. Both East Smithfield and St Katherine's were situated in the county of Middlesex; however, as they were both within the Tower Liberties and City Freedom they also belonged to the City. Not only were the boundaries complex but they tended to cause some administrative and jurisdiction problems.²² This sort of issue was not entirely peculiar to Rosemary Lane. Petticoat Lane in Houndsditch, for example, was also split between the City and Middlesex. But,

²⁰ Michael Berlin, 'Reordering rituals: ceremony and the parish 1520-1640', in Paul Griffiths, Mark S.R. Jenner, (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social history of early modern London*, (Manchester, 2000), p. 59.

²¹ Strype, *Survey of London, (1720)*, Portsoken Ward, St Katherine's, p. 10.

²² Ruth Paley, 'An imperfect, inadequate and wretched system? policing London before Peel', *Criminal Justice History*, 10, (1989), p. 100.

the level of complexity reached a new high, in Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair, where there were either three or four jurisdictional splits between the City, the Tower Liberties, Middlesex and the Lordship of East Smithfield, depending on how you count them. Despite the confusion (and in theory the City authorities had no real legal jurisdiction in urban Middlesex and vice versa), the City and Middlesex courts seemed to have co-operated when possible.

STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As mentioned above the ward records of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century show that Portsoken ward encompassed just over half of St Botolph Aldgate parish. This chapter will now examine the structure of local government first, in Portsoken ward, and then in the parishes of St Botolph Aldgate and to a lesser extent St Mary Whitechapel. It will ask how successful and wide-ranging was the system of local government in the eastern suburbs and Liberties of the Metropolis and if the fragmented character of local government fundamentally changed the nature of the 'neighbourhood'.

The City

The City of London was ruled by an oligarchy, a corporation which was presided over by the annually elected Lord Mayor and his court of Alderman made up of London's richest and finest merchants and traders. As Alice Campbell notes, there were 26 Aldermen in the City of London, one for each of the City wards. Portsoken was one of these. The 26 wards were themselves in turn divided into 242 small precincts, few larger than 3 acres in size, for tax and administrative purposes. The most senior role in the ward was that of common councilman, who were elected by vestry and ward members, freemen of the City of London. There were in total 250 common councilmen

with some precincts permitted to elect more than one councilman. Elections for common councilman were held at the yearly wardmote on St Thomas's Day.²³

At ground level in each precinct, local government was implemented by the ward, manor and most importantly by the parish. In the 1690s there were 97 parishes within the walls and 13 parishes outside the walls, but still in the City.²⁴ As Craig Spence notes, from those 110 parishes within the 'Bills of Mortality' approximately £40,000 per year was generated by rents on parish property.²⁵ Part of this sum was then dispersed to the parish poor across the metropolis under a scheme managed by the Court of Aldermen along with the distribution of food and coals to the poorest Londoners. The immense scale of these civic institutions, Mayor, Court of Alderman, Common Council, Wards, parishes, Guilds, provided the backbone of both London's administration and of elite social life, and is thought to be one of the reasons for the City's relative stability in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁶

Portsoken Wardmote Inquest

Additionally, in Portsoken Ward, the Wardmote Inquest added a further layer of administration. It was composed of men from each ward forming a jury with a foreman and four speakers. Inquest men, as they were known, were generally those men 'who

²³ Alice E. Campbell, 'The London parish and the London precinct', *Guildhall Studies in London History*, 11, 3, (1976), pp. 117-119; Valerie Pearl, 'Change and stability in early modern London', *London Journal*, 5, (1979), p. 15.

²⁴ D.V. Glass, 'Notes on the demography of London at the end of the seventeenth century', *Daedalus*, (1968), pp. 581-582.

²⁵ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 109-110

²⁶ Valerie Pearl, 'Change and stability' pp. 3-34; Steven Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London*, (Cambridge, 1989), Chapters, 2, 7; Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London*, (Cambridge, 1991,) p. 17, p. 32, p. 62, p. 98.

had either held precinct office or fined for it previously'.²⁷ They performed jury service at the Guildhall each January and they presented and fined those in the ward who were deemed to have caused sexual misdemeanours, a nuisance or breaking any City and Ward regulations which included the errant watch men.

The Inquest Jury also kept an annual list of the licensed victuallers in the ward. In 1687, eight out of thirty one licensed victuallers in Portsoken ward were women.²⁸ Moreover, those caught selling ale without a licence would be brought before the inquest and would be admonished before their peers. This was not a court of record, the accused could not be charged or sent to the house of correction; they were 'presented' and sometimes fined, but the punishment was deemed to be the public censure in front of a twelve man jury of fellow ward inhabitants and neighbours.

The Inquest men would 'perambulate' around the ward two or three times a year dressed in their gowns of office looking for those who kept a bawdy house or an unlicensed ale-house, checking the weights used by butchers and bakers, reporting those who kept bad pavements or did not have a licence to sell goods or certificates of freedom. As the Inquest minutes reveal many women were fined for not having the correct licence. Rosamund Dudley in 1708 and Frances Hennister in 1716 are just two of the many women presented and fined for selling spirits without a licence. Moreover,

²⁷ London Metropolitan Archive, (hereafter LMA), Portsoken Wardmote Inquest Minutes 1684-1798, MS 2649/1; Webb, *English Local Government, vol. II, The Manor and the Borough*, (reprint, 1963), pp. 569-685, P. E. Jones, *The Corporation of London: Its Origins Constitution, Powers and Duties*, (1950); Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 87, p. 136; Campbell, 'The London parish', p. 119; Pearl, 'Change and stability', pp. 3-34.

²⁸ LMA, MS 2649/1.

shop or stall owners could be summoned to attend the inquest and explain why they had used defective weights.²⁹

Keeping a bawdy or disorderly house was a common presentment. In 1685, William White, Combmaker of Little Tower Hill complained to the Inquest men that his neighbours were keeping bawdy houses.³⁰ In 1684 George Watts, was presented for keeping a bawdy house on Little Tower Hill, 'wherby much mischief passes and doth dayley and so said by persons or most of them'.³¹

Property owners or their licensees could also be summoned to explain why they had bad or blocked paving as this was deemed their responsibility.³² This was to continue until the 1760s when a succession of Paving Acts came into force across London beginning with the Westminster Paving Act of 1762. The Westminster Act endeavoured to employ teams of commissioners to keep the streets of London under repair. The new Acts eventually brought about a more uniform scheme for scavenging the streets, and for the removal of household rubbish and for dealing with any blockages on the highways.³³

Many of those who were presented at the Wardmote for having defective paving outside of their properties were elite house holders or owners of properties in the ward. It was the obligation of each householder to keep the pavement outside of their property clear and in good repair. Nonetheless, in 1694 the Chamberlain of the Tower was presented for having a bad pavement on Little Tower Hill. Lady Fitch and Sir John Swoopato were both presented for having defective pavements in the Minories, while John Bigham was

²⁹ LMA, MS 2649/1.

³⁰ LMA, MS 2649/1.

³¹ LMA, MS 2649/1.

³² Webb, *The Manor and the Borough*, pp. 594-606, Campbell, 'The London parish', pp. 118-119

³³ George, *London Life*, pp. 107-108.

presented in 1698 for keeping horses in his cellar. In 1688 a list of local people who were reputed to be Papists were also presented.³⁴ Moreover, in 1714 Widow Tanner was presented for keeping a stall or a shop 'not being free' and one Sarah Adams shared the same fate in 1717.³⁵ On the other hand, how much of a reprimand was being presented or fined at the annual Wardmote? This is unclear; though many of those who were fined were repeat offenders, suggesting that they did not take the punishment too seriously.

Constables were nominated on a yearly basis and they worked alongside the ward beadle to maintain the requirements of the watch. Moreover, ward constables were also tasked with reporting non-attendance at church and, as Alice Campbell adds, any misbehaviour by parishioners that occurred during church services.³⁶ The parish and the ward were intrinsically linked and especially in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate which was the only parish in the ward of Portsoken.

Each year the wardmote jury would make a formal report of its findings for the year to the Court of Aldermen. They hoped that by bringing troublesome cases such as the illegal Rag Fair to the attention of the City government they would receive official City help to have the nuisance abated. The ward Inquest records show repeated presentments over several years of unlawful hawkers and 'a great number of disorderly persons' for selling 'old cloaths and rags forestalling the inhabitants' ... anywhere from Tower Hill to Rosemary Lane.³⁷ There is no doubt that nuisance was taken seriously. It was seen as a step on the road to chaos and instability by early modern authorities.

³⁴ LMA, MS2649/1; I Will & Mar. c. 18 (1689).

³⁵ LMA, MS2649/1.

³⁶ Campbell, 'The London parish', p. 119.

³⁷ LMA, MS2649/1.

Moreover, the majority of complaints presented before the Wardmote Inquest were more in the spirit of maintaining order and discouraging disorder. 'Annoyances, Misdemeanours and Defaults' that occurred in the ward had to be curbed.³⁸ The petitions and proclamations concerning Rag Fair will be discussed further in chapter 4, but this nuisance and the unwillingness of the City authorities to regulate the market, brings us back to the issue of the policing of Rosemary Lane by the City marshals, constables and watchmen.

East Smithfield, Leet and Baron Courts

Playing a similar role to the Wardmote Inquest, but for those parts of the neighbourhood contained within the Manor of East Smithfield, in the Middlesex section of the parish of St Botolph Aldgate, the Manorial Court Leet and Court Baron met once or twice a year, presided over by the Lord of the Manor or his steward. In the 1730s this was Sir Humphry Parsons MP, Alderman and proprietor of the Red Lion Brewery. The East Smithfield Court Leet, Maitland tells us, received, 'pleas, for any sum under 40 shillings'. The Court had one 'Stewart, a town clerk and three attorneys'.³⁹ Sidney and Beatrice Webb have written that the manorial courts in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were mostly used for the 'Suppression of Nuisances'.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Wardmote Inquest and the East Smithfield and St Katherine's Court Leet were used to manage common nuisances associated with the Manorial market, 'the Assize for Ale... unscoured

³⁸ LMA, MS2649/1.

³⁹ William Maitland, *The History of London from its foundation by the Romans to the present time... With several accounts of Westminster, Middlesex, Southwark, and other parts within the Bill of Mortality*, (1739), vol. 1, p. 392.

⁴⁰ Webb, *The Parish and the County*, pp. 13-29.

ditches, unmended highways, trees overhanging the road...or declining to serve as an Ale-taster, Dog-muzzler, or Scavenger'.⁴¹

the great court of the manor or court baron was..., essentially a private Court of the Lord, necessarily incident to every Manor, having for its object the maintenance of the rights of the Lord against his tenants and of the privileges of the tenants against the Lord, together with the settlement of their mutual differences and the organisation of their common affairs. It was not a court of record but a private jurisdiction forming part of the estate and property of the Lord.⁴²

The Court Leet along with the Court Baron could also make its own by-laws which were binding on all the residents of the manor. Richard Burn wrote in 1756 that:

Any Court Leet, with the assent of the tenants, may make By-laws under certain penalties, in relation to matters properly within the cognizance of such Court, such as reparation of the highways and the like.⁴³

The court was summoned by a notice given by the Steward to the Reeve or Bailiff, then affixed to the church door, or the Quest House door in East Smithfield. The court was presided over by either the Lord or his Steward. Summons were not issued as attendance by all the tenants of the manor, whether freeholders or copyholders, was compulsory. The Webb's note that the Courts Leet could also be criminal courts, courts of record with the Steward of the manor presiding. Similar to the Wardmote Inquest, the Court Leet could fine, but it had no power in the first instance to gaol or imprison those found guilty.⁴⁴ It was 'empowered summarily to punish by fine any contempt committed in Court and even to commit the offender to prison in default of payment'. In

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 13-29.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁴³ R. Burn, *Justice of the Peace*, vol. iii. p. 240, (1820) quoted in Webb, *The Parish and the County*, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁴ Theodore Barlow, *The Justice of the Peace*, (1745), p. 159.

the manorial Court Leet the Steward was thought to have powers equal with that of a Justice of the Peace.⁴⁵

The Court Leet of East Smithfield was quite similar to the Ward Inquest in that it had a jury and many of its members served on the St Botolph vestry and as Ward Inquest members. In 1730 a Mr P. Bentham, was steward to the court.⁴⁶ The jury members perambulated around the manor twice a year collecting rents and checking for disorder. The four Headboroughs and two Constables were told to 'enquire and present all Nuisances that which is an annoyance to many' and report to the Steward. In their attempts to keep order and to dispel disorder before it could occur, the list of nuisances included:

If any encroach upon the King's highway inclosing any part of it - this is a nuisance. If any make laystalls and Dunghills or lay Timber wood or other things on the King's highway this is a nuisance and enquirable. If any diverts an antient way or water course of its proper channel this will be enquirable. If any person lay any carrion or any other ...dirt in the highway this is a very great nuisance and by you enquirable. You are to enquire of Eve Droppers such as listen at walls or windows to hear tales and report them if as neighbours they tend to breach the peace. You are to enquire and present all common Baretors and Scolds and other breakers of the peace. You are to enquire of all unlicensed Alehouses and if any Alehouses have a licence ...you are to enquire if they keep good orders and their houses, otherwise you are to punish offenders. You are to enquire of all Gaming house, houses of Bawdery and other such disorderly places.⁴⁷

Checks were made on defective weights used in shops and Constables were also told to enquire of 'all Bakers, Butchers, Poulterers and others' that they 'vend good meat...fitt for men's body'.⁴⁸ Once again the majority of 'Nuisances' that were presented and fined were those that concerned blocked or bad pavements and those caught with defective

⁴⁵ Webb, *The Parish and the County*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ LMA, MS 9680/1, fo 218, fo 217.

⁴⁷ LMA, MS 0428/1-2.

⁴⁸ LMA, MS 0428/1-2.

weights. Fines ranged from 1 shilling to 10 shillings. In 1756 James Whaley who lived by the May Pole at the start of Butchers Row was fined 10 shillings for having a bad pavement outside of his building. Richard Douglas and Nathaniel Norris of Nightingale Lane were each fined 3 shillings 4 pence for the same misdemeanour while Edward Worth was fined 3 shillings 4 pence for having defective scales.⁴⁹

The neighbouring precinct of St Katherine's by the Tower, (Fig. 2.1) enjoyed a similar local Leet Court with an annual meeting held every Michaelmas, on 29 September. The local business discussed at this gathering included the election of precinct officers, making disbursements to the poor (which would normally be a parish function) and maintaining the watch-house and the engine for putting out fires.⁵⁰

St Botolph Aldgate

The parish of St Botolph Aldgate formed the largest administrative jurisdiction involved in running Rosemary Lane. It covered almost 80 acres of land and experienced sustained growth during the early modern period. It was a large but poor parish, described by William Maitland in 1739 as 'one of the most populous places within the bills of mortality'.⁵¹

The northern part of the parish of St Botolph Aldgate was based in Portsoken ward; while the Southern part of the parish was within the Lordship of East Smithfield, in the County of Middlesex.⁵² The boundaries of the parish were also significant to the

⁴⁹ LMA, MS 0428/1.

⁵⁰ LMA, MS 9680/1, fo218, fo217.

⁵¹ Maitland, *The History of London*, (1739), p. 391.

⁵² Frederick Youngs, *Guide to the Local Administration Units of England*, Vol.1: (Southern England), p. 299, p. 341.

parishioners and nowhere more so in parishes such as St Botolph Aldgate, St Sepulchre, St Andrew Holborn and St Giles Cripplegate which incorporated both the City and Middlesex borders. Moreover, as Ian Archer notes, vestry members maintained loyalties to their section of the parish and 'divisions were maintained' in the way that vestrymen were deliberately chosen from and for the differing sections of the parish.⁵³

This same pattern of awareness and loyalty was also evident in parish bequests with testators specifying the section of the parish that they wanted to benefit. One testator, former Alderman Sir Samuel Starling, donated property rents to the building of a school to educate boys from each half of the parish, but then specified that the schoolhouse was to be situated in the Middlesex section of the parish. Sir John Cass of St Botolph Aldgate stipulated in his will that some of the rents collected from his properties in the area should be used to fund a school specifically to be built on the City side of the parish beside the church.⁵⁴

The church and parish of St Botolph Aldgate were described in 1714 by James Paterson in his survey of London Church life, *Pietas Londinensis*:

St Botolph without Aldgate - it so called because it's very near Ald-gate, without the Walls, but within the Liberties of London, it's an ancient church, built of Brick and Stone; it escaped the Violence of the Fire in 1666; and is adorned with a great many antient Monuments, a fine Organ, given by Mr Thomas Whiting; a large Tower one hundred foot high, with six Bells; a beautiful School-house, erected close to it by Sir John Cass in 1710; and enriched with divers large Donations, from well-disposed Benefactors thereto; and consists of a large and populous parish; wherein are above one thousand dwelling houses.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ian Archer, 'Government in early modern London' in *Two Capitals, London and Dublin*, p. 147.

⁵⁴ *A new and compleat survey of London. In ten parts. ... In two volumes. ... By a citizen, and native of London.* Vol. 2, 1742. 2 vols, *Eighteenth Century Collections On-line*, www.gale.cengage.com accessed, 4 March 2010.

⁵⁵ H.P. Thompson, *Thomas Bray*, (1954), pp. 86-88.

The bequest was to be administered by the vestry clerk, Jeremiah Bentham (senior), who at the time of the bequest, also sat on the committee for the workhouse until his death in 1741.⁵⁶ The Sir John Cass Foundation continues to support educational projects in London to this day.

As mentioned above the first school in the parish was funded by a bequest from vestry member Sir Samuel Starling in 1673. This was considered to be unusual at this time. Starling, donated annual rents of £22 from properties he owned in the parish of St Mary Whitechapel as a foundation of the school 'for the better education of the poor youth' of the parish of St Botolph Aldgate. The school was built at the end of the Quest House on Little Tower Hill with a 'teacher qualified with a Batchelor of Arts from Cambridge' employed to teach 40 boys and 30 girls. The school was to be jointly administered by the jury of the Leet Court of Manor of East Smithfield and the Inquest of Portsoken ward.⁵⁷

As Michael Berlin notes for early modern Londoners, 'the parish was the crucial nexus of urban existence'.⁵⁸ St Botolph Aldgate was no exception; for parishioners it was the hub of local government and it was the main resource for welfare for the poor of the parish. The parish vestry contained a small group of wealthy men mostly merchants such as Starling and Cass in the late seventeenth century and for the eighteenth century local notables included fellow vestry members J.P. Richard Riccards, Joshua Harle and merchant Edward Holloway. One of the most prominent families was that of Sir John Parsons of the Red Lion Brewing Company in St Katherine Street. Parsons was the Lord of the Manor of East Smithfield keeping a house in Well Close Square. A leading Tory and

⁵⁶ Malcolm Johnson, *Outside the Gate: St Botolph's and Aldgate 950-1994*, (1994), p. 33.

⁵⁷ Strype, *Survey of London (1720)*, pp. 44-45.

⁵⁸ Michael Berlin, 'Reordering rituals' in Paul Griffiths and Mark S.R. Jenner, (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social history of early modern London*, (Manchester, 2000), p. 50.

M.P. for Reigate Parsons was also Sheriff of London in 1687, and Lord Mayor 1703-4.⁵⁹ His son Sir Humphrey was elected Lord Mayor of London in 1731 and 1741, and despite his Jacobite leanings and regular visits to the Pretender's court in France he became M.P. for London in 1727. Sir Humphrey Parsons was Lord of the Manor of East Smithfield he died during his second term as Lord Mayor in 1741.⁶⁰ However, we also know from probate material, vestry minutes and from the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, that the vestry also contained a host of substantial, but less wealthy tradesmen and merchants. This will be discussed further in chapter 3. However, in the first half of the eighteenth century, the membership of the vestry included surgeons, butchers, brewers, licensed victuallers, jewellers, a builder, brasier, wine importer, shipwright, leather cutter, currier, vintner, bricklayer, broker, funeral director, upholsterer, grocer, brandy importer, confectioner, plasterer, draper, distiller and inn keeper.⁶¹

Extra-parochial churches

The neighbourhood also had its fair share of Non-conformist meeting houses which would confirm in part, Pearl's view of its often 'radical' history.⁶² As discussed in the introduction, the city suburbs, especially the east side, quickly earned a reputation for puritanism and radicalism during the reign of Charles I. Pearl suggests that puritanism

⁵⁹ History of Parliament On-line, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/parsons-sir-john-1639-1717> accessed 9 June 2013.

⁶⁰Spence, *London in the 1690s*, p. 118. In the 1693-4 Aid assessments John Parson's property in Well Close Square had a rental value of £117 per annum for stock valued at £3,200, which Spence attributes to brewery stock; Charles Welch, 'Parsons, Humphrey (c.1676-1741)', rev. Jacob M. Price, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21460>, accessed 19 Oct 2011.

⁶¹ Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills accessed at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/>. (hereafter TNT), John Hills, Apothecary, (TNT PROB, CW 11/739); Nathaniel Bell, (TNT PROB CW 11/1011); John Whalley, Grocer, he supplied cheese to the workhouse, LMA, St Botolph Aldgate Renter Churchwarden Accounts, MS 2627/1;. Further examples of vestry members and their varied occupations are included in chapter 3

⁶² Pearl, *Puritan revolution*, p. 40.

was perhaps particularly strong in the Liberties because 'the magistrates of these areas were much less well organised than the City Aldermen and less likely to report seditious teaching to the Privy Council'.⁶³

As shown on John Rocque's map of London and Westminster in 1746, this area included five parish churches, two Presbyterian meeting houses, four Anabaptist meeting houses, a Quaker meeting house, and three Independent meeting houses, a Jewish synagogue, Huguenot church, a Swedish church, Danish church at Well Close square and a Flemish church close to the Tower itself. This was all within a 3 mile radius. The Irish also had a large base in East London and particularly on Rosemary Lane and while they did not openly worship, Irish Catholics were evidently a strong presence in this neighbourhood and, while normally accepted as a part of the community, were at other times subject to discrimination by their English protestant neighbours.

It is not known how many Nonconformists, were members of the St Botolph Aldgate or St Mary Whitechapel vestries during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Roman Catholics and those who refused to swear an oath of allegiance and supremacy were required to pay tax at double standard rate, and were also excluded from serving in local government. And while this blanket exclusion did not apply to most dissenters, some parishes, such as St. Martin in the Fields, passed resolutions excluding Nonconformists from becoming either Churchwardens or serving as vestrymen. Sidney and Beatrice Webb believed this was a relatively widespread occurrence; although they also note that some vestries allowed wealthy Nonconformists to take more lowly offices

⁶³ Ibid.

and then charged them a hefty fine for release from office.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, we cannot confirm how many Nonconformists lived in this neighbourhood but we do know that it was an area that attracted new immigrants and people who wanted to live outside of the City Walls. We will now move on to discuss the part that the parish and ward played in keeping order in this neighbourhood in east London.

The cost of governance

All this administration came at a cost. Each parish vestry was responsible for the collection of local parish taxes in the form of 'rates' levied on the rentable value of all fixed property. A church rate was collected from each household in the parish, the proceeds from which went towards the upkeep of the fabric and functioning of the church. Although a poor parish, St Botolph Aldgate was unusual in that it was a beneficiary of a number of parcels of land and property gifted to the parish from some of its wealthy parishioners on their death, though these never came close to covering annual expenses.⁶⁵

In addition to the church rate, a poor rate was levied on all property with a rental value over £1 per annum. This again was collected from each householder and used as the basis to pay for monthly pensions to the sick and needy of the parish, to the nurses who cared for many paupers, and for occasional supplies and 'disbursements' to needy parishioners.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Spence, *London in the 1690s*, p. 11; Webb, *The Parish and the County*, pp. 242-243.

⁶⁵ Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, p. 189.

⁶⁶ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, p. 109; Maitland, *The History of London*, (1756), pp. 1208-9; Pearl, *Puritan revolution*, pp. 45-68; J.M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror*, (Oxford, 2001), p. 89.

There were also central government taxes, raised with the aid of a set of local commissioners, who collected additional revenue from the same householders on a yearly basis. Originally, this took the form of a four shillings in the pound tax rate in support of William's wars of the 1690s; however, by 1700 it became a permanent annual 'Land Tax'. Although a national levy, the local collectors could well have been the self-same vestry men that collected parish taxes - men who knew the residents and the area.⁶⁷

The vestry minutes for St Botolph Aldgate are remarkably comprehensive and show just how involved many local inhabitants were in the everyday affairs of the parish. In order to govern and organise the parish the vestry included four churchwardens, two overseers of the poor, five headboroughs, two constables, six scavengers, two beadles and eight watchmen.⁶⁸ It was also one of the largest and poorest out-parishes in London in the eighteenth century.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, there were more than a few elite and middling men living in this parish; many of whom were members of the vestry and ward inquest juries. In 1622-3 St Botolph Aldgate was confirmed as a select vestry by the Bishop of London and it was said to be governed by 'fifty substantial parishioners'. Twenty four parishioners in each half of the parish, usually the most affluent and prosperous men of the parish were named.⁷⁰ However, by the mid-1740s Maitland remarks that the vestry was 'neither select nor general; with all being admitted who have serv'd or fin'd for offices'.⁷¹ Vestry members included the Bentham family who were active parish members of St Botolph Aldgate for at least two generations. Jeremiah Bentham Senior,

⁶⁷ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 7-14.

⁶⁸ Maitland, *Survey of London*, (1739), pp. 389-392.

⁶⁹ Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, pp. 189-190.

⁷⁰ D. A. Williams, 'London Puritanism: the parish of St Botolph Aldgate', *Guildhall Miscellany*, 2, 1, (1960), pp. 24-38.

⁷¹ Maitland, *Survey of London*, (1739), pp. 389-392.

trustee of the Cass foundation, lived in Church Lane beside St Botolph church where his grandson Jeremy Bentham, the social reformer and philosopher was born in 1748.⁷²

Overseers appointed from the vestry had responsibility for assessing the poor rate and for its collection. This involved a systematic perambulation of all the streets in the parish, going door to door and recording all the details of who had paid, and whether a house was empty.⁷³ This was a time consuming job for an unpaid parish officer, and since the overseer had to recoup the money they spent from their own pockets on the poor from the rates, the position could also prove financially awkward as well. Edward Hatton records in his *New View of London* published in 1708, that there were 2,300 houses in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate in the early part of the century.⁷⁴ Despite this, as we have seen there seems to be little disintegration in parish standards that Clark and Slack found in London parishes, in St Botolph Aldgate.

THE WORK OF PARISH AND WARD OFFICERS

Sidney and Beatrice Webb summed up the power of the local parish vestry when they wrote that it was the custom for the parish to 'provide for its inhabitants whatever services or regulative ordinances were deemed locally expedient...'. More importantly, and as they acknowledge, the eighteenth century parish was the core of local government responsible for the burial grounds, parish cottages, parish land, endowed charities, watchhouses, whipping posts, clocks and fire engines:

maintenance of the church and its services, the keeping of the peace, the repression of vagrancy, the relief of destitution, the mending of the roads,

⁷² LMA, MS 2545/4, 1744-5; F. Rosen, 'Bentham, Jeremy (1748-1832)', **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography** (Oxford, 2004; online edn, May 2007).

⁷³ Campbell, 'The London parish', p. 117.

⁷⁴ Edward Hatton, *A New View of London: or an Ample Account of that City in two Volumes or eight Sections*. Vol. 1 of 2, (1708), pp. 167-168.

the suppression of nuisances, the destruction of vermin, the furnishing of soldiers and sailors...were among the multitudinous duties imposed on the parish and its officers by the law of the land.⁷⁵

Poor relief

Care for the poor and elderly formed a vast set of responsibilities for the mainly unpaid parish officers and vestrymen. Moreover, there is no doubt that they endeavoured to do this to the utmost of their ability. Possibly, to ease this burden, the parish of St Botolph Aldgate was maintained as two separate entities, with an upper precinct and a lower precinct for 'civil purposes'. This meant that each section of the parish was responsible for collecting the local taxes including the Poor Rate, Church Rate, the Paving and Scavenger rates. In 1711 the Overseers for the East Smithfield half of the parish were able to report from their rate books that there were '1,409 houses and about 9,000 inhabitants, of whom two thirds do not pay poor rates'.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Webb, *The Parish and the County*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ LMA, MS 2712, 1711-1738.

	Poor Rate Collection	Church Rate Collection	Total Rate collection disbursed to the poor in 1727	Houses
St Botolph Aldgate 1727 Upper precinct	£802.0.0	£1,002 7s 6 ½d	£1,311 5s 8d	1239
St Botolph Aldgate Lower precinct East Smithfield 1727	£761 8s. 3d	£997 12s 9¾d	£1,159 12s 9½d	1435
St Mary Whitechapel 1727	£1,383 19s. 7d	£1,100 14s. 1d	£ 2,107 4s. 5d	2792

Table. 2.1: Rates collected from St Botolph Aldgate and St Mary Whitechapel in 1727.

By 1727 there were thought to be 2,674 houses overall in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate with Samuel Jordan, Overseer of the Poor and Churchwarden Thomas Lloyd collecting £1563 8s. 3d from those parishioners who paid poor rates.⁷⁷ As Table 2.1 shows, overall and including a donation from the Church Wardens account £2,470 18s. was collected and disbursed to the poor and needy of St Botolph Aldgate in 1727. Moreover, the parish of St Mary Whitechapel, another poor parish, was in a similar position. Although they had just one hundred more houses, they collected a similar amount of money for the poor. In the same year, the parish of St Mary Whitechapel received a total of £2,107 4s. 5d that they could use for the poor of the parish.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Maitland, *The History of London*, (1739), pp. 389-392, pp. 779-780.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

The St Botolph Aldgate vestry minutes record thousands of payments made to the parish poor and to some casual and unsettled poor, as well. Parochial relief took the customary form of a mixture of pensions and casual payments. Moreover, from 1728 to 1739 regular weekly pensions ranging from 6d to 2 or 3 shillings were received by parishioners, and money for shoes and clothing including clothes from Rag Fair seen below in Fig. 2.3. Other disbursements were made to a few 'strangers', vagrants or a person without settlement, but this was usually money to bury them or send them on their way.

	Paid for a shirt for Jonathan	2	8
	A pair of shoes & buckles for Ja: Stuart a fish boy.	1	6
	for Marg: Hockerday at Goughy.	4	—
	A pair of shoes & stockings for Riders son.	10	8
	A gown Betty: shoes stockings shift apron hanker: }	2	4
	and cap for Marg: May in the hospitall.	17	6
	A pair of shoes for William Tompson & Courant.	1	9
	Paid for shoes stockings & shirt for Wm: Stevin W: }	11	10
	Wallis Mary Macklow and Eliz: Lewis.	1	9 2
	A pair of shoes for Sarah Kempthorn & Jones.	3	6
	A coat & shirt for W: Wallis shoes shift & pair of }	3	6
	boodie for Marg: May a frock & shirt for }	1	1
	Dumcalff Child all cost.	6	—
	Paid for 35 Ells of cloth at 10 ^s Ell to make shirts for 4 ^{Boys}	1	9 2
	For making the said shirt and shift.	3	6
	Two pair of shoes for Herbert two Boys.	3	6
	A D: for Mary Elliot at Paris's.	1	—
	Paid for cloathing Marg: Mays children when she }	6	—
	came out of the hospitall.	1	9
	A pair of shoes for Wm: Martin.	3	2
	A pair of shoes & stockings for Geo: Earle.	4	6
	and for two shirts.	7	2
	A pair of Old shoes for Hannah Funderston.	2	6
	A pair of D: for James Stuart at Pennys.	14	—
	Tabitha Lester & John her son pap's from Aldgate above }	4	—
	being sick and almost naked paid for cloathy at Ragg }	2	—
	hair when they went into the Hosp: just.	9	—
	Paid for two pair of leather breeches for 2 Boys.	2	—

Fig. 2.3: Disbursements to the poor of St Botolph Aldgate.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ LMA, MS 2642/1, St Botolph Aldgate, Vestry Minutes Disbursements, 1724-37, no page number, 1730. See also MS 2627/1, 1742, Renter Churchwarden Accounts, 'Paid Philip Frith for Apparel for the Workhouse bought at Rag Fair £4 14 7'.

The 1662 Act for 'the better Reliefe of the Poor' updated from the Elizabethan statute of 1601 is usually known as the Act of Settlement.⁸⁰ This was thought to have been ill-thought-out poor law legislation; however, it did define settlement according to place of birth, and gave parishes the right to restrict migration into the parish and to exclude those from other parishes.⁸¹ It was updated in 1685, forcing strangers to a parish to rent a property of not less than £10 per year, or if they failed to do so, to make themselves known to a parish officer within 40 days of residency, giving details of their family situation.⁸² Those 'immigrants' to the parish that were thought most likely to become chargeable could be forcibly removed by two justices of the peace. This legislation was in turn modified by two further Acts in 1692 and 1697, which formalised the system of settlement and removal that would continue largely unchanged until the end of the Old Poor Law in 1834.⁸³ Under this system, besides renting a tenement worth £10 per annum, a settlement could also be gained by the payment of local rates, or via a former indenture as an apprentice, or the easiest way, by marrying someone with a settlement in that parish. Most poor people gained a settlement by birth or marriage.

⁸⁰ 43 Elizabeth c. 2, (1601); 13 & 14 Charles II c. 12, (1662).

⁸¹ Stephen M. MacFarlane, 'Social policy and the poor in the later seventeenth century', in A. L. Beier and R.A.P. Finlay, (eds.), *London, 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis*, (1986), pp. 252-277; Tim Hitchcock and John Black (eds.) *Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examinations, 1733-1766*, (1999), pp. viii -xi. See also Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling poverty: the voices and strategies of the English poor, 1640-1840*, (1997), pp. 1-18.

⁸² 1 James II c. 17; Hitchcock and Black, *Chelsea Settlement*, pp. ix-xi.

⁸³ Hitchcock and Black, *Chelsea Settlement*, p. x; William & Mary, c.11, and 8 & 9, William III, c.30; Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782*, (Basingstoke, 1990), pp. 59-64.

Middlesex for the Examination of Jane Gater of the parish of St
 Botolph without Aldgate in the said County single woman
 taken on oath before Me one of his Majesties Justices
 of the peace for the County of Middx. residing in or
 near the said parish of St Botolph without Aldgate this
 Seventeenth Day of May 1760

This Examinant on her oath saith that about eight Months ago one Thomas
 Smith of Watling Street near Cheap side London Upholsterer did
 prevail with this Examinant to suffer him to lye with her at the house
 of his father Thomas Smith in Moor Fields in the parish of Saint
 Botolph without Bishopsgate London Broker And the said Thomas
 Smith the younger had carnal knowledge of this Examinants Body
 several times where by she conceived with Child or Children of which
 she now goeth with and is pregnant And this Examinant saith that
 the said Child or Children of which she now goeth with and is
 pregnant as aforesaid is or are likely to be born a bastard or bastards
 and to be chargeable to the said parish of St Botolph without
 Aldgate she being poor and not able to provide for the same And that
 the said Thomas Smith the younger is the true and only father of
 the said Child or Children so likely to be born a Bastard or Bastards
 as aforesaid And lastly saith that this Examination is voluntary
 and that she hath not been forced or compelled to be examined by
 any Person or persons whatsoever

Sworn this 17th Day of May
 1760 before Me

The Mark of
 Jane Gator

Chris. Scott

Fig. 2.4: St Botolph Aldgate Pauper Settlement for Jane Gater

Source: LMA, MS 2676/3, St Botolph Aldgate Pauper Settlement, Vagrancy and Bastardy Examination book, 1757-1761.

Nonetheless, at least theoretically, every parishioner had a 'settlement', and a large component of parish work involved policing that system of belonging, through examinations, certificates and removals. Jane Gater (Fig. 2.4) is a typical case of a young woman in need of relief. Gater was dismissed from her job as a servant when her

employers found out that she was pregnant to the son of the house. In order to recoup the likely cost of supporting her bastard child, the parish needed to establish the father's identity, and did this via a 'bastardy examination', which allowed it to demand a bond indemnifying the parish from the father.⁸⁴ Equally typical was the case of Ann Willcox, whose settlement was based on that of her husband, Joseph, who had 'gone to sea' and not returned. Willcox, swore on oath that her husband had been bound for several years as an apprentice to a Mr Steel in the Flemish Church Yard (St Katherine's precinct) but 'gained no subsequent settlement' before his departure. Or Henry Roberts, who gained relief when he swore that he was:

Thirty three Years ago, Bound Apprentice for Seven Years to Mr. Phelix Oneal, by St. Katherine's Dock in the precinct of St. Katherines in the County of Middx , Cork Cutter and served all his Apprentiship there and gained no Subsequent Settlement since to his knowledge.⁸⁵

These were common enough bases for a case, and in each instance, the mutual obligations between parish, pauper and in the case of Jane Gater, the father of her child, was established through a formal settlement or bastardy examination, leading to the doling out of relief. But, even where a settlement was disproved, some relief might be expected. Tim Hitchcock notes those who were turned away from the workhouse or without settlement could receive some form of casual payment even if it was only to enable them to leave the parish.⁸⁶

Payments to the poor were made for an almost unlimited variety of reasons, but usually involved immediate need, medical care or clothing. For example in June 1728

⁸⁴ LMA, MS 2676/3, Pauper Examination book, 1757-1761; Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, *et al.*, *London Lives, 1690-1800* (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 24 April 2012), (hereafter LL), **ref:** GLBAEP103080057. See also MS 2678/2 Register of admissions to the workhouse 1736-1816.

⁸⁵ LMA, MS 2676/1, 1743-5.

⁸⁶ Tim Hitchcock, *Down And Out in Eighteenth Century London*, (2004), p. 144.

disbursements to the poor of the parish included a payment of 6 shillings to 'Taft the Madman', while, 8d. was paid for 'for washing Jane's things for the hospital' and five shillings for 'Cloaths for Anne Rawson at the Hospital'. In December of the same year payments were made for several 'strangers taken out of the street' and two shillings was paid for 'Carriage and Subsistence for Rachel Wood to Nottingham'.⁸⁷ On the 2nd September 1730 (see Fig. 2.3) the parish paid fourteen shillings for 'Tabitha Lester and her son passage from Aldgate being sick and almost naked, Cloathes from Ragg Fair when they went into the hospital'.⁸⁸ While far from being a perfect system, the vestry minutes show that local government, the vestry, was evidently doing its best to provide help to its poorest inhabitants.

Besides outdoor relief and occasional payments in extremis, St Botolph Aldgate also had two workhouses, according to Maitland, one in each part of the parish, built in the 1730s.⁸⁹ In 1768 there were 145 inmates in the St Botolph Aldgate East Smithfield work house.⁹⁰ Payments are shown to local suppliers, almost 50 on the list, many of whom were also members of the vestry. They included Solomon Morgan of Kings Street who supplied groceries and soap; Henry Willoughby of Hartshorn brewery, Ditch Side for supplying ale; Robert Freeman who supplied bread; and Edward Worth a butcher from Last Street, East Smithfield who supplied meat. Only a few women are listed as suppliers and they were most probably widows: Mary Wilford a grocer, Elizabeth

⁸⁷ See Fig. 2.3 from LMA, MS 2642/1, 1728-1737.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Maitland, *The History of London*, (1739), pp. 389-392;

⁹⁰ LMA, MS 2627/1, Church Warden's Accounts 1746; LMA, MS 2682, Workhouse weekly expenditure 1767-1828; MS 2688/1, list of suppliers to the workhouse.

Hickman who supplied cheese and Mrs Mary Blore of Pains Rents East Smithfield who supplied coffins.⁹¹

THE WATCH

Valerie Pearl notes that 'the government of London consisted of a multitude of overlapping courts and jurisdictions in which the citizens and housekeepers were either represented or took part in person'.⁹² Indeed, beadles, constables, headboroughs and watchmen of each parish and ward were still primarily responsible for maintaining order on the City streets. Order or the concept of order was a paramount concern for London's authorities. Furthermore, concerns regarding the ability of the watch to deal with the rise in crime in the metropolis at night time continued to multiply.

Throughout most of the eighteenth century the streets of London were policed in the day by the marshals, constables and deputy constables and in the evenings by the watchmen in their respective parishes. In 1663 an Act of Common Council declared that there should be 5 constables for Portsoken ward, which included Rosemary Lane, one constable to every 277 houses. Even with deputy constables in tow this was not very many men for such a 'disorderly' area. The so-called 'Robinson Act' named for the sitting Lord Mayor of 1662 John Robinson, also decreed that the City's watchmen should patrol from 9pm to 7am in winter and from 10pm until 5am in summer. In 1705 there were thought to be 27 night watchmen patrolling all of Portsoken ward with approximately 1,400 houses on their beat.⁹³ Again not a large number of men to patrol such a notorious

⁹¹ LMA, List of inhabitants who served or were fined for various parish duties, MS 2671/1; LMA, MS 2688/1, 1764, list of suppliers to the workhouse.

⁹² Valerie Pearl, 'Change and stability', pp. 15-16.

⁹³ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p.116, pp. 175-176. See also Elaine A, Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: The Night-watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London 1720-1830*, (Stanford, California, 1998); Tony

area and even this figure probably overstates the level of policing. Each ward had to pay and staff their own beat, which meant that in reality many posts remained vacant.

It is clear that many contemporaries had little faith in the watch. Under manning of the watch was a problem that many parishes and wards faced. Prior to an Act of 1737 each ward and parish had to supply their own watchmen. This meant in practice that only a few parishes could afford to pay for the constables or watchmen that they were supposed to have. Moreover, many Common Councilmen were of the opinion that a move away from a night watch made of up parish volunteers or conscripts was needed.⁹⁴ Occasionally lack of a watch house or neglect of the watch house also became a problem for the neighbourhood. In 1694 several inhabitants of the Liberty of East Smithfield in St Botolph Aldgate complained that their watch house had fallen into disrepair and that the watch 'had been forced to make use of a public house, which produces many inconveniences, the watchmen being often overtaken in drink'.⁹⁵

If we are to believe M. Dorothy George, a watch house was a necessity in this area, as she contended, 'East Smithfield, Houndsditch, parts of Shoreditch and Whitechapel, Rosemary Lane (Rag Fair), Petticoat Lane and Radcliff Highway were dangerous neighbourhoods'.⁹⁶ In 1708 a petition was sent from the churchwardens and constables of Whitechapel parish to 'their worshipful majesties and justices of the peace for the County of Middlesex' declaring that a watchhouse was needed. The petitioners wrote of

Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*, (1999), pp. 104-105; Tim Wales, 'Thief-takers and their clients' in *Londinopolis*, pp.67-84; R.B. Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in Rural Middlesex*, (Cambridge, 1991); R.B. Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder In Eighteenth Century England*, (London and New York, 2004), p. 34.

⁹⁴ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p.116.

⁹⁵ Middlesex county records, Calendar of Sessions Books, 1689-1709 (1905), p. 96, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=66106&strquery=ragfair>, accessed 12 November 2007.

⁹⁶ George, *London Life*, p. 93.

their concern regarding the nuisance caused by the ‘many abuses and irregularities committed in Ragg Fair...’ with no watch-stand or watch-house close by the constable on watch had to do so from ‘a nearby public house which proves inconvenient’.⁹⁷

Thomas Nash replied on behalf of the Middlesex bench, ordering a watch house to be built, and Whitechapel vestry members were told to ‘summon before them the inhabitants of the said parish and precinct’ to get it done.⁹⁸ The much maligned watch were given a watch house which stood in the centre of Rag Fair at the end of Rosemary Lane and the start of Cable Street. Consequently, in 1717, one Austin Davies from Whitechapel received this note from parish Constable George Gerrard giving him orders to stand his turn at the nightly watch.

You are hereby summoned to appear at the Watchhouse [at] the Lower end of Rosemary Lane near Rag Fair on Tuesday the 24th of this Instant September by ten of the Clock at Night and bring with you a Staff Six Foot long [and] also a Lauthorne & Candle and there Attend until the watch Breaks up. Fail not at Your Peril.

Given and my hand this 5th day September 1717. Geo Gerrard. Constable.⁹⁹

As Keith Wrightson reminds us, petty officers such as constables or watchmen were ordinary members of the community.¹⁰⁰ Early modern local government meant that petty officers were elected to serve by the community, whether it was the vestry or the wardmote. The only way of evading serving in the role of watchmen, constable or scavenger was to pay a fine which in turn would then pay the salary of the office left vacant.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ LMA, MJ/1708/10/21.

⁹⁸ LMA, MJ/SP/1708/10/57.

⁹⁹ *LL*, January 1718, page 0047, ref: LMSMPS50167PS501670047.

¹⁰⁰ Keith Wrightson, 'Two concepts of order: Justices, constables and jurymen in seventeenth-century England', in John Brewer and John Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (1980), p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, 'The London parish', p. 120.

Various attempts were made in the 1720s to improve the ways that the night watch was recruited and organised. In April 1720 an 'Act for the appointing a Nightly Watch, and regulating Beadles, in ... England', was proposed and passed in the House of Commons. The act proposed that the watch should be regulated by local Justices of the Peace.¹⁰² This would involve 'two or more JPs having ultimate control with the ability to decide how the watch would operate in each parish: how many watchmen, how many hours they would work, their route, weapons and their pay'. The watch would be coordinated by the high constable and parish constables with an extra rate levied to each parish member who paid the poor rate to cover the additional costs.¹⁰³

However, this bill and several similar regarding a reorganisation of the night watch failed to get through the House of Lords. Elaine Reynolds notes that the 1720 Act was formally opposed by the Westminster Burgesses and the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey who believed the bill removed their authority over the parish watch and that it was 'prejudicial to their ancient Rights and Privileges'.¹⁰⁴ Reynolds also suggests that 'its failure was a measure of the growing power of the parish vestries in Westminster', this was in no doubt in part due to the number of aristocratic householders in that parish.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, in 1735 a succession of Watch Acts for Westminster were finally passed that were applicable to each parish or to the City and Liberty overall.¹⁰⁶ They gave the Middlesex justices the right to oversee any parochial

¹⁰² Elaine Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830*, (1998), p. 11

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the metropolis, 1730-1830*, (1999), p. 105.

watch in Westminster.¹⁰⁷ Westminster was the starting point, by 1737 the Common Council pushed through a City wide Watch Act which was implemented by all the London wards; resulting in the reformation of the watch in at least the Western part of Rosemary Lane. St Mary Whitechapel did not have a Parochial Night Watch Act imposed until 1763, creating a disparate geography of policing, for much of the century.¹⁰⁸

The London wards had the main responsibility for managing the numbers of watchmen allocated to them by Acts of Common Council, but the parishes and precincts were also involved.¹⁰⁹ An escalation in robberies in 1733 persuaded the vestry in St Botolph Aldgate to increase their nightly watch. On the 28 October the watch was set at 9 pm until 6 am in the morning with four watchmen ordered to stay at their box until they were relieved by the constables in the morning. A further six men had to stay at their night watch stands around the parish. One was placed: 'at end of Norwich Court, one at the pump at Butchers Row, one at St Benet's Wharf gate, one at the Williford's door, one at the shops in Swann Alley and the last one at [vestry member] Mr Denow's house on Rosemary Lane'.¹¹⁰

Nonetheless, the numbers of watchmen for each ward remained dependent on the wealth of the parish or ward in question. As noted above, in 1705 there were 26 night watchmen patrolling Portsoken ward, and 28 after 1737, with each watchman responsible for almost 50 houses.¹¹¹ This figure compares badly with the more affluent

¹⁰⁷ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁸ Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁹ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 174.

¹¹⁰ LMA, MS2642/1, 1733, MS 2534/49-56, 1731-32. John Denow appears in the poor rate assessment as the householder of a property on Rosemary Lane.

¹¹¹ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 116, pp. 175-176. See also Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 169-225.

Cornhill Ward, which in 1737 had one watchman per ten houses or Cheap Ward which had one watch man per 14.1 houses.¹¹²

The Watch Act of 1737 decreed that watchmen should be at their post or boxes on every night of the year from 10pm until daylight in the summer and from 9pm in the winter.¹¹³ Furthermore, in 1744 in the parish of Christ Church, Spitalfields, the vestry arranged the watch so that 'every inhabitant may have a watchman by their door every three-quarters of an hour'.¹¹⁴ Ruth Paley argues that this was not an exceptional case, indicating that perhaps the poor reputation that contemporaries gave to the local watch was exaggerated.¹¹⁵ Moreover, as Tony Henderson points out, watchmen were constantly reminded of their duty according to the Act itself, 'to apprehend all Nightwalkers, Malefactors, Rogues, Vagabonds, and all disorderly Persons whom they shall find disturbing the Public Peace, or shall have just cause to suspect of any evil designs'.¹¹⁶

However, this particular Act of 1737 and its consequent improvements, either in practise or in the level of policing, were established precisely to help calm the growing fears of crime felt by Londoners. Nevertheless, these measures fell short as a correspondent of the *Whitehall Evening Post* concluded:

The Frequency of audacious Street Robberies repeated every Night in this great Metropolis, call aloud on our Magistrates to think of some Redress; for, as the Case is now, there is no Possibility of stirring from our habitations after dark, without the Hazard of a fractured Skull, or the Danger of losing that Property

¹¹² Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 144-145. The 1737 bill was passed as 10 Geo II, c.22, (1737).

¹¹³ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 197.

¹¹⁴ Paley, 'An imperfect, inadequate and wretched system?', p. 115.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Cited in Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 89-90; 10 Geo.II, c.22 (1737), An Act for the Better Regulating the Nightly Watch and Bedels within the City of London and Liberties thereof; for Making more Effectual the Laws now in Being, for Paving and Cleansing the Streets and Sewers in and about the said City.

People are sometimes obliged to carry...These Villains now go in Bodies, armed in such a Manner, that our Watchmen, who are generally the superannuated Sort, absolutely declare, they dare not oppose them...¹¹⁷

Fear of disorder was more evident especially after a war, when a populace of unemployed soldiers and sailors were newly discharged on to the streets. In 1749, Londoners were still experiencing the after effects of the War of The Austrian Succession.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, as Tony Henderson notes, public concern regarding the watchmen and the constables did not diminish but grew over the century. Attempts to regulate and discipline their behaviour became commonplace. Thus in the 1790s:

McDonald, one of the Supernumerary Watchmen of this parish for suffering Disorderly Women to be Cursing and Swearing in the Street and making a Riot and he in his box and took no notice of them. Caslake, Watchman, Parliament St. for harbouring bad Women upon his Beat at ½ past 2 O Clock. Dawson, a Supernumery Watchman for harbouring loose women in and about his stand.¹¹⁹

Moreover, minutes recorded at the Portsoken Wardmote court confirm that many complaints were received regarding watch men, some who were censored for 'Neglect of Duty' and others for 'harbouring women of the town'. Thus, the watch continued to be ridiculed in the press and on the streets with some commentators advising that watchmen were less evident patrolling their 'beat' and more often found 'in the more congenial surroundings of the watch house'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *Whitehall Evening Post*, 14-17 January 1749, Cited in N. Rogers 'Confronting the crime wave: the debate over social reform and regulation, 1749-1753' in Davison, L., Hitchcock, T., Keirn, T & Shoemaker, R.B., *Stilling The Grumbling Hive, The Response To Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750*. (Stroud, 1992), p. 104.

¹¹⁸ Shoemaker, *The London Mob*, p. 40.

¹¹⁹ Westminster City Archives: F2282, 29 Sep 1791, E3048, 20 Aug 1785, E3050, 15 Mar 1791, cited in Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 110.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-110. See also *The Times*, 10 May 1786.

WHEN GOVERNANCE FAILS

In 1727-28 Daniel Defoe published a series of pamphlets on property crime and social order. He suggested that London was becoming 'a Scene of Rapine and Danger' and he particularly criticised the watch. He also condemned plays such as Gay's *The Beggars Opera* (1728) for encouraging 'Rogues', who now 'valued themselves on their Profession' and 'the watchmen who were unable to control them because they were 'for the most Part, decrepit, superannuated wretches'.¹²¹

What is more, as Robert Shoemaker has argued, the eighteenth century was 'quintessentially the century of the mob'.¹²² Fears concerning mob activity on the street were widespread with the 'poor' assumed to be rioting over some issue most days. However, the lower classes were not the only rioters on the street; as Shoemaker points out there were on occasion people of all classes involved in street protest. On the other hand, for contemporaries the fear of the 'mob' was fear of the disorderly lower classes gathering together, becoming uncontrollable and upsetting the whole order in society. Henry Fielding wrote of 'his fears that the 'disorderly throng had become so powerful' that it 'threaten [ed] to shake the balance of our constitution'.¹²³

1736

Undeniably, most Londoners were apprehensive when they saw or heard that the mob had taken to the streets. To that end the following event is a reminder of the fragility of maintaining order in an overly populous neighbourhood. Indeed alarm bells must have rung for Robert Walpole in the antagonistic summer of 1736 when in July of that year

¹²¹ Daniel Defoe, *Augusta Triumphans: Or, the Way to make London the Most Flourishing City in the Universe*, (1728) p. 48, cited in Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 190.

¹²² Shoemaker, *The London Mob*, pp. 110-152.

¹²³ Cited in Shoemaker, *The London Mob*, pp. XI-XII.

rioters shouting 'down with the Irish' took to the streets of East London.¹²⁴ The Irish in question lived in and around Rosemary Lane close to Salt Petre bank and the Rag Fair.¹²⁵

The riots which began in Shoreditch and Spitalfields culminated in an attack on houses around Rosemary Lane, Rag fair and Cable Street. Moreover, we know that the disturbances in July 1736 were taken seriously. Horace Walpole and his brother Robert exchanged several letters to this effect. George Rudé writes that they were ultimately worried that the riots would spread into the city.¹²⁶ On Monday 26 July 1736, Horace Walpole reported that a group of men had assembled in a 'very disorderly manner' at Shoreditch near Spitalfields. He wrote that their 'cry and complaint was of being underworked and starved by the Irish'.¹²⁷ And while this gathering was dispersed peacefully by the militia from the Tower the mob continued to gather on the subsequent evenings. By Thursday night the mob had reformed in Brick Lane, where John Collet a local resident and Militia lieutenant caught up with the rioters and ordered his men to load their guns. Collet asked the leaders directly the cause of their complaint. A spokesman from the mob claimed that the master builder of St Leonards Shoreditch church had sacked his English work men and employed Irish men who worked for a cheaper rate, he also claimed that several of the master weavers in Spitalfields 'employed none but Irish by which means the English manufactures were starving and they chose rather to be hanged than starved!' ¹²⁸

¹²⁴ George Rudé, "'Mother Gin" and the London riots of 1736', *The Guildhall Miscellany*, September, no 10, (1959), p. 55. Along with the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, George Rudé still provides one of the best descriptions of the riot and the background to events. To note, two hundred years after this event Rosemary Lane (Royal Mint Street) and Cable Street would become the setting for another infamous riot instigated by Oswald Mosely.

¹²⁵ Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin, Irish Migrants in Victorian London*, (Manchester, 1979), pp. 45-67.

¹²⁶ Rudé, "'Mother Gin" and the London riots of 1736', p. 55.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 55-56.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 56.

Collet's response was to caution the mob that the master builder Mr Goswell had already dismissed his Irish labour and had now employed English men in their place. Moreover he reported that Chetham, the Spitalfields weaver who employed 200 Irish weavers, had promised to discharge them when they had finished their current pieces. Accordingly, on hearing Collet's explanation the mob dispersed. Moreover, on Friday morning Horace Walpole prematurely reported to his brother that there was now 'an end to this bustle'. However, he spoke too soon, as Rudé notes the mob reformed on Friday the 30th July around Brick Lane and Spitalfields joining forces with local rioters around Goodman's Fields before they marched into Rosemary Lane and Rag fair shouting 'King George forever and down with the Irish'.¹²⁹

Nonetheless, considering the numbers of Irish who lived in this neighbourhood and the level of anti-Catholic feeling that ebbed and flowed it is actually surprising that there were not more riots. Moreover, according to M. Dorothy George the Irish in London 'were a police problem, a sanitary problem, a poor-law problem and an industrial problem'.¹³⁰ Perhaps this was a bit of an exaggeration by George, this riot was not just an indiscriminate attack on properties purported to be Irish. This riot had been meticulously planned: the mob leader on this occasion carried a list of names and addresses of people and particular buildings that they wanted to attack.¹³¹

Consequently, Mary Connelly of Rag Fair - a witness to the events - described to the Old Bailey how the mob informed local English people to 'put a candle in their window or

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 57

¹³⁰ George, *London Life*, p. 125.

¹³¹ *OBP*, Robert Page, William Orman Rod, Thomas Putrode, 13 October 1736, t17361013-5.

they would pull their houses down'. A light in a window was a common method of showing support for a cause.¹³²

By the time the mob reached Rosemary Lane they were said to be several hundred strong. They continued on to Rag Fair causing havoc as they went, passing Well Street where they pulled down a tavern - they then went on to attack the Bull and Butcher a large coaching Inn on the corner of Cable Street.¹³³ John Waldon, the publican, testified that he was in bed when he heard the mob attack his windows. He jumped up, bolted his doors and told his eighteen lodgers to 'get up and shift for your lives'.¹³⁴ Waldon was fortunate that his property and guests escaped more serious damage and injuries. The mob continued to smash his windows stealing some legs of lamb that were hanging there.¹³⁵ In Rag Fair they tried to demolish the Queen's head alehouse which was owned by an English man. They then went on to attack the Windmill Alehouse in Back Lane, Well Close square before crossing into Mill yard where they attacked a boiling cook's shop and a tavern kept supposedly by Irish people.

Richard Burton a brewer's cooper described how he was at the end of Red Lion Street and saw the mob coming down Bell Yard with sticks and lighted links. Burton described how one man made 'a sort of speech directing the rest to go to Church Lane to the

¹³² *Daily Gazette*, 2 August, 1736, George Rudé, *Paris and London in the 18th Century*, (1974), pp. 202-11; Rudé, "Mother Gin" and the London riots of 1736', pp. 53-63; Peter Clark, 'The 'Mother Gin' controversy in the early eighteenth century', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 38, (1988), pp. 63-84; Shoemaker, *The London Mob*, p. 119; *OBP*, Mary Connelly, 13 October 1736, t17361013-5, OB t17361013-6.

¹³³ *London Evening Post*, 30 July 1736.

¹³⁴ *OBP*, Robert Mickey, Joshua Hall, 13 October 1736, t17361013-6; *OBP*, Robert Page, William Orman Rod, Thomas Putrode, 13 October 1736, t17361013-5.

¹³⁵ *OBP*, Robert Mickey, Joshua Hall, 13 October 1736, t17361013-6; *OBP*, Robert Page, William Orman Rod, Thomas Putrode, 13 October 1736, t17361013-5.

Gentlemen and Porter alehouse'.¹³⁶ Burton then ran to alert his neighbour Austin Allen, licensee of the Gentlemen and Porter. However, the mob were already there carrying great sticks 'like stakes from baker's bavins' to attack his house. Burton told how he tried to dissuade the mob from their attack but to no avail and they proceeded to break the windows and try and destroy the property.¹³⁷

Austin and Elizabeth Allen were by all accounts saved by local magistrate Clifford William Phillips from Goodman's Square who arrived along with Richard Farmer JP and the Captain and some guards from the Tower. *Read's Weekly Journal* reported that Justice Phillips led the guards 'with his sword drawn seizing a number of the mob himself'.¹³⁸ The Riot Act was read once more but as the *Daily Gazette* noted the mob failed to disburse until almost daylight.¹³⁹

It is difficult to ascertain how many people were injured in this riot. There is evidence that at least three people were shot and several people injured. However, it is still unclear as to whether those shot or injured were victims or perpetrators.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the majority of information regarding the actual riot is taken from newspaper reports and witness depositions. Nonetheless, nine men were consequently arrested and taken to the watch house in Rag Fair for the night. The *Daily Gazette* noted that none of the men charged had any visible connection with the local industries linked to the Irish workers.¹⁴¹ While the authorities must have been thankful that the mob gathered in the

¹³⁶ *OBP*, Robert Page, William Orman Rod, Thomas Putrode, 13 October 1736, t17361013-5; Rudé, "Mother Gin" and the London riots of 1736', pp. 53-63.

¹³⁷ *OBP*, Robert Page, William Orman Rod, Thomas Putrode, 13 October 1736, t17361013-5.

¹³⁸ *Reads Weekly Journal or the British Gazetteer*, 7 August, 1736.

¹³⁹ *Daily Gazette*, 2 August, 1736.

¹⁴⁰ Rudé, "Mother Gin" and the London Riots of 1736', p. 58.

¹⁴¹ *Daily Gazette*, 3 August 1736; On the 23 August one of the foot guards from the Tower, Joshua Hall was sent to Newgate by Clifford William Phillips for his involvement in pulling down houses during the riots, *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, August 23 1736.

suburbs away from the City, they were still close enough to the City walls to cause concern.

Furthermore, by all accounts normality returned to this neighbourhood by the weekend. Unfortunately for the Irish in this neighbourhood, many of whom were upstanding citizens, an imbedded history of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudices tended to intensify in extremis. Anxieties regarding the Irish population in London ebbed and flowed with rumour and times of political unrest. George Rudé has suggested that the passing of the new Gin Act that had just been approved and was due to come into effect in September was a major factor in the riots and unrest that took place in east London in July.¹⁴²

Gin and Justices

The 1736 Gin Act (the third attempt at addressing the issue in under a decade), was aided on speedy passage through parliament by information gathered by the Middlesex justices who were asked to compile a report detailing the numbers of vendors selling spirits in Middlesex.¹⁴³ They found that there were 7,044 premises selling spirits in the county, half of which were established victuallers with 3,855 who sold gin and brandy alone.¹⁴⁴ The detailed but not exactly accurate information gathered by the parish constables in 1736 shows that the majority of people selling distilled spirits in Whitechapel were the alehouse keepers followed by the Chandlers, small shopkeepers

¹⁴² Rudé, "Mother Gin" and the London riots of 1736', p. 54.

¹⁴³ Clark, The 'Mother Gin' controversy, p. 66. See also Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker (eds.), *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800*, (Cambridge, forthcoming), Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁴ LMA, MR/LV06/44, A list of the Victuallers, inn holders, coffee houses and all other retailers of distilled liquors in the parish of Whitechapel, Jan 3rd 1735/6; LMA, MR/LV06/51-54 list of Brandy sellers in East Smithfield, Jan 1735/6, ES /56.

who sold everything from cheese to gin. Moreover, the gathering of this information by informing constables caused resentment among the many small retailers who could ill-afford to pay their rent never mind purchasing a yearly licence.

In the parish of St Mary Whitechapel a tailor, a shoemaker, a painter, and a gardener were among those who sold gin and brandy without a licence. The new Gin Act would try to enforce a £50 licence to sell spirits on every one of these petty salesmen and women. The Act was promising to cripple those small time sellers of distilled spirits who would never be able to pay the new licence fee.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, the Act itself caused division among the Middlesex justices and particularly in the neighbourhood of Rosemary Lane where the information for the first report was gathered. In this area alone between 3 April and 12 June 1738, there were 79 trials brought under the Act, seventy-five of which were based on the evidence of an Informer.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the very same justices who were active on the evening of the main anti-Irish riot along Rosemary Lane, Clifford William Phillips JP and Richard Farmer JP were deeply involved in this process. However, Phillips a distiller by trade was against the Act while Farmer was in favour of the Gin Act and an avid supporter of the excise men and local informers.

In 1737 Phillips and Farmer had a public argument in Rag Fair concerning their opposing views on the use of informers and excise men used to bring offenders to court for breaches of the Act. Their disagreement ended in the courts with Phillips suing Farmer for libel. Consequently, Phillips was reprimanded by the bench for his support

¹⁴⁵ Clark, 'The 'Mother Gin' controversy', p. 78; *The Daily Gazette*, 2 August 1736.

¹⁴⁶ Jessica Warner, Frank Ivis, 'Informers and their social networks in eighteenth-century London: a comparison of two communities', *Social Science History*, 25:4, (2001), pp. 569-571.

for a woman from Rag Fair, who had been convicted under the new Gin Act of 1736. Phillips was said by Farmer to have 'given great Encouragement to the Breach of the Act ...and done his utmost to discourage all Endeavours to bring offenders to justice'.¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, despite this censure Phillips was later knighted for his service to the Commission of Peace in Tower Hamlets.¹⁴⁸

There remained significant public concerns about the justices in the neighbourhood of Rosemary Lane, and the ability of local government to maintain order. This concern was exacerbated by the behaviour of men such as Richard Farmer, and his fellow Justice, Sir Samuel Gower who, besides using informers in relation to the Gin Act, were responsible for issuing many of the warrants employed by thief-takers, and who shared the proceeds from prosecutions. A broader discussion in relation to the judiciary and the thief-takers will be undertaken in chapter 5.

CONCLUSION

Most of our knowledge about Rosemary Lane is based on the records of Portsoken Ward and St Botolph Aldgate parish, the 'neighbourhood' encompassed many more layers of local government than this, creating a complex patchwork of authority, obligation and belonging. Sometimes, as in 1736, the system broke down; or criminals and thief-takers, used the very complexity of the system for their own benefit. But local government nevertheless provided a wide-ranging and surprisingly effective service to the majority of its inhabitants. Evidence of this effectiveness, can be found both in the payments made to the poor, the weekly pensions and the upkeep of the workhouse; and

¹⁴⁷ Warner and Ivis, 'Informers and their social networks', p. 568.

¹⁴⁸ *Westminster Journal or New Weekly Miscellany*, 18 October 1746.

in the levels of participation in vestry and ward offices, by everyone from knights of the realm, to drapers and salters and undertakers. The Leet and Wardmote courts had little real power beyond chivvying householders to do the right thing, but they were nonetheless, a real presence. However, that some names can be found in attendance at the Court Leet of St Katherine and then again at the Court Leet of the Manor of East Smithfield at the St Botolph Vestry and again at the Wardmote Inquest, suggest that the 'neighbourhood' remained the dominant focus of identity, while parish, wardmote and court Leet, effectively served, rather than simply governed, this larger community.

This highly populated area on the City's eastern border had a system of local government in place that despite its many limitations almost worked. Order was maintained by people obeying the rules and regulations. This chapter has shown the background or backbone of the structure of local government and authority in this area. By striving to keep an orderly City, they hoped to deter threats of anarchy and insurrection and fears of the omnipresent mob that were existent among many of London's residents. It has revealed itself to be a mostly orderly, but rather unremarkable London suburb. Subsequent chapters will show a different picture, including the extent of poverty and the extent of crime and disorder that lay beneath this somewhat calm surface.

Chapter 3

The Social Geography of an East London Community

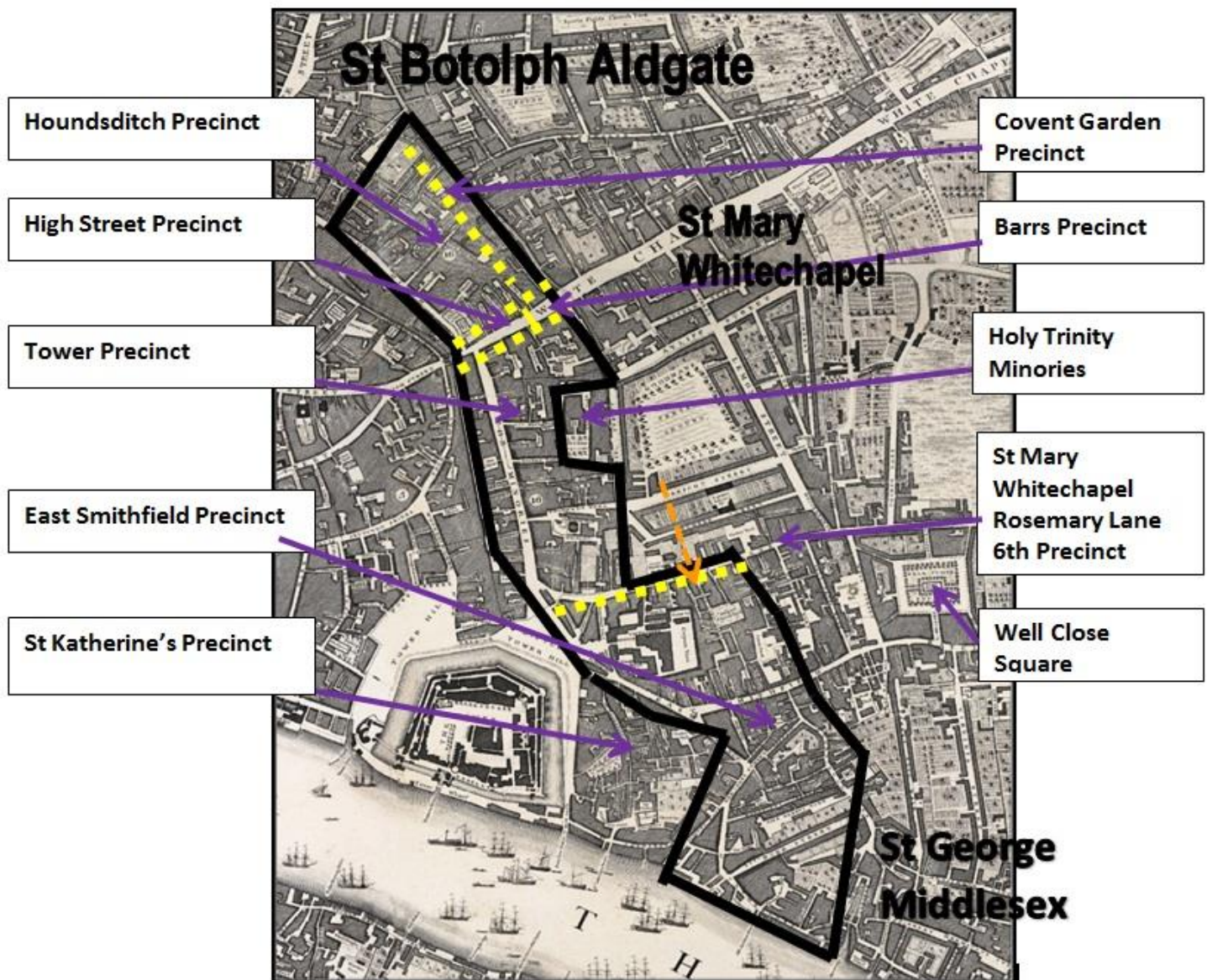


Fig. 3.1: Map of St Botolph Aldgate showing precincts

Source: *A Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark; with the Contiguous Buildings; From an actual Survey taken by John Rocque Land-Surveyor, and Engraved by John Pine, Bluemantle Pursuivant at Arms and Chief Engraver of Seals, &c. to His Majesty.*

Courtesy of © Motco Enterprises Limited, Ref: www.motco.com (hereafter *Rocque's Map 1746*) showing the parish of St Botolph Aldgate, The precincts of Houndsditch, Covent Garden, Barrs, High Street, Tower Hill and East Smithfield, Holy Trinity the Minories, St Katherine's Precinct, Well Close Square, St Mary Whitechapel parish and St George in the East parish.

Key: The **Black** solid line denotes the parish boundaries of St Botolph Aldgate. The **Yellow** dotted line marks the precincts within the parish. The **Orange** arrow denotes Rosemary Lane.

INTRODUCTION

If we look into the Streets, what a medley of Neighbourhood doe we see! Here lives a personage of high Distinction; next Door a butcher with his stinking Shambles! A Tallow-chandler shall front my Lady's nice *Venetian* window; and two or three naked curriers in their Pits shall face a fine Lady in her back Closet, and disturb her Spiritual thoughts.

Old England, (Saturday, July 2, 1748).¹

This contributor to *Old England* was describing the streets of the metropolis as a whole, but they could as easily have been specifically referring to Rosemary Lane which throughout the eighteenth century was characterised by just this same mixed population. Despite Rosemary Lane's reputation as a 'disorderly' neighbourhood, it nevertheless contained many substantial householders, happy to live amongst their poorer neighbours. This chapter explores this mixed social geography of wealth and poverty.

By the nineteenth century the East End had garnered a solid reputation as a 'slum' that acted as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, the very word 'slum', derived from London cant and meaning a back room or alley was popularised in books known as 'East End' novels. Unfortunately, by the early to mid-1800s a large section of Whitechapel and the surrounding area could be described as a 'slum' as it increasingly suffered from bad housing, bad sanitation, dirty alleys and streets, disease, and abject poverty. Street clearances and lack of decent housing ensured that this densely packed area suffered disproportionately as a result of the cholera epidemic of 1866 that left 3,909 people

¹ *Old England*, (Saturday, July 2, 1748); also quoted without attribution in George Rudé, *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808*, (1971) p. 86.

dead in its wake.² This 'slum' reputation was enhanced by the writers and commentators of the later nineteenth century who used the revelations that emerged following the crimes of 'Jack the Ripper' to tar the neighbourhood with a lasting association with violence and poverty.³ They also encouraged the fashion for 'slumming', a new phrase coined to describe the tourists who flocked to the East End to stare at the poor, frequently in specially commissioned omnibuses.⁴ Alan Mayne and Tim Murray have suggested that some historians have perpetuated a slum myth, especially for the East End of London, and that historians need to measure the 'essence of slums' against their 'environmental reality'. At the same time, and as Mayne has also argued 'Slums are constructions of the imagination', invented by 'bourgeois entertainers and social reformers'.⁵ But, for the East End this 'slum' reality, as much as the invention and reputation of the East End in the minds of a wider public, was essentially a nineteenth century creation. And yet, many historians and commentators have used this image of nineteenth-century London, with its rookeries and dark and dirty streets, to stand in for the very different reality of the East End in the eighteenth-century.⁶

An equally powerful image of the area is based on a more fully evidenced literature relating to seventeenth-century London. In the work of Michael Power, R.W. Herlan, Jeremy Boulton and most recently, Joseph Ward, a detailed picture of the settlement

² Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, (1971), pp. 103-104; H.J. Dyos, 'The Slums of Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, 11, (1967), pp. 5-40; H. J. Dyos, 'Urban transformations: a note on the objects of street improvement in Regency and early Victorian London', *International Review of Social History*, 2, (1957), pp. 159-265; David. R. Green, *From Artisans to Paupers, Economic Change and Poverty in London, 1790-1870*, (1995), pp. 181-184; Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, (Princeton, 2004), pp. 190-193. See also Jerry White, *London in the 19th Century*, (2007), pp. 9-35.

³ L. Perry Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, (New Haven, 2001).

⁴ Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 5-14.

⁵ Alan Mayne and Tim Murray, (eds.), *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes Explorations in Slumland*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 2; Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspapers Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914*, (Leicester, 1993), p. 1.

⁶ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (1966, 2nd edition, reprinted 1987), p.33, pp. 93-95, p. 345.

patterns of seventeenth-century London has begun to emerge that depicts the area east of the Tower as at least significantly socially mixed, if not wealthy. Michael Power has done the most to unpack and explore the development of the seventeenth-century East End with his detailed work on residential growth in the area, suggesting the built-up area was expanding rapidly and attracting substantial investment.⁷ Taking a wider view of London as a whole, R.W. Herlan has argued that poverty was most fully located in the City and western areas, rather than in the east. On the basis of parish poor rate returns of the 1650s, he has argued that London's poor lived principally in the large City parishes just outside of the walls and in a few parishes west of London Bridge.⁸ Joseph Ward adds to this picture the suggestion that although some neighbourhoods were wealthier than others, 'the liberties and suburbs did not consist only of London's poor'. He believes that 'the metropolis was a mixture of rich and poor'.⁹ The most detailed work on London's neighbourhoods is that of Jeremy Boulton, who has emphasized the importance of studying London's citizens in their immediate context in his work on both Southwark and the parishes in the West End. In this work, he has identified distinct social topographies of two different neighbourhoods in London that provide us with a clearer idea of the social mix in each. As he observes, 'residential patterns reflected the

⁷ M. J. Power, 'The Social topography of Restoration London', in A.L. Beier and R. Finlay, (eds.), *The Making of the Metropolis, London 1500-1700*, (1986), pp. 202-204; M.J. Power, 'East London housing in the Seventeenth Century', in Peter Clarke and Paul Slack, (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700: Essays in Urban History*, (1972); Michael J. Power, 'Shadwell: The Development of a London Community in the 17th Century', *London Journal*, 4, (1978); Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth Century London*, (2004).

⁸ R.W. Herlan, 'Social articulation and the configuration of parochial poverty in London on the eve of the Restoration', *Guildhall Studies in London History*, 2, 2, (1976), p. 53; M. J. Power, 'Social topography', p. 206; D. V. Glass, 'Notes on the demography of London at the end of the seventeenth century', *Daedalus*, 1968, p. 583; P.E. Jones and A.V. Judges, (eds.) 'London Population in the Late seventeenth Century', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Oct., 1935), pp. 45-63.

⁹ Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity and Change in Early Modern London*, (Stanford, Nov 1997), pp. 16-25.

social composition of urban areas and the ways in which individuals related to each other'.¹⁰

Again working on the West End, Robert Shoemaker has found that in the late seventeenth century substantial numbers of poor inhabitants could be found in the same neighbourhoods as wealthy ones. He suggests that 'this may have caused the social character of some inner West End parishes to decline markedly'.¹¹ Boulton's study of West End parishes echoes these findings, concurring with Shoemaker that while 'poverty was far from an overwhelming problem in the West End, with one in five in St Martin's and one in seven in St Paul's considered too poor to pay the tax, Westminster and many districts of suburban London returned twice as many poor'.¹² Finally, Michael Power's study of the Hearth tax returns for the 1690s indicates that the 'wealthy' parishes of London were not completely restricted to the central areas of the city, but 'spread out from east to west'.¹³ While none of this literature focuses directly on the East End, it is hard to escape the conclusion that while some areas outside of the City contained large concentrations of poor people, in reality the poor (and the well-to-do) were to be found in every parish in early modern London.

¹⁰ Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 166- 167; Craig Spence, *London in the 1690s: A Social Atlas*, (2000). For sixteenth and seventeenth century St Botolph Aldgate see also 'People in Place: families, households and housing in early modern London, 1550-1720', <http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/pip/project.html> and *Life in the suburbs: health, domesticity and status in early modern London*, <http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/LITS/index.html> directed by Professor Matthew Davies and Professor Vanessa Harding.

¹¹ Robert Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in London and Rural Middlesex, c. 1660-1725*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 292.

¹² Jeremy Boulton, 'The poor among the rich: paupers and the parish in the west end, 1660-1724', in Paul Griffiths, and Mark. S. R. Jenner, (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social history of early modern London*, (Manchester, 2000), pp. 197-215.

¹³ Power, 'Social Topography', pp. 202-204; J. Langton, 'Residential patterns in pre-industrial cities: some case studies from seventeenth century Britain', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 65, (1975), pp. 1-27; Gerald D Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City*, Chicago, 1968), pp. 11-18; S. Martin Gaskell, (ed.), *Slums*, (Leicester, 1990).

This picture has been reinforced by recent work on the built environment. Peter Guillery's *The Small House in Eighteenth Century London* has done a great deal to map the housing quality experienced by poor Londoners, while Miles Ogborn's work has taken a fresh look at the historical geography of some of London spaces, and presents new perspectives on public places such as the Magdalen Hospital and Vauxhall Gardens.¹⁴ At the same time, and especially in relation to the built environment, the eighteenth-century East End remains largely unexplored. And as Julie Schlarman writing in 2003 on the social geography of Grosvenor Square, has noted, there remains relatively little by way of an architectural history of early eighteenth-century London, and in particular, housing is 'relatively under researched'.¹⁵

Much of this literature focuses on seventeenth-century London, and while it overlaps with this study in the 1690s there remains a large *terra incognita* between the 'slum' of nineteenth-century imagination, and the 'mixed' neighbourhoods of the seventeenth century. We still know relatively little about who lived on London's streets, or the houses they occupied, whether rich, poor or somewhere in the middle during the early and mid-eighteenth century.

This chapter cannot provide a comprehensive social-geography of the East End - the records do not allow this. But, it will create a snapshot of one East End neighbourhood in the first half of the eighteenth century that seeks to go beyond the hackneyed picture

¹⁴ Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity, London's Geographies 1680-1780*, (1998). See also Frank Mort and Miles Ogborn, 'Transforming metropolitan London, 1750-1960', *Journal of British Studies*, 43: 1, (January, 2004), pp. 1-14. For an alternate poststructuralist view on space and geography see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall, (Berkeley, C.A., 1988); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicolson-Smith, (Oxford, 1991).

¹⁵ Julie Schlarman, 'The social geography of Grosvenor Square: mapping gender and politics, 1720-1760', *London Journal*, 28, 1, (2003), pp. 8-9.

of either a dark Dickensian rookery, or the possibly anachronistic image of an early modern 'mixed' community. It will explore the social structure of the parishes just east of the City wall, and compare the social composition of St Botolph Aldgate, with its neighbours: St Mary Whitechapel, Holy Trinity Minories, Well Close Square and St Katherine's precinct by the Tower (Fig. 3.1). By examining the five parishes that surround and encompass Rosemary Lane an estimate will be made of its community structure. To achieve this, and following a review of the seventeenth-century development of the area, this chapter utilizes land tax assessment and parish tax assessment data from the mid eighteenth century to explore the social structure, precinct by precinct.

POPULATION GROWTH

The most robust, if crude, measure of population growth can be found in the changing character of the built environment. Up to 1600 very little building had taken place on the land east of the Tower. Much of the area remained enclosed pasture land.¹⁶ However, the seventeenth century saw building along the eastern City wall, from Houndsditch to the Minories and St Katherine's Precinct. New houses spilled eastward, into East Smithfield, following the route of Ratcliff Highway to Rosemary Lane (Hog Street), and northward to Whitechapel Street and Spitalfields. Regulations and proclamations issued by James II to restrict building seemed unable to stop this urban growth. On Tower Hill alone 200 new but poor quality houses had been constructed by

¹⁶ Power, 'East London housing', p. 238; Vanessa Harding 'Families and housing in seventeenth century London', *Parergon*, 24, 2, (2007), pp. 119-120; John Stow, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster: containing the original antiquity, increase, modern estate and government of those cities*, written at first in the year MDXCVIII by John Stow, citizen and native of London...Now lastly, corrected, and very much enlarged ...by John Strype,...in six books, (1720), 2 vols. Vol. 1, Book. II, Chapter 2, *Eighteenth Century Collections On-Line*, (ECCO), *Eighteenth Century Collections On-line*, www.gale.cengage.com accessed, 11 December 2010, pp. 4-28.

1649. Rules were flaunted and despite some houses being pulled down, others were quickly put up in their place.¹⁷ Development occurred around the Navy Victualing Yard built on the grounds of the former Abbey of St Mary Graces (the burial place of many of London's plague victims), and houses also began appearing around Goodman's Fields north of the Almshouses on Rosemary Lane so beloved by Stow.¹⁸

Many of these new dwellings in Spitalfields were built by John Flower and Gowen Dean. The mid-seventeenth century also saw local brewer Alderman John Parsons and the political economist Nicholas Barbon approve sales of land in the Old Artillery ground for new housing. The newly built streets were thought to be more orderly in design with Pennington Street just south of Ratcliffe Highway held up as an exemplar of new artisan housing. Builder John Pennington was also responsible for the building of streets around Goodman's Fields with his partner Sir William Leman, a wealthy Hertfordshire baronet.¹⁹ Many of the new houses were constructed from the more expensive brick rather than wood and plaster. But, as Jerry White notes, despite fire regulations, some East End houses continued to be built from wood and have 'ship-lap boarding faced with brick' into the 1740s.²⁰

Thomas Kemp, victim of a burglary, describes one of the houses on Pennington Street:

'I live in Penitent-street in Ratcliffe Highway I went home and found both my back Door and fore Door open, and that I had been robb'd. I was a new Comer, my

¹⁷ Vanessa Harding, 'The changing shape of seventeenth century London', in J.F. Merritt, (ed.), *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions & Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype 1598-1720*, (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 130 -131.

¹⁸ Ian Grainger, Duncan Hawkins, Lynne Cowal and Robert Mikulski (eds.), *The Black Death Cemetery, East Smithfield*, (2008).

¹⁹ Power, 'East London housing', p. 238; Sir William Leman, DE/X22/28976-7, 16th May 1683, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>.

²⁰ Jerry White, *London in the Eighteenth Century: A Great and Monstrous Thing*, (2012), p. 32.

House was not quite fitted up, nor made so secure as it might be; my back Door was fastened with a wooden Pin that went into a Hole in the Wainscot; my fore Door had a Lock, but between the Lock and the Staple there was a hollow place through which the Lock might be push'd back. Behind my House was a Yard, with a dead Wall 8 Foot high. The hole in the Wainscot where the Pin of the back Door went in was burst, so that I suppose the Entry was made that way'.²¹

Poorly maintained and half-finished houses such as this one were common.

Peter Guillery notes that by 1700 the area along the Thames from the Tower to Limehouse was 'densely built over with small houses, though not excessively crowded'.²² Because of its proximity to the river many local men were mariners absent at sea for long periods. However, many men were employed in naval trades on the quay side and on the ships in port; porters, ship wrights, wharfingers and riggers would have lived and worked locally and would need accommodation. Guillery suggests that this anomaly ensured more houses in this area were used simply for living in, as opposed to serving as workshops with living accommodation. The escalation in ship building and the steady flow of mariners along this stretch of the Thames ensured that fewer artisans worked from home by comparison to other areas in London. At the same time, this growth in riverside industry ensured that this area quickly developed its own small localised manufacturing base supplying everything that was needed to support the expanding docks, or taking advantage of the ready access to imported materials. This part of London already had brewers in abundance but the other sea trades benefited greatly from the expansion of shipping and shipbuilding; sail making, distilling, sugar

²¹ Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, (version 7.0, 24 March 2012), (Hereafter, OBP), Thomas Banks, Elizabeth Banks, 12 January 1733, t17330112-23.

²² Guillery, *The Small House*, p. 20-26.

houses, dye works, glass works, lead works and copper works could be found along the northern bank of the Thames east of the tower.²³

And with houses came people. Using a standard multiplier for the number of people in each household, Michael Power has suggested that the population of the east London suburbs rose substantially from an estimated 21,000 in 1600 to over 91,000 in 1700.²⁴ These estimates must, however, be taken with a pinch of salt. Most early sources are organised around households, and generating a population from these requires an elusive measure of the average number of people in a household. Using the 1695 Marriage Duty returns, David Glass, for example, suggests 6.3 occupants per household for his sample of ten parishes from within the City walls.²⁵ On the other hand Craig Spence, using the 1692 poll tax returns to create a more detailed picture of household size for the City within and without the walls, concludes that average household size ranged from 3.29 persons outside the City walls (Portsoken ward) to 5.93 within the City walls.²⁶ Vanessa Harding's work reflects a similar pattern. She has suggested that Tower Hill precinct in Portsoken ward had a low mean of 3.34 persons per household (without lodgers).²⁷ The work of both Spence and Harding compares closely to P. Laslett and R. Wall's overall findings of 5.75 persons per household for London as a whole. In a recent article Mark Merry and Philip Baker have added to the debate concerning Tower Hill precinct, by suggesting that the number of household occupants was probably somewhere between the City average, and the lower figure for Portsoken

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Power, 'East London housing', p. 237.

²⁵ Glass, 'Notes on the demography', p. 585.

²⁶ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 90-92.

²⁷ Harding, 'Families and housing in seventeenth century London', pp. 130-134.

ward, at approximately 4.5 persons per household.²⁸ There remains, however, little real agreement on this issue.

Table 3.1 below shows the number of assessed houses in St Botolph Aldgate, for 1693-4, 1727, 1744-5 and the number of inhabited houses for 1801 taken from the first modern census. This approximation of houses in the parish over the century would imply that the housing stock rose in the first quarter of the century before falling in the second half of the century. In contrast to the seventeenth century the housing stock in St Botolph Aldgate would seem from the available figures to have declined between 1693-1801.²⁹

	1693-4 Aid Assessments	William Maitland 1727	1744-5 Church Rate Assessments	1801 Census Number of inhabited houses
St Botolph Parish - City	1,395	1,239	1,248	1,171
St Botolph Aldgate - Middlesex	1,094	1,435	976	1,097
Total houses	2,489	2,674	2,224	2,268

Table 3.1: Houses in St Botolph Aldgate 1693-1801. Source: Craig Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 15, 176, Appendix III; William Maitland, *Survey of London*, (1739), pp. 389-392; LMA, MS2545/1-20, (based on those houses paying the assessment); 1801 census found at Histpop - The Online Historical Population Reports Website, <http://www.histpop.org/> 1801 census accessed 22 October 2014. The 1801 Census figures shown are based on inhabited houses. There were 31 uninhabited houses in the City part of the parish and 25 in the Middlesex section.

²⁸ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 90-92; Mark Merry and Philip Baker, 'For the house herself and one servant': family and household in late seventeenth century London', *London Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 3, (November, 2009), pp. 206-212. Merry and Baker differentiate between 'Houseful' as 'The mean number of cohabitants within a single house' and 'Household' as the number of separately taxed groups within the single house; P. Laslett and R. Wall, (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time*, (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 125-128; Power, 'East London housing', pp. 257-8; See also Nigel Goose, 'Household size and structure in early modern Cambridge', *Social History*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Oct 1980), p. 364.

²⁹ 1693-4 Aid Assessments found in Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 15, 176, Appendix III; William Maitland, *The History of London from its foundation by the Romans to the present time...With several accounts of Westminster, Middlesex, Southwark, and other parts within the Bill of Mortality*, Book II, (1739), pp. 389-392; LMA, MS 2545/1-20, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate assessments, MS 2545/1-20; 1801 census found at Histpop - The Online Historical Population Reports Website, <http://www.histpop.org/> 1801 census, Enumeration Extract, accessed 20 November 2014, pp. 209, 214 totals for the whole parish on p. 501.

However, the numbers of families living in the houses is thought to have risen. The 1801 census records an overall figure of 3993 families living in 2268 houses in the combined St Botolph Aldgate parish.³⁰ In 1801, for the first time, the census also gives us a secure household size: 5.6 per household for the Middlesex side of the parish and 7.4 for the City side. Both these figures are substantially higher than even the highest estimates made for the 1690s, and together suggest that household size grew in both the City and Middlesex parts of the parish of St Botolph. Using the detailed Marriage Duty Tax assessment records of 1695 to estimate the population of the City in that year P.E. Jones and A.V. Judges found that the City side of St Botolph Aldgate had approximately 7,880 inhabitants (at 5.6 people per household).³¹ By comparison in 1801 the census recorded 8,689 inhabitants in the City side (7.4 per household); with 6,153 on the Middlesex side. The total population count for St Botolph Aldgate in 1801 according to the census was 14,842 inhabitants.³² Despite the decrease in housing stock, the parish population overall appears to have almost doubled since 1695.³³

Alternative figures can be calculated from the *Bills of Mortality*. These provide us with the numbers of deaths for each of the London parishes, and are believed to have been substantially accurate until the late 1750s. The *Bills*, for example, show that in 1744 some 550 people died in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate. On the basis of an average number of deaths in the parish per year for the whole of the 1740s, the *Locating London Lives* website estimates the population at approximately 17,484 for the whole parish at

³⁰ Histpop - <http://www.histpop.org/> 1801 census accessed 20 November 2014, pp. 209, 214, 501.

³¹ Jones and Judges, 'London population in the late seventeenth century', pp. 45-63; See also Harding, *Families and housing*, (2007), p. 120; Spence, *London in the 1690s*, p. 90.

³² Histpop - <http://www.histpop.org/> 1801 census accessed 20 November 2014; pp. 209, 214, 501.

³³ Data from London Population Estimates 1690s, 1740s, 1801, <http://www.locatinglondon.org/static/Population.html#toc6> Locating London's Past (www.locatinglondon.org, version 1.0, 17 December 2011, (hereafter LLP), Population estimates from the *Marriage Duty Assessments 1695*, accessed 27 November 2014.

mid-century.³⁴ This figure is an estimate based on the returns from the *Bills of Mortality* and it is therefore difficult to substantiate as it suggests a drop in population of approximately 2,640 by 1801 which is difficult to validate.

Overall combining these different measures suggests that following a period of sustained growth in the seventeenth century, the population continued to grow, albeit more slowly, through the first half of the eighteenth century, as more and more people crowded into a largely unchanging number of houses. These figures also suggest that the second half of the eighteenth century probably saw a strong trend towards higher densities. In other words, in relation to population, the first half of the eighteenth century probably saw the neighbourhood largely retain its 'mixed' and dynamic seventeenth-century character; while the second half of the century witnessed the beginnings of its decline into a nineteenth century slum.

TAXES

As well as forming the basis for historical population estimates, tax records also allow us to model the distribution of wealth. Taxes were calculated based on a standard rate of pence or shillings in the pound. A house having a notional rental value of £20 per annum would entail the payment of £4 (80 shillings) in tax on a 4 shilling in the pound rate.³⁵ Moreover, all taxes were based on property valuations made in the late 1690s, they did not alter. Property valuations remained the same in 1744-5 as they were forty seven years earlier in 1698. Consequently, property values became more imprecise as

³⁴ Data from London Population Estimates 1690s, 1740s, 1801, <http://www.locatinglondon.org/static/Population.html#toc6> Locating London's Past (www.locatinglondon.org, version 1.0, 17 December 2011, (hereafter LLP), accessed 14 June 2013.

³⁵ Power, 'East London housing', p. 253; Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 10-11.

the century wore on.³⁶ Furthermore, just as issues over household size problematizes tax records as evidence for population change, they also suffer from a series of significant drawbacks as a source for measuring wealth. First, not everyone paid taxes. Householders whose properties were worth less than £1 per annum did not pay land tax or parish taxes, and neither did householders who had an annual income of less than £10 per year. Thomas Bray, rector of St Botolph Aldgate in the early part of the eighteenth century wrote that there were some '1,409 houses and about 9,000 inhabitants, of whom two thirds do not pay poor rates'.³⁷ By the mid-eighteenth century many east London residents in the surrounding parishes and precincts of East Smithfield, St Katherine's precinct and Whitechapel were also exempt from paying taxes. As a result, while tax returns reveal a great deal about the wealthier inhabitants of the neighbourhood, it is important to remember that most householders - indeed the 'average' householder - did not appear in these records.

Second, even when partial coverage is taken into account, the sources themselves are of variable quality, and contain inconsistent information that is difficult to interpret. The parish assessors who collected the taxes, and who recorded the information as they perambulated the neighbourhood, did not always record a consistent level of detail. For example, it is difficult to tell from the rate assessments of 1744-5 (which forms the substantial basis for this discussion) exactly how many properties were owner occupier, or which were used as shops, alehouses or taverns. This information is only occasionally supplied. Moreover, the inclusion of 'stock in trade' in the estimates of the rateable worth of individual households makes secure generalisations difficult. In part this

³⁶ LMA, Information leaflet number 9, 'Land Tax Assessments for London and Middlesex', pp. 1-7.

³⁷ Lambeth Palace Archive, MS 2712, St Botolph Aldgate, (f.119).

component of the valuation ensures that the 'rateable value' has a stronger link to actual wealth, but it also over-represents trading goods, as opposed to financial assets, meaning that rateable values alone could hide very different levels of personal wealth beyond 'stock in trade'. Some St Botolph residents, vestrymen and middling to wealthy tradesmen, lived in properties worth as little as £10 in rateable value. In part, this reflects the extent to which substantial buildings that would have been much more valuable if located in the wealthier City parishes, could be respectably occupied in this neighbourhood. But it also reflects the extent to which rating materials do not always reflect financial wealth and social standing.

Third, the rateable value of each household was based on 'a single building - a house or tenement'.³⁸ Confusion over the precise nature of what was a 'single' household partially confounds the issue of wealth. Mark Merry and Philip Baker have found that in St Botolph Aldgate the normal practice was to record these separate households, with each householder paying their own assessed rate.³⁹ But Craig Spence has observed instances in the tax series of the 1690s, in which divided properties have been treated as a single tenement, and assigned 'a single shared rental value within the assessments'. This effectively elides the wealth of two separate households, and again confounds our ability to determine the distribution of wealth at a granular level.⁴⁰

Finally, it is clear that many householders sublet rooms. This ensured that even poor householders, dependent on even poorer lodgers, might appear reasonably well-to-do in the light of these sources. In his *The Making of the English Middle Classes* Peter Earle has

³⁸ 'Tenement' and 'cottage', both implied a single dwelling without an attached workshop, see M. J. Power, 'John Stow and his London', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 11, (1985)

³⁹ Merry and Baker, 'For the house herself and one servant', pp. 209-210.

⁴⁰ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, p. 66.

calculated that lodgers made up between 4-6 per cent of the overall population of London in the late 1690s. He argues that while less than 25 per cent of the middling classes took in lodgers this figure was higher for the lower classes that feature strongly in this study.⁴¹ Other evidence however, such as the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, suggest that this figure should be even higher for this neighbourhood, and that many poorer householders took in lodgers as a matter of course.⁴² John Walden, publican of the Bull and Butcher in Cable Street, was not that unusual when he testified that on Monday the 7 June 1736 his house contained 18 lodgers 'mainly country shopkeepers up in town for a short visit'. This was also an area full of transient sailors, many of whom could not afford to stay at the local inns.⁴³ However, despite these impediments the tax records remain an immensely valuable source of information regarding London's citizens.

PRECINCTS

With these caveats, and forewarned of their problematic evidentiary qualities, tax records nevertheless allow us to piece together a more detailed picture of Rosemary Lane and the precincts east of the Tower. Starting with St Botolph Aldgate and working southwards from Houndsditch towards Tower Hill, and then eastward to Well Close Square and East Smithfield, the remainder of this chapter will analyse the micro-geographies of wealth and poverty that marked each area, before assessing the neighbourhood as a whole.

⁴¹ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Classes, Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730*, (1989) pp. 213-217.

⁴² *OBP*, Between 1674 – 1765, some 203 trials mention lodgers.

⁴³ *OBP*, William Hall, 6 July 1763, t17630706-57; *OBP*, Anne Sullivan, 19 February 1766, t17660219-11; *OBP*, 21 February 1739, George Haggis, Richard Keeble, Thomas Gibbons, 21 February 1739, t17390221-31.

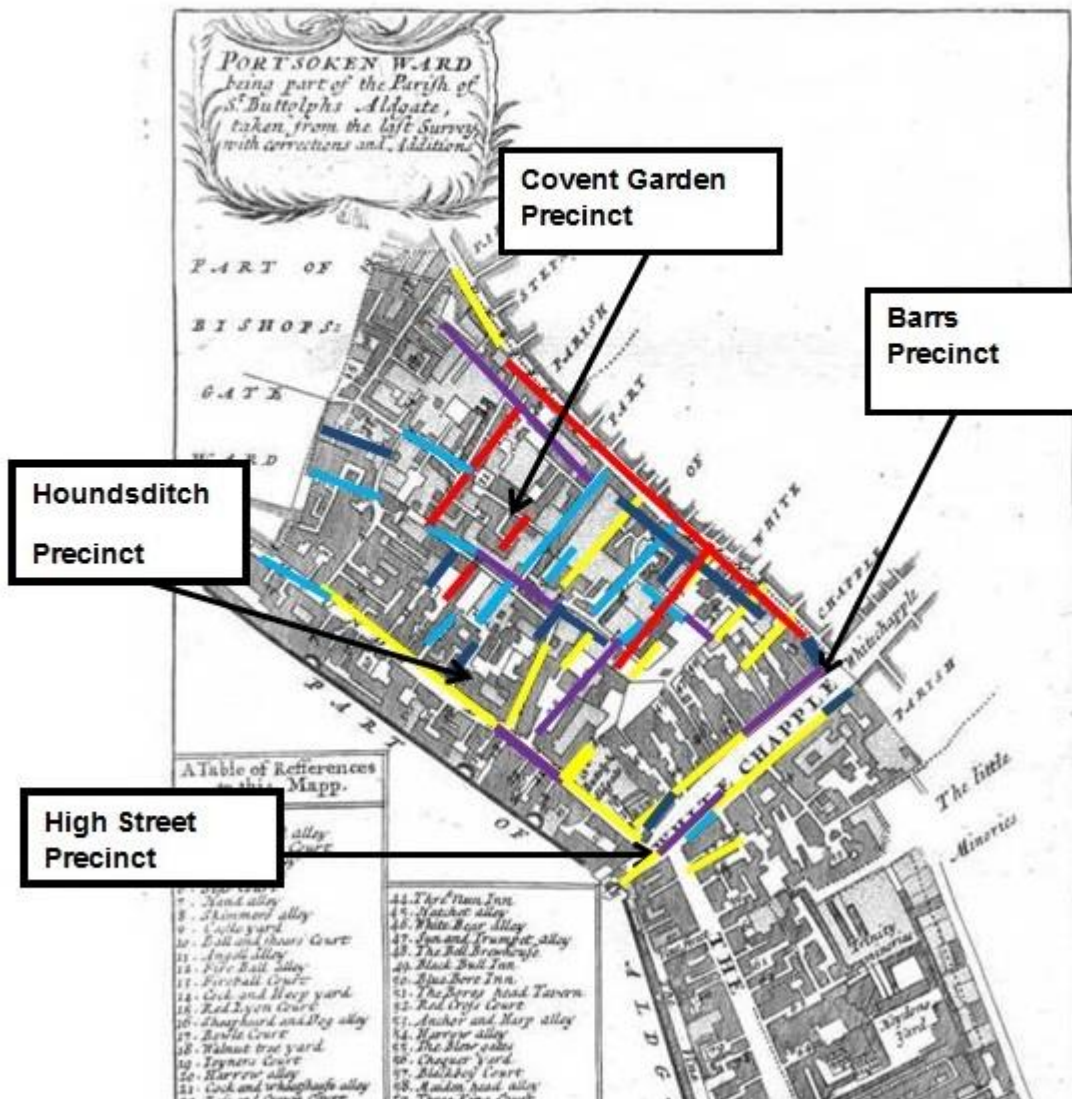


Fig. 3.2: John Strype (1720) Map of Portsoken showing the Upper precincts of St Botolph Aldgate, in Strype, A Survey of London,(1720).

Key: Light Blue = very poor £4 or under

Dark Blue = poor £5-8.

Purple = mixed some wealthy and some poor.

Red = comfortable/middling sort £9-20.

Yellow = wealthy over £20.

Houndsditch High Street precinct

John Stow and his successors John Strype and William Maitland have left us with an invaluable description of many of London's streets and alleys. Their surveys of London provide us with a wealth of material that can be used in conjunction with the

information contained in the tax records to gain a better understanding of the social geography of the area. In the (1720) John Strype edition of Stow's *Survey*, the precinct of Houndsditch High Street is portrayed as being 'taken up by Brokers, Joiners, Brasiers, Salesmen and such as deal in old Cloths, Linen and Upholstery Ware'.⁴⁴ As Peter Earle contends these shops and workshops would front buildings which also contained living space - bedrooms, kitchens and parlours - to the rear.⁴⁵

Houndsditch High Street had a long established reputation for the buying and selling of second hand or stolen clothes, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. However, when we examine the rental values assigned property in Houndsditch High Street (Fig. 3.2) we see that it was a mixed area with many properties assessed at over £40 per annum.⁴⁶

Peter Guillery notes that Whitechapel High Street had 'tall built shallow timber houses' built in the seventeenth century, and it is easy to imagine that the houses that lined the main roads adjoining Houndsditch had similar buildings. On the other hand the smaller streets around nearby Goodman's Fields are said to have had 'clusters' of small back to back courts laid out in the 1680s in a neat grid type layout.⁴⁷

The plan below, drawn in the early seventeenth century, suggests the kinds of interior space and gardens that might be found in a Houndsditch house fronting a commercial street in the early seventeenth century. The spatial configuration of the building would

⁴⁴ Strype, *Survey of London*, (1720), pp. 27-28.

⁴⁵ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Classes*, p. 210.

⁴⁶ LMA, MS 2545/4, 1744-5.

⁴⁷ Guillery, *Small Houses*, pp. 52-54.

probably have changed by 1745, but not the overall footprint, and this plan gives a strong sense of the size of buildings, and their general nature.⁴⁸

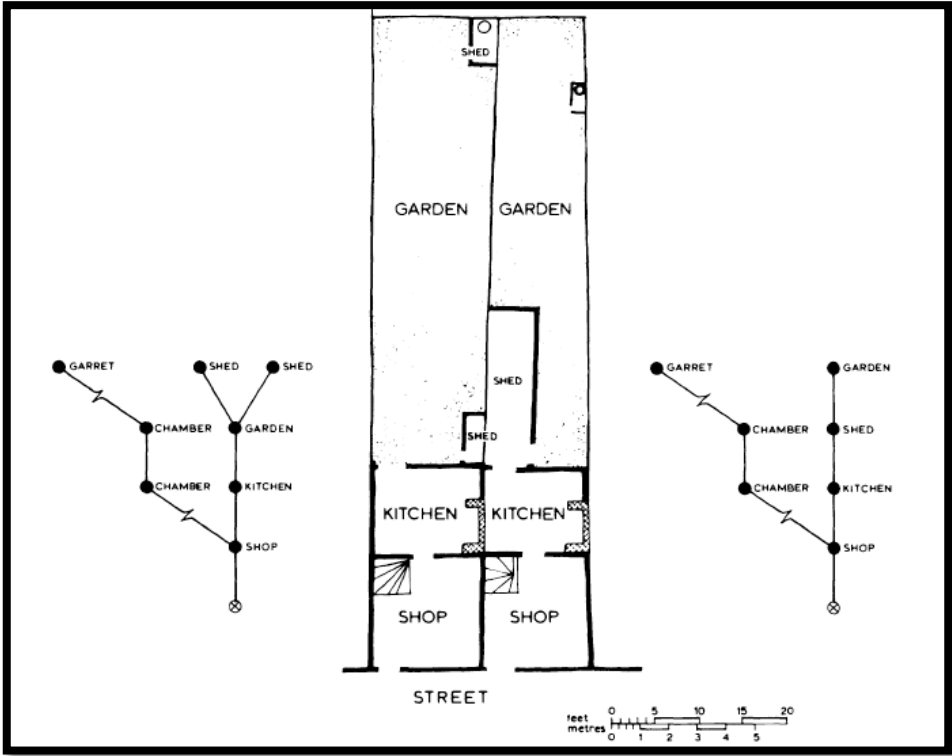


Fig. 3.3: Plans of Houses in Houndsditch.

Source: Two houses with shop fronts in Houndsditch based on a plan by Ralph Treswell.

A typical house in this area would have been small with a ground floor of around 200 square feet. One victim of crime at the Old Bailey inadvertently gives us a sense of the size of his house in Whitechapel when he describes how coming home and finding his windows broken open, 'he open'd his Door [and]he saw two Persons rush out at the Back Door'.⁴⁹ Michael Power found that some houses had as many as 8 small rooms, with two rooms on each floor, with two in the cellar and another two in the attic. But the

⁴⁸ Fig. 3.3, Plans 'two houses in Houndsditch' by Ralph Treswell taken from the *Christ's Hospital Evidence Book*, (ca. 1612), Guildhall Library, MS 12, 805 cited in Frank E. Brown, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.28, No.3, (1986), pp. 576-7. Many thanks to John Styles for this reference.

⁴⁹ *OBP*, Thomas Charlesworth, 4 December 1719, t17191204-32.

majority of small houses in this area had 1 room on each floor. Of the 701 houses surveyed in seventeenth century Shadwell 492 contained 3 rooms or less.⁵⁰

The highest household rental value in Houndsditch precinct was £100 and the average £12. 11s. and many of St Botolph Aldgate's prominent vestrymen lived here. These included Robert Phipps who rented a warehouse and ground in Cock and Hoop Yard valued at £36 per annum. Strype records Cock and Hoop Yard as 'a good open Place, with Buildings fit for good Inhabitants'.⁵¹ Shown in purple in Fig. 3.2, and similar to the Houndsditch High Street, Cock and Hoop Yard contained a wide range of property rental values from just £3 to £36 per year.

Vestry member Jeremy Bentham Senior lived on Church Lane, adjacent to St Botolph Aldgate Church in Houndsditch. The church and the Sir John Cass charity school were placed on the corner of Houndsditch and Aldgate High Street and the Whitechapel Barrs. Marked yellow in Fig. 3.2, this was another small but wealthy enclave in the parish with few houses assessed at less than £10.

Covent Garden precinct

Just east of Houndsditch precinct, (Fig.3.1) and forming the north western section of St Botolph Aldgate parish, Covent Garden precinct encompassed Gravel Lane and part of Petticoat Lane and the surrounding streets and alleys. Not to be confused with Covent Garden in Westminster, it was a relatively poor area with a few wealthy occupants sprinkled around Meeting House Yard and the end of Gravel Lane. The most expensive property in this precinct was that of John Macklean who owned two sugar houses, a

⁵⁰ Power, 'East London housing', p. 250.

⁵¹ Strype, *Survey of London*, (1720), pp. 27-28.

dwelling house, a warehouse, a counting house and stables valued in its entirety at £111. Macklean's properties were situated at the corner of Seven Step Alley close to the workhouse, Mr Denham's Presbyterian Meeting House and Alderman Crispin Gascoigne's brewery.⁵² Styrpe describes Gravel Lane as 'very large, branching itself into several Parts, as Seven Step Alley'.⁵³

Some of the residents were also traders, keeping small businesses and shops, including Windham Adams, a horner. Covent Garden precinct had 351 properties assessed in 1744-5. The average overall rental value was just £7, but the majority of people in this precinct were paying property rentals of less than £5.⁵⁴ On the Middlesex side of the City wall, low rents could secure a reasonable accommodation. Vestrymen, John Simmonds, a plasterer by trade, and coal merchant Colonel Arthur Stanley lived in properties valued at £7 and £8 respectively.⁵⁵ Given the financial obligations required of vestrymen, it is unlikely that this rateable value accurately reflects their overall wealth. But the impression from taxation records, is that poverty increased as one moved further to the east, and that Covent Garden precinct was larger but substantially poorer, and more uniformly poor, than Houndsditch.⁵⁶

⁵² LMA, MS 2545/2. See also St Botolph Aldgate Vestry Minutes, 1740-50, Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, *et al.*, *London Lives, 1690-1800*, (hereafter LL), (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 24 April 2012).

⁵³ Styrpe, *Survey of London*, (1720), p. 27.

⁵⁴ Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills (TNT, PROB CW 11) accessed at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/>, (hereafter TNT) Windham Horner, (TNT PROB CW 11/777).

⁵⁵ LMA, MS 2545/2, Colonel Arthur Stanley, Coal Supplier, MS 2545, LL, St Botolph Aldgate Parish, Minutes of Parish Vestries, 10 September 1745, LL ref: GLBAMV114010116; John Simmonds, Plasterer, Stoney Lane, Covent Garden Precinct, (TNT PROB CW 11/766); LL, St Botolph Aldgate Parish, Minutes of Parish Vestries, 12 October 1742, LL ref: GLBAMV113000299.

⁵⁶ LMA, MS 2545/2.

Barrs precinct

Just on the southern border of Covent Garden precinct, Barrs was the smallest precinct in St Botolph, with just 103 properties liable for tax. The original 'Barrs' were set adjacent to the entrance to St Mary Whitechapel Parish on Whitechapel street and originally the place of a toll bar guarding the way through to the City - marking the boundary between that part of the parish in the City, and the part 'without the barrs', and hence in Middlesex. This part of the parish contained a rich variety of retail shops including; John Whalley's grocery shop, Joseph Jarvis, saddler and leather merchant, John Hills an apothecary and Samuel Newton silver merchant. The majority of the shops in the precinct had a rental value exceeding £24 per annum; and overall, tax records indicate that this was quite a comfortable area. Six vestrymen lived here; the lowest rental value was £4 and the highest was £80. It also had the second highest average rental value in the parish at £17 19s. (Table. 3.2).⁵⁷

1744-5 St Botolph precincts	Assessed Houses/Properties	Average Rental Value	Minimum Rental Value	Maximum Rental Value
Houndsditch	298	£12 11s	£1 16s	£100
Covent Garden	352	£7	£1 10s	£111
High street	170	£18 4s	£1	£80
Barrs	102	£17 19s	£4	£80
East Smithfield	976	£12	£1	£400
Tower Hill	326	£11 15s	£1	£135

Table. 3.2: Property Rental Values in St Botolph Aldgate Precincts.

Source: LMA, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate Assessments, MS 2545/1-20.

⁵⁷ LMA, MS 2545/1, Barrs Precinct, John Hills, Apothecary, (TNT PROB, CW 11/739); Nathaniel Bell. (TNT PROB CW 11/1011); LMA, St Botolph Aldgate Renter Churchwarden Accounts, MS 2627/1; John Whalley, Grocer, High Street; Samuel Newton, Brasier appears in *OBP*, John Cronder, William Reynolds, John Russel, 16 October 1751, t17511016-37; LMA, MS 2627/1, Goodwin Blanchard kept a jewellery shop that sold silver snuff boxes; Brittain's coffee shop, Thomas Roberts, Overseer of St Botolph Parish 1744, LMA, MS 2545/3.

The higher property rentals found here are matched by Strype's description of this corner of the parish. Whitechapel Street was the main stagecoach route into Essex, and Strype describes it as being 'a spacious fair Street for entrance into the City Eastward' being 'better inhabited, and accommodated with good Inns.' He also describes it as having 'incessant traffic' and of the 'Butchers shops...who drive a considerable trade...lying conveniently for driving and carrying Cattle from Romford Market'.⁵⁸ Two butchers who lived in the precinct can be identified as vestrymen, Ingless Prescott and William Taylorworth.⁵⁹

High Street, Aldgate

To the west of Barrs precinct, and marking the southern boundary of Houndsditch precinct, High Street, Aldgate encompassed the next section westward of Whitechapel Road and formed part of a major thoroughfare out of the City. The precinct was noted as a busy shopping area: a wide thoroughfare for horses, stage coaches, carts and carriages, with good inns such as the Three Nuns, the Crown, The Black Bull and the Blue Boar.⁶⁰ The north side of the High Street was further described as having, 'several shopkeepers, who have a good retail trade out of the country'. Additionally, the Black Bull Inn mentioned in Strype's *Survey* was kept by Thomas Roberts in 1745 and valued at £80 per annum.⁶¹ High Street was a small but wealthy precinct; the highest average rental

⁵⁸ Strype, *A Survey of London*, (1720), pp. 27-28.

⁵⁹ Ingless Prescott (TNT PROB CW 11/ 760); William Taylorworth, (TNT PROB CW 11/833).

⁶⁰ Strype, *Survey of London*, (1720), pp. 27-28.

⁶¹ John Hills, Apothecary, (TNT PROB, CW 11/739); Nathaniel Bell. (TNT PROB CW 11/1011); LMA, St Botolph Aldgate Renter Churchwarden Accounts, MS 2627/1, John Whalley; *OBP*, Samuel Newton, John Cronder, William Reynolds, John Russel, 16 October 1751, t17511016-37; LMA, MS 2627/1, Goodwin Blanchard kept a jewellery shop that sold silver snuff boxes; Brittain's coffee shop, Thomas Roberts, Overseer of St Botolph Parish 1744, LMA, MS 2545/3.

value was £18 4s per annum. (Table. 3.2), but it also contained a large number of small, and less valuable properties.

Tower Hill precinct

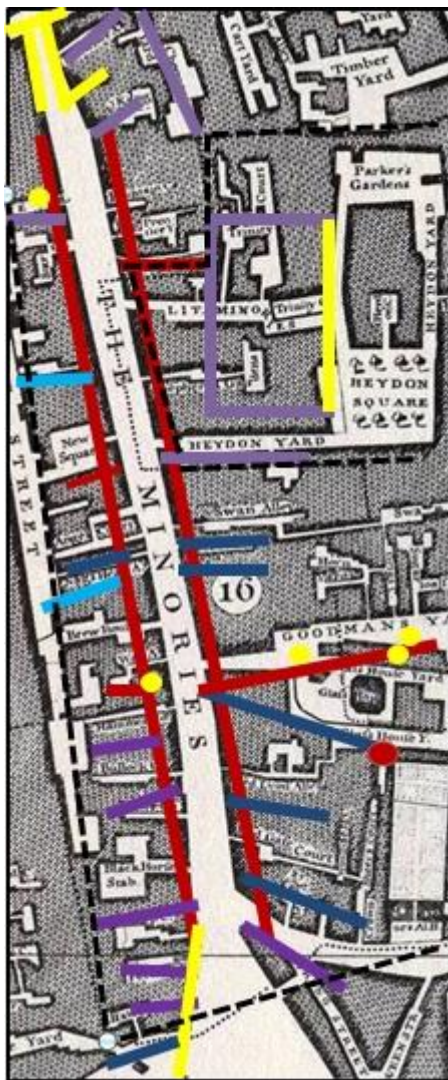


Fig. 3.4: Tower Hill precinct

Source: From *Rocque's map of London and Westminster 1746*, showing the Minories, LMA, MS 2545/6

Key:

Black dotted Line= St Botolph Aldgate border

Light Blue = very poor. £4 or under

Dark Blue = poor. £5-8

Purple = mixed some wealthy and some poor.

Red = comfortable/middling sort. £9-20

Yellow = wealthy over £20.

Stretching southward, hugging the line of the City wall, Tower Hill precinct encompassed the Minories and the 'Little Minories' and the streets and alleys that branched to the east and west. The Minories were named after the Minorite nuns who had formerly occupied an Abbey on the site. The parish tax assessments for the precinct reinforces Strype's

description of the area, as marked by both: 'fair streets with very good brick houses, well inhabited by several Merchants, and people of repute', and 'some less salubrious side turnings'.⁶² Three Kings Alley (or Court), built in the mid to late sixteenth century, is described as being pretty large, 'with two courts ...both indifferent good', while Ship Yard (formerly Ship Alley), built around 1550, was an 'indifferent large square court, but very mean'.⁶³ Swan Alley is described as being 'long nasty and narrow', while Red Lion Alley was 'long and narrow, with old built houses'. As Fig.3.4 illustrates, both alleys were relatively poor. Heydon Yard, where yearly rents ranged from £6 to £25 is recorded as being wide enough for a coach or cart, and leading to 'a good large square... with a row of trees, very ornamental in the summer season... a very handsome row of large houses with court yards inhabited by Merchants'. Most of the streets in Tower Hill precinct are described as 'good' or 'ordinary', very few are described as 'mean'.⁶⁴

Tax records suggest that Tower Hill was a comfortable to wealthy area in 1745. In William Maitland's 1739 edition of *History of London*, he describes this area as 'containing two or three courts, all pretty well inhabited'.⁶⁵ The Minories was the main thoroughfare on Tower Hill. The Minories with a view of St Botolph Aldgate depicted in 1810 below (Fig.3.5) was, as Maitland suggested, a 'broad and Spacious street' with shops and alehouses such as The Bunch of Grapes and the Pye Tavern, both used by St Botolph vestry for meetings.

⁶² Strype, *Survey of London*, (1720), pp. 27-28.

⁶³ Harding 'Families and Housing in Seventeenth Century London', pp. 130-134.

⁶⁴ Strype, *Survey of London*, (1720), pp. 27-28.

⁶⁵ Maitland, *History of London*, (1739), pp. 389-92.

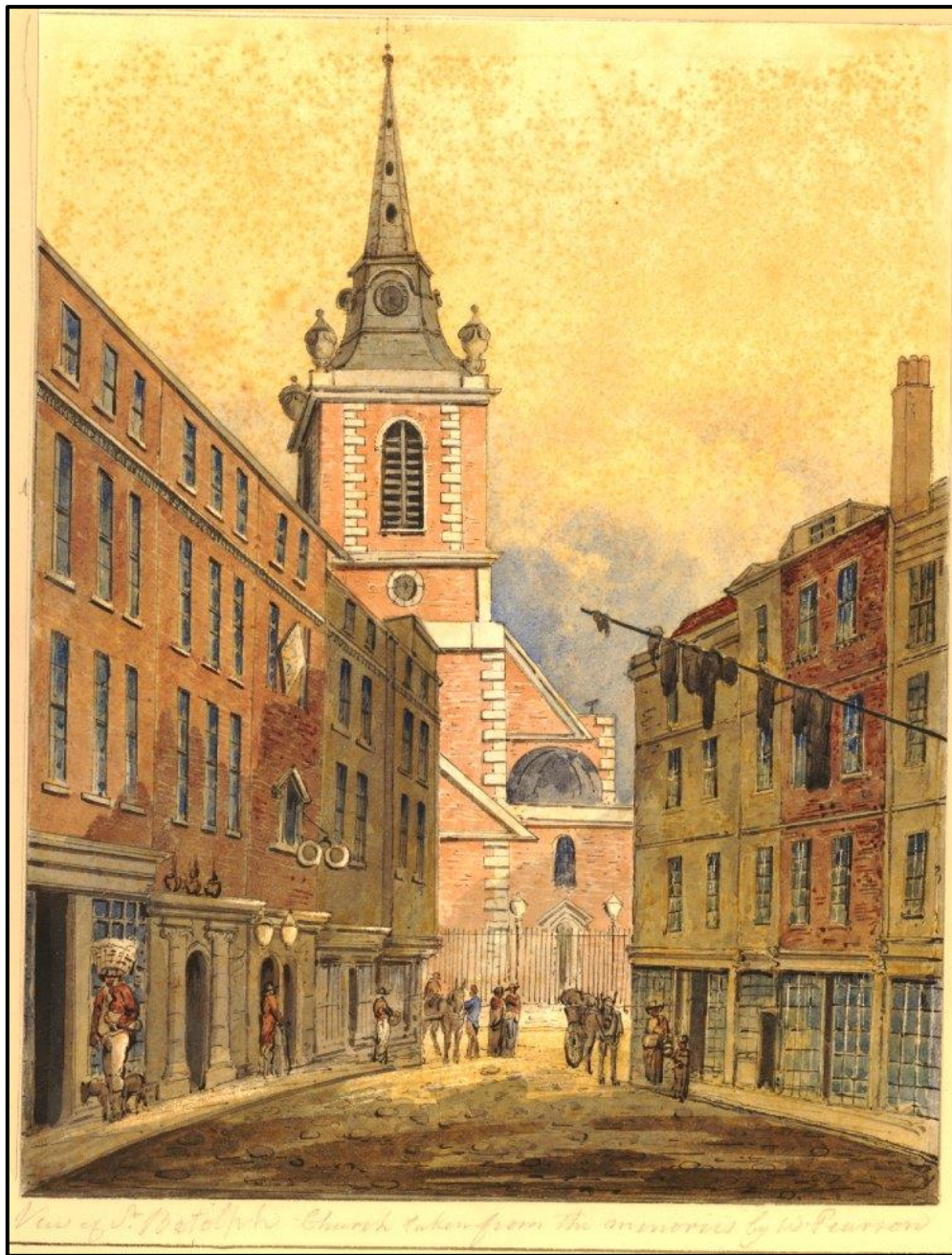


Fig. 3.5 View of St Botolph Church from the Minories

Source: William Pearson, *Old Houses on the North West Corner of the Minories and Aldgate*, 1810. British Museum, Binyon 22, Crace XXIII.92. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Name		Rental value £	Occupation/Office
William	Arnold	16	Glazier
William	Hope	22	Not known
Whitebread	Vokins	27	Churchwarden
Nicholas	Caitlin	18	Fruiter
Joseph	Tufton	10	Not Known
Richard	Riccards	38	J.P. and Glass House Owner
John	Adams	20	Horner
Robert	Harrison	23	Not known
Edward	Everard	20	Not known
Stephen	Flower	28	Vestry member
John	Briggs	30	Not known
Samuel	Spencer	22	Tobacconist
John	Townsend	26	Not known
Mary	Raven	20	Pawnbroker
John	Watts	20	Vestry member
Widow Elizabeth	Broughton	10	Clothes seller
William	Rolfe	24	Butcher
William	Threkhould	26	Goldsmith

Table. 3.3: A selection of Tower Hill Rate Payers.

Source: Tower Hill Precinct, LMA, MS 2545/6

Table.3.3 above shows the occupations of a small selection of the residents of the Minories in 1745, reflecting its diversity and relative prosperity. Middlesex JP Richard Riccards Esq, listed in Table. 3.3, owned five properties in St Botolph, the largest of which was his own house with stabling, just off the Minories in Goodman’s Yard. Half of Goodman’s Yard was in the parish of St Mary Whitechapel and it is described by Strype’s *Survey* as ‘a pretty handsome open place, indifferently well built’ with stables. Strype also notes that there were several ‘Gunsmiths who were adept at driving a considerable trade’.⁶⁶ At the southern end of the Minories, Robert Pycroft, vestryman, resided in a large house with stabling valued at £135. He also owned a property in Vine Street

⁶⁶ John Adams, Horner, (TNT PROB CW 11/790); George Jermyn, Apothecary,(TNT PROB CW 11/789); Elizabeth Broughton, clothes seller, (TNT PROB CW 11/845), William Rolfe, Butcher (TNT PROB CW 11/790); William Threkhould, Goldsmith, (TNT PROB CW 11/785); Jacob Cook, (TNT PROB CW 11/766); Nathaniel Smith, Mathematical Instrument maker, (TNT PROB CW 11/758), Roger Curtis, Tailor, (TNT PROB CW 11/1004).

valued at £25 per annum. Edward Holloway Esq, a distiller with a Draper's shop on the Minories had four properties locally with rental values ranging from £3 to £50.⁶⁷ The average rental value for the Tower Hill precinct was £11 15s.⁶⁸

Holy Trinity precinct

Just east of Tower Hill precinct and south of High Street, Holy Trinity precinct was co-terminus with the parish of Holy Trinity the Minories, which itself had the status of a peculiar, free from the authority of the Bishop of London. As noted in chapter 2, its relationship with the surrounding parish of St Botolph was uncertain.

Holy Trinities formed a relatively wealthy enclave, with a single household, belonging to a Mr Thomas Attwood, valued at £310 per year. The average rental value was £15. 1s., but this was skewed upwards by Attwood's almost aristocratic residence. Out of 120 residents liable to tax, 20 per cent of houses were valued at £20 - £310; 29 per cent between £10 - £19; and 48.7 per cent at between £5 - £9. Only 2.3 per cent were valued at £4 or less (Table. 3.4), suggesting a large proportion of households were reasonably well off, with rateable values closely bunched between £5 and £20, and few residences in real poverty.⁶⁹ By comparison, 63 per cent of the householders of St Katherine's precinct, just to the south, paid between £1 and £5. 10s.⁷⁰

Occupations in Holy Trinities were varied but they include merchants, tailors, mariners, a hair cutter, a glass seller, a hair seller, a sieve maker, a carpenter, a baker, a tobacconist, a cook, a peruke maker, a gunsmith, a plasterer, a cooper, a broker, and a

⁶⁷LL, Edward Holloway, LMA, MS 2642/2; LL, Bridewell Hospital, PL. BR | MG Court of Governors' Minute Books, BBBRMG20206MG202060373 BR | 15th October 1747.

⁶⁸ LMA, MS 2545/1-20.

⁶⁹ LMA, Holy Trinity Minories, MS 5285/1-5, 1745.

⁷⁰ LMA, St Katherine's Precinct MS 6010/14.

turner.⁷¹ Sir Isaac Newton was perhaps this parish's most famous resident during his period as Master of the Mint at the Tower of London at the end of the seventeenth century.⁷² There were a few wealthy gentlemen in this small community including Mr John Pearman who was noted as serving as a churchwarden and a few sea captains, which is not surprising given the location, Captain David Critton and Captain Jonathan Collett, who served as overseer for the poor.

⁷¹ 'Four Shillings In The Pound Aid 1693-1694: Middlesex, Tower Liberty, Well Close', *Four Shillings In The Pound Aid 1693/4: The City of London, the City of Westminster, and Metropolitan Middlesex* (1992), URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=21871> , Date accessed: 05 November 2012; 'Four Shillings In The Pound Aid 1693-1694: Middlesex, Tower Liberty, Trinity Minories', *Four Shillings In The Pound Aid 1693/4: The City of London, the City of Westminster, and Metropolitan Middlesex* (1992), URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=2180> , Date accessed: 05 November 2012'.

⁷² Isaac Newton Master of the Royal Mint, The Royal Mint Museum, <http://www.royalmintmuseum.org.uk/history/people/mint-officials/isaac-newton/> , accessed 26 July 2013.

Rosemary Lane precinct

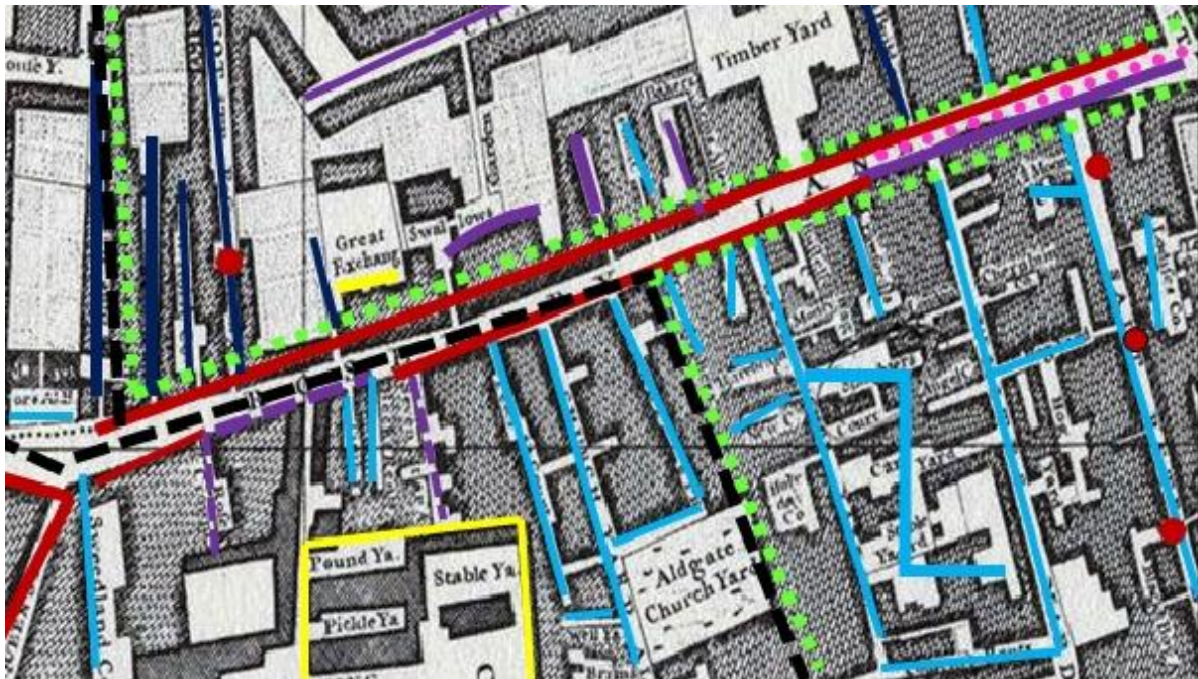


Fig. 3.6: Rosemary Lane

Source: From Rocque's Map 1746, LMA, MS 2545/ 5, LMA, MS 6015/11-20 showing Rosemary Lane.

Key: Green border = Whitechapel Parish.

Pink = Rag Fair 1745.

Light Blue = very poor £4 or under

Dark Blue = poor £5-8.

Purple = mixed some wealthy and some poor.

Red = comfortable/middling sort £9-20.

Yellow = wealthy over £20.

For Land Tax purposes Whitechapel, Tower Division was divided into sections, with Rosemary Lane forming its own precinct: the 6th division. This included Chamber Street just north of Rosemary Lane to Salt Petre Bank and Green Yard; and St Christopher's Court in the west and part of Church Lane and Cable Street to the east. The precinct contained 710 properties, with a maximum rateable value of £62, a minimum of £1, and an average rateable value of £5. 12s. Many of the properties assessed on Rosemary Lane would have been shops with accommodation; nonetheless, there were only a few poorer residences shown on the main street itself and given the street's reputation this is surprising.

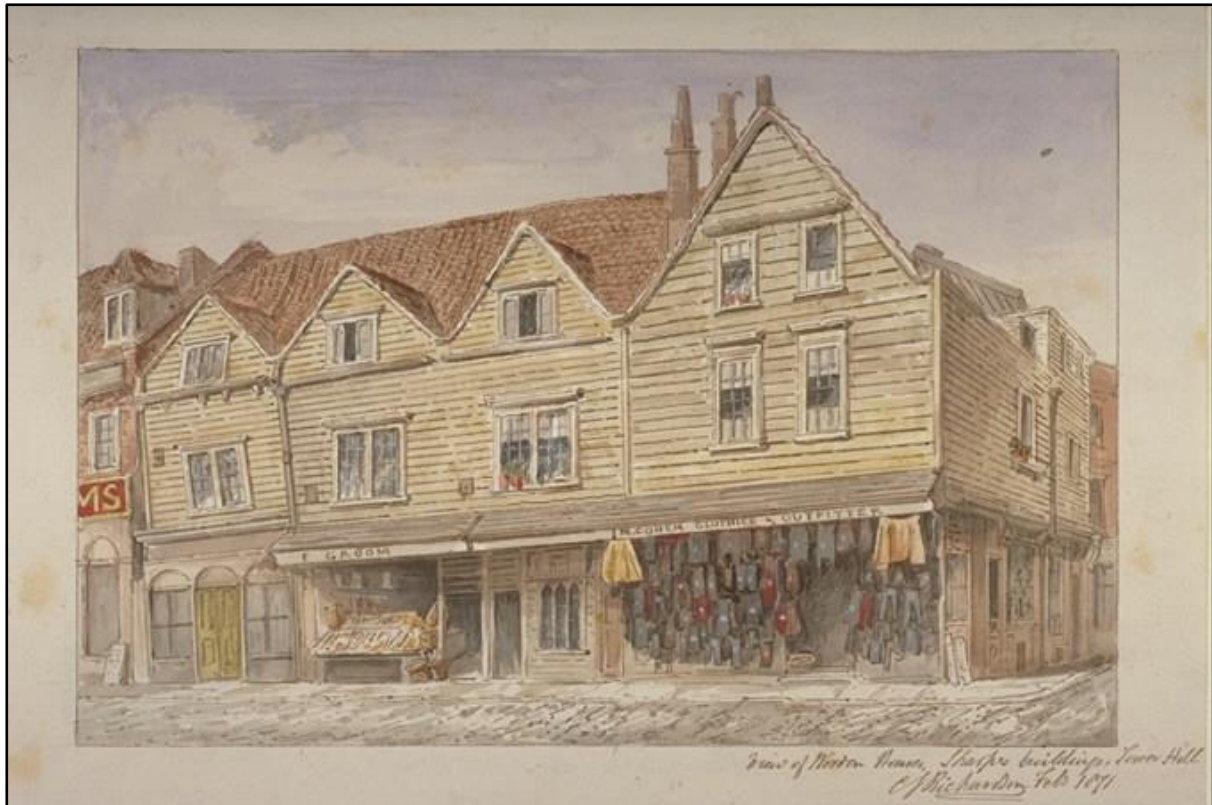


Fig. 3.7: Sharp's Buildings

Source: LMA, Sharp's Buildings, Rosemary Lane by Charles James Richardson in 1871.

However, the backstreets of Rosemary Lane show a different level. The areas marked in light blue in Fig.3.6 show that the back alleys and courts between Rosemary Lane and East Smithfield to the south were at the bottom of the scale in property value with many households assessed at only £1-2 per annum. Nathaniel Harris, the thief-taker, lived in one of the small streets marked in light blue - Darby Street- where 20 out of 32 properties were assessed at having a yearly rental value of £1. In the poorest corners of the precinct, conditions could be very hard. Sarah Main, a victim of rape, lodged in a house close to Rag Fair. Her testimony in court describes a lowly lodging in New Exchange at the heart of the precinct:

'I lodg'd in the New 'Change, in Rag-fair, with a single Woman, - a poor Woman; she blacks Shoes. I gave her 6 d. a Week for my Lodging, and there was two others lodged there, who gave her 6 d. a Week a-piece. My Landlady and a Woman big

with Child, and a Boy was in the Room, - 'twas a Ground Room, where the Woman, the Boy, and I used to lie, for a Penny a Night'.⁷³

Sarah Main paid around £1 per year to lodge in a shared room in Rag Fair. But, these records also indicate that Rosemary Lane itself contained a mix of houses, the residents of some of which were quite well off.

In part this reflects the large number of alehouses in the neighbourhood (which normally attract a high rateable value). Rosemary Lane contained the Seven Stars Alehouse run by James White valued at £10 per annum, and the Alderman Parson's Head whose landlord Jeremiah Lester was a close friend of Nathaniel Harris thief-taker. It was valued at £14 per annum. One of the most popular drinking establishments was the Blue Anchor Alehouse close to Blue Anchor Yard and Darby Street. This was an established meeting place for the thief-takers, but it also stands out as a highly rated household in what was otherwise one of the poorest parts of the neighbourhood. In 1745 it was assessed with a rental value of £10, when Thomas White was the landlord. Close by Charles Barton kept The Ship in Swan Alley. William Mayhew, a constable in Tower ward, ran the 14 Stars Alehouse, while William Legoe kept the Blue Bell Alehouse. And William Cole, vestryman, kept the Queen's Head Tavern close to Sharp's Building at the start of the Lane with a rental value of £13.⁷⁴

But then again the area also had its share of wealthy and powerful individuals beyond its alehouse keepers. Prominent residents of this part of the neighbourhood included Sir Samuel Gower, Middlesex magistrate and leading sail cloth manufacturer. Gower was well known to the thief-takers and kept his main house in Down the Garden, a court just

⁷³ *OBP*, 21 February 1739, George Haggis, Richard Keeble, Thomas Gibbons, 21 February 1739, t17390221-31.

⁷⁴ LMA, MS 2545/ 5, LMA, MS 6015/11-20.

off Mill Yard and adjacent to the Anabaptist meeting house. Gower had at least four properties; and his main manufacturing base was insured for £525 in 1748. His primary dwelling house was valued at £50, and he also had two stable blocks valued at £20 and £10 per annum.⁷⁵ He also owned a property in East Smithfield and a Play House in Goodman's Fields that was reputedly a brothel.⁷⁶ While some small 1 room up and 1 room down houses could be found even along the main thoroughfare, there were also a good number of larger houses, including 2 and 3 storey buildings, such as those shown in Fig. 3.5.⁷⁷

Moreover, apart from Rag Fair, which took place six afternoons out of seven, we know from drawings of Rosemary Lane that each side of the street was lined with shops. Elizabeth Compton kept a clothes shop on the Lane with a rental value of £12. Nathaniel Harris, as well as being a thief-taker, also owned a hat shop on Darby Street just off Rosemary Lane, assessed at £4.⁷⁸ Thomas Gibbons, part-time thief-taker, kept a Barber's shop in Nelson's Court just off the Lane. Furniture shops, butchers shops, earthenware shops, were open alongside the numerous clothes shops, a gun making shop, a baker's shop and a sugar house. John Linstead, who lived at the Crooked Billet on Rosemary Lane, kept a shop in the 'Change' selling linen and stockings. His shop was valued at £10.⁷⁹ But, the highest property rateable values on the Lane were £62. A group of shops owned by Captain Johnson in the Great Exchange or Johnson's 'Change' as it was

⁷⁵ LMA, Tower Division Land Tax Assessments, Well Close Square, MS 6015/11-20; LMA, MS 8674, vol. 72, 53730, 1748, Hand in Hand Insurance, Samuel Gower.

⁷⁶ Ruth Paley, 'Thief-takers in London in the age of the MacDaniel gang, c.1745-1754' in Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (eds.), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750-1850*, (Oxford; 1989), pp. 330-335.

⁷⁷ St George in the East parish church website contains drawings of Sharps Buildings on Rosemary Lane, the drawing above is reported to by Charles James Richardson in 1871, <http://www.stgite.org.uk/media/rosemarylane.html>

⁷⁸ LMA, Tower Division Land Tax, St Botolph Aldgate, Middlesex, East Smithfield, MS 6011/1-17, Nathaniel Harris, Darby Street, 1743.

⁷⁹ *OBP*, John Downs, 13 September 1758, t17580913-12.

described by Maitland is given this valuation; as was a property owned by Nicholas Gestor in the New Exchange or 'High Change' at the end of Lane close to Rag Fair and Cable Street.⁸⁰

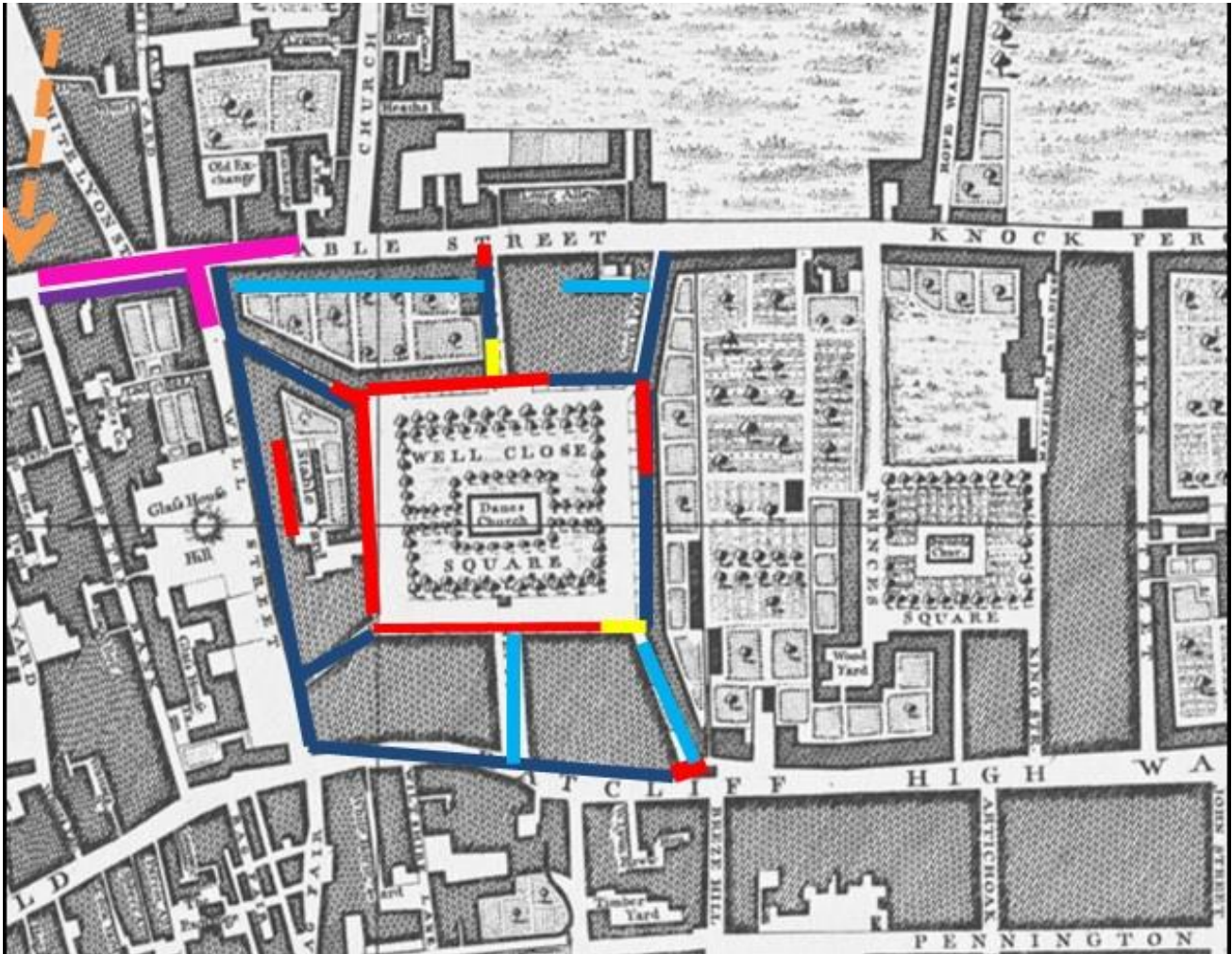


Fig. 3.8: Well Close Square.

Source: From Rocque's Map 1746, Royalty of Well Close Square 1745 Land Tax Assessments Tower without, MS 6004, 1-56A, 1745.

Key: **Orange** arrow denotes Rosemary Lane. **Pink** block = Rag Fair 1745.

Light Blue = very poor £4 or under

Dark Blue = poor £5-8.

Purple = mixed some wealthy and some poor.

Red = comfortable/middling sort £9-20.

Yellow = wealthy over £20.

⁸⁰ LMA, The Royalty of Well Close Square, MS 6015/11-20, 1745.



Fig. 3.9: Danish-Norwegian Church in Well Close Square engraved by Johannes Kip in 1796 from *Spitalfields Life* <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2012/12/30/the-lost-squares-of-stepney/> accessed 10 March 2014.

Well Close Square precinct

The eastern end of Rosemary Lane, led into Well Close Square precinct, one of the Tower Liberties. It was said to have been ‘a neat square but of no great extent’ with the Danish church as a centre piece. In 1745 this was a mixed neighbourhood, with approximately 200 houses of which 20 were empty and not assessed. The drawing above (Fig.3.9) provides an idea of the scale of the houses surrounding the church. Nicholas Barbon began developing Well Close Square in the 1680s, and as Peter Guillery writes, the houses were, ‘not modest, and they incorporated fashionable classical

embellishments'.⁸¹ There was also a court house with a small gaol attached on the south side of the square. This was mainly used for debtors. With its proximity to the Thames the square became the home of many with maritime connections. At least eight of the householders on the Square were sea captains and a number of naval officers and seamen also lodged here. In Grace's Alley South of the Square, one Mrs Bowers kept a public house with lodging for seamen. It was reputed to be a bawdy house by a disgruntled sailor accused of stealing goods belonging to the owner.⁸² Well Close Square was also home to one church minister and several gentlemen. The Honourable Umporvil Robinson, JP, Richard Farmer both lived there; as did Farmer's clerk James Warriner. One of the alehouses surrounding the square was used as a court and debtors prison, we know little information regarding it but it is said by M. Dorothy George to have belonged to the Tower Royalty (Liberties of the Tower).⁸³ A house in the square was owned by the Parson family, owners of the Red Lion Brewery. Daniel Ireson, a wealthy merchant and Botolph vestryman, had a residence and two Sugar Houses on the square. He also owned three houses in Meeting House Yard close to Gravel Lane.

This was a respectable address in eighteenth-century London. However, the northern periphery of the square was just yards away from Rag Fair (see Fig. 3.8) and Cable Street. Samuel Unwin, thief-taker and landlord of The Ship Tavern, lived just yards away in Shorter Street - an alley that ran from Rag Fair onto the north side of the Square. Notorious thief-taker Stephen MacDaniel lived for a time in Back Lane also on the northern periphery of the Square. Next door to Unwin lived Jane Johnson, a dealer in

⁸¹ Guillery, *The Small House*, pp. 70-73.

⁸² *OBP*, Robert Hunt, 18 May 1738, t17380518-2.

⁸³ George, *London Life*, p. 291. The Museum of London has displayed some of the original wooden walls with prisoner's carvings from the interior of the prison in their eighteenth century gallery.

Rag Fair, who appeared at the Old Bailey on several occasions accused of theft.⁸⁴ The maximum property rental on the square was £20 and the minimum was £2. The average rental was £6. 7s.⁸⁵ Overall the property values on the square were not high, but these values belie the wealth and influence of the residents. East Smithfield and St Katherine Precinct were considerably poorer in comparison.

The next section of this chapter will discuss this area which was the poorest in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate along with the precinct of St Katherine's. A coloured map has been used in this instance to demonstrate the conglomeration of very low rental value of the housing in this area. Moreover, as indicated above, this map only includes those people whose property was worth more than £4 (£1 rental value). We cannot guess the full extent of poverty in this area but the map gives us some indication.

⁸⁴ (Samuel Unwin), LMA, Land Tax Tower Division, Royalty of Well Close Square, MS6004, 1-56A, 1745; OBP, Jane Johnson, 19 May 1743, t17430519-18.

⁸⁵ LMA, Tower Division Land Tax Assessments, St Katherine's Precinct, MS 6010/14, 1745.

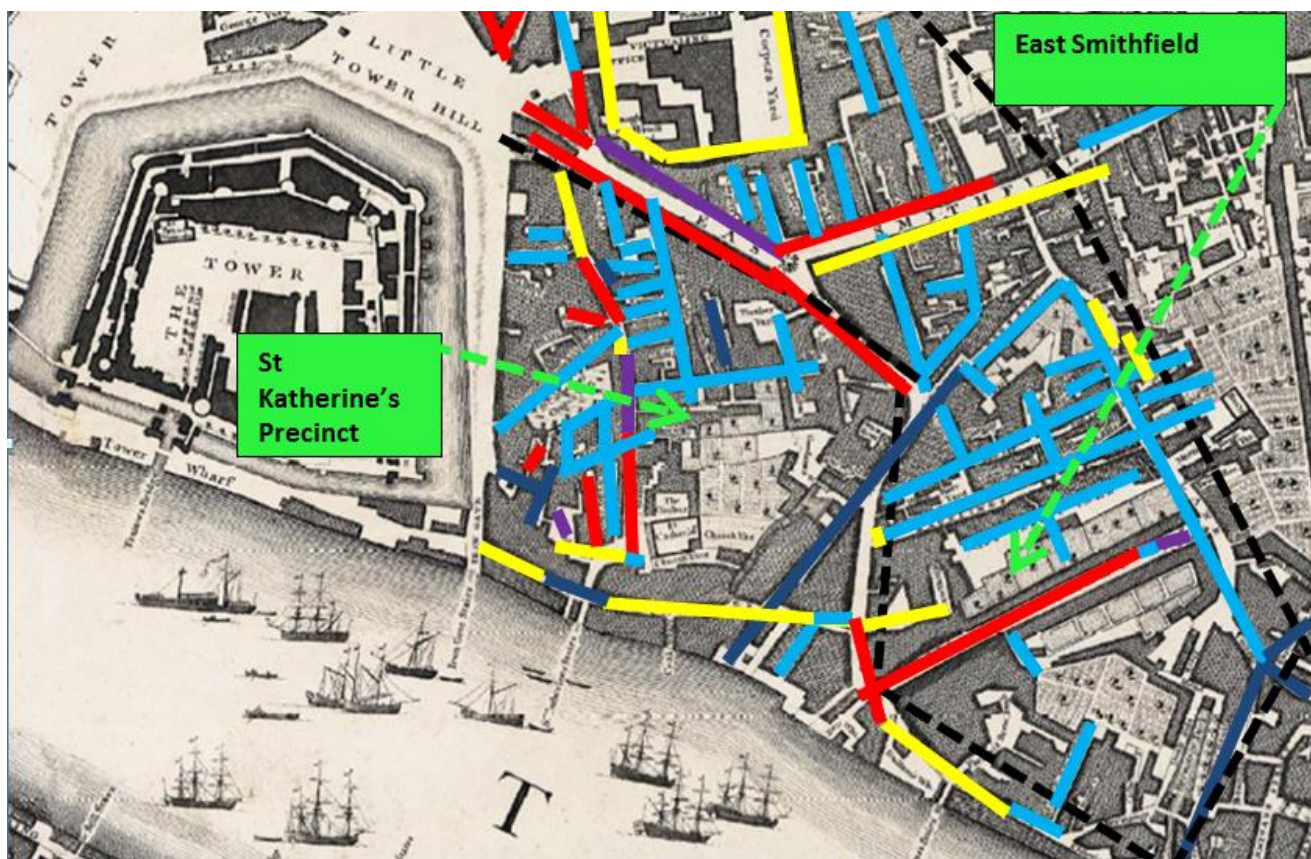


Fig. 3.10: East Smithfield and St Katherine's by the Tower

Source: From Rocque's Map 1746, showing St Katherine's precinct and East Smithfield. Rental values from St Botolph Aldgate, East Smithfield, 1744-5, LMA, MS 2545/5; LMA, Tower Division Without, 1745, St Katherine's Precinct MS 6010/14.

Key:

Black dotted line = St Botolph Aldgate parish

Light Blue = very poor £4 or under.

Dark Blue = poor £5-8.

Purple = mixed some wealthy and some poor.

Red = comfortable/middling sort £9-20.

Yellow = wealthy over £20.

East Smithfield precinct ran southwards from Rosemary Lane and Well Close Square to the Thames, encircling St Katherine's precinct to the west. Although a generally poor area, East Smithfield also contained substantial businesses, and government offices. The wealthiest square footage in East Smithfield was the Navy Victualing Office (shown in yellow in Fig.3.10). It was set within a walled, gated compound on the site of today's Royal Mint, close to the Tower of London. The yearly rentals for houses and properties

ranged from £20 to £400 per annum; and the average property rental was £104 per year. It was home to the high ranking civil servants, clerks, master butchers, corn buyers, bakers, messengers and servants. In his role as Surveyor General of Victualing for the Navy, Samuel Pepys was a regular visitor to the Victualing Office; and in 1664 he wrote 'so to the victualling office and then home'.⁸⁶ Home was after all just a few streets away in Mincing Lane.

The Victualing Yard was built on the site of St Mary Grace's Abbey and two former plague burial grounds. On John Rocque's map of 1746 we can clearly identify the associated Coopers Yard and the Slaughter Yard. There was also a brewery and bakery; and housing for some of the highest ranking administrators in the navy. In total, seven properties valued at £400 each could be found within its walls. This was the first, and foremost, large-scale naval food supply base in Britain until 1785 when it was found inadequate for the needs of the expanding navy and closed.⁸⁷

Just beyond the Yard the distribution of wealth changed rapidly. There were reasonably comfortable businesses such as Matthew Hammond's Victualing Office Coffee House, assessed as having a rateable value of £9 per annum.⁸⁸ But most of the rest of the precinct was significantly poorer, and the area was characterised by houses built from wood and plaster with only some of the larger houses being built completely from brick.

⁸⁶ Samuel Pepys Diary, Thursday 15th June 1764, <http://www.pepysdiary.com/archive/1666/05/29/index.php> accessed 20 November 2011.

⁸⁷ See also Ian Grainger and Christopher Philpotts, (eds.) *The Royal Navy Victualling Yard, East Smithfield*, (2010), pp. 1-2, pp. 10-15, pp. 34-37. See also Ian Grainger, Duncan Hawkins, Lynne Cowal and Robert Mikulski (eds.), *The Black Death Cemetery, East Smithfield* (2008); Ian Grainger and Christopher Philpotts (eds.), *The Cistercian Abbey of St Mary Graces, East Smithfield, London*, (2011).

⁸⁸ LMA, MS 2545/1-20; MS 2627/1, Renter Churchwardens Accounts.

Forty five newly built houses on Tower Wharf in 1645 were said to be built of wood and Flemish wall (lath and plaster) and tiles with only two being built of brick.⁸⁹

As in Rosemary Lane precinct, there were also large numbers of alehouses - some forty-four according to Power, one for every sixteen houses.⁹⁰ These varied in size and value. Vestryman, Thomas Watson kept the Queen's Head alehouse, close to the Navy Victualling office in East Smithfield, valued at £13. This was occasionally used for vestry meetings. But there was also the Sugar Loaf alehouse, adjacent to King Harry's Yard kept by Freeman Baldwin, the Ship in Angel Court kept by Adam Savoury, the Golden Anchor in Butcher's Row run by Elizabeth Morris. Albion Thompson kept the Cock and Lyon in Red Cross Street and John Morgan kept the King's Arms in Nightingale Lane. This last house was rated at just £2 per year.⁹¹

Nevertheless, the major thoroughfares were reasonably well off most likely reflecting a mixture of substantial housing and warehouses. And substantial shops and businesses can be identified, including Thomas Layton's bakery and Solomon Morgan's grocery shop on Kings Street. There were also jewellery and broker shops kept by Richard Foot and James Jacobson.⁹² Kings Street, just west of the Victualing Yard is shown in Fig. 3.10, coloured red, reflecting its status as a comfortable middling street with quite a few merchants active in the parish. In Fullers Court, Elizabeth Avery, a goldsmith kept a

⁸⁹ Power, 'East London housing', pp. 245-249.

⁹⁰ Power, 'Shadwell', pp. 39-40.

⁹¹ LMA MR/LV/07/1-5 Tower Division, 1750-51.

⁹² LMA, MS2671/1 Renter Church Wardens Accounts; LMA, MS 2688, St Botolph Aldgate Work House Accounts, City side, Thomas Layton and Solomon Morgan supplied the workhouse, Richard Foot and James Jacobson, they all appear in the Church Rate Accounts MS 2545/1-20, East Smithfield 1745. Strype, *A Survey of London*, (1720), pp. 27-28; Judy Jowett, *The Warning Carriers: How Messengers of the Goldsmiths' Company warned the Luxury Trades of Criminal Activities in Eighteenth-Century London*, (Silver Studies, Number 18, 2005), pp. 72-75.

shop that also sold petticoat hoops, while coal merchant John Stanton kept a business in Swan Alley.

But beyond a small number of relatively wealthy thoroughfares, Fig. 3.10 above reveals a landscape that also included many poorer streets. Much of the housing in this precinct probably resembled that in Bayles Place - a tiny alley just off East Smithfield built in the mid-seventeenth century. Michael Power describes Bayles Place as consisting of four, two-storied houses, with each house having between four and seven rooms. There was also one three-storey house in Bayles Place which had seven rooms split into two tenements. A typical small house would have had one ground floor room, some 12 feet by 15 feet that would act as a living space, possibly as a bedroom, and as a food preparation and eating area. A single pair of stairs would lead from this room to a chamber of the same size above. This could be a bedroom, or it could be used as another living space for lodgers. There may also have been a cellar or a garret room.⁹³

Despite the generally low standard of local housing, outside the Victualing Yard, there were some well-constructed small houses of note. Pennington Street included more than one hundred small houses laid out in rows. Built in the 1680s and 1690s for local artisans and labourers, Pennington's houses were said to have been built for longevity with each house having 3 rooms and a 17ft brick frontage. Guillery notes that 40 of these houses remained in use through the 1920s.⁹⁴

⁹³ Power, 'East London housing', p. 26, pp. 249-251; R. D. Sheldon, 'Barbon, Nicholas (1637/1640-1698/1699)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1334>, accessed 25 Sept 2009.

⁹⁴ Guillery, *Small Houses*, pp. 52-54; Power, 'East London Housing', p. 241.

While we have no description from Stow or Strype of Last Street we know that it was close to Brush Alley and the Ditch side beside the Tower walls, it was one of East Smithfield's more prosperous streets. Vestry member Robert Hall owned 4 properties here rated between £12 and £50. There was an assortment of different shops and businesses along this street, including Edward Worth's butcher shop, cutler John Onion kept a business here as did goldsmiths, Henry Jowet and Peter Foot who had premises next door to one another. The average rental in Last Street was £17; the highest property rental was £150 and the lowest £2 per year.

The next street of interest is Burr Street. It contained some of the parish's most prominent residents, including brewery owner, Lady Sarah Parsons (widow of Alderman Sir Humphrey Parsons), whose house was assessed as having a rental value of £100. Equally prominent were men such as Captain Joshua Harle, who kept a popular grocery shop close to the Hermitage Bridge. Harle sold everything from snuff to soap (Fig. 3.11) some of his customers travelled from the City to purchase goods; his property was assessed at a rateable value of £20 per annum.⁹⁵ As one would expect in a neighbourhood close to the Thames there were at least five sea captains; as well as two barber surgeons, Dr John Atkinson and Dr Arnold Boatswainsman.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, just yards away in Burr Street, thirty eight houses were noted as being empty by the parish tax collectors in 1744-5; possibly the rents were too high for the poorest East Smithfield residents. The average rental on the street was a middling £11. 1s. Moreover, East Smithfield, had the highest number of residents whose properties

⁹⁵ BM, Joshua Harle Trade card, Heal, 68.133, © Trustees of the British Museum; LMA, MS 2545/1-20 East Smithfield.

⁹⁶ LMA MS 2545/1-20, East Smithfield; TNT PROB CW 11/812.

were valued in the lowest bracket £4 or below. If we were to calculate the rental of East Smithfield without the high rentals associated with the Victualing office, the average tax assessment for households was just £6. 6s. per annum. And in among the better off residents of East Smithfield, there were numerous streets where houses attracted assessments of just £1 to £2. Peter's Court just off Rosemary Lane contained 9 houses assessed at just £1 each. Maudlin's Rents a court close to King Henry's Yard had 20 houses with a rental value of £2. Nonetheless, houses with a value of less than £1 did exist here, but they were not taxed and so do not appear on the tax collectors' lists.

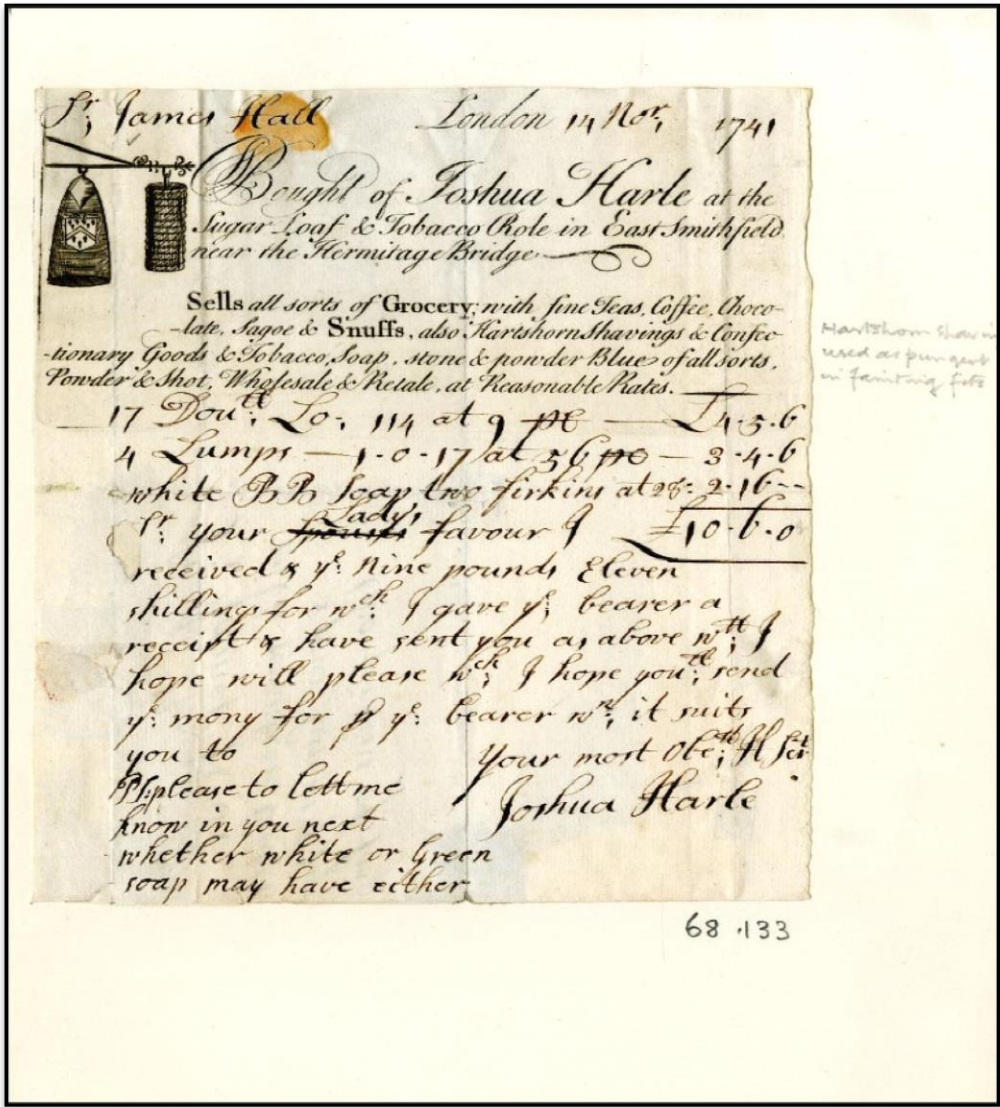


Fig. 3.11: Captain Joshua Harle's receipt for goods purchased, Courtesy of the British Museum, BM. 68.133, © Trustees of the British Museum.

St Katherine's Precinct

Surrounded by East Smithfield to the east, and the Tower to the west, St Katherine's precinct was the poorest area in this neighbourhood. In 1664 St Katherine's precinct is said by Power to have had the most densely built housing in East London with 927 households in the precinct and an average of 40.3 households per acre.⁹⁷ At a similar time Whitechapel had some 2,482 households with 14.7 households per acre and the Minories had 114 households with an average of 22.8 per acre. Only East Smithfield came close to St Katherine's level of housing density, with 1,239 households, or 33.9 households per acre.⁹⁸

Because of the detailed work on the precinct undertaken by Craig Spence, the deteriorating character of the area and its housing stock, can be assessed over six decades. For the 1690s, Spence found 839 households in St Katherine's, with a mean rateable value of £5. 10s.⁹⁹ By 1725, William Maitland's estimates show that this had fallen to some 731 properties.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, by 1745 the land tax assessments indicate that this figure had again dropped to roughly 707 properties. The average yearly rental for those 707 properties was £7 10 shillings, the vast majority being small low value houses, with few larger and more valuable properties interspersed. This could suggest that many houses had fallen out of the tax regime, as being valued at less than £1 per annum. In addition, by 1745, and tax assessors observed that close to 100 houses were

⁹⁷ Power, 'East London housing', pp. 244-245.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁰ Maitland, *History of London*, (1739), p. 428.

found to be empty or derelict, and that many others had been simply pulled down since their last assessment.¹⁰¹

Moreover, with 71.5 per cent of householders paying the lowest rates and 8 per cent of the overall housing either derelict or empty, this area had clearly deteriorated in 60 years.¹⁰² When we break the statistics down further, we find that by 1745, 63 per cent of householders in this parish paid taxes on a rateable value of between £1 - £5. 10s. Some 30 per cent of householders paid between £6 - £19 10s. and just 7 per cent on the higher rates between £20 and £180. One resident who fitted the middling category was Bomer Lovett, a sometime thief-taker, who lived in this poor neighbourhood. His wife kept a shop in Cats Hole close to the Iron Gate Stairs. Lovett lived in a household valued at £7 per annum. A turnkey at St Katherine's Gaol, Lovett worked with thief-taker Nathaniel Harris on occasion and he will be discussed further in chapter 5. Some alleys and courts barely rose above the minimum rent in this precinct. At the same time, and despite the overall poverty of the area, there were houses rated at the upper end of the spectrum, reflected how even a 'poor' neighbourhood contained some pockets of wealth.

St Katherine's Lane, marked predominately in yellow and red, (Fig. 3.10) was the wealthiest street in the precinct. Some of the higher valued premises especially around St Katherine's Lane were most likely a mixture of substantial houses warehouses and some mixed business premises. The most expensive single property in this precinct belonged to William Hunt who kept a house, a warehouse and a wharf for unloading flour situated between Iron Gate Stairs and St Katherine's Stairs. The property was

¹⁰¹ LMA, St Katherine's Precinct, MS 6010/14; Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 53-55; Guillery, *The Small House*, p. 70.

¹⁰² Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 22, 58, 73, 107.

valued at £180 per annum. Richard Holloway's house, at the start of St Katherine's Lane, was valued at £70 per annum. Elizabeth Stuteville kept a house with a rental value of £50. Goldsmiths Richard and Samuel How lived in St Katherine's Lane and appear in *The Warning Carrier's*, a note book carried by men employed by the Goldsmiths Company to warn trusted members regarding stolen goods.¹⁰³ They kept premises here valued at £12 and £14 respectively.

However, these relatively wealthy residents were the exception and the majority of householders were paying a minimal valuation. The preponderance of light blue lines shown in Fig. 3.10 testifies to St Katherine's being generally a largely poor area. Moreover, the fact that there were some courts and alleys that show on the map but do not appear in the tax assessments at all reveals that whole streets had simply fallen below the standard £1 valuation and suggests, in part, an increasingly run down environment.¹⁰⁴

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Both within individual precincts, but also across the wider neighbourhood, the evidence of rateable values and tax assessments suggests a varied and variegated distribution of wealth. To a degree, the poor and the rich lived together. Table. 3.4 aggregates the data for the precincts that make up St Botolph Aldgate as a whole, along with the data for the adjoining precincts of Holy Trinity, Well Close Square and St Katherine's.

¹⁰³ Jowett, *The Warning Carriers*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ Power, 'East London housing', pp. 244-245.

1744-5	Total Assessed Houses/ Properties	Maximum Rental Value	Average Rental Value	Minimum Rental Value
Well Close Square	180	£20	£6 6s	£2
St Katherine's precinct	707	£180	£7 10s	£1
Whitechapel 6th Division Rosemary Lane	709	£62	£6 12s	£1
Holy Trinity The Minories	120	£310	£15 1s	£2
St Botolph Aldgate Parish (including Houndsditch, Covent Garden, High Street, Barrs, East Smithfield and Tower Hill precincts.	2224	£400	£11 19s	£1

Table. 3.4: Comparison of Neighbourhood Property Rental Values

Source: LMA, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate Assessments, MS 2545/1-20; LMA, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate Assessments, MS 2545/1-20; LMA, Tower Division Land Tax Assessments, Royalty of Well Close Square, MS 6004/1-56, 1745; LMA, St Katherine's Precinct, MS 6010/14, 1745; LMA, St Mary Whitechapel, 6th Division Rosemary Lane, MS 6015/11-20, 1745; LMA, Holy Trinity Minories, MS 5285/1-5, 1745.

This material suggests that St Botolph Aldgate and the wider neighbourhood of Rosemary Lane remained remarkably 'mixed' through at least the mid-eighteenth century. The average rateable value of £11 19s. for St Botolph's was itself high, but more telling was the existence of households in the parish valued at £400.

Having made this observation, this 'mixing' remained more true for the areas near the City, and became increasingly less true, the further east and south one went. The precinct of Holy Trinity on the City side of the parish was particularly noteworthy for the number of its rich inhabitants, and its relatively high average rateable value of £15 1s. (made up of many wealthier inhabitants, rather than a few very rich individuals). To the east and south, towards the Thames, the picture changes. The lowest average rateable

values recorded for 1744-5 were for Well Close Square and Whitechapel 6th Division - 6s. 6d. and 6s. 12d. respectively - with St Katherine's and East Smithfield coming in close behind. These precincts recorded rateable values that bunched at the low end, with a few, but very few, higher value households.

Moreover, the fact that there were extremely high rateable values associated with establishments such as the Navy Victualing Yard in East Smithfield, substantially skewing the average valuation for the area, should not disguise the high percentage of low rateable valuations. When we compare City precincts such as Holborn, Drury Lane or the Strand, with mean household rateable values of £21 7s. in the 1690s; the returns for these eastern precincts look very low, even when institutions such as the Victualing Yard are factored in.

We also need to be wary of assuming that high-valuation households in otherwise poor neighbourhoods, reflects real social mixing. There were at least 52 licensed alehouses in Portsoken ward in 1750; 31 in St Katherine's, and 57 in St John's Wapping (which included Well Close Square). There were over 100 in St Mary Whitechapel, all likely to be both highly rated, and yet servicing a markedly poor clientele. There were also many drinking establishments and normal houses that sold spirits but did not have a licence.¹⁰⁵ While a relatively well-off alehouse keeper may have lived above the shop, their presence did little to aid social interaction.

This material suggests a pattern, in which the traditional 'mixed' neighbourhood of the seventeenth century was most fully preserved in the areas closest to the City, and the

¹⁰⁵ LMA, MR/LV/6/79, 1750, Book 118 Aldgate; MR/LV/07/1-5, Register of the Innkeepers and Alehouse keepers within the Tower Division, 1750-51.

those areas along the Thames and further to the east, had, even by the mid-century, begun to evolve into a more socially uniform series of communities.

WOMEN HOUSEHOLDERS

Patterns of overall population change and the distribution of wealth by household provide important perspectives on the character of this neighbourhood. But they tend to hide one all-important aspect of the area - the relative dominance of the area by female householders. Rosemary Lane had an above-average number of women residents. Craig Spence has calculated from the 1693-4 aid assessments that out of 92.9 per cent of assessed householders in metropolitan London, 84.1 per cent were male and 15.9 per cent were women. While he claims no unique residential pattern exists for male householders within the assessments, he has found that there were some distinctive residential patterns of women householders. At the heart of the City in Cheapside, women made up between 5.6 per cent to 9.7 per cent of all householders. In contrast, in the parishes close to the City wall at Aldgate and Coleman Street this figure rises to 16.7 per cent of householders.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 75-77.

	1693-4	House- holders	Women House- holders	Percentage
St Botolph Aldgate (City & Middlesex)	4s. in the pound tax, 1693-4	2489	445	17.9
Well Close Square	1693-4	124	13	10.4
St Katherine By The Tower (precinct)	1693-4	846	186	23.7
Holy Trinity The Minories	1693-4	116	18	15.5

Table 3.5: Women Householders 1692-1694.

Source: Spence, *London in the 1690s*, (2000); Appendix III; Portsoken ward and St Botolph Aldgate (Middlesex, East Smithfield), pp. 176-177; Appendix III, (Portsoken) St Botolph Aldgate, City and Middlesex; , *The Four shillings in the Pound Aid 1693-1694: Middlesex, Tower Liberty, Well Close Square, Trinity Minories, St Katherine By The Tower (precinct)*, *The City of London, the City of Westminster, and Metropolitan Middlesex* (1992), <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=21871>, Date accessed: 05 November 2012.

This predominance of women increased even further, as one moves eastward. In St Katherine's precinct, for example, Spence finds that the percentage of women householders rises to 23.7 per cent (Table 3.5). Spence contends that this was due to the availability of 'small, cheap houses'. In parts of the hamlet of Ratcliff, this figure rises to 26.2 per cent and in Wapping Stepney and Wapping Whitechapel women headed 21.3 per cent of households.¹⁰⁷ In part, this was simply about poverty. In seventeenth-century Southwark the percentage of female and particularly widows as head of households was directly correlated with poorer lanes and alleys. Boulton found that 20 per cent of householders in the poorer streets of Boroughside were female, compared to 7.6 per cent in the wealthier lanes and on the High Street.¹⁰⁸ This also reflects Nigel Goose's findings for seventeenth-century Cambridge.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 75-78.

¹⁰⁸ Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁹ Goose, 'Household size and structure', p. 378.

The tax returns for 1744-5 suggest that this overall pattern does not substantially change in the first half of the eighteenth century (Table. 3.6). Women still account for an above average, 17.1 per cent of householders, in precincts such as St Katherine's.

1744-5	House/Property holders	Women Householders	Percentage
St Botolph Aldgate (City & Middlesex)	2224	326	14.6 %
Well Close Square	180	26	14.4%
St Katherine By The Tower (precinct)	707	121	17.1%
Holy Trinity The Minories	120	18	14.8%

Table. 3.6: Women Householders 1744-1745.

Source: LMA, St Botolph Aldgate, MS 2545/ 1-20; LMA, Land Tax Assessments, Middlesex, Well Close Square, MS 6004/1-56A, St Katherine by the Tower, MS 6010/14, Holy Trinity the Minories, MS 5285/1-5.

In large measure this distinctive pattern is about the nature of employment and household formation in the eastern parts of London. Spence suggests that much of this apparent gender skew resulted from the long periods of time sailors spent away from home, leaving women to act as head of household in their absence. Moreover, cheaper housing and more opportunities for women's work in connection with the navy must also have attracted women to the area.¹¹⁰ Victualing, one of the main employments of East Smithfield and its surrounds was a female dominated occupation. Peter Earle, on the basis of registers of the *Sun Fire Office* for London 1726-9, found that 37.6 per cent of

¹¹⁰ Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750*, (1994), p. 117.

business women in London were involved in some way in the victualing trades.¹¹¹ We have already noted the high number of alehouses and other drinking establishments that marked the area. Many of these were run by women. Sarah Newman kept the City of Bristol Tavern in St Katherine's Court and had a substantial property with a rateable value of £40 per year. This was quite possibly a substantial lodging house for mariners and travellers. The majority of women tax payers labelled with an occupation were connected to the victualing trades.

But women were not restricted to any one occupation. Apart from the alehouse keepers, two female goldsmiths, two proprietors of sugar houses, numerous clothes sellers and petticoat makers can all be identified. Gold Broker and petticoat hoop maker Elizabeth Waters kept a business of St Katherine's Lane Close rated at £4 per annum.¹¹² In this precinct alone, out of 119 women householders, 32 had properties with a rateable value over £5; while the wealthiest female householder occupied a house rated at £98 per annum.¹¹³

CONCLUSION

Overall this neighbourhood was poorer than most neighbourhoods in London, with whole streets rated at £1 or less per annum, and many pockmarked by empty or derelict houses.¹¹⁴ There was a core working community that lived in the back streets and alleys of East Smithfield, St Katherine's and in the Whitechapel section of Rosemary Lane that were extremely poor. At the same time, there were still rich people among the poor. Rate assessments indicate that by the mid-century at least, they were most commonly

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 148.

¹¹² LMA, MS 6010/14, St Katherine's precinct, 1745; Jowett, *The Warning Carriers*, p. 75.

¹¹³ LMA, MS 6010/14, St Katherine's precinct, 1745.

¹¹⁴ Boulton, 'The poor among the rich', p. 237.

found on the 'main' streets, while poorer residents fanned out in the adjacent streets and alleys.¹¹⁵ But, their houses nevertheless backed on to one another, and their lives no doubt intersected in complex ways.

As the work of historians such as Jeremy Boulton has demonstrated, even in the richest corners of London, poor people lived amongst the better off residents. There were few enclaves, even in Westminster that belonged to the rich alone.¹¹⁶ And although the area had a reputation by mid-century as a disorderly one, there is little sense that it was thought of as completely run down or a 'slum' or rookery, with all their nineteenth century connotations. The difference with Rosemary Lane was that overall property was cheaper to rent than in the City and the West End. While nearly one third of the properties in St Botolph Aldgate were assessed as having a rateable value of £10 or more per annum, this was in an area where £10 would secure a much better house than in the City or in the West End.¹¹⁷ Many wealthy residents from this neighbourhood were living in properties that if shifted to the West End would have been worth triple the yearly rental. There may have been a few areas that were heading the way of a nineteenth-century slum, especially around Rag Fair and in St Katherine's, but there were also many areas that must have seemed salubrious and well appointed; communities that worked. Using the sources available this chapter has provided a detailed analysis and depiction of the streets and people of this neighbourhood. The following chapter will focus on Rag Fair and its reputation for disorder.

¹¹⁵ Earle, *The Making of The English Middle Class*, p. 205.

¹¹⁶ Boulton, 'The poor among the rich', pp. 215-218.

¹¹⁷ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, p. 90.

Chapter 4

Rag Fair: Clothes, Pawn Shops, Complaints and Crime



Fig. 4.1: Map of East London showing Rosemary Lane. *A Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark; with the Contiguous Buildings; From an actual Survey taken by John Rocque Land-Surveyor, and Engraved by John Pine, Bluemantle Pursuivant at Arms and Chief Engraver of Seals, &c. to His Majesty. This section of the map shows East London, with Rosemary Lane marked with a pink arrow. Courtesy of © Motco Enterprises Limited, Ref: www.motco.com*

INTRODUCTION

In 1722 Daniel Defoe published two novels. *Moll Flanders* is the more famous, but he also produced:

*The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque, Commonly call'd Col. Jack, who was Born a Gentleman, put 'Prentice to a Pick-Pocket, was Six and Twenty Years a Thief, and then Kidnapp'd to Virginia, Came back a Merchant; was Five times married to Four Whores; went into the Wars, behav'd bravely, got Preferment, was made Colonel of a Regiment, came over, and fled with the Chevalier, is still abroad compleating a Life of Wonders, and resolves to dye a General.*¹

In *Moll Flanders* Defoe sets most of the London narrative in the City and the West End, but in *Colonel Jack*, Defoe's eponymous hero lives initially in the East. Defoe depicts Colonel Jack's youth as spent earning his living running errands for the 'Folks on *Rosemary-Lane*'.² According to Defoe, the orphaned Jack slept each night with his companions, his 'brothers', in the annealing sheds of Glass House Yard on Well Street. As Defoe describes it:

Those who know the position of the Glass-houses, and the Arches where they neal the bottles after they are made, know that those Places where the Ashes are Cast, and where the poor Boys lye, are Caveties in the Brick-work, perfectly close, except at the entrance, and consequently as warm as the Dressing-room of a Bagnio; that it is impossible they can feel any Cold there... and therefore the boys lye not only safe, but very comfortable, the ashes excepted...³

Glass House Yard was in the heart of 'Rag Fair', a section of Rosemary Lane situated at the western end of Rosemary Lane, close to Well Close Square and close to the New Exchange (a small group of shops, see Fig.4.2 and Fig. 4.4). This is where the moveable

¹ Daniel Defoe, *Colonel Jack, The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque, Commonly call'd Col. Jack...*, edited by Samuel Holt Monk, (reprint 1970), [1722], pp. 7-19, p. 37, p. 77; Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth Century London*, (2004), pp. 42-43. See also Hal Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law*, (Baltimore, 2001), pp. 101-111

² Defoe, *Colonel Jack*, p. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, p.16.

market known as Rag Fair had its centre, and most consistent location. Defoe directs us there, to '*Rosemary- Lane, by the End of the Place, which is call'd Rag-Fair*'.⁴

Jack's first encounter with an old clothes seller in Rag Fair encompasses an experience shared by many Londoners. With the profits generated by selling stolen goods, Jack and his 'brother' splash out on stockings and shoes to protect their bare feet, the first of which they bought in Rag Fair:

So away we went together and we bought a pair of *Rag-Fair* Stockings in the first Place for 5d. not 5d. a pair but 5d. together, and good stockings they were too.⁵

For Jack's brother, the 'Major', as he grew in wealth from a series of thefts, the shoes and stockings were followed by a slowly expanding wardrobe, all purchased at the 'Fair':

He began to have cloths on his back to leave the ash-hole, ... and which was more, he took upon him to wear a shirt, which was what neither he, or I had ventur'd to do for three year before...⁶

As we have already noted, Rosemary Lane was lined with shops selling all types of food and goods - everything an eighteenth-century Londoner would need to get by. And Jack and his brother were customers here as well, setting themselves down to dinner in an 'open box' at a 'boiling cook's in Rosemary Lane':

... where we treated ourselves nobly, and... for we had three-penny-worth of boil'd beef, two-penny worth of pudding, a penny brick, (as they call it, or loaf) and a whole pint of strong beer, which was seven pence in all.⁷

Defoe's portrayal of Rosemary Lane and its penchant for cheap food, cheap second hand clothes and cheap shoes is an accurate one. But the most distinctive component to this geography of retail remained the 'Rag Fair'. A movable market, Rag Fair hawkers could

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p.15.

⁶ Ibid., p.17.

⁷ Ibid., p.15.

be found along the breadth and width of this street causing major problems for inhabitants and local businesses (see Fig.4.2).

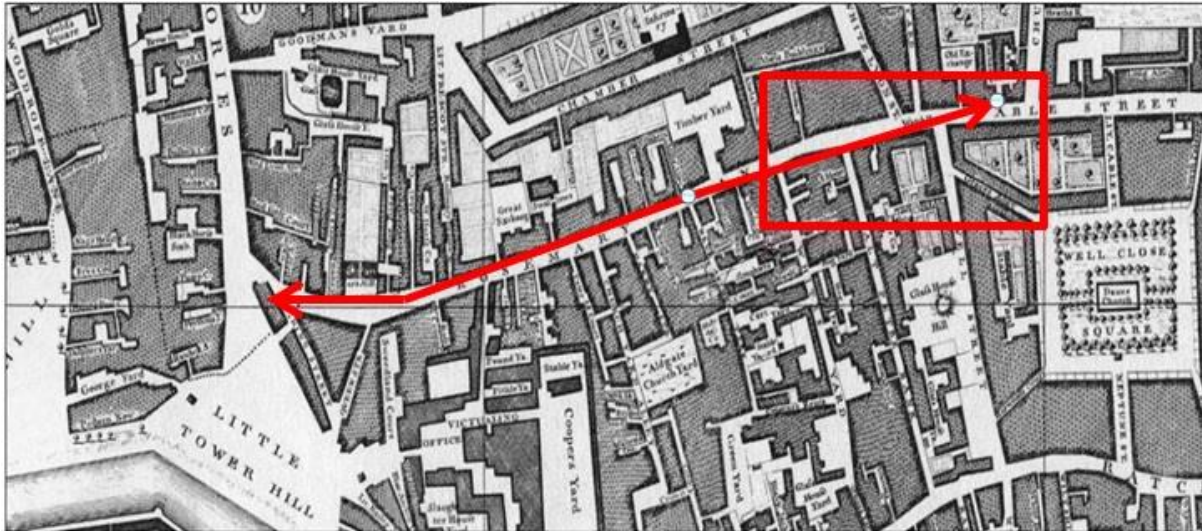


Fig. 4.2: Rocque's map of 1746 showing Rosemary Lane. Key: Red line denotes the whereabouts of the moveable Rag Fair. The Red Box denotes the permanent area on Rosemary Lane known as 'Rag Fair'.

Strictly speaking this was not a 'fair' at all - not in the sense of St Bartholomew or Southwark Fair. It did not provide entertainment - though entertainment could be found there - and its primary purpose was to sell old clothes. In 1888 a Royal Commission defined a market as an 'authorised public concourse of buyers and sellers of commodities meeting at a specific place and time'.⁸ While Rag Fair had the buyers and sellers of commodities, it was not authorised, it did not have a license. However, it still functioned much to the dismay of the authorities. As we saw in the introduction countless proclamations and handbills opposing the, '...Selling of old Raggs and Cloths... by **Idle, vagrant, Loose and Disorderly** Persons...who continue to assemble together

⁸ Royal Commission on Markets, *Final Report* (P.P. 1891, XXXVII), p. 2.

every Day of the Week (Sundays excepted), from about the hours of One or Two in the Afternoon, till Night... in or near *Little-Tower-Hill*, leading towards *Rosemary-Lane*...⁹

This chapter will provide a glimpse of the 'disorderly' men and women who frequented Rag Fair, and the 'tumultuous rogues'¹⁰, those thieves and buyers of stolen goods who helped give Rosemary Lane its reputation for theft and disorder, and the more respectable shoppers and shopkeepers whose custom and enterprise made the Fair work. In the process, it will explore the attitudes exposed by the proclamations, petitions, and resolutions that sought the fair's closure - the jaundiced view from the heights of authority. But more significantly, it will explore how the fair worked as a site of exchange, and as a locus of crime, asking both whether the neighbourhood deserved its reputation, and what roles it played in the lives of working people. Finally, it will locate the Fair within the network of pawnbrokers - both legitimate and illegitimate. It was these established shopkeepers who defined the economic context within which the street vendors of the Fair operated.

Much of this chapter concerns women. It discusses petty theft and the pawning and selling of clothes - activities largely undertaken by the women of the neighbourhood- while the regulation and attempted suppression of the fair was pursued primarily by men. In part, this is simply an epiphenomenon of policing. As discussed in chapter 2, policing of this area was generally carried out by parish constables, the parish watch, occasional City marshals, specially appointed

⁹ London Metropolitan Archive (hereafter LMA) LMA, 'Court of Aldermen Repertories, 'Proclamation against the holding of a ragg fair in or near little tower hill leading towards Rosemary Lane', Portsoken ward, Proclamation issued by Mayor Thomas Barnard, January 1737, Rep 142, fo 153.

¹⁰ Ibid.

constable and the local thief-takers - all men. But this chapter is not intended to serve primarily as an analysis of gender. It seeks to go beyond a gendered dialectic to understand the relationships on the ground, between order and disorder; to explore both why the authorities were so concerned with crime in this area and why they linked it directly to Rag Fair; and why Rag Fair nevertheless continued.

COMPLAINTS

M. Dorothy George argued London was a 'seeming paradox' characterized on one hand by 'extreme disorderliness', and on the other, 'beneath the turbulence, an essential orderliness'.¹¹ Rag Fair exemplifies this paradox. No other street market in eighteenth-century London was so frequently attacked. And yet, despite all the rhetoric and attempts to stop it, Rag Fair continued. The Rag Fair hawkers would simply move jurisdiction or run away and come back the next day. As a result, it was seemingly impossible for the authorities to stop the illegal trading. Their failure, however, did not stop them from trying. The 'Fair' generated profound local opposition which both evidences its history, and reflects the essentially respectable character of much of the wider neighbourhood.

The first petition against the Rag Fair was written in February 1700 and was presented to the Middlesex Bench by the parish of Whitechapel. In 'The humble Petition of Several Inhabitants of the Upper Hamlet of Rosemary Lane in the Parish of St Mary Whitechapel in the said County', the parish claimed:

That daily Meetings are held and kept in the said Hamlet under Pretense of a Custom for keeping a Faire there which is called Hagg Faire. That the said Meetings are a very great hindrance and Disturbance to your Petitioners And

¹¹ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (Penguin reprint, (1992),[1925]), p. 9.

forasmuch as the Chief Aim and Intent of these Meetings are to buy & sell Stolen Goods and for the Encouragement of all manner of Wickedness, Theft & Debauchery And forasmuch as Several Persons there doe frequently harbor & Encourage Several Persons who resort to these Meetings...'.¹²

A further petition from the High Constable of Whitechapel condemning those who 'unlawfully assemble' in the streets followed.

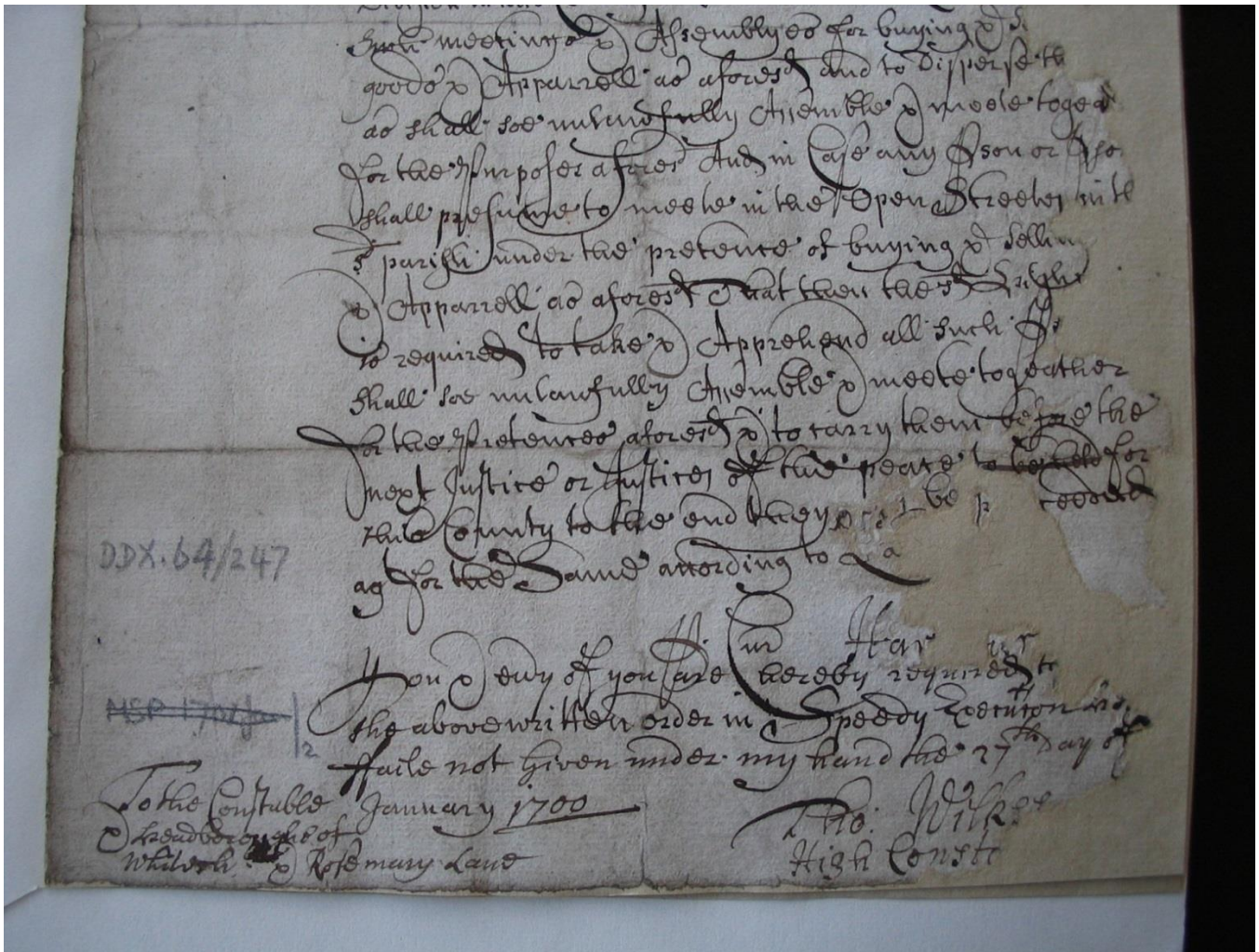


Fig. 4.3: Petition from Thomas Wilkes, St Mary Whitechapel Vestry, London Metropolitan Archive.¹³

¹² LMA, MJ/SP/1701/01/001-002, Inhabitants of Rosemary Lane Whitechapel ask for the Rag Fair to be suppressed, 'The humble Peticon of Severall Inhabitants of the upper Hamblett of Rosemary Lane in the Parish of St Mary white chapple in the sd County'. I am grateful to Dr Diane Payne for this reference. See also Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *London Lives, 1690-1800* (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 24 April 2012), (hereafter LL), LL Ref: LMSMG040000028, Middlesex Sessions General Orders of Court, Order to suppress Rag Fair, 11th October 1716;

¹³ MJ/SP/1701/01/001-002, January 1700, Petition to Middlesex from Thomas Wilkes, High Constable.

This same complaint, in almost identical language, would be repeated regularly for the rest of the century, alternating between appeals to the Middlesex Bench, originating in the parish vestries of either Whitechapel, or the Middlesex part of St Botolph Aldgate, and to the Lord Mayor and the City from the Portsoken Wardmote Inquest, and the City side of St Botolph's.

In 1737 the first published Mayoral proclamation ordering the closure of Rag Fair was produced. In stock phrases that changed little from decade to decade the fair was condemned for:

...blocking the street, in or near *Little-Tower-Hill*, leading towards *Rosemary-Lane*... and the said inhabitants ...are in great danger of being robbed and Pilfered by Rogues, Thieves and pickpockets, who daily attend at such unlawful Meetings.¹⁴

In the same year an appeal from inhabitants of St Botolph Aldgate was submitted to a meeting of the Common Councilmen of the City presided over by the Lord Mayor, and a further proclamation was published bemoaning the spread of Rag Fair from the 'Tower to the Minories ... to the great annoyance of the residing and passing public'.¹⁵

No doubt the movement of the stalls and market benches from one jurisdiction on this street to the other ensured that orders were issued from both the Middlesex

¹⁴ LMA, CLA/048/PS/01/065, City Proclamation issued by Mayor Thomas Barnard, January 1737, Rep 142, Fo 153, 1737, An order about Ragg fair -“ agreed to be printed and set up in the most publick places of this City and Liberties thereof and that it be likewise published in some of the publick dayley Papers”.

¹⁵ LMA, Court of Common Council Journals 1416-1811, 1740-62, Jor.63 fol. 20, Jor. 69, fol. 125, fol. 248; 14 June 1785 fol. 253-5. See also Jor.70, fol. 237-8, A new petition regarding old clothes, Jor. 71, fol. 94, Misc. Mss.85.22; LMA, MS 2649/1, Portsoken Wardmote Inquest: Minutes 1783 -1789 presentations to the Lord Mayor by John Chamberlain, Foreman, complaints regarding the spread of Rag Fair from the Tower to the Minories -‘ ...to the great annoyance of the residing and passing public’.

bench and the City Aldermen. In 1745 a further order to suppress Rag Fair was issued, this time by the Middlesex Bench. It is worth quoting in full:

Whereas a Remonstrance was made by the Grand Jury for the County of Middx to the Court of General Sessions of the Peace holden at Hicks Hall in St. John Street in and for the Said County on the twenty fifth Day of February last. Setting forth that they had made proper enquiry into and found that a great Number of tumultuous people did in a riotous manner daily assemble themselves together in great numbers, most part of them Strangers and Foreigners, as Scotch, Irish, French and many Vagrant Jews as well as English in a place called Rosemary Lane in the Parish of St. Mary Whitechapel in the Said County under colour of buying and Selling Old Cloaths, Raggs and Several other Commodities, By means whereof the Kings Highway in the Said Lane is dayly obstructed from about ten of the Clock in the Forenoon till Night each Day in the weeks (except Sundays) So that his Majesty's Subjects cannot without great Difficulty pass and repass with Coaches, Carts, Drays, Horses, or Persons with Burthens, and even Foot People cannot go about their lawfull Affaires, and the Inhabitants and Shopkeepers are often obliged to keep their Doors and Shops Shut in time of Publick Business to keep the Said Mobb, who are a parcell of disorderly People out of their Houses and Shops, and they greatly Suffer in their Trade and Business by hindering the fair Traders and Dealers from Nuisance, This Court upon reading the Said Remonstrance at this present General Quarter Sessions of the Peace holden for the County of Middx Doth Order that it be And It is hereby recommended and referred unto his Majesty 's Justices of the Peace for the Said County residing in the Tower Division in the Same County (in which Division the Said place called Rosemary Lane doth lye) or any three or more of them as a Committee to assemble together, And to view the Said place called Rosemary Lane, And to inquire and examine into the truth of the Matters Set forth in the Said Remonstrance, And to consider by what lawfull ways and Means the tumultuous Assemblies, Nusances and Disorders therein mentioned (if any Such there be) may be Suppressed or prevented, And to use all lawfull ways and means for the Suppressing or preventing the Same, And for the preservation of the Kings Peace the Said Committee of Justices if they Shall think it necessary may require the High Constable of the Said Division and Such other Peace Officers, as they Shall think requisite as his Assistants from time to time to attend the Said the Said Committee of Justices touching the Premisses, And the Said Committee of Justices and desired to make their Report touching the Said matters to them referred to the Court of the next General Sessions of the Peace for the Said County.

By adjournment on Thursday the 25th Day of April 1745.¹⁶

This Middlesex Sessions order of court is the first time that ‘strangers and foreigners’ are mentioned as a problem. But as an area marked by cheap rents, Rosemary Lane attracted its fair share of French Huguenots, Irish migrants and an increasing number of Jewish immigrants, particularly from mid-century onwards.

In 1750-51 the Court of Alderman’s Repertories - the minute books of the Court - reveal that several inhabitants of Portsoken Ward were made constables, as part of another attempt to suppress Rag Fair.¹⁷

During the course of the 1780s complaints and presentations against the illegal hawkers continued. In 1785, after yet another proclamation against Rag Fair, the court promised to insert a clause specifically directed at the fair, into a proposed bill designed to lay an additional duty on ‘Hawkers and Pedlars’ as one strategy to try and curb their activities.¹⁸

While the vast majority of official pronouncements relating to the fair are negative, seeking to close it down, others sought to regulate the fair, and run it as a business.

On the 15th October 1722 Matthew Howard, ‘Farmer of Public Markets’, served ‘Mr Sheriff’ of the Court of Aldermen with a writ of ‘Ad Quod Dampum’ - literally

¹⁶ Middlesex Sessions General Orders of Court, LL, ref: LMSMG0556020125, Order against Nuisances and Disorders in Rosemary Lane, 25 April 1745.

¹⁷ LMA, Court of Aldermen Repertories, 1750-1, Rep. 155. fol. 49, fol.515; LMA, Order to Suppress Rag Fair renewed, Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1740, REP 145, fo 236; LMA, CLA/048/PS/01/065; Proclamation to suppress Rag Fair issued by Mayor Daniel Lambert, 1741; LMA, CLA/048/PS/01/066, Proclamation issued by Mayor Richard Clark, 1785.

¹⁸ LMA, Court of Common Council Journals, 1416-1811 14 June 1785, fol. 253-5. See also Jor.70, fol. 237-8, A new petition regarding old clothes, Jor. 71, fol. 94, Misc. Mss.85.22; LMA, MS 2649/1, Portsoken Wardmote Inquest: Minutes 1783 -1789 presentations to the Lord Mayor by John Chamberlain, Foreman, complaints regarding the spread of Rag Fair from the Tower to the Minories - ‘...to the great annoyance of the residing and passing public’.

'according to the harm' - in an attempt to obtain a grant or licence to hold the market legitimately.¹⁹ This traditional medieval device would have brought the fair within a clear legal framework, but it was never granted. In October 1743 George Shanks served a similar writ to a meeting of the Court of Aldermen. On both occasions the Mayor opposed the writs as 'Highly Prejudicial to the Rights and Liberties of this City'.²⁰

To some Londoners the orders and proclamations published by the authorities must have seemed like an invitation to a wild street party that would be worth visiting, while to others they presented a frightening image of an area best avoided. Age, gender, self-construction as a 'respectable' Londoner, must have all contributed to each individual's reading of these proclamations. But in the light of official hostility and the failure of all attempts to legitimise it, Rag Fair has to be considered as having been 'authorised' by the people who shopped there. The fact that it lasted almost into the twentieth century is testament to its local legitimacy and popularity. And while the fair was clearly abhorred by the City government, the ward of Portsoken and by the local parishes it did not stop the parishes, in particular, from buying second hand clothes for their paupers at Rag Fair.²¹

¹⁹ See <http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/guide/rol.shtml>, accessed 8 April 2014.

²⁰ LMA, Matthew Howard Petition, 1722, Rep. 127, fol.542, fol. 556, Rep.128 fol. 11; LMA, George Shanks Petition, 1719, Rep 124, fol 146, 1740, Rep 145, fol 236; See also LMA, Rep.148, fol. 223, rep. 149, fol. 58, Howard's case carried on for a year with no clear resolution. Shanks petition was dismissed on the 4th December 1743; LMA, 1719, Rep 124, fol 146, 1740, Rep 145, fol 236.

²¹ LMA, MS 2642/1, 1730-31 Disbursements St Botolph Aldgate Vestry minutes; MS 2627/1 1742, 'Paid for Apparel for the Workhouse, bought at Rag Fair' £4 14s 7d. See above, ch.1.

SHOPPING ON ROSEMARY LANE

Court records from the *Old Bailey Proceedings* confirm that people came from all over London to either shop in Rosemary Lane or to steal or sell stolen goods. On a typical day out shopping, for example, Ann Sullivan, of Bunhill-Fields in Shoreditch, took herself and a friend from Smithfield after some two miles of hard city walking, to Rag Fair to purchase some 'linings for a gown', before walking on to Billingsgate to buy some eels before returning home, a round trip of over five miles.²² Rosemary Lane was a major shopping area, but it was not a sophisticated one. It did not have the stylish shops selling luxury items one found in places such as Cheapside. Nonetheless, at a time when made-to-measure clothing was a rare expense and second hand, and even third hand clothing typified the wardrobes of the majority of Londoners, Rag Fair was a busy shopping area serving a self-evident need. And beyond 'rags', here you could buy anything from oysters to a single shoe.

As discussed in chapter 1, by 1700 and possibly before there is evidence that goods were being sold from transient stalls and from baskets and blankets placed upon the ground on Rosemary Lane. In the *Proceedings* of August 1700, local people first refer to a Rag Market on Rosemary Lane, which quickly became known as Rag Fair.²³ While the trade in second hand clothing dominated Rosemary Lane, it is clear that it formed just one component of a more complex economy, encompassing an eclectic array of goods for sale including shoes, bed linen, bread, cheese, meat, fish, jewellery, books, pots and pans and even fruit trees - and indeed rags. John Beattie has claimed that theft was

²² Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913*, (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 24 March 2012), (Hereafter, *OBP*), William Harper, April 1733, t17330404-53.

²³ *OBP*, John Tackerberry, 28 August 1700, t17000828-11.

'encouraged in the metropolis by the ease with which almost any object could find a buyer or be pawned'.²⁴

Richard Simms believed that he could sell stolen cattle on this street. He took two steers from Henry Burton's land at St Leonards Shoreditch and drove them to Rosemary Lane where he was subsequently caught.²⁵ And Peter Douay and Nicolas Fowler were arrested when they tried to sell a stolen 'Iron Hundred Weight' worth 10 shillings, to a Blacksmith on Rosemary Lane.²⁶ James Green of Whitechapel was caught trying to sell two bibles belonging to his master at Rag Fair.²⁷ Nevertheless, the second-hand clothing businesses remained the mainstay of this street, and Rag Fair clothed many of London's poorer residents on a regular basis.²⁸ But we should not assume that the character of exchange involved was simple or one way. Many of the second-hand clothes shops in this area doubled as pseudo pawn broking establishments in which the nature of ownership, and of exchange was complicated by use of old clothes as collateral. By the 1740s London had around 250 large pawn broking emporiums and many more small informal pawnbrokers that operated from private homes, small shops or alehouses.²⁹ In the metropolis, as Alannah Tompkins notes, 'facilities for pawning were ubiquitous'.³⁰ London's working classes were as likely to use the Fair to pawn their clothes, as to buy them, problematizing the very notion of 'shopping'. As Miles Lambert remarks

²⁴ J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800*, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1986), p. 189.

²⁵ *OBP*, Richard Simms, 8 July 1713, t17130708-67.

²⁶ *OBP*, Peter Douay, Nicholas Fowler, 10 May 1722, t17220510-11.

²⁷ *OBP*, James Green, 17 May 1716, t17160517-24.

²⁸ John Styles, *The Dress of the People*, p. 176.

²⁹ Linebaugh, *The London Hanged, Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, (1991), pp. 227-228.

³⁰ Alannah Tompkins, 'Pawnbroking and the survival strategies of the urban poor in 1770s York', in Steven King and Alannah Tompkins (eds.) *The Poor in England 1700-1850, An economy of makeshifts*, (Manchester, 2003), pp. 172-173.

pawnbrokers 'relied overwhelmingly on pledges of clothing' in their transactions.³¹ And according to Beverly Lemire 'pawnbrokers constituted a significant part of the clothing trade.'³²

Second Hand Clothes

As Beverly Lemire has demonstrated, the trade in second-hand clothes, 'was not restricted to the indigent, to the destitute or to the recipients of charity'.³³ Working people across a wide spectrum of employments bought second-hand clothing. Even Adam Smith was aware of the importance of clothing to the eighteenth-century poor. In *The Wealth of Nations*, he wrote:

The old clothes which another bestows upon him, he exchanges for other old clothes which suit him better or for lodging, or for food, or for money with which he can buy food, clothes or lodging as he had occasion.³⁴

This was an old industry even in 1700, especially in this part of the capital.³⁵ Moreover, some of the largest second hand clothes dealers in Britain were based close to this area. In addition, by the 1780s there were some 92 registered second-hand clothes dealers in the London/ Middlesex area.³⁶ The Fair formed a dynamic nexus around which many of

³¹ Miles Lambert 'Cast-off Wearing Apparell': The consumption and distribution of second-hand clothing in Northern England during the long eighteenth century, *Textile History*, 35, (1), (2004), p. 2.

³² Beverly Lemire, 'Peddling Fashion: Salesmen, Pawnbrokers, Tailors, Thieves and the Second-Hand Clothes Trade in England, c. 1700-1800,' *Textile History*, 22 (1991), p. 71, pp. 77-8.

³³ Beverly Lemire 'Consumerism in pre-industrial and early industrial England: the trade in second hand clothes', *Journal of British Studies*, 27, (January 1988), p. 23.

³⁴ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), quoted in Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, p. 253.

³⁵ M. Ginsburg, 'Rags to riches: the second-hand clothes trade 1700-1978', *Costume*, 14, 1980, p. 121.

³⁶ Lemire, 'Peddling fashion', pp. 71-78; Beverly Lemire, 'The theft of clothes and popular consumerism in early modern England', *Journal of Social History*, 24, 1990, pp. 258-260. See also Beverly Lemire, 'A Good Stock of Cloaths': the changing market for cotton clothing in Britain, 1750-1800, *Textile History*, 22, (2), 1991, pp. 311-28; Garthine Walker, 'Women, theft and the world of stolen goods' in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, J. Kermode and G. Walker, (eds.), (1994), p. 89; Lynn MacKay, 'Why they stole: Women in the Old Bailey, 1779-1789', *Journal of Social History*, 32.3, (1999), pp. 623-639.

these dealers congregated, with secondary concentrations around London's other second-hand clothes markets in Monmouth Street and Houndsditch.³⁷

At mid-century one of the largest suppliers and buyers of second-hand clothing kept a shop at the top of Tower Hill at the opposite end of Rosemary Lane to Rag Fair. John Matthews was an Overseer to the Poor in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate. He also ran a large business concern which took him all over England, buying and selling as he travelled. Matthews paid rates for a building on Tower Hill in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate, with a rateable value of £22 per annum in 1745.³⁸ But he was simply the most successful of a large number of traders. John Sullivan and Robert Roberts, for example, kept more modest shops in Rosemary Lane in 1752.³⁹

Additionally, pawnbrokers were known to sell on their unclaimed clothes to local second hand shops and clothes dealers. One victim of theft, Richard Stevens giving evidence at the trial of his tenants William and Mary Donnington pleaded with the judge 'My Lord I want to know how I may get these Things again, for there are four or five of these Brokers [who] join together to make a Publick Sale every Month'.⁴⁰ This particular broker's sale occurred in St Katherine's precinct just yards away from Rag Fair and was a well-known venue for selling on second hand goods.⁴¹

³⁷ In 1786 Thomas and Edward Smith of 47 Houndsditch valued their stock of second hand clothing at £2,820, Lemire, 'Peddling fashion', p.73.

³⁸ John Matthews, LMA, MS 2545/1; LL ref: GLBAMV114010136, St Botolph Aldgate Vestry Minutes, 3rd May 1748, Lemire 'Consumerism in pre-industrial and early industrial England, p. 8.

³⁹ *OBP*, Paul Sheals, 14 September 1752, t17520914-45; *OBP*, Robert Douglass, 6 December 1752, t17521206-33.

⁴⁰ *OBP*, Mary His, William Donnington, 15 May 1746, t17460515-3.

⁴¹ *OBP*, *Ordinary of Newgate's Account*, March 1733 (OA17330305). In 1733 before being hanged 16 year old William West confessed to the Ordinary of Newgate that he stole countless handkerchiefs with 'two young Women... who live by buying up all the Handkerchiefs they bring to them, and exposing them to publick Sale in the other end of Town'.

One measure of the Fair's importance was its ability to attract a national clientele. James Congleton from Newcastle upon Tyne, for example, came twice a year to buy stock for his shop from the Rag Fair dealers.⁴² And John Waldon, proprietor of the Bull and Butcher, an inn in Cable Street attacked during the anti-Irish riots of 1736, remarked that he had 'a great Number of Country Shopkeepers lodge in my House when they come to Town; we have some 60 or 70 People in the House...'.⁴³ Rosemary Lane was an important annual stop on the circuit for clothes dealers from all over the country. Sarah Main who lived in the 'New Exchange' Rag Fair paying 6d a week for her lodging, provides us with a rare description of market life in the heart of Rosemary Lane:

The New 'Change [New Exchange] is a Place like a Square, where the People bring old cloaths, and lay them down for Sale.⁴⁴

⁴² James Congleton is the prosecutor in the trial of *OBP*, Mary Matthews, 14 January 1743, t1743114-20.

⁴³ *OBP*, John Waldon gives evidence in the trial of rioters Robert Mickey and Joshua Hall, 13 October 1736, t17361013-6.

⁴⁴ *OBP*, George Haggis, Richard Keeble, Thomas Gibbons, 21 February 1739, t17390221-31.



Fig. 4.4: High Change, Rag Fair, 1782, aquatint, Guildhall Library, London, p749141x.

The New Exchange also contained some small shops. Sarah Allen, victim of a robbery, kept a shop there selling ribbons and silk petticoats. She described it as 'tis a Place like Exeter Exchange' - a shopping arcade built on the Strand in the late seventeenth century.⁴⁵ The New Exchange appeared on John Rocque's map of London and Westminster in 1746, at the end of Rag Fair facing Well Close square and is thought to have been built in the early 1740s. This early shopping centre was joined by another called the Great Exchange, built in 1741 by local landowner Captain Richard Johnson. This was a substantial building nicknamed 'Johnson's Change' by residents. The whole property encompassing 'Johnson's Change' had a rental value of £62 per annum in

⁴⁵ *OBP*, Mary Hoards, Mary Chess, 24 February 1736, t17360225-21.

1745.⁴⁶ The *Daily Advertiser* described the opening of the Great Exchange close to the Minories on Rosemary Lane:

now near a hundred Shops open'd, where all manner of Apparel...new and second-hand, are sold cheaper than any other Place in London; also ready money given for all-manner of cast off Cloaths.⁴⁷

Moreover, two shopping exchanges in one east London Street confirm Rosemary Lane's place as the foremost place to buy cheap second hand clothes in London. An image of The New Exchange (Fig. 4.4) printed c. 1782 provides us with an impression of Rag Fair that shows women as forming the majority of traders on the street. The somewhat neighbourly peaceful scene above also clearly belies the rhetoric used by the authorities in their dire warnings against the 'disorderly' Rag Fair.⁴⁸ Regrettably, while the legitimate second hand clothing business thrived on this street the thieves and sellers of stolen clothes also thrived.

BUYING AND SELLING STOLEN GOODS

Some shop owners and pawnbrokers were genuinely tricked into buying stolen goods by clever thieves. Elizabeth Linstead and her husband John kept a linen shop close to the Great Exchange. Elizabeth was duped into buying 13 ½ yards of stolen checked linen cloth by Susanna Kirby. Kirby along with her accomplice masqueraded as a servant travelling with her mistress who was selling a remnant of cloth. The goods had originally been stolen from Mary Dennis who kept a linen shop in Houndsditch. Dennis

⁴⁶ LMA, Whitechapel Land Tax Assessments Tower division, 6th Division Rosemary Lane, MS6015/11-20.

⁴⁷ *The Daily Advertiser*, 18 May 1742; Derek Morris, *Whitechapel 1600-1800: A Social History of an Early Modern London Inner Suburb*, (2011), p. 83-87; Captain Johnson's property the Great Exchange was valued at £62 per annum in 1745, St Mary Matfellow Whitechapel, 6th Division Rosemary Lane, MS 6015/11-20, 1745; LMA, MS 8674, Hand-in-Hand Fire Insurance, vol. 29, 48606.

⁴⁸ High Change, Rag Fair, aquatint, Collage, Guildhall Library London, P749141x. (with thanks to John Styles for locating this print.)

sent her shop maid Mary Evett to Rosemary Lane to look for the stolen linen. This is an important point as despite Houndsditch having its fair share of broker's shops who sold old clothes; Rag Fair and Rosemary Lane remained the first place that people looked for their stolen goods and this is reflected in the number of crimes recorded as having occurred there. The court heard that Evett spotted two women one of which was Kirby on Rosemary Lane wearing aprons made from the stolen material. Kirby was taken to court and found guilty to the value of 10d.⁴⁹

Despite the relative prominence of women, male thieves made up almost 55 per cent of the total number of theft cases that appear in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* 1674-1760 (See table 4.1). This number included thief John Clarke of Whitechapel, he stole a linen waistcoat from the window of Alexander Bagnall's shop on Rosemary Lane.⁵⁰ John Jenkins was caught while trying to steal a cloth coat and two bay waistcoats from the shop of Elizabeth Simpson on Rosemary Lane. William Simpson caught Jenkins as he made for the door. Although found guilty to the value of 10d. Jenkins did not live long enough to receive his punishment and died in prison.⁵¹

Understandably, shop keepers proved to be popular as victims of theft on Rosemary Lane. In September 1742, Dorothy Wood was indicted for stealing 'a Pair of Stays, val. 10s.' out of the clothes shop belonging to Elizabeth Compton, on Rosemary Lane. Wood was caught as she was leaving the shop and a search of her clothes found the missing

⁴⁹ *OBP*, Susanna Kirby, 24 February 1748, t17480224-9. See also Heather Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks and the survival strategies of the poor in early eighteenth-century London', in Steven King and Alannah Tompkins (eds.) *The Poor in England 1700-1850, An Economy of Makeshifts*, (Manchester, 2003), pp. 137-165, but in particular, pp. 149-150.

⁵⁰ *OBP*, John Clarke, 12 October 1748, t17481012-19.

⁵¹ *OBP*, John Jenkin, 5 December 1750, t17501205-4; Shopkeeper Elizabeth Simpson was possibly the wife of John Simpson of Chamber Street just behind Rag Fair, £12 per annum rental in 1745, LMA, Whitechapel Land Tax Assessments Tower division, Rosemary Lane, 6th division MS 6015/11-20.

'stays' in a bag tied around her waist under her dress. The court found Wood guilty to the value of 4s. 10d. and sentenced her to transportation.⁵² Elizabeth Compton's shop on Rosemary Lane was targeted by thieves on more than one occasion. Two years after Wood was convicted, in March 1744 Elizabeth Phillips, of St. Mary Whitechapel, was indicted for stealing a satin petticoat, value 10s from Compton's shop. This time Compton requested that the magistrate send the perpetrator Phillips to the Bridewell to be whipped, but the justice 'obliged' her to prosecute. Phillips was eventually acquitted when a crucial witness failed to appear in court.⁵³

Widow Ann Bready's shopping spree on Rosemary Lane concluded with her being sentenced by the Old Bailey to being whipped. She was found guilty of stealing, 'three hats, value 3s. the property of Charles Boyce'. Boyce a hat-maker in Rosemary-lane was advised by a neighbour that Bready 'who was very much in liquor' had left his shop with the 3 hats under her apron.⁵⁴ The numbers of people willing to buy stolen goods was seemingly endless, as John Beattie has written: 'shopkeepers, publicans as well as pawnbrokers and street traders were willing to accept goods without asking too many questions'.⁵⁵ At the same time, the *Proceedings* also contain many cases of shopkeepers being indicted for selling stolen goods. Shopkeeper Elizabeth Linstead may have been honestly duped, but many shopkeepers seem to have, as John Beattie notes, turned a conveniently blind eye to the origins of their purchases. Brokers such as Alexander Bagnall who was a victim of theft also bought stolen watches, or William Reynolds who

⁵² *OBP*, Dorothy Wood, 9 September 1742, t17420909-2.

⁵³ *OBP*, Elizabeth Phillips, 4 April 1744, t17440404-9. Elizabeth Compton possibly the wife of George Compton of Rosemary Lane, £12 per annum rental value in 1745, LMA, Whitechapel Land Tax Assessments Tower division, MS 6015/11-20.

⁵⁴ *OBP*, Ann Bready, 4 December 1751, t17511204-6.

⁵⁵ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p. 189; John Styles, 'Clothing the North: the supply of non-elite clothing in the 18th century North of England', *Textile History*, 25, (1994), pp. 158-159.

kept a gin shop and took pawns on the side are prime examples. Reynolds lent money and gin on a hat that was taken during a highway robbery committed close to Well Street and Ratcliff Highway. The victim John Putt was attacked with a hammer and had his hat stolen. The hat was reported to be covered in blood, but Reynolds agreed to lend money on it. He then attempted to sell the bloody hat to local thief-taker and hatter Nathaniel Harris. With the acumen of a true detective, the blood and hammer marks on the hat led Harris to suspect that a crime may have been committed.⁵⁶

Clearly for London's poor, clothing equalled currency and they did not have to travel far to find a buyer for their goods whether stolen or legitimate.⁵⁷ Clothing, rags and material were valued items whatever state they happened to be in – they could always find a buyer. A handkerchief for example could be worth as little as 3 to 6 pence for plain cotton, 1 shilling 6d for cambric, 2-3 shillings for silk and up to 20 shillings for a lace and silk handkerchief.⁵⁸ Clothing theft was not a new phenomenon. James Sharpe's research on Essex between 1620 and 1680 has shown that 14 per cent of all thefts were of clothing or household linens.⁵⁹ And while this was not a huge figure it reflects its popularity as an item worth stealing. John Beattie's study of crime in Surrey and Sussex endorses this research. He has found that theft involving clothing or household linens amounted to 23.7 per cent of all stolen goods. In urban Southwark the total was even higher with clothing and linen related thefts amounting to 27.1 per cent of stolen

⁵⁶ *OBP*, William Reynolds gave evidence in the trial of Thomas Doddson, 13 January 1736, t17360115-23.

⁵⁷ Sarah Lloyd, 'Agents in their own Concerns', in King and Tompkins (eds.), *The Poor in England 1700-1850*, pp. 108-109.

⁵⁸ For examples see *OBP*, Thomas Flory, 12th October 1720, t17201012-7; *OBP*, Elizabeth Stevens, 14th January 1726, t17260114-30; *OBP*, John Young, Thomas Whithead, 11th January 1717, t17170111-29; *OBP*, William Talmarsh, 10th May 1722, t17220510-23.

⁵⁹ J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Seventeenth Century England: A County Study*, (1983), pp. 91-93.

goods.⁶⁰ It is of little surprise that north of the river and particularly at Rag Fair on Rosemary Lane in the eighteenth century we find that 70 per cent of trials (Table. 4.1) involved clothing, shoes or household linens.

Common everyday pieces were the mostly easily disposed of - the sort of clothing and household items that everyone used. Ann Cook was indicted for stealing 'a Stich'd Night Cap, value 6d.' and a 'Stuff Night Gown, 18d.' from the compting house of Thomas Warren on 6 October 1707. Warren later found his stolen night cap at a pawnbroker's shop. In her defense Cook told the court that she had bought the night cap in Rag Fair. But having no proof of this she was found guilty of theft to the value of 10d.⁶¹

PAWNBROKERS

Pawnbrokers formed an integral part of both the experience of shopping at Rag Fair, and the Fair's role in a wider economy of exchange that melded into theft. Defendants constantly complained to the courts that they bought the goods of someone else from a pawnbroker or dealer in Rag Fair. Furthermore, complicated stories of transactions could save a suspect from the gallows. This chapter will now discuss the impact of pawn broking in relation to clothes theft and the complex character of exchange the pawn of clothing implied - not so much buying and selling as lending and using.

When in 1725 Anthony Areton, a shopkeeper in Rag Fair, was accused of stealing a cloth coat belonging to Edward Rudge, he told the court that he had purchased the coat from one Jonathan Hughs, who in turn deposed that he had bought the coat of pawnbroker Joseph Walters, who then deposed that he had bought the coat from a thief known by the

⁶⁰ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p. 186.

⁶¹ *OBP*, Ann Cook, 15 October 1707, t17071015-14.

name of Bains. The more people involved in the chain of exchange, the more likely that the shopkeeper or pawnbroker, whether innocent or guilty, would get off. Bains, the thief, remained free and Areton was acquitted.⁶² This trial does much to highlight the roles of pawnbrokers as intrinsic links in a chain of transactions.

The role of pawning goods in the workings of Rag Fair was made more central by the ubiquitous role of cloth and clothing in the pawn broking trade. Even outside of Rosemary Lane, clothes and the pawnshop went together. Items of adult clothing were the most common goods pawned at Fettes' pawnshop in York, with women's aprons and gowns particularly standing out. And, as with theft, women were prominent. Of the 150 to 200 pledges that Fettes took in a week over three-quarter of pledges were normally made by women and of those two-thirds were made up of clothing.⁶³ In a sample taken over a two week period in September 1777, Alannah Tompkins found that women in York pledged goods more often and made more repeat visits than men. The most frequent male customers visited the shop on three separate occasions in two weeks, while women in comparison visited the shop on four or more occasions with one woman in particular, Sarah Beeforth, pawning goods 15 times. As Tompkins notes, 'the pledging of clothing and household goods by women to raise credit supplies circumstantial evidence for an overlap between the pawning poor and those guilty of theft.'⁶⁴ As John Styles points out, 'so familiar a part of everyday life was pawning for plebeian Londoners that they were expected to have a regular pawnbroker'.⁶⁵

⁶² *OBP*, Anthony Areton, 24 February 1725, t17250224-72.

⁶³ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, p. 163.

⁶⁴ Tompkins, 'Pawnbroking', pp. 180-181.

⁶⁵ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, p. 176.

On the other hand, the pawnbroker's reputation for making large profits from pledges meant that many poor people were cheated. A pamphlet from 1706 described how pawnbrokers 'commonly take sixpence in the pound per month for what they lend upon pawns, which is 30 per cent per annum'. The maximum legal rate of interest was five per cent at this time.⁶⁶

More than 60 brokers or pawnbrokers together with a few goldsmiths and jewellers kept businesses in this area. This figure, an approximate one, is compiled from the *Proceedings*, parish records, newspapers and Judy Jowett's *The Warning Carriers*, which provides a list of goldsmiths, watchmakers, toymakers, jewellery makers and brokers for London who were registered with Goldsmith's Hall.⁶⁷ Jowett's list, while it does not include every goldsmith, broker or pawnbroker for London and particularly not for east London, provides important details. Jowett also produced maps reflecting a series of walks carried out by messengers on behalf of Goldsmith Hall, warning traders of stolen goods which they may have been offered for sale.⁶⁸

William Bulstrode carried out this role as a 'warning carrier' to the edge of the City and out to East London between 1732 and 1743.⁶⁹ A list of brokers shops, jewellery shops and goldsmiths that Bulstrode visited were recorded in his notebook. According to Jowett, Bulstrode's route for this neighbourhood was mainly composed of brokers and pawnbrokers. Brokers in this context are classified as people who took pledges and

⁶⁶ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730*, (1989), p. 50.

⁶⁷ Judy Jowett, *The Warning Carriers: How Messengers of the Goldsmiths' Company warned the Luxury Trades of Criminal Activities in Eighteenth-Century London*, (Silver Studies, Number 18, 2005), pp. 70-76.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* The addresses of participants are as Jowett notes approximate but where possible I have double checked with parish records and PCC wills.

traded in second hand goods.⁷⁰ As to be expected there are few goldsmiths in this area compared to the rest of London. However, Jowett remarks that goldsmiths were routinely recorded as acting as pawnbrokers from as early as the fourteenth century which is why they are included in the map (Fig. 4.5) below.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid., Jowett notes that brokers on the messenger's warning list were not commodity traders or 'sworn brokers' licenced freemen of the City, p. 16.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 19.

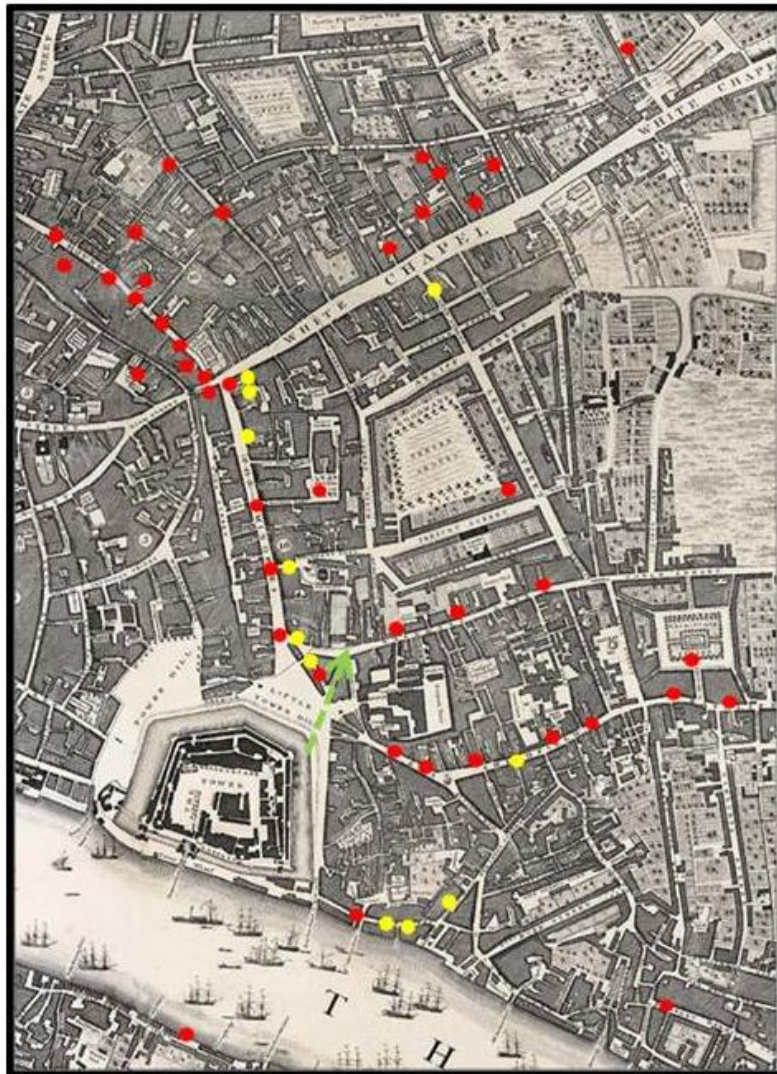


Fig. 4.5 Pawnbrokers and Goldsmiths: *John Rocque's 1746 map of London and Westminster.* This section shows Rosemary Lane and the surrounding neighbourhood. Key: Yellow dot= Goldsmiths. Red dot= Brokers/Pawnbrokers. Green Arrow = Rosemary Lane.⁷²

⁷² There is no definitive list of pawnbrokers or brokers for this area in the first half of the eighteenth century. This map does not claim to be exact but it provides an approximation of local brokers. It has been created using the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, tax records, parish records, probate records and Judy Jowett's *The Warning Carriers*, pp. 70-76.

The majority of the pawnbrokers listed pursued a complex economy of their own, combining pawn broking and money lending with other trades. Margaret Harvey sold some old clothes, Thomas Reynolds was a silversmith and Richard Foot and James Jacobson sold gold, silver and other items of jewellery. Patience Forrester sold gin and spirits and dabbled in lending. Some mixed the selling of second hand clothing with pawnbroking.⁷³ In the absence of an official register of pawnbrokers for this period the names recorded in the Warning Carriers' list above provides us with an additional indication of just who was lending money on goods in the neighbourhood.

According to information collected from the parish and land tax, the brokers and those acting as pawnbrokers ranged in wealth. Elizabeth Waters, of St Katherine's precinct, had a property rental value set at £4 per annum in 1745, Ralph Brooks property in Houndsditch was valued at £13 per annum, while Elizabeth Avery, goldsmith, pawnbroker and petticoat hoop maker of Fullers Court, East Smithfield, occupied a property with a rental value of £8 per annum. The most affluent was Thomas Gardiner of Aldgate High Street, watchmaker/pawnbroker, whose property was valued at £40 per annum.⁷⁴

For a later period, 1774 to 1778, the records of the Sun and Royal Exchange Insurance companies can be used to reinforce the impression drawn from earlier sources. These include policies for some 152 pawnbrokers in London. However, once again, this figure

⁷³Margaret Harvey, see *OBP*, t17480706-8; Foot and Jacobson are recorded as Goldsmiths, see Judy Jowett, *The Warning Carriers*, pp. 70-76. See also LMA, MS2545/3, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate based on property rental value.

⁷⁴LMA, MS2545/3, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate, 1745, Mr Thomas Gardiner, Black Boy Alley, High Street precinct; LMA, Tower Division Land Tax Assessment, MS 6010/14, Mrs Elizabeth Waters, St Catherine's precinct, 1745; Jowett, *The Warning Carriers*, p.75; Elizabeth Avery was indicted on a charge of shoplifting in 1730 the victim William Wynne lived in Houndsditch his property valued at £50 per annum MS 2545/4; Elizabeth Avery, Prerogative Court of Canterbury (hereafter PCC) 11/743, *OBP*, Elizabeth Avery, 28 February 1730, t17300228-56.

represents only a fraction of the total number of pawnbrokers in London as the majority of small and informal brokers were unlikely to have insurance. It would not have included those women and men who acted as casual brokers to the very poor.⁷⁵

By way of comparison Liverpool, although a much smaller city had 11 pawnbrokers in 1774 and 36 pawnbrokers were listed in the city directory by 1800.⁷⁶ Miles Lambert has identified references to traders acting as pawnbrokers in Whitby and Leeds in the 1730s and 1740s, while Elizabeth Anderson has identified one broker in Edinburgh in the 1720s.⁷⁷ And of course, there is the example of George Fettes' substantial operation in York. Fettes' pledge books reveal that he received a total of 10,879 pledges in just eighteen months from July 1777 to December 1778.⁷⁸ All of the above examples simply suggest both that the role of pawnbrokers was important to working people throughout England, and that in London the scale of the business was immense.

Women and Pawnbrokers

As with Fettes' pawnshop in York, women featured strongly among the customers of Southwark haberdasher turned pawnbroker and money lender John Pope. In Beverly Lemire's work on the ledgers of this seventeenth century entrepreneur, the dominance of women's activity both as borrowers and in the pawning of goods is made evident.

Women accounted for 199 of the possible 302 loan transactions and 320 of a possible

⁷⁵ LL. Additional datasets, <http://www.londonlives.org/static/AHDSFIR.jsp> This database is derived from the relevant volumes from two series. First, the Sun Insurance Company Registers, 1710-1863 (MS 11936-7: 1,262 volumes in total); and second, the Royal Exchange Insurance Company Registers, 1753-9, 1773-1883 (MS 7252-5: 173 volumes, including supplementary series). When originally consulted these records were held at the Guildhall Library. They have since been moved to the LMA.

⁷⁶ Lambert, 'Cast-off wearing apparell', pp. 4-5.

⁷⁷ Lambert, 'Cast-off wearing apparell', p.16, Elizabeth Anderson, 'Nearly new: the second - hand clothing trade in eighteenth century Edinburgh', *Costume*, 31, (1997), p. 43.

⁷⁸ Tompkins, 'Pawnbroking', p. 177.

443 pawning transactions between 1667 and 1671.⁷⁹ Lemire shows that married women of the labouring and artisan sorts actively secured loans of money through direct borrowing or by pawning goods, playing a pivotal role in the management of the family economy.⁸⁰ This would suggest that the legal constrictions placed on women were being completely ignored. This high level of female economic activity could also reflect the 'longstanding customary practice' in London seafaring communities of women exercising a power of attorney on behalf of absent seafaring kin. A power of attorney gave them the legal right to conduct any business in their sailor relative's name.⁸¹

Beyond simple bilateral exchanges, women were also involved in borrowing networks which could involve them in what Lynn MacKay describes as a 'complex juggling act'. They would pawn on a daily or weekly basis and retrieve goods once a wage was received. The numbers of women who ended up accused of theft was a measure of the precariousness of their situation.⁸² As Steven King notes, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that these women did not see themselves as poverty stricken, but rather that pawning was a common feature of the economy of makeshifts. King has found a similar story for rural England at this time. Additionally, as Garthine Walker has pointed out, 'the participation of women in pawn broking and receiving and selling stolen goods

⁷⁹ Beverly Lemire, 'Petty pawns and informal lending', in Brulard, Kristine and O'Brien, Patrick (eds.), *From Family Firms to Corporate Capitalism*, (Oxford, 1998), pp. 118-119.

⁸⁰ Lemire, 'Petty pawns', p. 124.

⁸¹ Margaret Hunt, 'Women and the fiscal-military state in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *Imperial History: Culture Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*, (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 29-47.

⁸² MacKay, 'Why they stole' pp. 630-631.

should not be underestimated'.⁸³ For many people the pawnshop was a 'relative feature of life'.⁸⁴

Women were also frequently used to pawn stolen goods on behalf of men. William Dawson sent a female companion to pawn a stolen watch with Elizabeth Longate on two separate occasions at her premises in East Smithfield.⁸⁵ Thomas Dodds used a female friend, Nan Hoy, to pawn a stolen hat with a broker on his behalf on Rosemary Lane.⁸⁶ In a bid to save herself from a criminal charge, Nan Hoy gave evidence against her friends and avoided being indicted for receiving stolen goods. Then again, when the trial came to the Old Bailey both Elizabeth Longate and Ann Dunkerton, 'wife' to Dawson, were acquitted on the charge of receiving stolen goods. Being a woman was not a guarantee of receiving a more lenient treatment, but it helped. Peter King's recent work using a sample from the Old Bailey Newgate registers 1791-1793, reveals that 61 per cent of prosecuted males were convicted compared to 44 per cent of females. King argues that London women who were accused of shoplifting or pickpocketing were more likely to be treated leniently compared to their male equivalents. Women, King notes, 'were 2.5 times more likely to be discharged before trial and one third more likely to receive a not guilty verdict if they made it to court'.⁸⁷ In the case of receiving stolen goods, a similar distinction was usually made.

⁸³ Walker, 'Women, theft', p. 92.

⁸⁴ Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850, a regional perspective*, (Manchester, 2000), p. 134.

⁸⁵ *OBP*, Elizabeth Longate appears in the trial of Adam John Foster, Little Will, Ann Dunkerton, 5 December 1750, t17501205-59.

⁸⁶ *OBP*, Nan Hoy appears in the trial of Thomas Dodds, 15 January 1736, t17360115-23.

⁸⁷ Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins*, (Cambridge, 2007), p.167. Garthine Walker has not found the same leniency meted out at the Cheshire courts towards women, Walker, 'Women, theft', pp. 81-83; Humfrey, 'Female servants', p. 75.

Pawn broking was also a popular casual employment for many women in the parishes east of the Tower.⁸⁸ Theoretically, unless they were widows, women could not own a business. Women's work outside of the home was regulated by the City authorities as they were pushed to the margins of commerce. Nonetheless, as Beverly Lemire has shown for the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and as Laura Gowing argues for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite regulations that controlled women's work selling goods on the streets, they did just that.⁸⁹ And as Lemire's work on pawn broking and informal lending south of the river reveals, women were prevalent at the margins, acting as informal lenders:

Neighborhood women employed their knowledge of character and local commerce to fulfill supplementary credit functions, acting as petty pawn brokers themselves or arranging loans, acting as agents for lenders within their communities.⁹⁰

We can find these women on close examination of the historical margins. Many can be traced through land tax, records of licensed victuallers, in criminal records as evidence givers, as defendants or victims of crime. Wealthier business women can also be found in records of probate or in tax records. Mary Raven or Ravencroft kept a pawn broking business in Goodman's Yard just off the Minories. Her property had a rental value of £20 per annum.⁹¹ Elizabeth Longate, mentioned above, kept a pawn broking business in East Smithfield.⁹² Local broker/pawnbroker Margaret Harvey kept a shop in Houndsditch close to St Botolph Aldgate Church and kept a sizable property with a rental value of £33

⁸⁸ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 170. Earle notes that 11.4 per cent of London women kept pawnbroking businesses between 1660-1730; Jowett, *The Warning Carriers*, p. 16.

⁸⁹ Laura Gowing, 'The freedom of the streets' in Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of early Modern London*, p. 138.

⁹⁰ Lemire, 'Petty Pawns', p. 122.

⁹¹ *OBP*, Mary Ravens appears in the trial of Joanna Jewers, Sarah Sanders, 4 April 1744, t17440404-24.

⁹² *OBP*, Elizabeth Longate appears in the trial of Adam John Foster, Little Will, Ann Dunkerton, 5 December 1750, t17501205-59; Longate also features in *OBP*, Joseph Gill Walter Keen, otherwise Cane, 16 January 1755, t17550116-11.

per annum.⁹³ But even at its more secure and profitable end, this was a perilous business with the threat of dire consequences for poor judgement or misbehaviour.

Mary Felton, for instance, was found guilty of larceny in 1765 when she was caught stealing clothes and linen from her master John Newman's house. She was charged with stealing:

four linen sheets, value 4 s. a damask table-cloth, a stuff gown, a linen gown, a dimity petticoat, five linen aprons, a pair of leather shoes, a baise petticoat, a white petticoat, a sattin cardinal, a pair of shift sleeves, a hat, two laced caps, and two plain caps.⁹⁴

When caught she confessed to having pawned or sold the goods in several pawn shops between Houndsditch and Whitechapel. Felton confessed her crime and gave the names and addresses of the brokers that she had used to pawn her stolen goods:

some in Gravel-lane, at Mrs. Fosset's; some at Mr. Clark's, in George-yard, Spital-fields; some at Mr. George Slee's, Cox's-square and some at Mr. Brown's, in Coleman-street.

Three out of the four of Felton's brokers were formal pawnbrokers while Sarah Fossett, the fourth lender, was employed at the Box Tree alehouse in Gravel Lane.⁹⁵ Felton tried to lessen her chances of being caught by using several pawnbrokers, leaving just a few items with each. But, in confessing to her crime and her methods, she effectively laid each one of the brokers she dealt with open to the charge of receiving stolen goods.

⁹³ Jowett, *The Warning Carriers*, p. 104; *OBP*, Joseph Saunders, 6 July 1748, t17480706-8; Margaret Harvey, LMA, St Botolph Aldgate, Church rate collection, MS 2545/4, Houndsditch.

⁹⁴ *OBP*, Mary Felton, 16 January 1765, t17650116-14.

⁹⁵ *OBP*, Mary Felton, 16 January 1765, t17650116-14.

Informal Pawnbrokers

Many alehouse keepers acted as informal pawnbrokers and money lenders.⁹⁶ As Tompkins points out, 'respectable' pawnbrokers would not take the risk of lending money to the very poor unless they knew them to be in regular employment.⁹⁷

However, there was a real need for the service of a pawnbroker to the very poor, and there were several informal brokers around Rosemary Lane willing to provide this service. One of the reasons that residents turned to their local, informal or casual broker was because they were neighbours and they knew each other - creating a relationship of trust. John Smith was one such informal pawnbroker. Smith kept at least two alehouses on Rosemary Lane including the *Cheese and Pump* alehouse in Rag Fair and the *Sign of the White Horse* sometimes called the *Yorkshire Grey* - an alehouse frequently mentioned in the *Proceedings* in cases involving thieves and thief-takers alike.

In 1743 Smith was happy to take a pledge from Jane Price of Rag Fair, who brought a silver watch to his premises to pawn. At Price's trial when asked, 'are alehouse keepers pawnbrokers?', the local constable, Thomas Webb, replied, 'it was a Demand they made'. This implies that certain alehouse keepers acted as pawnbrokers for those who could not get credit with more established dealers. Webb further described Smith's alehouse as 'a House where a great many of these People resort.'⁹⁸ Despite Smith's willingness to extend credit to Price, there were real limits on his dealings with his less trustworthy customers. Margaret Jefferson, for example, visited Smith in order to pawn some lace on behalf of her friends, Dorothy Carter and Sarah Whittle - both known local thieves.

Whittle had previously pawned the stolen lace with broker Anne Garner for 16s., and

⁹⁶ Styles, 'Clothing the North', p.158; Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 55.

⁹⁷ Tompkins, 'Pawnbroking', p. 183.

⁹⁸ *OBP*, Jane Price, 12 October 1743, t17431012-38; John Smith also kept the Sign of the White Horse sometimes called the Yorkshire Grey alehouse frequented by thieves and thief-takers alike.

when it was retrieved, she charged Jefferson with pawning the item with Smith. However, knowing the item's provenance, Smith refused to take the pawn, telling Jefferson, 'No, I'll lend her [Whittle] nothing upon her own Account, if she was going to Tyburn; but I'll lend 20s. upon your account'.⁹⁹ Smith was clearly struggling to balance the local reputations of the two women, and the implications of their friendship. Sarah Whittle was a savvy serial thief who used a selection of receivers of stolen goods and pawnbrokers to sell on the items she stole, putting each one in serious danger.¹⁰⁰ This particular case highlights both the criminal activity of the pawnbroker Smith, and the difficult situation an informal broker could find himself or herself in when asked to act by a trusted neighbour. It also demonstrates how women might use friends to act as a guarantor when their own reputations were dubious, or when they wished to remain anonymous. Beverley Lemire found that 'over 70 per cent of women turned to other women of their acquaintance to facilitate their transactions'.¹⁰¹ Smith was right to be wary of Sarah Whittle. She was tried on three occasions and only narrowly escaped conviction each time. However, her accomplice Dorothy Carter was not so lucky, receiving a death sentence for stealing the lace Smith had refused to accept.¹⁰²

'Honest' Pawnbrokers and Regulation

In 1744 a pamphlet in defense of the 'honest' pawnbroker was widely disseminated with the purpose of influencing Parliament in relation to an Act for regulating Pawnbrokers it was then considering. The *Apology* defended brokers and maintained that the interest they charged was not unreasonable. The pamphlet also claimed that pawnbrokers

⁹⁹ *OBP*, Dorothy Carter, 10 October 1733, t17331010-19; *OBP*, John Lancaster, 6 July 1738, t17480706-41.

¹⁰⁰ *OBP*, Dorothy Carter, 10 October 1733, t17331010-19; *OBP*, John Lancaster, 6 July 1738, t17480706-41; for further cases involving Smith and his alehouse see *OBP*, t17430907-43; t17420909-30; t17430519-18; t17431012-38.

¹⁰¹ Lemire, 'Petty pawns', pp. 121-6; See also Garthine Walker, 'Women, theft', pp. 84-85.

¹⁰² *OBP*, Dorothy Carter, 10 October 1733, t17331010-19.

became receivers of stolen goods primarily by accident.¹⁰³ But this was an argument that went against the grain of public and Parliamentary opinion. In the first half of the eighteenth century it is clear that the affluent classes in general viewed pawnbrokers as little more than receivers of stolen goods. Henry Fielding was incensed by pawnbrokers, blaming them for many of the crimes committed involving the selling of stolen goods. He sought to increase the punishment meted out for those found guilty of receiving stolen goods even in cases where the thief was acquitted. As Fielding fulminated: 'What Arguments are there against extirpating entirely a Set of Miscreants which, like other Vermin, harbour only about the Poor, and grow fat by sucking their Blood ?'¹⁰⁴ Of course Fielding did not live in poverty and he may have viewed pawnbrokers differently if he had to use them to keep his family from starving.

Not everyone was quite as intolerant as Fielding. One commentator justified the role of pawnbrokers, arguing that, 'if employers would pay their workmen on the completion of work, there would be no problem of their acting as 'fences' or 'locks' for stolen goods'.¹⁰⁵ However, Fielding's view of pawnbrokers was shared by many of his contemporaries and the majority of the main London newspapers were vehemently opposed to pawnbrokers and their links to the world of stolen goods. Throughout the 1730s and

¹⁰³ Alannah Tompkins, 'Pawnbroking', pp. 170 -171. See also *Reasons against licensing pawnbrokers: Humbly offer'd to the consideration of the legislature, occasion'd by a bill for that purpose depending in the House of Commons. Wherein the pamphlet, intitl'd, An apology for the business of pawnbroking, is examined and confuted; and the practice of pawnbrokers in general prov'd to be injurious to trade, an encouragement to rogues, and destructive to society: demonstrated by variety of examples, (1745), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, (Hereafter ECCO)(galegroup.com), accessed 10 May 2012.*

¹⁰⁴ Henry Fielding, *An inquiry into the causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, etc. With some Proposals for Remedying this Growing Evil. In which the Present Reigning Vices are impartially exposed; and the Laws that relate to the Provision for the Poor, and to the Punishment of Felons are largely and freely examined, (1751),* William Henley (ed.), *The Works of Henry Fielding, ESQ.* (16 vols.), vol. 13 - Legal Writings, (1903), pp.113-114.

¹⁰⁵ Linebaugh, 'The London Hanged', p. 228.

1740s pawnbrokers were cited in the newspapers and denigrated as “The greatest encouragers of robbers”. *The Weekly Miscellany*, in January 1738 suggested:

whatever goods are brought in by the person, without enquiring how they came by them; tho’ by the money ask’d and lent on the goods the said Pawnbroker must know they were not honestly come by.¹⁰⁶

It is not difficult to see why many contemporaries viewed pawnbrokers in this light when many of the cases involving the theft of clothes and goods involved a pawnbroker or multiple pawnbrokers. Thieves relied on the pawnbroker or general buyer to turn their stolen loot into hard cash, and it is difficult to believe that the pawnbroker honestly believed on every occasion that the goods they were buying were legally obtained, especially in this neighbourhood.

Various attempts were made to formalize the conduct of pawnbrokers including that by Henry Fielding, discussed above. In 1745 Parliament came close to passing an Act that would have ensured that pawnbrokers were licensed.¹⁰⁷ And the London newspapers remained quite vociferous in their condemnation of pawnbrokers.¹⁰⁸ Finally, in 1757, an Act was passed that required pawnbrokers to keep a register of every transaction with the date, name and address and the sum of money lent to the customer, and to charge a fixed rate of interest on goods pledged.¹⁰⁹ Though, as the majority of pawnbrokers around Rosemary Lane were informal and combined with other businesses, they were not overall affected by this kind of regulation.

¹⁰⁶ *Weekly Miscellany*, January 6, 1738. See also *Reads Weekly Journal, Or British Gazetteer*, March 22, 1735.

¹⁰⁷ Although never passed, the proposed bill ‘*A Bill intituled An Act for the more effectually preventing the receiving of Stolen Goods, by the Regulating of Pawnbrokers, 1745*’, can be found at <http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk/marketing/index.jsp> accessed 22.6.2012.

¹⁰⁸ *Read's Weekly Journal Or British Gazetteer*, Saturday, March 22, 1735. See also *Daily Journal*, March 13, 1731; *London Evening Post*, March 21, 1738; *London Evening Post*, July 20 1751; *General Evening Post*, July 20, 1751; *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, March 22, 1735.

¹⁰⁹ Tompkins, ‘Pawnbroking’, p. 172.

Margot Finn suggests that the rapid growth in pawn shops and pawning replaced bartering as a method for the poor acquiring goods. Finn notes that the increased formalisation of pawnshops in the later eighteenth century, as they moved from the alehouse to the 'free-standing pawnshop' forced a change as they became the 'pillar of working class exchange relations'. Pawning, Finn argues, 'offered consumers who were perched precariously on the boundaries of middle class respectability', a credible way of maintaining the appearance of respectability. However, in the first half of the eighteenth century there seems to have been very few pawnshops that enjoyed a reputation for being respectable.¹¹⁰

Pawnbrokers at the Old Bailey

Women may have generally been treated with a little more leniency by the London courts, however, occasionally someone accused of receiving stolen goods was punished more harshly than the thief. Robert Delaney and George Campbell were found guilty of stealing several items of clothing and shoes from Ann Lewson's shop. They tried to pawn some of the goods at Patience Forrester's shop but she refused to take the pledge, offering instead to buy them outright. Forrester went on to sell some of the stolen goods to a 'Duke's servant' and a clothes dealer in Rag Fair. Forrester when hearing that the goods were stolen promptly endeavored to get them back to the prosecutor; however not promptly enough. Controversially, the thieves Delaney and Campbell were sentenced to 7 years transportation for theft, while Forrester received 14 years transportation for receiving stolen goods with the judge declaring that:

The Court have no discretionary Power in relation to Receivers of stolen Goods, or Persons who rob their Lodgings, but must sentence the former to be

¹¹⁰ Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914*, (Cambridge, 2003), p. 78.

transported for 14 Years, and the latter for 7. With Regard to other Larcenies, they may inflict the Common-Law Punishment, of Branding or Whipping. ¹¹¹

Furthermore, in an effort to make an example of their trade, the court sentenced some pawnbrokers to the ultimate punishment. In 1738 Mary Ashford from Guildford received the death penalty for receiving stolen goods from John Dixon; a sentence clearly intended to caution pawnbrokers and women receivers of stolen goods. *The Evening Post* in 1738 vehemently supported this decision arguing:

The capital conviction of this woman is a rare instance, but a very good one; for if some of these pawnbrokers were made examples of we should find but few thieves for though it may be too harsh to say they make rogues, it is a very mild censure to charge them with encouraging them in the continuation of their practices. ¹¹²

Despite the Pawnbroking Act of 1757 which helped to bring the trade into line, and despite the occasional purge by the courts on pawnbrokers, both the brokers and the thieves appear to have continued to thrive on Rosemary Lane.

CRIME ON ROSEMARY LANE

Did the neighbourhood merit so much attention from the City authorities? Data collected from the Old Bailey Proceedings between the years 1674 and 1760 suggest that there were some 326 trials concerning theft of stolen goods and 411 trials in all, which include mention of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair (Rag Fair 1700-1760), (Table. 4.1). The 326 trials for theft reflect the tiniest percentage of crimes committed in this area, and provide no more than an indication of the much larger 'dark figure' of unrecorded crime. However, it does provide a starting point; and measure that should

¹¹¹ *OBP*, Robert Delaney, George Campbell, Patience Forrester, 8 December 1742, t17421208-23 and s17421208-1.

¹¹² *The Evening Post*, 21 March 1738.

allow Rosemary Lane to be compared to other parts of the capital. This total averages 3.8 trials per year, and on the face of it would not seem to justify the City government and local residents' apparent anxieties concerning thieves and receivers in this particular area, but a detailed comparison with other parts of London, allows us to test this conclusion.

Crime in London

Historians of crime agree that the number of people prosecuted in the courts, particularly for felony crimes at the Old Bailey, had a confused and uncertain relationship to both all the criminals who could have been charged, and an even more uncertain relationship to the underlying crime rate.¹¹³ The editors of the *Proceedings* did not print every trial heard at the Old Bailey before the 1720s and a high percentage of theft and receiving cases were either informally resolved between the thief and the victim, and thus made it no farther than the local magistrate, or else were thrown out by the Grand Jury prior to trial. As a result, even from among the small percentage of thieves actually caught, the vast majority were never prosecuted, primarily because of the cost and effort involved. Robert Shoemaker, for example, has found that in the two years between 1720 and 1722, while proceedings were begun against almost two thousand criminals, 1209 of these resulted in a recognizance (non-indicted), and only 640 in indictments.¹¹⁴ And this selection process, the likelihood that a criminal, once caught would be tried, affected different parts of the city in different ways. Shoemaker

¹¹³ J.M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror*, (Oxford, 2001), p. 33; Robert B. Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in Rural Middlesex*, (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 42- 49; Peter King, 'Crime, Law and Society in Essex, 1740-1820, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1984), cited in Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, p. 52.

¹¹⁴ Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, pp. 42-49.

argues that the West End parishes had higher prosecution rates compared with the suburban parishes east of the City. Whereas in the West End he found 10.9 recognizances and 5.7 indictments per 1000 inhabitants, in the urban parishes in the east the equivalent rates were 6.2 recognizances and 2.4 indictments per 1000 inhabitants. Shoemaker suggests that this disparity reflects the relative poverty of people in the East End parishes, and hence their inability to afford to prosecute - though as noted in Chapter 3, there remained substantial pockets of wealth in the east.¹¹⁵

Another factor likely to influence the prosecution rate in the east was the sheer numbers of Justices who were active in this enclave just beyond the City wall. With the courts, both the Old Bailey and the Middlesex Sessions House relatively far away, and a local justice readily to hand, a higher proportion of prosecutions in this area were likely to end following an interview in the JPs parlour or commitment to a house of correction. This effect was particularly marked in relation to petty larceny (the theft of goods worth a shilling or less). John Beattie suggests that the vast majority of London magistrates chose to send virtually all petty thieves to the house of correction excluding them from the figures recorded in the *Proceedings*.¹¹⁶ This would have been a much cheaper option for the victims of theft, as would using summary jurisdiction, informal mediation or the issuance of a recognizance.¹¹⁷ Moreover, many prosecutors especially those who knew their offender, just wanted the return of their goods. And when a prosecution for the theft of even small items could result in transportation or death, there was a strong

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 58-60, pp. 277-282, pp. 301-302.

¹¹⁶ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 24.

¹¹⁷ Peter King, 'Decision-makers and decision-making in the English criminal law 1750-1800', *The Historical Journal*, 27, (1984), pp. 33-34; Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, p. 167. For an excellent account of the London Summary Courts see Drew, D., Grey, *Crime, Prosecution and Social Relations: The Summary Courts of the City of London in the Late Eighteenth Century*, (2009).

motivation to keep justice local and informal.¹¹⁸ Consequently, we do not have a reliable figure for theft in this area, and about all we can be certain of is that the real figure was considerably higher than that recorded in the archives. Even the apparently consistent and comprehensive set of trials reproduced in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* reflect only a small proportion of crime.

Despite all these caveats, the *Old Bailey Proceedings* nevertheless provide at least a consistently filtered window on to the workings of the neighbourhood.¹¹⁹ The published session papers, when combined with the records from London and Middlesex sessions, vestry minutes, insurance records, tax records and early newspapers allow us to glimpse the lives of ordinary people, from shopkeepers to shoppers, from victims to offenders of crimes; and as importantly, to compare the representation of this neighbourhood, as found in the court record, to that of others. This information will be used to reveal the victims, buyers and sellers of stolen goods and answer the question of whether Rosemary Lane deserved its reputation.

Theft in the Neighbourhood

The theft of wearing apparel, cloth or household linens remained one of the most frequently prosecuted offences in the eighteenth-century criminal courts, and Rag Fair was a perfect location for selling these items on.¹²⁰ As a result, clothes and associated objects dominated the record of theft in Rosemary Lane. In part, the theft of clothing was popular precisely because the networks needed to sell clothes on were already in

¹¹⁸ J.M. Beattie, 'The criminality of women in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of Social History*, 8, (1975), pp. 92-93; Peter King, *Crime and Law*, pp. 167-168.

¹¹⁹ *OBP, 1674-1913*.

¹²⁰ See Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p.187; Garthine Walker, *Gender Crime and Social Order in Early Modern Cheshire*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, (June, 1994), particularly pp. 184-185. Styles, *The Dress of the People*, p. 327; Lynn MacKay 'Why they stole: women in the Old Bailey, 1779-1789' *Journal of Social History*, 32.3, (1993), p. 625.

place. Moreover, the legitimate second-hand clothes dealers co-existed here with the dealers and pawnbrokers sustained by theft and the buying and selling of stolen goods and old clothes. And finally, as Madeline Ginsberg suggests, the frequent appearance of clothes and other wearing apparel in cases heard at the Old Bailey, form a 'testament to their ultimate value'.¹²¹ Out of the 326 trials for theft involving Rag Fair and Rosemary Lane recorded in the *Proceedings*, 223 trials involved the theft of wearing apparel, cloth or household linens. This amounts to 70 per cent of all crime in this neighbourhood. Moreover as Table 4.1 shows when compared to other notorious London neighbourhoods with a reputation for the selling of second hand clothing, Rosemary Lane dominated the wider trade, and the record of thefts that trade engendered.

¹²¹ Ginsburg, 'Rags to riches', p.123.

Place name	Old Bailey Proceedings trials involving non-violent theft 1674-1760*	Women	Men	Total number of cases involving theft of clothing/cloth
Monmouth Street and Seven Dials	142	65 45.7 %	90 63.4 %	96 66.2%
Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair	326	148 45.4 %	222 68.0%	223 70.0 %
Houndsditch	60	19 31.66 %	44 73.3 %	38 62.2%
Petticoat Lane	58	28 48.3 %	40 69 %	23 38.3 %

Table. 4.1 A Comparison of thefts recorded in the *Old Bailey Proceedings 1674-1760* in selected areas. See note below.¹²²

Detailed analysis of these comparative figures simply reinforces the impression of the significance of the Rag Fair at Rosemary Lane in the wider ecology of London's used clothes market, and equally its ecology of crime.

Monmouth Street

After Rosemary Lane, Monmouth Street records the second largest number of thefts.

With a long reputation for suspect dealings in the clothes trade Monmouth Street/Seven Dials close to Holborn, also had its fair share of second hand clothes shops and a reputation similar to Rosemary Lane. But the actual recorded thefts are on a much

¹²² *OBP*, Table. 4.1, calculated 7.3.13 Statistics gathered from *OBP* using API search between the years 1674 to 1760. Total of trials differ from total of men and women as some trials had more than one person involved. (*Rag Fair 1700-1760) The earliest mention of Rag Fair that I can locate is 1700).

smaller scale, with 142 cases in the *Proceedings*.¹²³ Like Rosemary Lane, local residents of Monmouth Street and Seven Dials were not only concerned about crime levels in this area, but also with the cost to the parish. In 1713 Monmouth Street residents close to Seven Dials petitioned for the suppression of the sale of rags in the street, claiming that several of the vendors 'by reason of their poverty are likely to be chargeable to the said parish'.¹²⁴ Monmouth Street clothing was, as Jerry White has argued, known either for its 'tawdry showiness', or depending on your point of view, for its fashionableness. It also appears to have specialised in clothing for men and boys.¹²⁵ This local emphasis on fashionableness, is best evidenced by moments when it was found wanting. When Daniel Jones, a seller of second hand clothing in Monmouth Street, described a batch of goods he was offered, he said:

There was an old Suit of Cloaths, and three old Coats; they were all old Fashion'd Things, except a Black Coat.¹²⁶

Although written in the early nineteenth century Charles Dickens' *Sketches of Boz* provides a detailed account of the place and its trade that reflects back on the street's reputation in the early eighteenth century:

A 'Monmouth-street laced coat' was a by-word a century ago; and still we find Monmouth-street the same. Pilot great-coats with wooden buttons, have usurped the place of the ponderous laced coats with full skirts; embroidered waistcoats with large flaps, have yielded to double-breasted checks with roll-collars; and three-cornered hats of quaint appearance, have given place to the low crowns and broad brims of the coachman school; but it is the times that have changed, not Monmouth-street. Through every alteration and every change, Monmouth-street has still remained the burial-place of the fashions; and such, to judge from all present appearances, it will remain until there are no more fashions to bury.¹²⁷

¹²³ *OBP*, Table. 4.1.

¹²⁴ LMA, MJ/SP/1713, (Temp, Anne), no1.

¹²⁵ Jerry White, *London in the Eighteenth Century, A Great and Monstrous Thing*, (2012), p. 191.

¹²⁶ *OBP*, William Cudmore, 7 December 1737, t17371207-4.

¹²⁷ Charles Dickens, *Sketches of Boz*, (1836), p.72.

In other words, Monmouth Street was the posh end of the trade.

Petticoat Lane and Houndsditch

The numbers of cases of theft occurring on Petticoat Lane and Houndsditch also reflect both their importance as sites of trade, and their relative insignificance in relation to Rosemary Lane. Just 58 and 60 thefts over 86 years occurring on these streets made it into the *Old Bailey Proceedings*. Their reputation for crime and dubious trading comes from a different era. Petticoat Lane market was of little consequence especially in the first half of the eighteenth century, just a small local clothes market. And while Houndsditch had more of a longstanding association with slightly suspect brokers, when compared to Rag Fair, there is just no comparison. This is reflected in the numbers of crimes that involved clothing in each area. Of the thefts recorded mentioning Petticoat Lane just 23 per cent involved clothing while the equivalent figure for Houndsditch is 38 per cent.

Formerly called Hogs Lane (similarly Rosemary Lane was formerly known as Hog Street), Petticoat Lane was reputed to have had a clothes and bric-a-brac market from the seventeenth century. But by the 1680s broker's shops were more common. When Thomazine Tally and Sarah Charleton were tried at the Old Bailey for breaking into the house of one Thomas Grimes of Spitalfields and taking a quantity of household goods, these were later found at a 'broakers' in Petticoat Lane.¹²⁸ Houndsditch's reputation for the selling of second hand clothing goes back to Elizabethan times and possibly before that. Ben Johnson included a reference to Houndsditch brokers in his 1599 play *Every Man in His Humor*:

¹²⁸ *OBP*, Thomazine Tally, Sarah Charleton, 12 October 1687, t16871012-21.

Wellbred: 'Where got'st thou this coat, I Marle ?'
Brainworm: 'Of a Houndsditch man, sir, one of the Devil's near Kinsmen'.
Wellbred: 'That cannot be, if the proverb hold for "A crafty knave needs no broker"'.
Brainworm: 'True, sir; but I did need a broker, ergo'.¹²⁹

Nonetheless, in the first half of the eighteenth century both Petticoat Lane and Houndsditch brokers were eclipsed by Rag Fair's old clothes sellers. However, this depiction would change in the third quarter of the eighteenth century as the numbers of defendants and victims with Jewish names increases. The new wave of Jewish immigrants to East London made Houndsditch their own and substantially affected the second hand clothing trade in London and more specifically at Rag Fair.¹³⁰ Women clothes sellers who made up the majority of those selling clothes from baskets and stalls in Rag Fair over the course of the first half of the century would diminish in number with the influx of male Jewish immigrants to East London who would come to dominate the trade in the nineteenth century.

The Place for Clothes Theft

One of the most common phrases associated with trials for the theft of clothes was: the goods were later found, or sold, or bought in 'Rag Fair'.¹³¹ Thomas Baily was one of many victims of theft who found his goods for sale in Rag Fair. Baily kept a shop close to the Great-Turnstile in Holborn, and on the 31st January 1732/3, 43 pairs of boy's stockings were stolen from his shop. Baily sent his 'boy', Thomas Bonn, to Rosemary

¹²⁹ Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humor*, Act 3, Scene 2, (1599).

¹³⁰ Lemire, 'Consumerism in pre-industrial and early industrial England', p. 15.

¹³¹ *OBP*, A keyword search found that approximately 211 trials involved the words "in Rag Fair" using theft as an offence category. 1704-1760.

Lane to look for the stolen goods and he located them at the men's clothing shop belonging to Richard Hancock a short time later.¹³² Similarly:

John Tigget of St. Martins in the Fields, was indicted for feloniously stealing 23 pair of Shoes, a pair of Slippers, and a pair of Boots, the Goods of Roger Edmunds, on the 1st of June. It appear'd, that the Prosecutor lost his Goods, and had Intelligence that the Prisoner had sold several pair in Rag-Fair; upon which he was Apprehended, and in his Examination confessed the Fact, the Jury found him Guilty to the Value of 10d.'¹³³

Some thieves boldly wore the garments they stole. In 1719, Elizabeth Baker was indicted for stealing a 'Callicoe Gown and Petticoat' from the daughter of her mistress, Mrs Lawrence. Baker was found with the goods 'upon her back' in Rosemary Lane. When questioned in court she stated that she made use of the clothes 'only to go and see a friend in'.¹³⁴ Had Baker just 'borrowed' the clothes? Baker's decision to wear this outfit, and her self-proclaimed concern to appear well-dressed to her friends, suggests the important role clothing had in servants' lives.

Domestic servants also appear to dominate this record of crime. Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair provided the second-hand clothing that the purses of London's many domestic servants could afford. Servants were also thought to earn extra income by selling old clothes belonging to their employers - with or without their employer's permission.¹³⁵ In 1690, Anne Burton, was found guilty of: 'stealing a Tabby Petticoat, a laced Cravat, 5 silver spoons, a Corner and a quoif', from her employer, Samuel Hill. Some of the goods were later found in a pawn-shop in Rosemary Lane.¹³⁶ Servants were also given cast off clothing by their employers and it is more than possible that this led to some ambiguity

¹³² *OBP*, Michael Allom, 21 February 1733, t17330221-10.

¹³³ *OBP*, John Tiggett, 8 July 1713, t17130708-31.

¹³⁴ *OBP*, Elizabeth Baker, 4 Dec 1719, t17191204-36.

¹³⁵ Earle, '*English Middle Class*' p. 219.

¹³⁶ *OBP*, Anne Burton, 10 December 1690, t16901210-37.

regarding ownership of articles of clothing. This is especially true if there was a falling-out between mistress and servant or if the servant was found to be abusing their generosity by pawning clothing 'gifts'.¹³⁷ Many servants saw this as a perquisite to their job, while their employers occasionally saw these same clothes as temporary loans. Peter Moss, a journeyman tailor at a shop on Tower Hill, was found guilty of stealing several pairs of breeches and other items of clothing from his Master Thomas Rymer. Moss later sold the breeches to pawnbrokers including James Jacob and Richard Foot in their shops in East Smithfield.¹³⁸

Gendered Thefts

In one of the few studies we have of early modern clothes theft, it was found that in Cheshire female thieves were more likely to steal clothes or cloth than were their male contemporaries.¹³⁹ This observation appears to also hold true for London, the South East, and most especially Rosemary Lane.¹⁴⁰ This is hardly surprising given that clothing was portable, and as Garthine Walker has pointed out, 'clothing constituted the largest category of household expenditure'.¹⁴¹ Clothing was also valuable, and the temptation to steal it was perhaps reinforced by its ubiquity, and by the opportunities to easily sell on or borrow money on items stolen. Beattie has argued that women stole for the same reasons as men 'largely as a means of survival, as a way of supplementing inadequate wages or of supplying the most basic wants'.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, pp. 278-279.

¹³⁸ *OBP*, Peter Moss, 24 February 1748, t17480224-2.

¹³⁹ Walker, 'Women, theft', pp. 87-89.

¹⁴⁰ Lynn Mackay, 'Why they stole', pp. 623-39; Lemire, 'Pawnbroking', p. 132; Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, Table. 4.9; B. A. Hanawalt, 'The female felon in fourteenth-century England', *Viator*, 5, (1974), pp. 262-3; J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Seventeenth Century England*, pp. 10, 92, 146.

¹⁴¹ Walker, 'Women, theft', pp. 89-91.

¹⁴² John Beattie, "'Hard Pressed to Make Ends Meet": women and crime in Augustan London', in *Women and History*, Valerie Firth, (ed.), (Toronto, 1995), pp. 106-7.

Many of the opportunistic clothes thieves who were caught stealing or selling goods at Rag Fair were young single women, servants and working girls such as Anne Burton or Jane Mullins who had little or no money of her own. Mullins was accused of stealing clothing and other goods from her employer's house in order to pawn them at a local shop in Houndsditch. Mary Worrel, the pawnbroker in question, gave evidence at the Old Bailey describing how, 'the prisoner [Mullins] brought the things mentioned in the indictment, and pawned them at our house; the first she brought in last September, but she was constantly coming backwards and forwards; she had some of them out several times'.¹⁴³ Mullins' behavior would not have been thought very unusual. Moreover, the frequency of pawning goods and retrieving them was already a common occurrence for many working class women who used the system of short term loans to manage a family budget.¹⁴⁴

Beattie has argued that the numbers of property crimes committed by women were in reality much higher than those recorded in the existing criminal records. As we have heard, many victims did not take their assailants to court. Prosecutors were possibly discouraged by the cost, trouble and the penalties that could be meted out especially to women.¹⁴⁵ But one category of thief nevertheless seemed to attract a disproportionate number of prosecutions: female domestic servants. Defoe was well aware of the precariousness of being a servant when he wrote that female servants:

¹⁴³ *OBP*, Mary Mullins, 15 May 1755, t17550515-29.

¹⁴⁴ Tompkins, 'Pawnbroking', pp. 180-181; Lemire 'Petty 'Pawns and Informal Lending', p. 133.

¹⁴⁵ Beattie, 'The criminality of women', pp. 92-93.

if they are out of place, they must prostitute their bodies, or starve; so that from clopping and changing, they generally proceed to whoring and thieving, and this is the reason why our streets swarm with strumpets.¹⁴⁶

From Defoe to the newspapers of the day stories appeared on a regular basis chronicling the latest servant caught stealing from their employers. In part this was as much to do with the concerns a patriarchal society had regarding the large numbers of uncontrolled single females in the City - females who had no male relative keeping them in order - but it also just reflected the extraordinarily large numbers of domestic servants in London.

Servants such as Widow Anne Harding who was accused of taking a shirt, two pairs of sheets and a blanket belonging to her employer Benjamin Legoe were frequently to be found at the Old Bailey. Harding confessed that she had pawned some of the goods belonging to her employer at differing pawnbrokers and that she had sold a stolen blanket at Rag Fair. In her defence she told the court: 'I own I pawned these things, but no more'. This statement implies that Harding believed that pawning her employer's goods was not as bad as selling them outright, though Harding was found guilty of the lesser offence of stealing and sentenced to be transported.¹⁴⁷

Mary Mims stole some clothes and a silver spoon from her employer. She told the court that she did this to get her shoes out of pawn, and 'pleaded that she did not take them with a felonious intent' and would have redeemed the spoon and returned it to its rightful place.¹⁴⁸ This was a common story, but it is fair to say that it was highly probable that many women were so used to living by an 'economy of expedients' that

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Defoe, *Everybody's Business is Nobody's or PRIVATE ABUSES, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES: EXEMPLIFIED In the Pride, Insolence, and exorbitant Wages of our Women, Servants, Footmen, &c.* (1725), p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ *OBP*, Anne Harding, 24 October 1759, t17591024-30.

¹⁴⁸ *OBP*, Mary Mims, May 1719, t17190514-37. Nb. The word 'intent' in this quote is taken from the original image of the text, and has not been included in the online transcription.

the constant pawning and retrieving was an integral part of how they lived their lives.¹⁴⁹ What is more, 'borrowing' goods to pawn probably did not feel like a real crime if you intended to return the goods in a short time. Sometimes thieves managed this juggling act and sometimes they risked everything by pawning or selling goods without the owner's permission and they got caught - as in the case of Mary Mims and Ann Harding among countless others. For some this complicated movement of possessions either borrowed or stolen was just a small step away from possible transportation or the hangman's noose.

There is no doubt that many of those that stood accused of theft at the Old Bailey were guilty of the crime. However, the majority of eighteenth-century Londoners, both men and women, depended on credit and the conversion of their goods into money when it was needed, and back again into goods, when they could be afforded. The high number of lone women, many of whom had seafaring or soldier husbands away from home for long periods of time, simply reinforced this fact of life. Married women's work was sporadic and seasonal, bringing in an irregular income. Moreover, it was normal for women to be responsible for managing the family credit even when their menfolk were at home.¹⁵⁰ This was no easy task and many women were dependent on pawnbrokers to balance the family budget. Many of London's poorer citizens could not afford to keep their possessions sitting idly in a closet: they had to use them for credit. Anything, they could do without could be pawned or sold and bought back when times were better.

However, the public anxiety engendered by the criminal component of this gendered economy of makeshifts was shared by lawmakers and citizens alike, and found voice in

¹⁴⁹ Olwen Hufton, 'Women and the family economy in eighteenth-century France', *French Historical Studies*, Vol.9, No.1, (Spring,1975), p. 19.

¹⁵⁰ Lemire, 'Petty pawns and informal lending', p. 112.

new legislation under Queen Anne.¹⁵¹ In 1713 theft from a dwelling house of goods over the value of 40 shillings was made a capital offence and joined the long list of Acts that made up the 'Bloody Code'. The statute directly targeted those 'wicked and ill-disposed servants and other persons' that might have escaped hanging when the right to claim benefit of clergy had been extended in 1706.¹⁵² However, as with much of the Bloody Code, it is less clear that statute law impacted significantly on the practice of the court. Most women thieves who were found guilty were convicted of thefts of under 40 shillings. Paula Humfrey has found that out of 95 theft trials at the Old Bailey involving women servants 79 convictions were upheld, however, only 10 of that number actually received a death sentence.¹⁵³

In 1711-12, one quarter of the surviving depositions in the City of London session papers involve an alleged theft by a servant.¹⁵⁴ This high percentage reflects why London's middle and upper classes were anxious about the servants they had living in their homes or coming into their homes on a daily basis. In her influential book *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France* Olwen Hufton reveals similar finding for France, with employers of domestic servants being one of the highest categories of victims at court. Hufton also notes that more than half the number of urban thefts in her sample involved clothing or materials.¹⁵⁵ Out of sixty-five servants who were hanged at Tyburn between 1703 and 1772, forty five were men and twenty were women.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 39.

¹⁵² Beattie, 'The criminality of women', p. 92.

¹⁵³ Paula M. Humfrey, 'Female servants and women's criminality in early modern London' in S. Devereaux, A. May and G. Smith, (eds.), *Crime and Society in the Old World and the New* (Toronto, 1997), p. 75.

¹⁵⁴ J.M. Beattie, 'London crime and the making of the bloody code', in Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Keirn, and Robert B. Shoemaker, (eds.), *Stilling The Grumbling Hive, The Response To Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750*, (Stroud, 1992), pp. 68-76, note 60.

¹⁵⁵ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France*, pp. 258-259.

¹⁵⁶ Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, p. 252.

Women made up a high percentage of those accused of theft in the 326 theft trials documented for Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair recorded in the *Proceedings* - 45.4 per cent of defendants were women (see Table. 4.1). In 1718, Jane Best of St Dunstan, Stepney was one of those defendants. Best was accused of stealing two hats from a local alehouse. Best visited the alehouse at 7am in the morning and 'call'd for a Pint of Ale.' However, while the serving girl filled the tankard, Best took two hats and hid them under her clothes. Shortly afterwards, the alehouse landlord, John Dagg, realised the hats were missing. He went immediately to Rosemary Lane where he found Best standing in the middle of the street with his best hat in her hand crying 'Who will by a new Hat'. Best was found guilty of the robbery and transported.¹⁵⁷

Similarly, in 1744 Elizabeth Phillips was accused of stealing a cloth coat belonging to Charles Kettree. Kettree found his coat for sale in Rag Fair three quarters of an hour after it was stolen.¹⁵⁸ This kind of opportunistic theft tended to be committed by women, reinforcing the gendered complexion of the neighbourhood which will be examined in detail in Chapter 6.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, this constant exchange of attire was said to have affected the way clothing was made in the eighteenth century. Anne Buck contends that 'as little stitching as possible was done so that the expensive material could be more easily unpicked to make up again'.¹⁶⁰ This was such a common occurrence that prosecutors frequently found their stolen goods made into several items. Furthermore, this would have been relatively easy for women most of whom were proficient at sewing to re-model a garment or make up material in order to re-sell it.

¹⁵⁷ *OBP*, Jane Best, 4 December 1719, t17191204-33.

¹⁵⁸ *OBP*, Elizabeth Phillips, 10 May 1744, t17440510-24.

¹⁵⁹ Walker, 'Women, theft', p. 87.

¹⁶⁰ Anne Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth Century England*, (1979), p. 160.

A Disorderly Neighbourhood?

Overall, the figures for theft associated with Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair are impressive. And the fact that so many victims of theft not only sought out their goods at Rag Fair, but actually found them there, reflects the extent to which Rosemary Lane was central to a wider system of theft and resale. It is also clear that prosecutions ran at a higher rate in this neighbourhood than elsewhere. The parish of St Paul's Covent Garden was reputed to have had some of the highest rates of crime prosecutions in London. But, while there were 88 prosecutions for theft in Covent Garden recorded in the *Proceedings* in the 1740s for a population of just over 5,000, this compares to 105 theft prosecutions recorded in East London for the single street of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair for the same period.¹⁶¹ Perhaps this neighbourhood deserved its disorderly reputation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined Rag Fair as a place to buy and sell. It has looked at the pawnbrokers who did so much to facilitate the behaviour that ensured Rosemary Lane would appear so frequently in the records of trials at the Old Bailey. And it has explored the repeated failed attempts to close it down.

The majority of thieves who stole clothes did so because they were poor and because it was relatively easy. They stole garments that they could either wear themselves or sell on at Rag Fair. They rarely stole really valuable items: a silk dress would be difficult to pawn or to sell. Instead, they needed ordinary everyday garb that could be sold on

¹⁶¹ Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, p. 292; *OBP*, 7.3.13, statistics gathered using an API search Jan 1740 to Dec 1750 using "Covent Garden" as key word and "Rag Fair" OR "Rosemary Lane" as key word, all offences, 1740-1750.

quickly and that would be difficult to identify. As Paula Humfrey has pointed out for labouring women especially, 'access to a quasi-banking system that traded in goods as well as currency was a central vehicle in surviving on a marginal income'.¹⁶² The women who worked at Rag Fair selling second hand clothes from a stall or who bought and sold stolen goods were taking part in this quasi banking system as were the informal lenders such as Sarah Fossett of Houndsditch who participated taking pledges on her friends and neighbour's possessions. As John Styles has observed, the second hand clothes trade was a prominent feature of plebeian life in London 'it was fed by and often encompassed, pawnbrokers, both formal and informal'.¹⁶³ The character of exchange involved, in the networks of legitimate and criminal exchange, set Rag Fair apart.

By the early eighteenth century this street had become a commercial centre specialising in the buying and selling of old clothes. It attracted London's poor who travelled there from across London to shop. Rag Fair brought both legitimate and illegitimate business to the area; it provided a venue in which to buy all manner of second hand clothing and other goods. However, theft and receiving was endemic and expected. People made a living from knowingly buying and selling stolen goods. Whether it was the servant or the seasoned thief, male or female this was the place to deal, and it was also a place that made the boundary between legitimate trade and criminality, uncertain and grey. It was also a world dominated by women. The world of stolen clothes was defined by networks of poor women. Whether their reasons for stealing (or borrowing) and selling clothes and household linens was to ensure that they had enough to live on or whether

¹⁶² Humfrey, 'Female servants', p. 81.

¹⁶³ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, p. 174.

it was done simply to make money - women were at the heart of it. The buyers of stolen goods, the pawnbrokers and the dealers were largely made up of women.

Over the course of the century this area in London's eastern suburbs became intrinsically linked with the development of second hand clothing shops, tailors' shops and the emerging pawnbroker emporiums. Rag Fair survived into the nineteenth century because of this trade. This was a place that contained a concentration of all the venues necessary to help the poor survive, but in the process it created a world where the buying and selling of stolen goods became a huge business. Rag Fair represented a different culture of exchange in which crime was simply one extreme on a continuum of behaviours. This chapter has sought to suggest that many of the normal rules of economic exchange, in which ownership and property are clearly defined and unproblematic, simply do not work in quite the same way at Rag Fair.

The theme of the ambivalent nature of local crime established in this chapter continues in the next. If pawnbrokers - both formal and informal - contributed to a network of criminality, the next chapter will argue that a gang of thief-takers, who infested the neighbourhood, gave a further distinctive malevolent twist to its culture.

Chapter 5

The Thief-Takers of Rosemary Lane 1732-1756

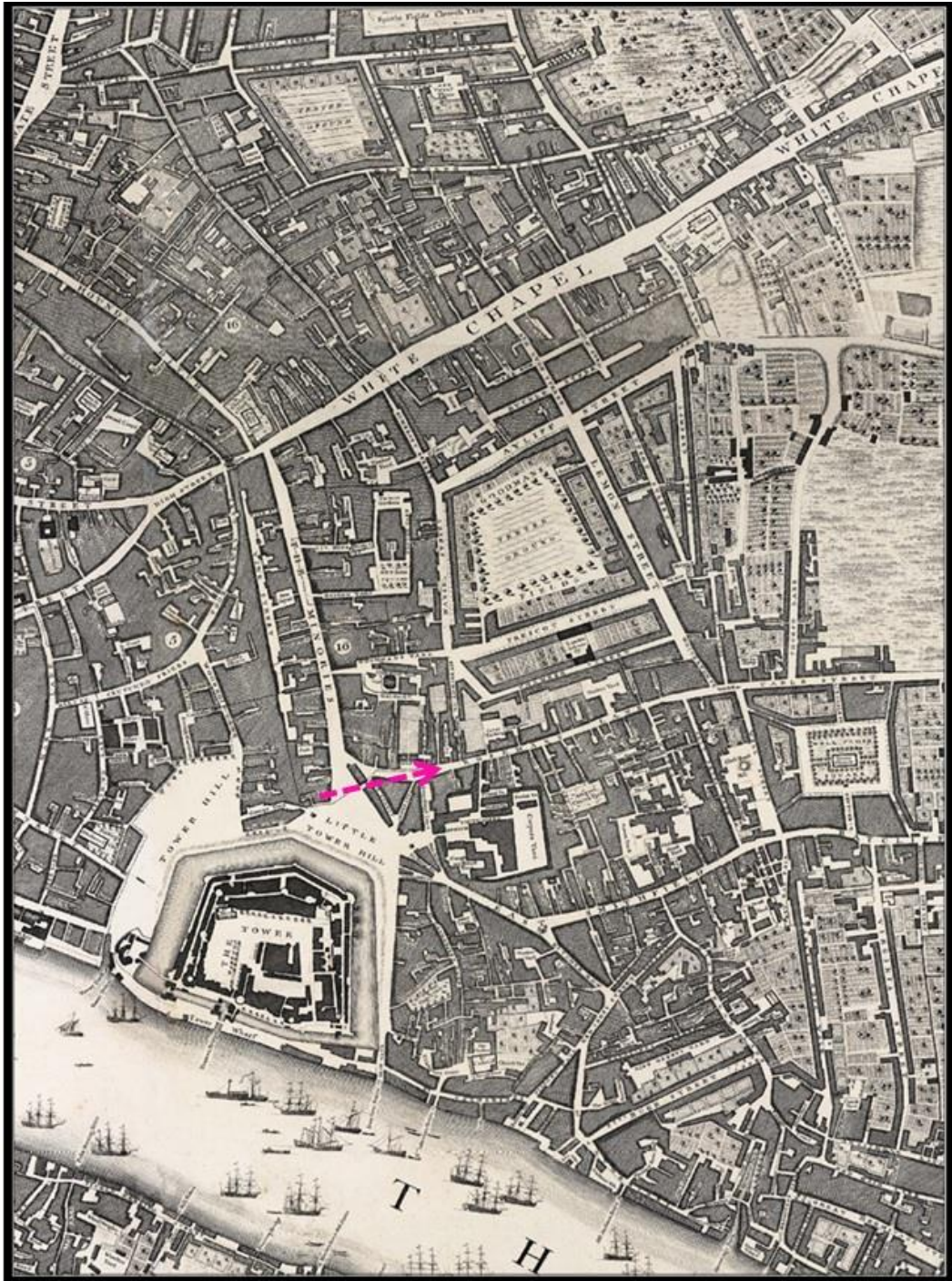


Fig. 5.1: Map showing East London and Rosemary Lane. *A Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark; with the Contiguous Buildings; From an actual Survey taken by John Rocque Land-Surveyor, and Engraved by John Pine, Bluemantle Pursuivant at Arms and Chief Engraver of Seals, &c. to His Majesty.* This section of the map showing East London and Rosemary Lane. Courtesy of © Motco Enterprises Limited, Ref: www.motco.com
Key: Pink dotted line identifying Rosemary Lane as it proceeds east towards Cable Street.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 described Rosemary Lane and particularly Rag Fair as a place where crime and disorder co-existed with an orderly London suburb. This chapter focusses on a group of thief-takers who used the crime associated with Rag Fair to embed themselves in the neighbourhood, and who organised and controlled a substantial criminal network at mid-century. It will illustrate how a group of thief-takers from the poorest of backgrounds used the 'bloody code' and the Government's system of rewards to make money by prosecuting men and women as thieves whether they were guilty or not. Moreover, it will argue that to understand the forces which drove the evolution of the criminal justice system, we need to explore its workings on the level of the neighbourhood. This chapter will suggest that while Thomas De Veil was writing a new page of policing history with the establishment of Bow Street, and while Henry and John Fielding's runners were located in the West End, the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane formed an important nucleus of professional (if corrupt) policing in the East.¹

As early as 1601, the jurisdictional complexity of the suburbs led Sir Stephen Soame, City alderman, to describe them as, 'the very sink of sin, the nurcery of naughty and lewd people, the harbour of rogues, theeves, and beggars, and maintainers of idle persons...'.² Little had changed by the eighteenth century. And many historians have recognised this basic geography of crime and disorder. John McMullan has argued that the Liberties and suburbs were 'free zones immune from city policing and authority

¹ J.M. Beattie, *The First English Detectives: The Bow Street Runners and the Policing of London, 1750-1840*, (2012), pp. 8-15; John. L. McMullan, 'The political economy of thief-taking', in *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 23, (1995), pp. 121-146.

² Hayward Townshend, *Historical Collections, or, An exact account of the proceedings of the four last parliaments of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory*, (1680), p. 325.

...independent and unregulated deviant territories'.³ And Ruth Paley observes that it was not 'a coincidence that many of the worst London rookeries either straddled or were close to the City and Middlesex border, enabling criminals to evade arrest by their ability to move easily from one to the other'.⁴ The unchanging structures of City governance, led to both a perception that the outlying suburbs were subject to high levels of crime, and the perception that they might provide fertile ground for thief-takers. But, nevertheless, the sheer complexity of the administrative systems involved has been largely ignored.

Eighteenth-century London simply did not have a 'centralised police' of the sort created in Paris by Louis XIV in 1708 - the forty 'officers de paix'.⁵ And while Ian Archer and others have argued that in the sixteenth-century 'the City proper had a relatively well-coordinated system of policing, and machinery was available for the close regulation of its inhabitants', this does not imply a single or coherent system.⁶ Even in Rosemary Lane, policing was not entirely left to a straightforward parish system of constables and a watch. There were salaried constables and city marshals policing London by the early eighteenth century.⁷ But, the patchwork of precincts, parishes and liberties that comprised the neighbourhood meant that while the system might be served by well-meaning and effective individuals, it could never be coherent.

³ John McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld 1500-1700*, (Rutgers, New Jersey, 1984), pp. 144-146.

⁴ Ruth Paley, *The Middlesex Justices Act of 1792: its origins and effects*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1983), pp. 5-6.

⁵ Clive Emsley, 'Policing the streets of early nineteenth century Paris', *French History*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1987, pp. 257-282. For further information on policing in eighteenth century Paris see David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740-1790*, (Cambridge, 1986).

⁶ Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 235.

⁷ John Styles, 'The emergence of the police - explaining police reform in eighteenth and nineteenth century England', *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (1987), pp. 15-22; Clive Emsley, *Policing and its Context, 1750-1870*, (1983), pp. 172-173.

This lack of coherence was then exacerbated by the fact that there remained no public body or section of local government charged with actually investigating crime or collecting evidence in order to prosecute offenders on behalf of victims. As John Beattie points out, the onus remained on the victim of the crime to catch the culprit throughout almost all of the eighteenth century. The victim also had to pay for a warrant from a justice of the peace and to prosecute the offender through the criminal justice system.⁸ As a result, to the geographies of crime and policing has to be added a micro-geography of prosecution embedded in local practice.

Despite recognising the basic division between suburb and centre, the history of London crime has not traditionally been described from the point of view of the capital's neighbourhoods. Recent work has tended to focus on London as a whole, and in the process has tended to underplay the importance of the variegated systems of policing that marked the different neighbourhoods of the capital. In relation to crime John Beattie has argued that London provided,

the most conducive conditions for men who intended to band together in criminal activities, because it offered both the richest targets and a denser network of flash houses and receivers and other “underworld connections” that enabled men (and women) to live irregularly without necessarily drawing suspicion upon themselves’.⁹

But, like most historians Beattie gives the impression of the existence of a single, unified, community of crime. Gangs and policing are discussed in terms of ‘London’, when in reality the eighteenth-century metropolis was made up of a patchwork of neighbourhoods, divided by jurisdiction, each with their own character, and accent.

And while work by John Beattie on the City and South London, and by Robert Shoemaker

⁸ J.M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror*, (Oxford, 2001), p. 226.

⁹ J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800*, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 254-255.

and Elaine Reynolds on Middlesex and Westminster, respectively, have increased our knowledge of crime in the suburbs, no one has written a history of crime organised around any one of the disorderly neighbourhoods that encircled the City - Covent Garden, Drury Lane, St Giles, Moorfields, or Rosemary Lane.¹⁰ This chapter will suggest that due to its geography, its overlapping boundaries and its reputation for disorder, Rosemary Lane became the hub for the majority of the most infamous thief-takers of eighteenth-century London. And that to understand the conditions that underpinned the development of the thief-takers, one needs to understand the character of the disorderly neighbourhood they chose to make their home. It will argue that adding a local dimension to our understanding of crime, policing and prosecution, changes the story.

The criminality, corruption and sheer violence of thief-takers has been noted and debated by historians of crime. But both criminals and thief-takers have been depicted as city-wide phenomena. Two early and worthy examples include Patrick Pringle's book *The Thief-Takers* published in 1958, followed twelve years later by Gerald Howson's book *Thief-Taker General: The Rise and fall of Jonathan Wild* published in 1970. More recently, excellent scholarly essays have been provided by John Beattie, Tim Wales and John McMullan who between them have written about London thief-takers from the last

¹⁰ Robert B. Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in Rural Middlesex*, (Cambridge, 1991); Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker (eds.), *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800*, (Cambridge, forthcoming). Many thanks to both authors for early access to their material; Elaine Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830*, (1998), p. 4; Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, (2003, 2nd edn, 2006); Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900*, (2nd edn, 1996); Norma Landau, (ed.), *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660-1830*, (Cambridge, 2002); Joanna Innes, and John Styles, 'The Crime Wave: recent writing on crime and criminal justice in eighteenth century-England', in *Rethinking Social History: English society 1570-1920 and its Interpretation*, Adrian Wilson, (ed.) (Manchester, 1993), pp. 201-265; Andrew Harris, *Policing The City, Crime and Legal Authority in London, 1780-1840*, (Ohio, 2004).

quarter of the seventeenth to the late eighteenth century.¹¹ And most impressively, Ruth Paley's detailed, even magisterial investigation of the 'MacDaniel gang' and their trials has highlighted the blatant corruption evident not only among thief-takers but also among the magistracy in the metropolis at mid-century.¹²

This chapter will take a lead from Paley's study, but take a closer look at these men in their specific geographical environment. It will suggest that by looking at the thief-takers from the perspective of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair we can develop a more nuanced understanding of the forces that brought this system of 'policing' into being.

In order to achieve this more detailed picture, this chapter will consider the activities of the foremost London thief-takers and criminals *circa.* 1732-1756, who operated directly out of East London and particularly from Rosemary Lane including Stephen MacDaniel and John Berry the only two leading thief-takers who appeared at the Old Bailey.¹³

In addition, this chapter will focus on the activities of Nathaniel Harris, the most active thief-taker in London, and his associates, Samuel Unwin, Bomer Lovett, Ralph Mitchell, George Holderness, Thomas Stanley, George Ballentine or Valentine, Richard Morris,

¹¹*OBP*, Jonathan Wilde, 13 May 1725, t17250513-55; Patrick Pringle, *The Thief-takers*, (1958); Gerald Howson, *Thief-Taker General: The Rise and Fall of Jonathan Wild*, (1970); J.M. Beattie, 'Detection and prosecution : thief-takers, 1690-1720', in Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 226-256; For an account of earlier thief-takers see Tim Wales, 'Thief-takers and their Clients' in Paul Griffiths, and Mark. S. R. Jenner, (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social history of Early Modern London*, (Manchester, 2000), pp. 73-84.

¹² Ruth Paley, 'Thief-takers in London in the age of the MacDaniel gang, c.1745-1754' in Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder, (eds.), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750-1850*, (Oxford, 1989), p. 332.

¹³ Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 1674-1913, (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 24 March 2012), (Hereafter, *OBP*), *OBP*, 26 February 1755, Stephen MacDaniel, John Berry, James Salmon, James Eagan, t17550226-55, 1st March 1755, t17550301-1, December 1755, t17551204-3; PRO, KB 1/11/2, E art., 27 geo II, *R. v. Mitchell et al.*, notice to appear and receive judgement. See also Joseph Cox, *A Faithful Narrative of the most Wicked and Inhuman Transactions of that Bloody Minded Gang of Thieftakers, alias Thieftmakers, MacDaniel, Berry, Salmon, Eagan alias Gahagan....(1756)* passim, British Library 1416.9.12 (2). Both Salmon and Eagan were small time thief-takers with little involvement in the majority of thief-taking activity that took place on Rosemary Lane.

James Brebrook, Charles Remmington, William Palmer Hind, William Body, Edward Pinches and James Warrener (clerk to Justices Richard Farmer and William Withers) – all either located in the neighbourhood, or active there.

EARLY PRIVATE LAW ENFORCEMENT

Sometimes thief-takers worked in groups, sometimes alone; sometimes they worked with the local beadle, constables and city marshals; sometimes they were the beadle, or constable or city marshal. By the eighteenth-century, they were also an established part of the system, going back at least a hundred years. Luke Hutton, writing in 1596 complains bitterly about the *Black Dog of Newgate* - his description for London's thief-takers: 'infamous cony-catching knaves who continually seek the spoil of others to enrich themselves'.¹⁴

With crime levels perceived to be high and no established force to 'police' the city, the City justices used whatever means was available to them to control crime. As we have seen in Chapter Four, city marshals, constables and watchmen were the backbone of the system of community policing, but 'thief-takers' created a flexible, private cadre of law enforcement officials. By using thief-takers to target known thieves, robbers, counterfeiters and murderers they sought to allay public fears, and indeed this is evident as much in the Liberties and suburbs as in the City itself.¹⁵

But this long established system was given a fillip by the activities of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners (hereafter SRM). The first SRM was established around 1690 in

¹⁴ A.V. Judges, (ed.), *The Elizabethan Underworld* (1930), pp. 278-282, also cited in Paley 'thief-takers', pp. 310-311 .

¹⁵ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 1.

the Tower Hamlets area of London.¹⁶ And arguably places like Rosemary Lane provided the primary reason for its existence. The SRMs will be dealt with more fully in Chapter 6, but they also form an important backdrop to the evolution of the thief-takers, many of whom were active members and informers. By placing rewards, informing, and what might be described as 'crime management' at the heart of its programme, the SRMs provided a new template for the thief-takers. Between the SRMs and the activities of Isaac Newton at the Mint, who became increasingly involved in both detecting crimes such as coining and forging, and who actively used rewards as a part of his activities, a new economy of crime detection was created.¹⁷ Men such as Bodenham Rewse and John Jenkins who worked for the SRMs arresting prostitutes in the 1690s and 1700s, and later found new employment catching coiners and forgers at the behest of Isaac Newton, along with known thieves, such as Anthony Dunn and Anthony St Leger both former felons employed by Newton, set a pattern for corruption that would extend to the rest of the criminal justice system in the following decades.¹⁸

Even at the height of the system, when the SRMs and the Mint, and the wider system of rewards, provided what could be a steady income, the majority of thief-takers also earned money from a combination of activities, including work as turn-keys and wardens in the privatised prisons and lock-ups of the capital, and as keepers of sponging houses and alehouses. Many of them also had a 'trade', beyond that of thief-taker.¹⁹ As a result they always remained ambiguous living between their local communities, and

¹⁶ T.C. Curtis, 'The societies for the reformation of manners a case study in the theory and practice of moral reform', *Literature & History*, 3, 1976, pp. 45-64.

¹⁷ See Thomas Levenson, *Newton and the Counterfeiter: The Unknown Detective Career of the World's Greatest Scientist*, (2009).

¹⁸ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 226-256.

¹⁹ Paley, 'Thief-takers,' p. 305.

an evolving bureaucracy of criminal justice. The most significant lynch pin connecting the two, was the system of rewards.

REWARDS

As discussed briefly in Chapter One, by 1692 a London thief-taker could claim £40 for the successful prosecution of a highwayman. The claimants could also be given the highwayman's horse, his sword, gun knives and any goods that had not been stolen. The £40 reward became known as the 'parliamentary reward' or 'blood money' since the conviction of highway robbery carried a capital charge.²⁰ By 1695 rewards could also be claimed for catching clippers and counterfeiters and from 1706 for apprehending and successfully prosecuting burglars.²¹ Rewards were split between the prosecutor, some witnesses, the constable and the thief-takers involved with the capture and conviction of the offender.

The £100 royal proclamation reward devised by the City government ran continuously from 1720 to 1745. As Beattie notes, it began in January 1720 with no date of cessation and it was applied to 'offences committed over the previous three months and to those that might be committed hereafter'.²² This unprecedented amount of money, offered in conjunction with the £40 statutory reward already in place for the conviction of robbers, meant that the profits of a conviction could amount to the equivalent of several years' wages for an artisan. The royal proclamation reward was a direct reaction to the post-war rise in crime and particularly in highway robbery in London. Indictments for robbery at the Old Bailey doubled between the years 1713-1722, particularly in

²⁰ Pringle, *The Thief-Takers*, p18

²¹ Tim Wales, 'Thief-takers and their clients', p. 70.

²² Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 380 and notes. The proclamation ran continuously 1727-1745 only stopping for a few months after the death of George I in 1727.

Middlesex. The reward was to be paid for the conviction of robbers and murderers who committed the crime within a 5 mile radius of Charring Cross.²³ Ideally, this reward was intended as a form of compensation, an encouragement to the victims of burglary and robbery to prosecute their assailants and to honest thief-takers to help catch London's violent criminals; but it also acted as a powerful motive for false accusations.

These large rewards, paid out for successful convictions of robbers, were not without critics. Letters to the London press condemned the possible 'evil effects of large rewards...' that among other things they would create, 'no little Danger even to the *innocent*'.²⁴ In the mid-1740s London magistrates aired their fears to the Duke of Newcastle that large rewards were seen as an enticement to some of London's thief-takers.²⁵ The Proclamation Rewards were stopped for a time but then resumed in November 1749. However, it was resumed in response to fears of a post-war crime wave for a one year and again in 1750 for 15 months.²⁶ There is no doubt that the recorder of the City of London and the Aldermen were aware of the dangers of malicious or false prosecutions. This is evident in the controversy that emerged concerning Jonathan Wild, the self-proclaimed 'Thief-taker General'. This illustrated to anyone willing to listen that large rewards were likely to result in bad justice.²⁷ And the City was fully aware that some names appeared regularly on reward lists, and they tried to control the actual amounts paid to thief-takers, but generally the City was willing to accept the possibility of wrongful convictions, in order to allay public fears.

²³ Jeremy Pocklington, *Highway Robbery, 1660-1720: Practice, Policies and Perceptions*, Unpublished M.Phil thesis (Oxford, 1997), pp. 41-46, cited in Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 372.

²⁴ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 406-409.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 409.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 378-380.

²⁷ Gerald Howson, *Thief-Taker General*, p. 5.

Ruth Paley suggests that in 1744-5 alone the City paid out £1,800 in Proclamation Rewards.²⁸ Additionally, the thief-takers also on occasion received personal rewards offered by the victim. While the system of rewards formed the backdrop for the development of a local culture of thief-taking, this culture was brought into being in dialogue with a specific criminal gang - the Black Boy Alley gang. Although based in Chick Lane and Black Boy Alley 2.5 miles away, this gang helped to define the Rosemary Lane thief-takers.

The Black Boy Alley Gang

The Rosemary Lane thief-takers were clearly at odds with the gang that haunted the alleys around Chick Lane in Holborn. This gang of thieves and robbers were notoriously violent and they caused fear among hardened thief-takers and Constables alike. Decent people were generally tentative on entering the terrain of the Black Boy Alley gang. The Black Boy Alley gang was just one of the criminal gangs that caused havoc in London in the 1740s; the Royal Family was another.²⁹ Both of these gangs were of Irish decent. What is more, many of the Rosemary Lane thief-takers including MacDaniel, Stanley, Morris (former member of the Black Boy Alley gang) and Mark Chailes were known to be of Irish origin and some had links to the gangs.³⁰

²⁸ Paley, 'Thief-takers', p. 324.

²⁹ For information on the 'Royal Family Gang' and connections with thief-takers see, *OBP*, John Bowen, Edward Mullins, William Smith, Robert Carmitchell, Joseph Uptebake, Garret Lawler, Joseph Dowdle, Thomas Quin, 28th February 1750, t17500228-41.

³⁰ For Richard Morris's connection with the Black Boy Alley gang see *OBP*, Richard Burris, 12 October 1743, t17431012-37 arrests in this trial were made by thief-taker William Palmer Hind; *OBP*, William Brister, James Page, Theophilus Watson, James Roberts, John Potbury, otherwise Jack the Sailor, William Billingsly, otherwise Gugg, Henry Gadd, otherwise Scampey, t17441205-34, t17441205-35, t17441205-37, t17441205-48; Paley, 'Thief-takers', p. 304, p. 325.

Paley notes that a proclamation was issued in 1744-5 in a 'direct response' to the activities of this gang of highwaymen and thieves.³¹ Londoners were undoubtedly thankful when several of the Black Boy Alley gang were finally brought to justice in 1744. Several of the gang members, including vicious thieves Ann Duck and Ann Wells, (alias Barefoot) were finally convicted and sentenced to death just before Christmas in 1744.³² But many others, either escaped London, or made their peace with the thief-takers. Gang leader, William Harper, a former shoemaker from Dublin turned King's evidence to save his own skin and on his information, his former friends were sent to the gallows. Richard Morris was able to escape into hiding until the furore over this trial had settled down before joining the Rosemary Lane thief-takers as an active member. Numerous thieves became informers, turning King's evidence (giving evidence on behalf of the state) against their fellows in order to save their own lives - informing was big business.³³ And the eighteenth century criminal justice system was dependent on this process, forcing thief-takers and criminals into an awkward alliance. Through the course of the 1740s, several men moved from one side of the fence to the other, bringing with them, contacts and insight into the workings of London's criminal community. The crisis generated by the gangs, also encouraged the justices to give free reign to the thief-takers, aware of the popular anxiety the gangs were generating.

Rewards were a city-wide, if not national, phenomenon, and the gangs were likewise, largely located beyond the neighbourhood. But together they formed a strong impetus for the increased activity of the thief-takers in the later 1740s and 1750s. But to

³¹ Paley, 'Thief-takers', p. 325.

³² *OBP*, Ann Duck, Ann Barefoot, 17 October 1744, t17441017-23, t17430114-11, t17430629-10, t17430907-70, t17441017-6; Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker (eds.), *London Lives*, (Cambridge, forthcoming). See chapters 4 and 5 for new material on the Black Boy Alley Gang.

³³ *OBP*, Ralph Mitchel, 16 January 1730, t17300116-15.

understand how these influences worked in relation to the administration of justice, and the evolution of a system of thief-taking, the relationships they facilitated need to be located on the ground, and within the micro-geography of the neighbourhood. The governing height of the local system was occupied by the Justices of the Peace.

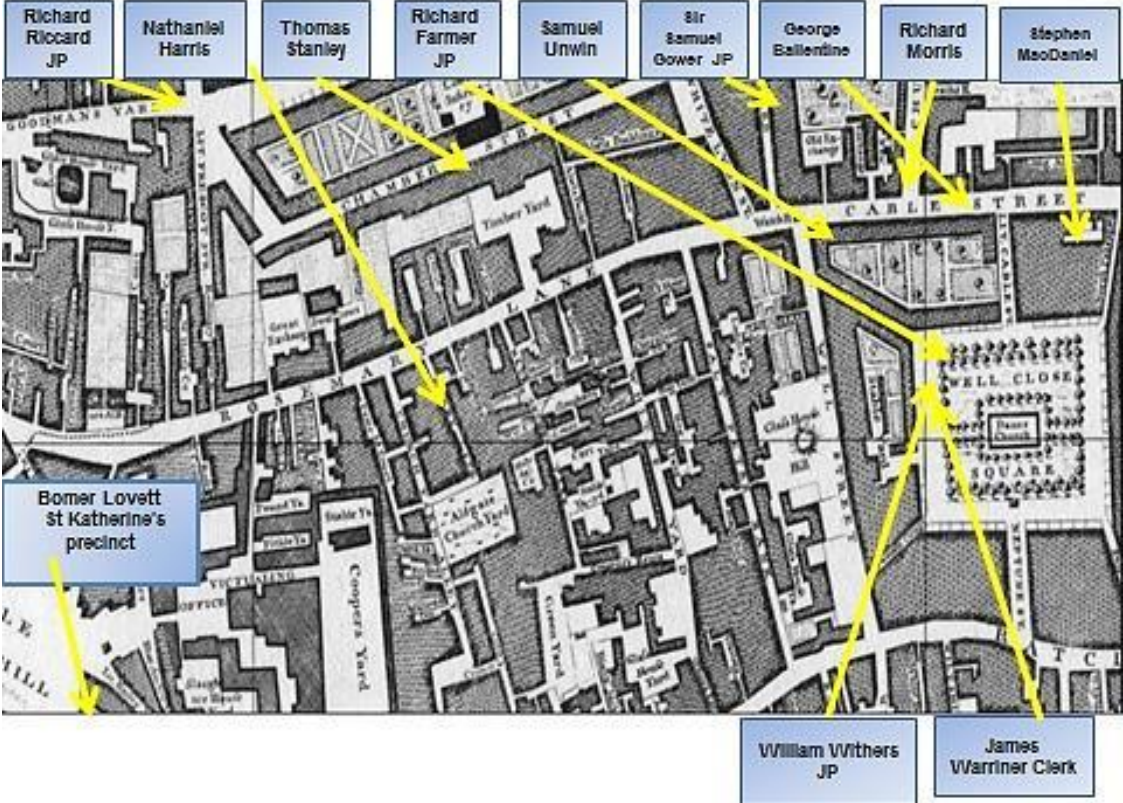


Fig. 5.2: Rosemary Lane: Dwellings of prominent Thief-takers and JPs. *John Rocque, London Westminster and Southwark, 1746.* © (Motco Enterprises Limited, ref: www.motco.com).

THE LOCAL JUDICARY

Without exception local JPs were considered by contemporaries to fall into the disreputable category of ‘trading justices’. The justices made money from every legal transaction and the thief-takers made money from aiding the justices with their work and from the subsequent convictions and rewards. As a result the network of local justices of the peace played a vital role in the story of the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane. As Norma Landau contends, ‘so notorious were the “trading justices” of eighteenth

century London that their very name was a byword for corruption'.³⁴ Paul Langford argues that some trading justices were so corrupt, that they were 'indistinguishable from the criminals with whom they dealt'.³⁵ Between 1716 and 1792 out of fifteen Middlesex justices brought into be examined (over a rather polite dinner at the Sessions House), twelve were removed from office by various Lord Chancellors after representations submitted by the Middlesex bench.³⁶ Middlesex trading justices resident in the neighbourhood included Sir Samuel Gower, and JPs Richard Farmer, Richard Riccards, William Withers and Colonel Clifford Phillips White.

Sir Samuel Gower was one of the wealthiest and most prominent JPs in this neighbourhood, and was censured by the Middlesex bench, for precisely this kind of behaviour.³⁷ The complexity of the relationships both between the Justices and the thief-takers, and among the Justices themselves, is exemplified by his case. He was censured for his 'Many Misbehaviors and Irregularities by him done and Committed in his Office of a Justice of the Peace'. And in reply, he simply apologized, declaring he was, 'Very Sorry for what he had done and promised he would not be Guilty of Any the like Practices for the future or do Anything whereby any Scandall might be brought on the Commission'. He was not removed from the bench, and continued to act as a JP until his death in 1757.³⁸ But, as Ruth Paley suggests there was clearly some collusion

³⁴ Norma Landau, (ed.), 'The trading justices trade', in *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660 – 1830*, (Cambridge, 2002), p. 46; Paley, 'Thief-takers', p.312, p.315.

³⁵ Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689-1789*, (Oxford, 1991), p. 444.

³⁶ Landau, 'The trading justices trade', p. 49.

³⁷ Webb, *The Parish and the County*, p. 330.

³⁸ William Fuller Maitland, *The London Chronicle*, September 1-3, (1757), p. 217.

particularly between Sir Samuel Gower and the thief-takers; probably facilitated by James Warrener, the justice's clerk.³⁹

But as important as his guilt, was his frosty relationship with his neighbouring JPs. Gower had enemies on the bench including two of his close neighbours. On the 26 December 1750 two Middlesex Justices Richard Riccards Esq of Goodman's Yard and Boulton Mainwaring of the nearby parish of St George Middlesex proceeded to make a 'General privy search' for all 'Rogues, Vagabonds, & other Disorderly Persons and houses of Ill-Fame in Cable Street and Goodman's Fields.' They principally searched a playhouse and licensed premises owned by Sir Samuel Gower who lived in Mill Yard, yards away from Goodman's Fields and close to Rag Fair. Gower was thought to be one of the leading manufacturers of sailcloth in England at this time; but was also accused of being associated with prostitution, disorderly houses, and a playhouse, which was 'said to draw customers to the nearby brothels'.⁴⁰

Riccards and Mainwaring proceeded to several nearby public houses - 'houses of Ill-Fame' - said again to be owned by Gower, who also issued the houses' licences to sell alcohol. Here, they 'Apprehended Seven Loose and Disorderly Women'.⁴¹ Gower was also accused of having used his office to sign an illegal 'permissive licence' granting the playhouse he owned, the right to sell spirits.⁴²

³⁹ See *OBP*, Stephen MacDaniel, John Berry, Mary Jones, 3 June 1756, (t17560603-16); *OBP*, Charles Orchard, 16 February 1737, (t17370216-22); Richard Holmes George French, *OBP* 24 October 1753, (t17531024-47); Paley, 'Thief-takers', pp. 314-315.

⁴⁰ LMA, Middlesex Sessions General Orders of the Court, 19th May 1743 - 22nd February 1753; *LL*, LMSMPS504080119, LMSMGO556020440; Derek Morris, *Whitechapel 1600-1800: A Social History of an Early Modern London Inner Suburb*, (2011), pp. 82-83.

⁴¹ LMA, Middlesex Sessions General Orders of the Court, 19th May 1743 - 22nd February 1753; *LL*, LMSMPS504080119, LMSMGO556020440.

⁴² Landau, 'The trading justices trade', p. 53.

Paley argues that Sir Samuel Gower had a substantial role in a feud between the thief-takers which centred on indictments brought against one Elizabeth/ Eleanor Roberts for keeping a disorderly coffee house and Bagnio in Goodman's Fields beside the playhouse.⁴³ And while it cannot be proved, the piecemeal evidence does suggest that a protection racket of sorts was run by Gower and the thief-taking gangs against some of the proprietors of the disorderly houses.⁴⁴ And the actions of Riccards and Mainwaring could be seen in the light of this collusion. But there also seems to have been an underlying feud between Gower and Richard Riccards, who owned land yards away from Gower's playhouse in Goodman's Fields. The proprietor of the playhouse, William Hallam a tenant of Gower, was also in dispute with Riccards over rental of a right of way close to the theatre.

The upshot of this investigation by Riccards and Mainwaring, acting on behalf of Tower division, was a report of Gower's conduct to the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, and an invitation to dinner at the Sessions House where Gower was interrogated by his fellow JPs and received a mild telling off.⁴⁵ But, the complex interplay between land holding and the running of commercial establishments, the administration of justice and the management of the local community, with thief-takers thrown into the mix, exemplifies the role of neighbourhood and geography in understanding the workings of the justice system.

⁴³ Paley, 'Thief-takers', pp. 314-315.

⁴⁴ LL, Middlesex Sessions Orders of court, LL ref: LMSMPS504080119, 28 February 1751 LL ref: LMSMGO556020449, Image 449 of 559, 20 April 1751, LL ref: LMSMPS504100111, Image 111 of 119; See also Paley, 'Thief-takers', pp. 310-334.

⁴⁵ LMA, MS 2545/6, Tower Hill Precinct, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate.

Rosemary Lane Thief-takers

In his chapter on thief-takers in London, John Beattie remarks that it is still uncertain how this group of men related to one another.⁴⁶ Ruth Paley argues that of the list of known thief-takers the majority of named men had worked together at some point - many of them under the leadership of Ralph Mitchell from Deptford. However, it seems equally plausible that Nathaniel Harris played as important a role as Mitchell, and served as a decision-making partner in the eastern suburbs. Nathaniel Harris's name appears in almost 40 trials recorded in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* in a period spanning over 20 years. He is mentioned in more trials than any other named London thief-taker. But, whoever was the effective 'leader' of the thief-takers - 30 or more in total - they all gravitated to Rosemary Lane.⁴⁷

It is possible that Nathaniel Harris was born just off Rosemary Lane. A Nathanill Haris was christened at St Botolph Aldgate Church in February 1710.⁴⁸ But in any case, Harris kept a hat shop and lived just off Rosemary Lane in Darby Street, (see Fig. 5.2) across from Swallow Gardens and close to Aldgate Church yard.⁴⁹ Samuel Unwin lived in this neighbourhood from at least the early 1730s. It is important to note how close both the thief-takers and local JPs lived to one another. This should have been the most crime-free street in London. Unwin lived at the Ship Alehouse, close to Well Close Square and Rag Fair where he was landlord until the late 1740s when he took over the Magpye Tavern on Tower Hill.

⁴⁶ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 412.

⁴⁷ Paley, 'Thief-takers', See appendix list A and B, p. 341.

⁴⁸ England, Births and Christenings, 1538-1975," index, *Family Search* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/NVSJ-7PX>: accessed 08 Mar 2013), Nathanill Haris, 24 Mar 1710.

⁴⁹ LMA, Land Tax Tower Division, St Botolph Aldgate, Middlesex, East Smithfield, MS 6011/1-17, Nathaniel Harris, Darby Street.

Already a criminal in his native Ireland, Stephen MacDaniel came to London from Dublin in the late 1730s or early 1740s. A sword cutler by trade he had various addresses around Holborn and particularly on Shire Lane where he kept an alehouse for a time.⁵⁰ But, having worked alongside Nathaniel Harris on several occasions, Stephen MacDaniel moved to east London in the late 1740s where he kept a chandler's shop and an alehouse on Back Lane close to Rag Fair.⁵¹ MacDaniel also served as a Marshalsea officer until he was stripped of office in 1753. Several thief-takers including Thomas Ind and John Miller were keepers at various London gaols and Bridewells. Bomer Lovett of St Katherine's was the keeper of St Katherine's Gaol.⁵² Lovett lived close to Tower Hill in Cats Hole, a poor street in St Katherine's precinct where his wife kept a chandlers shop.⁵³

Thomas Stanley, also a fugitive from Dublin, lived in Old Gravel Lane in the neighbouring parish of St George Middlesex, before moving to Chamber Street adjacent to Rosemary Lane. He took over as landlord of the Ship Alehouse in Shorter Street, Well Close Square from Samuel Unwin in the late 1740s.⁵⁴ From the 1740s Richard Morris also from Ireland and former member of the Black Boy Alley gang, moved from Chick Lane, to keep an alehouse close to Rag Fair. In 1752 he gave his address as Church Lane, at the end of

⁵⁰ Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, *et al.*, *London Lives, 1690-1800* (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 24 April 2012), (hereafter LL), LL. WCCDMV362080207, 1748, St Clement Danes parish minutes record that a Stephen MackDannell refused to pay his parish rates on several occasions. He was eventually taken to court. This is probably another reason why MacDaniel moved to East London.

⁵¹ Cox, *A Faithful Narrative*, p. 49; LMA, Land Tax Tower Division MS 6004/1-56A, The Liberty of Well Close Square, Stephen MacDaniel, Back Lane the rental value per annum of this property was £5.

⁵² Cox, *A Faithful Narrative*, p. 81, MacDaniel was discharged from his position on 4 Dec 1753 for misbehaviour.

⁵³ *OBP*, 17 April, Gerrard Bunn, t17510417-24; LMA, Land Tax Tower Division without 1745, St Catherine's precinct, 6010/14 from fols. 11-30, Bomer Lovatt, Cats Hole, £7 per annum property rental value.

⁵⁴ *OBP*, 3 July 1751, Richard Holland, Daniel Thoroughgood, t17510703-42.

Rag Fair and at the start of Cable Street.⁵⁵ George Ballentine lived in Cable Street, again close to Well Close Square, Rag Fair where he kept a house with a reputation for selling stolen goods.⁵⁶ And Charles Remington (Long Charles), a cabinet maker by trade, lived between Rag Fair and Kingsland Street, Hackney.

Some thief-takers, lived further afield, but nevertheless were active in the neighbourhood. John Berry, close partner of MacDaniel and perhaps the eldest of the thief-takers, was a horse dealer, living in George Yard, Upper Hatton Garden, Holborn, just 2.5 miles or so from the Lane. Another participant in this gang was William Body, a brewer and victualler who took over the once fashionable but run down pleasure grounds at Mulberry Gardens in Clerkenwell.⁵⁷ Chair-man, Thomas Ind, who lived for a time in Covent Garden (Westminster) also worked occasionally with this group. Ind became a turn-key at Clerkenwell new prison; and by 1752 he was keeping the Crown and Sceptre alehouse in Drury Lane and working as a thief-taker for Fielding.⁵⁸

This extended and fluid group of men coalesced in the years between the defeat of the Black Boy Alley gang, and the end of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748, which marked both the beginning of a new 'crime wave' and the return of the £100 rewards for capturing highwaymen and street robbers.⁵⁹ The end of the war threw returning jobless soldiers and sailors onto the streets, but also affected those men (and women) who worked on the docks or supplied the army and navy with clothing and food.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ LMA, CLA/047/LJ/SF866, Recognizance 15-18.

⁵⁶ *OBP*, 8 April 1752, Simon Chidley, John Holding, Charles Legoe, t17520408-54.

⁵⁷ LL, Middlesex Sessions, General Orders of the Court, LL ref: LMSMG0556010403 Image 403 of 563, 4th December 1740, William Body and Mulberry Gardens.

⁵⁸ (Thomas Ind) appears in *OBP*, James Hall, 19 February 1752, t17520219-2.

⁵⁹ Beattie, *The First English Detectives*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.18.

That the thief-takers coalesced in east London is probably down to the simple accident that a high proportion already lived there – attracting others in due course. But by 1750 many of them including, Richard Morris, Thomas Stanley, George Ballentine, Samuel Unwin and MacDaniel were running alehouses and suspected disorderly houses around Rag Fair. Consequently, they already appear to have a network of local thief-takers quite able to pull together a force of armed men at short notice. The back street alehouses they themselves ran, provided useful venues from which to plan their exploits and were regularly used as illegal holding cells, where confessions could be coerced, before presenting their victims to a JP. Rosemary Lane had the additional benefit of being just outside the City. And as Fig.5.2 shows, the watch house and the Justices who were concerned with the majority of prosecutions involving the thief-takers - Sir Samuel Gower, Richard Riccards, Richard Farmer and William Withers – were also readily to hand, just yards away.⁶¹

Their co-residence had a substantial local impact on the streets. Nathaniel Harris, for example, made a point of constantly looking out for known thieves at Rag Fair and around the neighbourhood. William Palmer Hind, Charles Remington (Long Charles) and Stephen MacDaniel admitted that they deliberately went out on Lord Mayor's Day 1744 to try and 'take up' some of the Black Boy Alley gang.⁶² On public holidays they would frequent fairs such as St Bartholomew's to catch thieves at work. This was proactive – indeed oppressive - policing of a sort largely new to London. For example, Remington deliberately followed twenty three year old George Hall - lately released

⁶¹ For an example of thief-takers holding suspects in their alehouses see, *OBP*, 14 September 1752, Randolph Branch, William Descent, t17520914-70; *OBP*, 3 July 1751, Richard Holland, Daniel Thoroughgood (otherwise Dann the Baker).

⁶¹ LMA, MJ/SR/3004/6.

⁶² *OBP*, William Taylor, 16 January 1745, t17450116-190.

from prison - until he could catch him at home with a large quantity (46) of stolen handkerchiefs.

This robbery had all the marks of a set up by the thief-takers. Remington or Long Charles as he was known, along with James Brebrook of Rag Fair, captured Hall but kept some twenty of the stolen handkerchiefs for themselves; being careful to leave in Hall's possession enough to ensure he would receive a capital conviction.⁶³ Hall had previously been in the employ of the thief-takers, and while he did not deny the theft, he was an easy mark for Remington. Hall had clearly out grown his usefulness and when money was in short supply, was turned to account for the reward.

The thief-takers did catch genuine hardened criminals and plenty of petty thieves (even Hall admitted his theft in court); however, they also must have made living in Rosemary Lane difficult for even the most honest plebeian residents.

Ruth Paley has identified Ralph Mitchell as the effective leader of London's thief-takers, with his home turf in Deptford, south of the river.⁶⁴ In making the case for the role of Rosemary Lane in the ecology of thief taking it is therefore worthwhile looking at Mitchell in some detail.

Ralph Mitchell

Ralph Mitchell was originally from the parish of St Margaret's Westminster but he removed to Deptford along with his associate George Holderness sometime before the

⁶³ *OBP*, George Hall, George Basset, 8 April 1752, t17520408-43; *OBP*, George Hall, Marmaduke Watkins, Joseph Huney, 27 February 1751, t17510227-4; see also *OBP*, William Hatton, 23 May 1751; *OBP*, Russel Parnell, 4 December 1751, t17510523-20.

⁶⁴ Paley, 'Thief-takers,' pp. 304-306.

1740s. However, both Mitchell and Holderness also regularly appear north of the river as an active thief-takers working in the neighbourhood of Rosemary Lane.⁶⁵

Mitchell came to prominence in the *Proceedings* in 1730, when he was charged on two counts of theft, for stealing sacks of oats and wheat. On this occasion he was found guilty of one indictment and sentenced to be branded. Soon after his release from New Prison, Mitchell can be found leading a gang of thieves that broke into the house of Colonel James des Romaine of Paddington. This time, Mitchell turned informer, describing to the court how the gang of thieves would meet at Thomas Moulton's ale house, the Red Lion in Rag Fair to plan robberies.

On Mitchell's evidence William Brown and Joseph Whitlock were found guilty and hanged. Mitchell appeared at the Old Bailey again in January 1734 as 'evidence' in the trial of William Simmons and George Peters. In this trial it becomes clear that Mitchell was leading a gang of thieves on a spree of robberies from the City out to the Radcliff Highway just south of Rosemary Lane.⁶⁶ One of the gang, seventeen year old George Peters, recalled in his account to the Ordinary of Newgate how he had got into 'bad company' with Mitchell and committed an 'abundance of robberies'. In Easter week alone he said that they committed up to '4 to 5 a night ... in and about Stepney Fields'.⁶⁷ Ralph Mitchell was quite used to travelling around London for his 'work' and he begins to appear regularly in the neighbourhood of Rosemary Lane from 1733, when he meets with other thieves, including Long Will from Rag Fair to plan robberies.

⁶⁵ *OBP*, Ralph Mitchell, 16 January 1730, t17300116-15.

⁶⁶ *OBP*, William Brown, Joseph Whitlock, 5 December 1733, t17331205-52; *OBP*, William Simmons, George Peters, 16 January 1734, t17340116-24; *OBP*, George Peters, 11 February 1734, OA17340211.

⁶⁷ *OBP*, William Brown, Joseph Whitlock, 5 December 1733, t17331205-520; *OBP*, William Simmons, George Peters, 16 January 1734, t17340116-24; *OBP*, George Peters, 11 February 1734, OA17340211.

In 1735, Mitchell turned his back on direct theft, to take on the role of a thief-taker. John Sindal, Anthony Lindsay and Ethelbert Hawks of Southwark were charged with breaking and entering the house of one Madame Jane Love of Ratcliff Highway and stealing items including plate, a copper fish kettle and various bits of clothing. Ralph Mitchell turned them in, and claimed the reward. Mitchell was already well known to local criminals in this neighbourhood. As Ethelbert Hawks in the Madame Love burglary case shouted to the court,

My Lord, There stands a great Thief-Catcher, he was the first that contrived the way of knocking at Folk's Doors, and so getting in and robbing their Houses. He robbed Col. Ronaines, and then turned Evidence and hang'd his Comrades, and now he's turn'd Thief Taker, and wants to hang us.⁶⁸

And although based in Deptford, it is clear that Mitchell and his friends did not see the river as marking a significant boundary, frequently travelling back and forth. Occasionally they travelled across London Bridge, which would bring them over close to the Monument and minutes from the Tower. On the other hand, the narrow road across the bridge had by 1722 become quite congested with carts, wagons and pedestrians and it was perhaps a little more inconspicuous taking a boat across.⁶⁹ In the Sindal case, the accused escaped in a rowing boat from the steps at Somerset House, rowing south and landing near to the Mint. There they met with Mitchell in Bridewell Alley, which was just by the new gaol in Southwark and offered to sell him the stolen goods.⁷⁰ But soon thereafter, the thieves Lindsay and Sindal were captured at the 14 Stars Alehouse on Rosemary Lane. Once more the Lane proved to be the place used by both criminals and

⁶⁸ *OBP*, John Sindal, Anthony Lindsay and Ethelbert Hawks, 26 February 1735, t17350226-61.

⁶⁹ *OBP*, Stephen MacDaniel, John Berry, James Eagan, James Salmon, 25 February 1756, t17560225-48.

⁷⁰ *OBP*, John Sindal, Anthony Lindsay and Ethelbert Hawks, 26 February 1735, t17350226-61.

thief-takers, and already we can see that Mitchell was quite powerful and feared by local criminals.

Mitchell went on to become a leading thief-taker not only on Rosemary Lane but south of the river in his native Surrey where he and George Holderness appeared quite regularly at the Surrey assizes especially in the 1740s and 1750s. John Beattie describes how at one trial in Surrey the accused shouted at Mitchell and Holderness, 'these people swear my life away for the sake of the reward', while another prisoner appealed to the judge: 'My Lord', 'is it probable that I should confess a Robbery to a common Thief-catcher?'⁷¹ Thus, despite being a convicted repeat offender, Mitchell started a long career as a thief-taker. And while Mitchell perhaps confounds the image of the thief-takers as a local neighbourhood operation; his high profile in Rosemary Lane reinforces the sense that the neighbourhood was at the epicentre of thief-taking. More typical, and arguably just as important, was local boy made bad, Nathaniel Harris.

NATHANIEL HARRIS AND THE THIEF-TAKERS

By the mid- 1730s Nathaniel Harris was known locally as constable or the 'thief-taker of Rosemary Lane'. Harris was a hatter by profession, and in addition to his numerous appearances at the Old Bailey, he also appeared at the lesser courts in London in his role as an officer for the court at Whitechapel.⁷² Harris's first appearance in the published *Proceedings* was in July 1732, when he arrested John Gillet (alias Mouth) for committing highway robbery on Rosemary Lane. John Maxey, a local man was robbed of his hat and wig whilst walking along Lime Street, just a mile away from the Lane on the City side of

⁷¹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp. 55-56.

⁷² *OBP*, 7 September 1748, Thomas Bacon, t17480907-55.

the Tower of London. On his return, Maxey went to Nathaniel Harris and asked him to keep a look out for the two men who robbed him. At the trial Harris explained how he caught the accused,

as soon as I opened my door O' Monday Morning, I saw the prisoner go by and finding he answered the Prosecutor's Description, I call'd to him; he turn'd back, and damn'd me, and made off, but I follow'd and took him.⁷³

Moreover, from this trial we immediately get an impression of Harris's prominence in the community. He was already the man to turn to when a theft or robbery had been committed in this area. And he quickly earned a reputation for bringing a successful prosecution. This evidently gave him a certain amount of power over his less lawful neighbours. What is less clear is whose interests (beyond his own) he was serving.

Through the 1730s and 40s Nathaniel Harris made regular appearances as the bail or as a witness on behalf of many local criminals including Irish Peg (alias Margaret Poland), notorious receiver of stolen goods in Rag Fair.⁷⁴ Despite his role as a sometime court official he was quite willing to be seen supporting his criminal 'friends' in Rosemary Lane. In 1739 Harris gave a character reference for thief Richard Keeble and his allies Thomas Gibbons and George Haggis, thief-taker and Whitechapel butcher. Keeble, Gibbons and Haggis appeared at the Old Bailey accused of raping Sarah Main in the New Exchange, at the end of Rag Fair, just past the Watch House close to Well Close Square and Cable Street. Justice Richard Riccards took the information in this case. Main gave a harrowing account of the attack and rape in court. However, with Harris' help, the accused were found not guilty by the jury of twelve men. Clearly, this verdict was aided

⁷³ *OBP*, John Gillet alias Mouth, 5 July 1732, t17320705-16.

⁷⁴ *OBP*, John Richardson, 6 July 1737, t17370706-8; *OBP*, Margaret Poland, alias Margaret Mayfield, alias Margaret Tweed alias Margaret Fosset alias Margaret Eaton alias 'Irish Peg', 28 June 1738, t17380628-14; *OBP*, Margaret Poland alias Irish Peg, 4 December 1740, t17401204-51.

by the large number of good character references that the accused received from a stream of Rag Fair inhabitants, including Harris and known thieves Mary Smith and Robert Kisby. Sarah Main, in contrast was portrayed as being someone with an 'ill character'.⁷⁵

Prisoners and their relatives frequently accused Harris of sending people to the gallows purely to collect the rewards. Moreover, Harris's friendships within the criminal networks on the Lane were possibly quite apparent to the court officers and magistrates alike. But, at the same time, he and his fellow thief-takers were seen by the authorities as a powerful weapon against violent robbers. And while many probably assumed that the criminals with a past history may not have been guilty of their final crimes, this did not, in eighteenth-century eyes, make them less guilty. At the same time, there is strong evidence of collusion and corruption in many cases.

One of the defendants in the Sarah Main rape case was Richard Keeble who appeared in the same February 1739 sessions at the Old Bailey on five separate indictments for crimes of rape and theft. He was found guilty on a subsequent theft charge and was transported to America. However, in 1742 and 1743, Keeble returned to England and to his old ways. He was charged in Surrey with a burglary offence in addition to which he was indicted for returning from transportation without licence. At his trial at the Old Bailey the court heard a statement from Nathaniel Harris in which he claimed that he was unsure that Keeble was the same person who had been transported three years previously. The court noted that Harris had indeed appeared as a character witness for

⁷⁵ *OBP*, George Haggis, Richard Keeble, Thomas Gibbons, 21 February 1739, t17390221-31.

Keeble in the subsequent court case. Remarkably, Keeble was acquitted of the burglary and of returning from transportation and allowed to remain.⁷⁶

Harris was guilty of collusion and more. Cuthbert Wharton of Rag Fair fell foul of Nathaniel Harris in 1739 when he was wrongly accused of a burglary and theft in Hoxton. Wharton was taken from his work by Harris and put before Justice Farmer to be charged. On this occasion Harris's money-making plans did not work so well, Wharton was acquitted on the evidence of one of his fellow defendants Thomas Deacon who told the court: 'Tis pity this Man (Wharton) should suffer wrongfully: I never saw him till these Men (Harris) brought him to me.'⁷⁷

Francis Dodd or Godd found himself in a similar position in 1750 when Harris stopped him in Rag Fair.

Nathaniel Harris: 'On last Saturday morning, coming along Radcliff Highway, I saw the prisoner and another person walking together; the other person had a bag on his shoulder; by the appearance of them I imagined the goods were stolen, and so followed them'.

Harris followed them to Rag Fair and arrested Dodd with a bag of cocoa and took him before Aldermen Bethel who sent him to gaol until the trial. However, it was found at the trial that Dodd had innocently purchased honest goods and he was immediately acquitted. Harris told the court that he was an officer in Whitechapel court. The judge instructed Harris to take the cocoa to his majesty's Customs House. Harris was the

⁷⁶ *OBP*, 21 February 1739, George Haggis, Richard Keeble, Thomas Gibbons, t17390221-31; *OBP*, Richard Keeble, 21 February 1739, t17390221-29; *OBP*, Richard Keeble, 8 December 1742, t17421208-56; *OBP*, Richard Keeble, 19 May 1743, t17430519-22.

⁷⁷ *OBP*, Cuthbert Wharton, John Deacon, 17 October 1739, t17391017-35.

prosecutor in this case - he paid for this indictment - more than likely hoping that he could keep the seized goods and receive the reward for robbery.⁷⁸

Fortunately both of these men were acquitted. Many others were not so lucky. Regrettably, we will never know exactly how many of Harris's convictions were unsound. It is safe to say that he, along with his fellow thief-takers on Rosemary Lane sent many innocent men and women to the gallows. This neighbourhood and particularly Rag Fair had by 1750 become a micro-world where thief-takers ruled the roost with many parish constables, JPs and their clerks in their influence.

Ralph Mitchell was an informer turned thief-taker who helped to commit men whether innocent or guilty for the reward, and while Harris appears to have come to thief-taking in a more honourable way, he was accused of much the same thing on many occasions. Their motivation was the reward.

In February 1737 Nathaniel Harris along with George Holderness from Deptford took part in the arrest of sixteen year old Charles Orchard who was accused of assaulting and robbing Elizabeth Elly in a shop in Well Close Square. Most likely Orchard was guilty but the evidence put forward by Holderness regarding the arrest suggests that this particular arrest was planned.

George Holderness: I was drinking at the Standard in Rag-Fair, and one Harris told me he had receiv'd Information concerning three Men, who had been robbing on the Highway: At his Request I went with him to search for them, at a House where Thieves are entertain'd, by Well-street; there we found the Prisoner, and three other Fellows.

Q: How came you to suspect the Prisoner?

⁷⁸ *OBP*, Francis Godd (Dodd), 17 October 1750, t17501017-41.

Holderness: Mr. Harris was directed there, and one of the Men made himself an Evidence against the rest. The Prisoner struggled when we took him, and fought, and would not go along, but after a few Blows were exchange'd, we got him to the Justice's and the other Man informing against the Prisoner for House-breaking, he was committed to Newgate. When we had got him to Jail, he desired me to call upon him,...and he begg'd I would desire Justice Farmer to permit him to be an Evidence, for says he, I can hang five Men, and can knock down the other Evidence, because he has not put all the Robberies in his Information, that I was concern'd in.

Oddly, Nathaniel Harris chief instigator of the capture did not appear at this trial. The reasons for his absence were given by James Warrener Clerk to Justice Farmer.

To prevent Harris's appearing against the Prisoner, they have got a Woman to swear the Peace against him, and have taken him into Custody.

This could have been a straightforward arrest but Orchard appears to have been arrested precisely in order to allow him to be charged with the other robberies; allowing in turn, the thief-takers to claim the rewards. Orchard was found guilty and sentenced to death.

In September of the same year Nathaniel Harris arrested John Richardson aged 22, who was accused of violently assaulting John Cuttings and taking his hat worth 5 shillings – this was highway robbery, and therefore subject to a reward. Cuttings searched Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair asking the shop keepers if anyone had offered to sell to them his stolen hat. At the eventual trial, the issue turned on the 'evidence' provided by James Wilson a known thief, who claimed to have been involved in the assault, and turned informer to avoid being indicted. The victim, Cuttings, however did not recognise either Richardson or Wilson, and Richardson was tried effectively on Wilson's evidence alone. The suspicion must be that Harris colluded with Wilson to get the reward. Richardson gave evidence to the court that he had never seen 'the evidence'

[Wilson] in his life, 'before Mr Harris the Thief-taker took me up'.⁷⁹ Harris proceeded to call a John Kisby to swear that Richardson knew Wilson, and that Wilson had tried to sell the hat in Rag-Fair to Irish Peg. Irish Peg whom we shall hear more about in chapter 6, was a notorious thief, a receiver of stolen goods and a dealer in old clothes at Rag-Fair. What is more Irish Peg was under the protection of Harris. Richardson was found guilty and sentenced to death; his parting words to the court were "That Harris swears my Life away for the sake of the Reward".⁸⁰ According to the Ordinary of Newgate Richardson was 'dull of hearing and slow of understanding'; he had no education and lived his life as a part of a gang of thieves.⁸¹ Richardson may or may not have been guilty of this crime but he was also an easy target for the thief-takers.

There is little doubt that the criminal fraternity believed that Harris was catching thieves purely for the rewards. At the same sessions in September 1737, John Cotton stood accused at the Old Bailey of 'Theft with Violence: Highway Robbery'. His victim was one Thomas Gale, who was walking home down Church Lane, past Whitechapel Church when Cotton and two others ordered him to 'Stand', and proceeded to rob him. John Billinger, Thomas Gibbons and Thomas Mills minor thief-taking colleagues of Harris, arrested Cotton in Chick Lane after they were seen trying to sell the prosecutor's silver buckles on Rosemary Lane.

Thomas Mills described how he came into Rag Fair at about seven in the morning and met with Harris, who told him about the robbery and who he suspected. Mills then went to an alehouse where he spotted Cotton. Was this another thief-taking scam? Cotton in his defence said 'I never was guilty of such a Misdemeanour in my life, they swear

⁷⁹ *OBP*, John Richardson, 7 September 1737, t17370907-29.

⁸⁰ *OBP*, John Richardson, 7 September 1737, t17370907-29.

⁸¹ *OBP*, John Richardson, 5 October 1737, OA17371005.

against me for the reward: they are all Thief-takers!’⁸² This was by now a standard defence; however, Cotton further admonished Gale (the prosecutor) that he would not have brought the indictment against him if it had not been for Harris the ‘Thief-catcher’. In addition, a Mr Hetherington, a friend of prosecutor Thomas Gale, was called to verify this story whereupon he said that,

I never saw the prisoner before in my life; I know that Harris came several times after Gale (the prosecutor) and I abus’d him once, and called him Thief-catcher, and told him he wanted to take away the Fellow’s life as he had done by many others, and he abused me and call’d me a great many bitches. I know the Prosecutor [Gale] was very unwilling to take the Prisoner’s life.

Thomas Gale was called and he admitted that Harris had to subpoena him to appear in court. He said that he had not wanted to ‘take away the fellow’s life’ but Harris threatened to put him in goal if he did not appear in court.⁸³ There is little doubt that twenty year old Cotton was guilty. However, what is telling here is the fact that the Gale the victim in this case did not want to prosecute and he believed that Harris was pushing this conviction purely for the reward.

Moreover, this trial also emphasises the power over life and death that Harris and his associates wielded in Rosemary Lane. Young and possibly naive men were the most common defendants in thief-taking trials. Petty criminals such as Richardson and Cotton were both aware that Harris could either support them or set them up and send them to the gallows if they did not stay in line.⁸⁴ Cotton and Richardson were both probably members of the Black Boy Alley gang and were hanged in October 1737.⁸⁵

⁸² *OBP*, John Cotton, 7 September 1737, t17370907-29.

⁸³ *OBP*, John Cotton, 7 September 1737, t17370907-29.

⁸⁴ *OBP*, John Cotton, 7 September 1737, t17370907-29.

⁸⁵ *OBP*, John Cotton, 5 October 1737, OA17371005; Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, pp. 149-50.

In July 1742 Harris, Samuel Unwin and William Palmer Hind arrested local men George Anderson, Richard Studder and Henry Hinton for breaking and entering John Inwood's house in Milk Alley and stealing materials to the value of £4.⁸⁶ Thomas Studder, brother of one of the accused, saved himself from standing trial by volunteering to 'make himself an evidence' before Justice Jones, informing to everything that happened during the robbery. On a tip off from Thomas Studder; Unwin, Harris and Palmer Hind rode to 'Mother Rippon's' possibly an alehouse in Epping Forest where the prisoners were hiding out. After a scuffle, all of the accused were rounded up with Harris grabbing Hinton, checking first to see where his pistols were. Hinton later told the court that Harris offered to let him go for £5 or £6. Harris denied the accusation. While Unwin added that the prisoners had offered to pay him money and a gold watch to save their lives, but he did not take it. However, Richard Studder claimed that Unwin had already taken all of his possessions. This suggests that thief-takers occasionally accepted bribes to let suspected thieves and robbers go free, but in a case like this, the reward was likely to be much more valuable than anything the thieves could offer. All three of the indicted men were found guilty of the theft and burglary and sentenced to death by hanging, generating three rewards.

Thief-taker, Samuel Unwin, in particular, had plenty of reasons for wanting this conviction. The Studder brothers' gang was said to have been causing mayhem close to Rag Fair and to Unwin's alehouse at Well Close Square. The gang was said to be sixty in number and to include the son of the keeper of New Prison.⁸⁷ This particular gang of robbers and pickpockets were notorious for dressing up and attending grand occasions

⁸⁷ *OBP*, George Anderson, Richard Studder, Henry Hinton, 9 September 1742, t17420909-25.

in London where they could mix with the crowd and pick the pockets of the wealthy. In May 1744, the *Penny London Morning Advertiser* reported on the gang of thieves from Rag Fair who 'hired cloaths at Twelve-pence a day when they go out a thieving that they may be the less suspected'.⁸⁸

At the same Old Bailey Session, Samuel Unwin appeared as a witness in a case of highway robbery that occurred just off Rosemary Lane in Well Street. Unwin traced a pair of stolen silver spurs to one John Miller a fellow thief-taker (and a turn-key at New-Prison, Whitechapel) and his wife Betty Miller (alias Barefoot) who bought and sold goods at Rag Fair.⁸⁹ While Miller and his wife were not implicated on this occasion, despite receiving stolen goods, the accused John Cooper, John Squire and John Jennings were found guilty of theft and sentenced to be hanged. Unwin would have made a tidy sum that day receiving a share of the rewards in both cases and cementing his place of authority on the street.⁹⁰

A trial report from 1740 hints at some of the brutality that could occur at an arrest. In 1740 Harris was sent to serve a warrant and arrest highwayman John Moore, who had robbed a coach at gun point as it was coming across Houndslow-heath. Harris went to Moore's lodging at the Jolly Sailor Tavern on Ratcliff Highway with other thief-takers they eventually found him at the Waterman's Arms, Ratcliff.

Harris: ... I immediately laid my Hands on his Shoulder, and said, I take you up for the Highway. He clapp'd his Hand in his Pocket, and I judged what he was going to do, so I called out to the young Man who was with me, - Cut away! He did so, and we got the Prisoner out of the Box, where he sat, and cut him, and laid him upon his Back. Then he said, he would surrender; and I took out of his Hand this Pistol ready cock'd, and loaded with five Slugs; and one of the Slugs was of the same Sort with

⁸⁸ *Penny London/ Morning Advertiser*, 21 May 1744.

⁸⁹ *OBP*, John Fosset alias, William Sylvester, 11 October 1738, t17381011-4.

⁹⁰ *OBP*, John Cooper, John Squire, John Jennings, 9 September 1742, t17420909-30.

those taken from Hide... This Pistol I took out of his Hand, and this I found in his Pocket’.

Prisoner: ‘They chopp'd my Hand off, before I saw them’.
‘...We were forced to use Violence to him, because he was so desperate; and upon searching him again at his own House, we found a Knife 15 Inches long upon him’.⁹¹

Harris was injured in the ensuing fight and conversely, when the trial came to court Harris found himself being reprimanded by the judge for taking goods and money belonging to Moore and was ordered to return them. Harris admitted to taking the money saying it was in recompense for his injury which stopped him working, ‘I was wounded in the Contest, and have lost the Use of my Thumb. I could not work for a Fortnight, and have expended the Money, in paying my own Surgeon’.⁹²

This case highlights the hard violent work that was involved in thief-taking and to a certain extent the reasoning behind the reward system. In addition, despite the lucrative rewards Harris was in debt and bankrupt by all accounts at this time. On the other hand this conviction would have earned him a major part of the £100 proclamation reward and the £40 statutory reward for convicting a highway robber.⁹³

Debtor’s Prison

How much money Harris received as his share of the awards between 1732 and 1756 is hard to calculate. Ruth Paley demonstrates that in 1744-5, £1,800 was paid out in proclamation rewards for City cases alone.⁹⁴ We do know that Harris was bankrupt on at least two occasions. In 1740 at the trial of John Moore he complained in court that he

⁹¹ *OBP*, John Moore, 16 April 1740, t17400416-36.

⁹² *OBP*, John Moore, 16 April 1740, t17400416-36.

⁹³ *OBP*, John Moore, 16 April 1740, t17400416-36.

⁹⁴ Paley, ‘thief-takers’, p. 324.

had 'not a Farthing about me; and I have been out of Business a long time'.⁹⁵ And in 1746 he was incarcerated in Newgate for debt.⁹⁶ In 1748 he was confined for debt again, this time in St Katherine's the Virgin and Martyr gaol close to the Tower of London. He was discharged in September that year when he was able to pay off all his creditors.⁹⁷ The turnkey and counter signatory on his Statement of Debt at St Katherine's Gaol, was one Bomer Lovett, associate of Harris and the Rosemary Lane thief-takers. Harris was finally released in September 1748 after satisfying all of his creditors who included William Warrener of Well Close Square (very possibly a relation of James Warrener, clerk to Justices Farmer and Withers) and his close friend Samuel Unwin, publican and thief-taker of Well Close Square.

Harris's prosperity seems to have recovered between 1749 and 1754. This was no doubt due to the re-issuing of the £100 proclamation reward encouraging thief-takers to make more successful convictions. Harris was back living in Darby Street, off Rosemary Lane and running his hat shop while continuing to act as an 'officer of the Whitechapel Court'.⁹⁸ Although clearly corrupt the support he received from local business men shows that Harris was still viewed as an important central figure in the local community, respected by the majority of his law abiding neighbours. He caught thieves, he paid his taxes and he had good relationships with the local judiciary.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *OBP*, John Moore, 16 April 1740, t17400416-36.

⁹⁶ *OBP*, Samuel and Eleanor Mecum, 3 Sep 1746, t17460903-35.

⁹⁷ LMA, MJ/SD/018/01A-18D (9a, 9b, 9c).

⁹⁸ *OBP*, Francis Godd [Dodd], 17 October 1750, t17501017-41.

⁹⁹ Paley, 'Thief-takers', pp. 305-312; *OBP*, Thomas Bacon, 7 September 1748, t17480907-55.

Bogus Crimes

Nonetheless, not content just to catch real thieves around Rag Fair the thief-takers continued their practice of setting up stooges for robbery or thefts. In the late 1740s just as Stephen MacDaniel moved into an alley just off Well Close Square, the thief-takers intensified their operations, constantly looking out for new victims for their bogus robberies.

The trial of William Holmes, John Newton and Francis Mandeville, for violent theft and robbery is a prime example that involved the most prominent of the thief-takers. A group of men including Harris, Ralph Mitchell, Thomas Stanley, George Ballentine and MacDaniel attacked the suspected thieves in the Queen's Head tavern in Back Lane by Rag Fair and made the arrests. One of the suspects John Symonds alias Spanish Jack turned 'evidence' at this trial and informed on his fellow robbers. However, Symonds was working for the thief-takers, not only would he escape hanging but he was informing for money.¹⁰⁰ He would later confess on his death bed that he had been promised a share of the reward by MacDaniel if he would 'entice' Holmes, Newton and Mandeville to commit a robbery.¹⁰¹ The thief-takers had more than one reason for wanting the successful prosecution of this crime. It would remove Anne Stitchborne a

¹⁰⁰ *OBP*, William Holmes, otherwise Bunks, John Newton, Francis Mandeville, 16 October 1751, t17511016-18.

¹⁰¹ *Reads Weekly Journal (or British Gazetteer)* Saturday, April 17, 1756; *Reads Weekly Journal (or British Gazetteer)*, Saturday, April 17, 1756. 'Thursday 7 night, John Simmonds alias Spanish Jack was executed at Maidstone. He was an old offender who had dealings with the thief-takers, as well as those in Newgate...and those at liberty. That he did in 1751 entice William Holmes, John Newton and Francis Mandeville to commit a robbery in Whitechapel, who, in a few days afterwards were all three capitally convicted and ...executed at Tyburn, he admitted an evidence and tho' they had (£)420 L. reward he received only 10 pounds, Macdaniel cheating him of the rest of his share....he declared as a dying man...that he was to have been with (Branch) Boswell and Descent who were executed for the murder of Mr Brown...of Well close sq but desired to be asked no more questions on that affair...'

notable receiver of stolen goods who was a part of the rival Carlow criminal faction in Rag Fair. This case will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

This by now was a well-practiced scam. Doubtless the authorities by continuing to pay out rewards were encouraging the thief-takers to send innocent men to the gallows. Harris and his fellow thief-takers were involved in several major cases of dubious propriety in 1750-1752 that evolved from Rosemary Lane. The first case was that of Richard Holland and Daniel Thoroughgood (Dan the Baker) who were accused along with Mark Chailes (or Shields) of committing a violent highway robbery on one Henry Debbins as he was walking close to Gerard Street in the City.

At the trial Chailes, an Irishman, told the court of how he was induced by Holland and Thoroughgood to commit the robbery and of how he went to Thomas Stanley (thief-taker) in Rosemary Lane and offered to make himself 'an evidence' before the Justice in return for his life. On the information of Chailes; Nathaniel Harris, Thomas Stanley, Ralph Mitchell and James Penprise arrested Holland and Baker at the Fox alehouse in Drury Lane and brought them back to Stanley's alehouse the Ship, close to Well Close Square and Rosemary Lane.¹⁰² There they searched them before taking them before the local justice. However, it is notable that instead of taking the suspects to Fielding at nearby Bow Street they brought them back to Rosemary Lane.

By bringing the suspects back to Rosemary Lane they could ensure they got the confessions they wanted, before taking them to their friends in the local judiciary. Both Holland and Thoroughgood maintained throughout the trial that Chailes was fully

¹⁰² Thief-taker James Penprise (Penprice) was transported in 1752 for stealing a hog and a hemp bag. *OBP*, James Penprice, Edward Perry, 14 September 1752, t17520914-26; (s17520914-1) He subsequently died on the journey, t17531205-37.

involved in the crime. Nonetheless, they were found guilty on his evidence and hanged.¹⁰³ As Ruth Paley notes it is easy to see how a jury could be convinced of a story when they were confronted with well-rehearsed evidence.¹⁰⁴

Just two years later Mark Chailes was found guilty of robbery and sentenced to be hanged. Before his death Chailes confessed to the Ordinary of Newgate that he had conspired with Harris, Stanley and Mitchell to set up Holland and Thoroughgood for the reward. He further confessed to being involved in other conspiracies in order to claim the reward or blood money as it was rightly named.¹⁰⁵

By the early 1750s the thief-takers must have believed that they were untouchable; their schemes became bolder and transparent yet they were still receiving support from the Middlesex judiciary.

DECLINE AND FALL

Some doubt about the system existed throughout its tenure. In 1745 thief-taker William Palmer Hind teamed up with Stephen MacDaniel and Long Charles Remington to indict one William Taylor by setting him up on a charge of stealing a handkerchief from Anthony Hamilton as he was walking through St Paul's Churchyard. In his defence, William Taylor denied the charge stating to the court that he saw Stephen MacDaniel (Stephen McDonald) pick Hamilton's pocket.

¹⁰³ *OBP*, Richard Holland, Daniel Thoroughgood (otherwise Dann the Baker), 3 July 1751, t17510703-42; *OBP*, John Lupton, 12 June 1741, OA17410612.

¹⁰⁴ Paley, 'Thief-takers' p. 326.

¹⁰⁵ *OBP*, Mark Shields (Chailes), 29 October 1753, OA17531029; *Reads Weekly Journal (or British Gazetteer)*, Sat, April 17, 1756. For further information on Chailes see Paley, 'Thief-takers' pp. 326-333.

The court were not convinced either, questioning the three thief-takers in turn.

Q. What are you?

Remmington: I am a cabinet maker.

Q. Are not you a thief-taker?

Remmington: 'If they fall in my way I take them sometimes. I saw the Prisoner take this handkerchief out of Mr. Hamilton's pocket, and go to put it into his own'.

Prisoner: 'Mcdonald (MacDaniel) is the person who took the handkerchief out of the gentleman's pocket, and now he wants to push it upon me. They are the greatest rogues and thief-takers in the world; they do it for the sake of the reward'.

Q. Is not the reward an inducement to you to give testimony.

Remmington: 'No; it is no inducement to me, the King's crown should not be an inducement to me'.

A Juryman of London: 'I knew Remington as an errand boy when he first came to town, and he took naughty ways, and would not stay with his master, he is a naughty man'.

Regrettably, the court found Taylor guilty to the sum of 10d but clearly the judge had some doubts.¹⁰⁶

But real pressure for change had to wait on the 1750s. In 1752 Stephen Solomon, a mariner from St Peter's Court Rosemary Lane had indictments served on Nathaniel Harris, Stephen MacDaniel, Ralph Mitchell, Thomas Stanley and Richard Morris on a kidnapping charge. This incident happened on Rosemary Lane but in what can only be an attempt by an innocent victim to get a fair hearing; Solomon took his case to the Guildhall. The City Instructions book for 1752 shows that in September of that year Harris and his friends were indicted to appear at the Guildhall for 'riotously assembling and assaulting and falsely imprisoning one Stephen Solomon'.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, Sir Samuel Gower signed the indictments that ordered the thief-takers to appear at the next sessions. And the Instruction book for the October 1752 sessions shows that all indictments for the gang had been mysteriously answered and discharged. Moreover,

¹⁰⁶ *OBP*, William Taylor, 16 January 1745, t17450116-19.

¹⁰⁷ LMA, MJ/SR/3004/6.

the sureties on each indictment were paid for by other thief-takers, and also by the justices' clerk, James Warrener.¹⁰⁸

In the following year Stanley, Mitchell and George Ballentine were indicted for the false imprisonment of Robert Ellison and 'holding him against his will for two hours until he paid Thomas Stanley £8 10s'. The sureties on this indictment were paid for by their Cable Street neighbour George Carlow and by Stephen MacDaniel.¹⁰⁹ Once more the indictments were signed by Gower and once more the case never came to court and it appears they were subsequently discharged. No reason was given for this, but it is likely that the prosecutor was too frightened to appear.¹¹⁰

In 1755 the *Public Advertiser* reported that some of the thief-takers including Thomas Stanley 'are so desperate...and are now joined in a pretended Press-gang, committing so many violent Acts of Cruelty, and presume to deter the Power of the Civil Magistrate'. The paper went on to say that 'Tis pity they are not pressed themselves to serve his Majesty and not suffered to live in England and maim his Subjects'.¹¹¹

In a related case, Stanley, Long Ned (Edward Hudson) and James Green attacked local Headborough Michael Kennedy and Lawrence Bury in the street. It is possible that Bury was a part of the rival Carlow faction that ran many of the competing disorderly houses

¹⁰⁸ LMA, CLA/047/LJ/04/119, Guildhall Sessions Minute Book, 1751-2; CLA/047/LJ/01/0865-6; Paley, 'Thief-takers', pp. 314-315.

¹⁰⁹ LMA, MJ/SR/2998, Fol 29-35.

¹¹⁰ LMA, MJ/SR/2998, Fol 29-35. With its proximity to the Thames, press gangs were a common feature around Rosemary Lane. Nicolas Rogers notes that one press gang from the *Royal Sovereign* ran amok through Rag Fair in September 1744 searching for a deserter, local people being wounded in the assault. See Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and Its Opponents in Georgian Britain*, (2008), pp. 17-18.

¹¹¹ *Public Advertiser*, Saturday, 1 February 1755.

in Rag Fair.¹¹² Bury had tried to foil Stanley's sham press gang arrest of an innocent sailor. Bury told the court at the Old Bailey:

He had often threatened me before. About ten days before this thing happened, Thomas Stanley, he, and one Nettle, came into the house of Mrs. Boswell, near Well-close-square, where I was drinking a tankard of beer; Stanley charged me with false swearing at Hicks's-hall, it was in favour of a sailor, whom they were about extorting 10 l. 8 s. from.¹¹³

When Kennedy and Bury tried to use a warrant to arrest Stanley et al, they were attacked. Using hangars (swords) and sticks they were said to have beaten Bury almost to death, setting a bull dog on him and nearly cutting his nose off. The *Public Advertiser* described the gang that Stanley and Long Ned belong to as one that went about with 'pistols and hangars' that they 'make no scruple of giving it out wherever they go'. However, despite the wealth of evidence against them the defendants were acquitted on the charge of 'breaking the peace and wounding' at the Old Bailey.¹¹⁴

Part of their luck, came from their association with James Warrener. Clerk to two justices, Warrener was involved in the majority of thief-taking related prosecutions. In 1738 complaints were heard in court by the prosecutor in a theft case regarding Warrener. He was accused of refusing to take the suspects statement without being paid a guinea. The court reprimanded him for extortion and 'declar'd it to be the Duty of all, who serve as Clerks under Gentleman in the Commission of the Peace, to be always ready to execute their office without Extortion'.¹¹⁵ Overall, Warrener proved a very good

¹¹² Paley, 'thief-takers', pp. 314-315, 331-332.

¹¹³ *OBP*, 15 May 1755, Edward Hudson, Barbara His (Hudson's wife), (t17550515-12).

¹¹⁴ *Public Advertiser*, Saturday 1st February 1755; *OBP*, 15 May 1755, Edward Hudson, Barbara His, (Hudson's wife), (t17550515-12).

¹¹⁵ *OBP*, Joseph Golding, 12 April 1738, (t17380412-17).

'friend' to the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane. He helped them to get warrants and he used his position as a clerk to swear to the good character of his friends in court.

But, by the mid-1750s the Rosemary Lane thief-takers seem to have been running wild, not even Warrener and Gowers' intervention could prevent the prosecution of Stephen MacDaniel; and with his conviction the effective condemnation of the thief-takers as a whole.

The trial of Stephen MacDaniel started on 1 March 1755, and became a sensation. It finally exposed this group of men as perjurers and murderers in the London newspapers and signalled the end of the Rosemary Lane thief-takers once and for all.¹¹⁶ The trial was orchestrated by Joseph Cox, High Constable of Black Heath, who ensured that the thief-takers were exposed to public ridicule.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the trial also sent shock waves of fear of exposure through the London magistracy, as more than one judge was implicated in the activities of this band of perjurers and murderers.

Stephen MacDaniel, John Berry, James Eagan and James Salmon were collectively accused of perverting justice by conspiring to incite Peter Kelly and John Ellis and Thomas Blee (the informant) to commit a robbery on James Salmon in Deptford two years previously in 1753. Salmon, Eagan and Blee were not thief-takers as such but dispensable small time thieves who were commonly used by MacDaniel and Berry for phoney robberies.¹¹⁸ This was a crime that resulted in both Kelly and Ellis being sent to

¹¹⁶*Public Advertiser*, 19 March 1755; *London Evening Post*, 28 August 1755.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Cox, *A Faithful Narrative of the most Wicked and Inhuman Transactions of that Bloody Minded Gang of Thieftakers, alias Thieftmakers, MacDaniel, Berry, Salmon, Eagan alias Gahagan....(1756)* passim, British Library 1416.9.12 (2).

¹¹⁸ *OBP*, John Swannick, William Bailey, 9 September 1747, t17470909-1; *OBP*, John Fulford, 3 July 1751, t17510703-26.

the gallows, while the thief-takers collected a reward.¹¹⁹ They were all found guilty of murder, but the verdict was respited due to a legal loophole and the defendants were found guilty by the jury of the lesser crime of ‘feloniously, consorting, aiding, abetting, assisting, counselling, hiring and commanding [Thomas] Blee to rob Salmon’, in order to claim the rewards.¹²⁰ It was an unusual case and Cox settled for a lesser charge in order to secure a conviction and protect the witness. They were found guilty of conspiracy and sentenced to be pilloried and imprisoned. MacDaniel, Berry and Mary Jones were further accused in June 1756 of the wilful murder of Joshua Kidden in January 1754, who was hanged after being set up to commit a robbery on Jones.¹²¹ And although relatively few of the gang were prosecuted, the trial had the effect of sending the majority of its members into hiding.

A few went on to work for John Fielding as ‘legitimate’ thief-catchers. Up to this point the thief-takers had narrowly escaped justice on many occasions before being brought to book by Joseph Cox, High Constable of Blackheath. And while Harris, Stanley, Unwin and Remington were all mentioned in Cox’s pamphlet, which was published in 1756 they were not directly implicated in this case. Of those gang members who appeared in court Eagan and Salmon died from injuries sustained at the pillory. John Berry reportedly died in prison, while Mary Jones went free. *The London Evening Post* reported that Stephen

¹¹⁹ *OBP*, Richard Holland, Daniel Thoroughgood, 3 July 1751, t17510703-42; See *OBP*, Stephen MacDaniel, John Berry, James Salmon, James Eagan, 26 February 1755, t17550226-55; 1 March 1755, t17550301-1, December 1755, t17551204-3.

¹²⁰ Paley, *The Middlesex Justices Act of 1792*, pp. 163-170. As Paley adds, MacDaniel, Berry et al, were tried for being accessories before the fact, but since the robbery in question had been contrived by them and the ‘victim’ was himself one of the gang, the judges found that the robbery, ‘being a pretended one’, had not legally taken place at all, and acquitted them. In February 1756 they were convicted on a lesser charge of conspiracy. A charge of murder, relating to the execution of one of their earlier victims also had to be dropped. *OBP*, Stephen MacDaniel, John Berry, James Salmon, James Eagan, 26 February 1755, t17550226-55; 1 March 1755, t17550301-1, December 1755, t17551204-3.

See also Leon Radzinowicz, *A history of the English Criminal Law*, 4 volumes, (1948-1968), pp. 339-342.

¹²¹ *OBP*, Joshua Kidden, 16 January 1754, t17540116-41.

MacDaniel received the King's pardon in 1762 and was released from prison on condition of enlisting in his majesty's 49th regiment of foot in America.¹²² A Stephen MacDaniel also appears on the list of those transported to Jamaica in 1762.¹²³

This was one of the most notorious cases heard at the Old Bailey in the mid-1750s. Joseph Cox was determined to bring the thief-takers to justice. However, he failed to convict all of the leading players in the Rosemary Lane group, including Ralph Mitchell. Early on, Mitchell became aware that Joseph Cox was determined to bring a prosecution, and he seems to have gone to ground in Deptford where he died in 1764.¹²⁴

Cox also failed to incriminate Harris. In his *A True and Faithful Narrative...* Cox reveals that Harris alone received nearly £60 from the six £100 proclamation rewards that were paid out for the conviction of Alexander Byrne, James Malone, Terence McCane, William Holmes, John Newton and Francis Mandeville. MacDaniel, Mitchell, Stanley and Remington received similar amounts. This money was paid out by the Middlesex judiciary, and did not take into account local payments made by differing boroughs across the London periphery for the successful prosecution of robbers. MacDaniel planned the scam on Peter Kelly and John Ellis in Surrey in 1753 partly because a conviction in East Greenwich would give them an extra reward payment of £20 from the Borough.¹²⁵ Nor did it take into consideration the £40 parliamentary bounty that each convicted robber would generate. Cox calculates that, in 1749 alone, there were 45

¹²² *London Evening Post*, Thursday April 22 1762; Public Record Office, (Hereafter PRO), SP 44/87 f.113, Stephen MacDaniel 12/04/1762.

¹²³ Clifford Neal Smith, 'British deportees to America 1760-1763', *Illinois State Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 6:3, (Fall, 1974), pp. 133-136.

¹²⁴ *London Evening Post*, Tuesday January 31, 1764.

¹²⁵ Kelly and Ellis were tried and convicted at the Assizes held at Maidstone, August 13, 1754, cited in Cox, *A Faithful Narrative*, p. 17.

convictions for real and counterfeit robberies amounting to £4,500 plus 45 x £40 paid out in rewards in the metropolis.¹²⁶

That it took so long to bring any of the thief-takers to justice for their crimes is perhaps surprising. John Fielding freely admitted that he had heard the confession of Thomas Blee, but did not wish to take the case up. Why Fielding decided not to take Blee's evidence is not explained, however, we know that several members of the gang had worked for both Henry and John Fielding, including Thomas Ind, William Palmer Jones, Berry, Harris and MacDaniel.¹²⁷

As for the other thief-takers of Rosemary Lane, in 1753 Nathaniel Harris seems to disappear after a further indictment to appear at Middlesex sessions in October, and we hear little more about the hatter of Rosemary Lane until 1773, when he turns up at the Guildhall acting as minor officer of the court. He gave his address as St George in the East, Middlesex.¹²⁸ By 1776 when he would have been possibly 66 years old he applied to St Botolph Aldgate for settlement citing his time spent in Darby Street as a ratepayer.¹²⁹ In 1749 Samuel Unwin was presented before the Grand Jury for receiving stolen goods. He was relieved of his City of London victualler's licence and sent to gaol.¹³⁰ In the early 1750s he took over the Dolphin Alehouse (Middlesex) adjacent to Well Close Square and Rag Fair.¹³¹ Unwin also went to ground around the time of the

¹²⁶ Cox, *A Faithful Narrative*, pp. 60-61.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3; *OBP*, Francis Keys, 12 September 1750, t17500912-36; *OBP*, John Stanton, William Russel, Edward Busby, Peter Oldfield, 28 February 1750, t17500228-32.

¹²⁸ LMA, City of London sessions Justices working documents, LL ref: LMSLPS150840093, Image 93 of 2315, November 1773.

¹²⁹ St Botolph Aldgate Parish Records, Pauper Settlement, Vagrancy and Bastardy Exams, LL ref: GLBAEP103160034, Image 34 of 115, 16th April 1776, Nathaniel Harris.

¹³⁰ LMA, MJ/SB/B/109, 6/30, Middlesex Sessions Minute Book; *OBP*, Margaret Scot, 11 April 1749, t17490411-32.

¹³¹ Cox, *A Faithful Narrative*, p.76.

MacDaniel trial. Charles Remington was last heard of at the Old Bailey in 1753.¹³²

Morris, who had already spent some time in prison, also drifted out of circulation around 1753. George Ballentine was last mentioned in a case of theft in 1755 as a receiver of stolen goods at his house in Back Lane, Rag Fair.¹³³

In 1750 it was reported in the *London Evening Post* that Thomas Stanley was taken up and committed to Newgate by Henry Fielding for the attempted assassination of James Annesley Esq.¹³⁴ However, this case was dismissed before it came to trial. He was further indicted for perjury in 1753 but was acquitted when the prosecutor failed to appear. He was indicted to appear at the trial for the assault and wounding of Lawrence Bury but he did not show up and we do not hear anything more from the Old Bailey regarding Stanley after 1755.¹³⁵ Considering how many hapless victims they sent to the gallows the Rosemary Lane thief-takers and their compatriots fared very well in the face of 'one of the bloodiest criminal codes in Europe'.¹³⁶

Rosemary Lane saw the best and the worst of eighteenth century policing between 1732 and 1756, with most of the criminal activity taking place around Rag Fair close to Well Close Square and Cable Street in the Whitechapel, Middlesex side of the parish. This was clearly a transitory period when an old fashioned disorderly neighbourhood, a 'nursery of naughty lewd people' of Sir Stephen Soames's era had by the mid-1750s begun a slow downfall.¹³⁷

¹³² *OBP*, Charles Remington, 2 May 1753, t17530502-48.

¹³³ *OBP*, John Diginham, 15 May 1755, t1755 0515-4.

¹³⁴ *London Evening Post*, 13 February 1750.

¹³⁵ *OBP*, Thomas Stanley, 30 May 1754, t17540530-41; *OBP*, Barbara His, (Hudson's wife), Edward Hudson, 15th May 1755, t17550515-12.

¹³⁶ D. Hay, 'Property, authority and the criminal law' in Hay, Douglas, Linebaugh, Peter, Rule, John G., Thompson, E.P., and Cal Winslow (eds.), *Albion's Fatal Tree, Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century*, (1975), p. 19.

¹³⁷ Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, p. 234.

Fielding's Runners

This neighbourhood and particularly the area around Rag Fair had by 1750 become a micro-world where thief-takers ruled the roost with many parish constables, JPs and their clerks in their influence. But they also fitted into a wider city-wide system. They were supported in their exploits by both the local judiciary and by the influential Fieldings who defended the actions of thief-takers including some of the men discussed in this chapter; and employed many of them directly. The Fieldings praised them for their courage and honour and defended their right to claim rewards for their services. And it was only after the MacDaniel trial, that this view would alter. As John Beattie has noted, 'it is clear that not every man attached to the [Bow Street] office in its early years was as respectable as the Fieldings claimed'; and this would seem to be true in relation to the Fieldings employment of men associated with Rosemary Lane.¹³⁸ In fact, many of them had criminal records. Of the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane Harris, MacDaniel, Berry, James Brebrook (Brabrook) and Thomas Stanley all brought prisoners before Fielding.

¹³⁸ Beattie, *The First English Detectives*, pp. 32-33.



Fig. 5.3: Stephen MacDaniel by Charles Leigh 1756.

For example Thomas Ind, who worked alongside William Pentlow one of Fielding's main runners was associated with thief-takers John Berry and John Wittingbury.¹³⁹ William Palmer Hind who worked for Fielding, was a close associate of MacDaniel and gave him a good character reference in court. Palmer Hind and William Body were supported in their petition to the London Recorder to receive a larger portion of the £40 reward by

¹³⁹ *OBP*, John Stanton, William Russel, Edward Busby, Peter Oldfield, 28 February 1750, t17500228-32; See also t1752051-14; t17540116-43; t17510116-36; William Pentelow was one of John Fielding's leading officers in April 1760 when he was acquitted of murder, LL, Middlesex Sessions Justices working papers, LMSMPS504910025, Image 25 of 54; LL, LMSMPS504820083, Image 83 of 119, April 1760 Pentelow's wife petitions the court for relief after he broke her arm with an iron poker. She claims that John Fielding issued a warrant to have her put in the Gate House prison to stop her raising a petition against (Pentlow)Pentelow; Pentelow was accused of murder in 1761, *OBP*, William Darwell, William Pentelow, 1 April 1761, t17610401-28.

John Fielding.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps they were not all named 'runners' but they were still working directly or indirectly for the Fieldings and there is little doubt that he knew of their exploits.

Moreover, John Fielding was later to admit that his brother had evidence against Stephen MacDaniel which he had refused to use at the time.¹⁴¹ When setting up his Bow Street office Henry Fielding argued that thief-takers were necessary, 'they risked their lives...by bringing violent men to justice' and 'thief-takers did good to society'. They may not have had open support from Fielding or Sir Samuel Gower, but they assuredly had tacit support. If we want to find the origins of Fielding's Runners, and the kernel that would become London professional police force, it is in the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane.

CONCLUSION

Stephen MacDaniel, Thomas Stanley and Richard Morris specifically moved to this neighbourhood in the 1740s because of the opportunities there for thief-taking scams and for the running of disorderly and sponging houses beyond the watchful eye of the City authorities. Ralph Mitchell, George Holderness and John Berry worked from this street because of this and because of the established relationships with local judiciary that Nathaniel Harris, Samuel Unwin, Bomer Lovett and their cohort already had in place. Here, they had the freedom to implement their corrupt interpretation of the law while remaining in close proximity to the City and to Southwark. They undoubtedly brought a few real criminals to justice in the process. However, they saved their 'friends' from gaol and they used their position to control groups of local thieves who supplied

¹⁴⁰ Beattie, *The First English Detectives*, p. 20, note 25.

¹⁴¹ Cox, *A Faithful Narrative*, pp. 3-15; Paley, *The Middlesex Justices Act of 1792*, pp. 163-170.

them with intelligence. They decided who would face the gallows, who would be sent to gaol or who would be sentenced to transportation. Nonetheless, this was an evolving criminal justice system and despite their unscrupulous and criminal behaviour thief-takers were a crucial element in the policing of eighteenth century London.¹⁴² To do this they had to work closely with the local judiciary.

The MacDaniel trial convinced the majority of the judiciary and government that the reward system was flawed. On the other hand, there was little doubt that the thief-takers provided a detection and policing service to their community that no one else was willing to offer. Arguably, the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane became the catalyst for change in the way that communities were policed and rewards given out in London. The incidents that took place and the people involved form a significant staging post in the evolution of a newly authoritarian police, to regulate a newly recalcitrant population. Westminster may have led the way with the first official runners but the core evolution of professional policing happened in this place on the cusp of the City wall. Moreover, it was the peculiarities of neighbourhoods such as Drury Lane, Covent Garden, Black Boy Alley and Rosemary Lane that result in all types of judicial developments from the eighteenth-century onwards. The thief-takers of Rosemary Lane moved around London without obstruction and they were encouraged by the authorities with the enticement of rewards to 'police' the crime that surrounded Rag Fair. Here they found a central place from which they could operate on both sides of the law.

More importantly this close study or micro-history of a London street has enabled us to confirm for the first time that the most infamous thief-taking gang of the eighteenth

¹⁴² Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, p. 423.

century was firmly based in Rosemary Lane. Furthermore, they were not a random selection of marginal people with criminal associations who just happened on this place. Their concentration on Rosemary Lane reflects the advantages of living in an institutionally liminal area where they could dominate the buying and selling of second hand clothes at Rag Fair and enjoy influence in the local community. This is a crucial to understanding how they interacted with both thieves and the criminal justice system. The Rag Fair on Rosemary Lane just on the City boundary was the nexus that drew thieves, disorder and thief-takers into play. This chapter has sought to demonstrate the importance of local studies to the history of crime in understanding networks of influence that could exist within one neighbourhood. By studying this particular neighbourhood in depth we can perceive that a large network of criminal activity was in firmly in place and it had tentacles that flowed between honest residents, thieves, receivers of stolen goods, thief-takers and the judiciary. The Rag Fair with its reputation for 'loose, idle, disorderly people', for thieves and receivers ensured that the thief-takers had a place to conduct their business of catching criminals for the reward.

Chapter 6

'Ill Favoured Sluts': The Women of Rosemary Lane

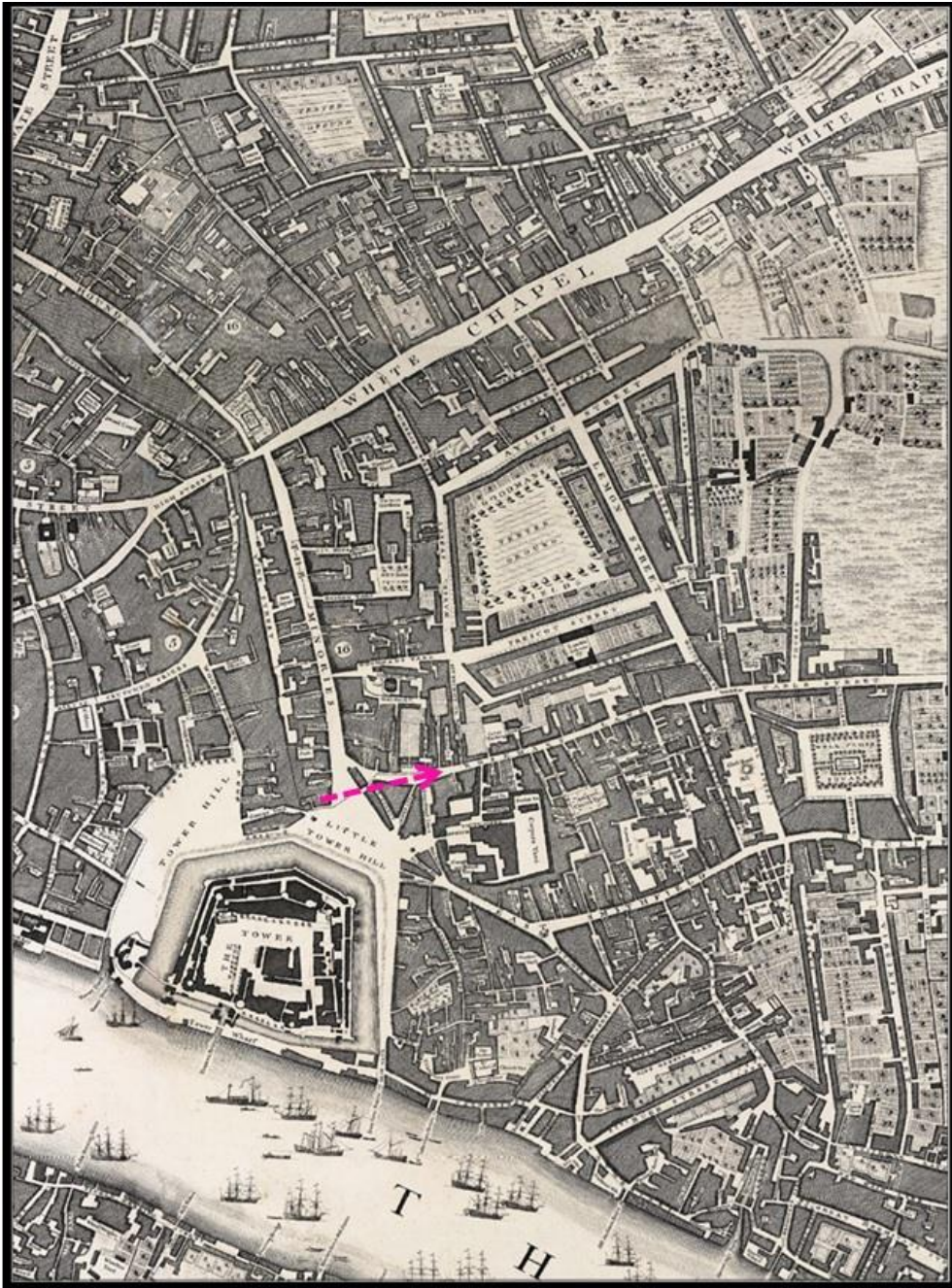


Fig. 6.1: Map of East London showing Rosemary Lane. *A Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark; with the Contiguous Buildings; From an actual Survey taken by John Rocque Land-Surveyor, and Engraved by John Pine, Bluemantle Pursuivant at Arms and Chief Engraver of Seals, &c. to His Majesty.* This section of the map showing East London and Rosemary Lane. Courtesy of © Motco Enterprises Limited, Ref: www.motco.com
Key: Pink dotted arrow identifying Rosemary Lane as it proceeds east towards Cable Street.

INTRODUCTION

Rag Fair was roundly condemned in literature and was subject to draconian policing by the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, and in both instances, it was the women of the neighbourhood who were perceived as the problem. In 1703, Ned Ward, writing in *The London Spy* confirmed the neighbourhood's reputation and that of its female residents with his description of Rag Fair:

A heathenish part of the Town... which in ridicule of fragrant fumes that arise from the musty rotten rags and burnt old shoes, is called by the sweet name of Rosemary Lane. Here such a numberless congregation of *ill-favoured sluts* were gathered together that we thought a fleet of French Protestants had just arrived... but upon a true inquisition into the meaning of this tattered multitude, we were informed... it was Rag Fair...¹

Ward was not alone in his opinion of the women of Rosemary Lane - in broadsides, pamphlets and printed news sheets the neighbourhood's reputation was both continually reiterated, and given a distinctly female character; with the female inhabitants of the Lane being consistently described as lewd, disorderly scolds.²

Similarly, as a primary focus of the activities of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, Rosemary Lane was associated with disorderly women through the societies' 'true crime' literature, and public targeting of prostitutes.

To some extent, the Lane's eighteenth-century reputation and gendered character simply built upon an older perception of the area. As discussed in chapter one Rosemary Lane had long been associated with radicalism, religious dissent, prostitution,

¹ Ned Ward, *The London Spy, The Vanities and Vices Of The Town Exposed To View*, (1703), edited with notes by A. L. Hayward, (1927), pp. 248-249.

² 'The Great and Famous Scolding Match between Four Remarkable Scolding Women of Rosemary Lane and their like number of Basket Women of Golden Lane', *The Protestant Mercury*, 1699, British Library (hereafter BL), 816.m.19 (63); (BL) *Great News from a Parliament of Women, now sitting in Rosemary-Lane, etc.* [A ballad.], (1684), 1876.f.1. (27); Laura Gowing, 'The freedom of the streets': women and social space, 1560-1640,' in Paul Griffiths and Mark, S.R, Jenner, (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social history of early modern London*, (Manchester, 2000), p. 131; Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century England*, (New Haven, CT, 2003), pp. 83-85; Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany*, (Virginia, 1992), pp. 7-8.

and the free and easy character of a neighbourhood beyond the watchful eyes of the City authorities.³ The gendering of the neighbourhood was also about its association with Rag Fair and its role in servicing the port of London – both economic functions associated with female labour. But, it was primarily about crime. Rosemary Lane may not have been the only disorderly neighbourhood in London – but there was very possibly more crime committed on this street than in other notorious areas of London, such as Drury Lane (see Chapter 4) or Convent Garden. And early eighteenth-century criminal prosecution focussed on female crime. In the 1700s over 50 per cent of all defendants tried at the Old Bailey were women; and among those accused of theft, this rose to 56 per cent. This percentage fell gradually over the course of the century, but among defendants charged with theft, women continued to account for over 40 per cent of all defendants through 1750.⁴

As innumerable proclamations warned, Rosemary Lane was a site that attracted ‘Rogues, Thieves and Pickpockets’, making it a natural setting for the evolution of a kind of criminal network, in which women were fully represented.⁵ Moreover, as Beverly Lemire comments ‘women on the commercial margins were often ready and willing to deal in stolen goods, as receivers and recyclers they knew what was in demand, what

³ D.A. Williams, ‘London Puritanism: the parish of St. Botolph without Aldgate’, *Guildhall Miscellany*, 2:1 (1960), pp. 24-38; J. A. Dodd, *Troubles in a City Parish under the Protectorate*, (1895); K. Lindley, ‘Communications, Whitechapel independents and the English revolution’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 1, (Mar., 1998), pp. 283-329; John McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London’s Criminal Underworld 1500-1700*, (Rutgers, New Jersey, 1984), pp. 144-146.

⁴ Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913*, (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 24 March 2012), (Hereafter, *OBP*), Statistics gathered using criteria male/female and theft 1670-1910: www.oldbaileyonline.org/stats.jsp

⁵ LMA, CLA/048/PS/01/065, Proclamation to suppress Rag Fair issued by Mayor Daniel Lambert, 1741.

housewives needed and what they would pay'.⁶ Occupation, marginality, and tradition conspired to make Rosemary Lane a female neighbourhood.

Given the plethora of historical writing concerning crime in the eighteenth century, there remains a notable lack of work directed at eighteenth-century criminal women and especially poor criminal women in London.⁷ But by studying defendants from Rosemary Lane, we can observe how plebeian women acted on the street. Additionally, criminal records provide unsurpassed evidence through which we can observe women's agency, their contribution to 'economic and social networks of exchange and interaction'.⁸ While society may have tried to marginalise women, if we look closely enough we can discern how they survived even at the margins. This chapter will show that many women were active agents who led full, integrated and productive lives despite the rhetoric of patriarchy.

It will also add to the recent work on women by historians such as Tony Henderson, Robert Shoemaker, and Tim Hitchcock's research on the experiences of plebeian women caught up in the St Martin's Round-House disaster of 1742.⁹ While Jennine Hurl-

⁶ Beverly Lemire, *Dress Culture and Commerce the English Clothing Trade before the Factory 1660-1800*, (1997), p. 113.

⁷ J.M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror*, (Oxford, 2001), Peter King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England*, (Oxford, 2000); R.B. Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment, Petty Crime and the Law in London and Rural Middlesex, c.1660-1725*, (Cambridge, 1991); Ruth Paley, 'An imperfect, inadequate and wretched system? policing London before Peel', *Criminal Justice History*, 10, (1989); Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900*, 2nd edn (London and New York, 1996); Norma Landau, (ed.), *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660-1830*, (Cambridge, 2002); E. Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830*, (1998); Innes, Joanna and Styles, John, 'The crime wave: recent writing on crime and criminal justice in eighteenth century-England', *Journal of British Studies*, xxv, (1988), pp. 380-435; Andrew Harris, *Policing the City, Crime and Legal Authority in London, 1780-1840*, (Ohio, 2004).

⁸ Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern Cheshire*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, (June, 1994), pp. 213-214.

⁹ Robert B. Shoemaker, 'Print and the female voice: representations of women's crime in London, 1690-1735' *Gender & History*, vol.22, No 1, April 2010; Robert B. Shoemaker, 'Gendered spaces: patterns of mobility and perceptions of London's geography, 1660-1750', in J.F. Merritt, (ed.), *Imagining Early Modern*

Eamon's work on the lower criminal courts of Westminster contributes a new and detailed identity for plebeian women as highly active users of the courts, as both assailants and prosecutors. For example Hurl-Eamon cites the case of Mary Clift, an alehouse keeper, who had Justice Narcissus Luttrell charged with defamation even though he was of a much higher rank in society.¹⁰ Finally, it will build on new micro-histories of individual women written by Heather Shore and Mary Clayton, which provide snapshots of plebeian women's lives and their relationships with their communities and the evolving criminal justice system. Heather Shore's work on Moll Harvey and Isabel Eaton, who proved a challenge to the Westminster judiciary, has exposed a pattern of female behaviour that was present in many London communities - nowhere more so than on Rosemary Lane. They may not have always been welcome participants in their communities, but as Heather Shore points out 'locality and community are hugely important in how we think about these interactions'.¹¹ This small but growing literature reveals the assertiveness that eighteenth-century women could exercise when the occasion arose.¹²

London: Perceptions & Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype 1598-1720, (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 144-165.

Tim Hitchcock, '“ You Bitches...die and be Damned”: gender, authority and the mob in the St Martin's round-house disaster of 1742', in T. Hitchcock and H. Shore, (eds.), *The Streets of London: From the Great Fire to the Great Stink*, (2003); See also J.M. Beattie, 'The criminality of women in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of Social History*, 8, (1975), pp. 80-116; Peter King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England*, (Oxford, 2000).

¹⁰ Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Gender and Petty Violence in London, 1680-1720*, (Ohio, 2005), p. 19. See also D.D. Gray, *Crime, Prosecution and Social Relations: The Summary Courts of the City of London in the Late Eighteenth Century*, (2009).

¹¹ Heather Shore, 'The reckoning': disorderly women, informing constables and the Westminster justices, 1727-33', *Social History*, 34: 4,(2009), pp. 409-427.

¹² Shore, 'The reckoning', p. 411; Mary Clayton, 'The lives and crimes of Charlotte Walker, prostitute and Pickpocket', *London Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (March, 2008), pp. 3-1. See Also Janice Turner, 'Ill-favoured sluts'? - the disorderly women of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair', *London Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2, (July, 2013), pp. 95-109.

This chapter seeks to add further evidence to this argument. First, it will explore the actual economic conditions on the Lane, and women's roles, both as legitimate traders and as prostitutes. Second, it will briefly explore the character of the literary representations of the women of rag fair and Rosemary Lane; highlighting the continuing tradition of women, who, in Laura Gowing's phrase, 'shift it well enough'.¹³ And third, through a detailed study of the workings of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners in the neighbourhood, it will explore how that representation was broadcast to a wider audience, and how the women of the Lane suffered under the aggressive policing of the Societies. Finally, it will explore the extent to which even the 'criminal' women of Rosemary Lane were representative of a wider community - a neglected community of both legitimate working women, as well as of prostitutes and women who worked as thieves and receivers. In the process, this chapter will expose the growing and interdependent relationship between the women of this neighbourhood, the thief-takers and the evolving criminal justice system. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the victims of theft, the thief-takers, the thieves, prostitutes and the women brokers who dealt in stolen clothing found themselves all living cheek by jowl in this neighbourhood. This resulted in a symbiotic relationship that will form the major focus and final point of this chapter.

WOMEN AT THE MARGINS

London women were, as Laura Gowing observes, subjected to a 'continuous stream of orders' from the late sixteenth century onwards, from the Aldermen's court restricting the numbers of fishwives, fruit sellers and herb women, and their movement around

¹³ Garthine Walker, 'Women, theft and the world of stolen goods', in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker, (eds.), (1994), pp. 89-92.

town. It is not stretching the boundaries of the long eighteenth century to note that little had changed by the first half of the eighteenth century. Women were still subject to these rules. And yet, large numbers of women remained economically active and on the street. They necessarily found ways and places to work. Most late seventeenth and eighteenth century women had to work; but by working on the public streets in an unlicensed market, the women of Rag Fair represented a particular kind of economic and domestic independence that the authorities associated with a profound form of disorder.¹⁴ Women who sold goods on the street could be attacked, sworn at and spat upon by men who clearly believed that they were fair game; and were subject to repeated attempts to control them.¹⁵ In 1585 the Cornhill Wardmote inquest presented ‘...the sellers of yarn for blocking the street... for that they stop and hinder the passage in the Queen’s High Street’.¹⁶ Nevertheless, despite the orders from the aldermen’s court in reality the London authorities had to tolerate women working on the streets or in shops and alehouses.¹⁷

This toleration had its limits. And while there may have been some easing of restrictions over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century many women still found themselves called to account before the local magistrate or Ward Inquest committee. The names of many poor local women appear in court records as cloth dealers and shop keepers and many appear as proprietors of ale houses and disorderly houses. For example, in 1692 Joan Key was fined for ‘selling Ale without a licence’. In 1694, Susanna Penny was fined for ‘keeping an ill house in Sun and Trumpet Alley, Whitechapel’ and in 1738 Elizabeth London was fined for ‘exercising her trade selling ale, not being a free

¹⁴ Gowing, ‘The freedom of the streets’, pp. 130-35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Quote from p. 141.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

woman'. In 1753 Jane Bowyer was fined for keeping a shop and not 'being free'.

Likewise in the same year Catherine Reeves was fined for 'keeping an open shop and carrying on her said trade as a sales women not being free of this City'.¹⁸

These presentations of women from Rosemary Lane remind us that while legal and moral restraints were in place to discourage women from engaging in male or 'public' activities, many women did so regardless. And they did so in part because the family economy depended on women working. As Eliza Haywood remarked in 1743, 'Only a fool will take a wife whose bread must be earned by his labour and who will contribute nothing towards it herself'.¹⁹ Women who lived in this majority poor neighbourhood had little option but to work. As Peter Earle has shown, between 1695 and 1725 a high proportion, 79.9 per cent, of women who appeared at the church courts were 'wholly or partly dependent on their own earnings for their livelihood'.²⁰ Additionally, with its proximity to the port and to the naval dockyards, local women were the wives, widows or mothers of sailors and had little choice but to try and support their families from their own resources. As Jennine Hurl-Eamon argues, 'throughout the eighteenth century wives were expected to contribute to the household coffers'.²¹

Craig Spence has shown that areas that contained a high number of women householders were more than likely to be poor.²² Rosemary Lane itself was partially situated in three different taxation districts, all showing a high proportion of female rate

¹⁸ Sample taken from the yearly presentations of the Beadle and Constables of Portsoken ward. Guildhall library, (hereafter GL), MS. 2649/1 Portsoken 1684-1798, 204B Guildhall Justice Room, Minute Books of Proceedings and 242A, Summaries of Ward Presentations, 1680-1845.

¹⁹ Cited in Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750*, (1994), p. 113.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-115.

²¹ Jennine Hurl-Eamon, 'The fiction of female dependence and the makeshift economy of soldiers, sailors and their wives in eighteenth century London', *Labor History*, Vol. 49, No. 4, (November, 2008), p. 481.

²² Craig Spence, *London in the 1690s: A Social Atlas*, (2000), pp. 75-79.

payers.²³ As we saw in Chapter 3, for the 1690s - women account for 17.9 per cent of ratepayers in Goodman's Fields and the southern part of St Botolph Aldgate. In the precinct of St Katherine by the Tower, just south of Rosemary Lane, women accounted for 22.5 per cent of ratepayers, with little change by the middle of the eighteenth century.²⁴ In other words, this neighbourhood was undeniably poor; but more than this it was clearly home to a higher proportion of women householders (and women as a percentage of the population as a whole) than other areas.²⁵

Many local women worked as servants or in the sewing trades and in the silk-winding industry which was a large employer of female labour in East London.²⁶ Additionally, this area was home to one of the largest sail cloth manufactures in England. It was owned by JP Sir Samuel Gower of Mill Lane just off Rosemary Lane and close to the large tenter grounds in Goodman's Fields.²⁷ M. Dorothy George notes that the sail cloth industry in Tower Hamlets employed both spinners and weavers 'of both sexes from age seven to seventy'.²⁸ To a lesser degree women could be found working as fish wives or hawkers, butchers, bakers, goldsmiths and pawnbrokers. East London women were also popularly employed, as noted above in the manufacturing of cloth, making and mending clothes; sewing sailor's slops working in chandler's shops, working as pastry cooks, in

²³ St Botolph Aldgate, City and Middlesex and St Mary Whitechapel (6th Division Tower Hamlets).

²⁴ LMA, St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate Assessments, MS 2545/1-20; LMA, Land Tax Assessments Tower Division, St Katherine's Precinct, MS 6010/14, 1745.

²⁵ Spence, *London in the 1690s*, pp. 176-178; LMA, St Botolph Aldgate, Church Rate Assessments, MS2545/1-20, 1744-5; Whitechapel 6th Division Rosemary Lane, MS 6015/11-20, 1745 16.8 per cent female named householders; LMA, Tower Division Land Tax Assessment, St Katherine's Precinct, MS 6010/14, 1745. The 1801 census records that St Botolph Aldgate had 4528 (52.11%) women and 4161 (47.88 %) men, See <http://www.histpop.org/> accessed 12 October 2011].

²⁶ Peter Earle, 'The female labour market in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol.42, No. 3, (Aug, 1989), pp. 339-344. See also Alice Clark, *Working Life Of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, (third edition, 1992); Judith Bennett, 'History that stands still: women's work in the European past', *Feminist Studies*, 14, (1988), pp. 269-283.

²⁷ William Fuller Maitland, *The London Chronicle*, Vol. 2, 3 September 1757.

²⁸ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (Penguin reprint, (1992),[1925]), pp. 167-170.

cook shops and as alehouse keepers. A list of those Whitechapel residents who kept premises that sold any sort of liquor licensed or non-licensed in 1735 shows that out of 320 listed establishments 46 were managed by women - 14.4 per cent. What is more, this figure does not take into account the many women who were alehouse servants or just worked for wages in various drinking establishments.²⁹

A number of attempts were made by governments to restrict the numbers of women weavers in East London, but M Dorothy George notes that by the end of the eighteenth century they had all but given up.³⁰ Moreover, the silk industry was one of the principal employments in this area with many women - the wives and daughters of seamen - engaged as silk-winders.³¹ In 1755 Thomas Pearson, a silk-throwster kept a mill with 160 bobbins in Goodman's Fields employing 800 people. Many of his employees were local women, including home workers, winding silk.³²

Working women were ingrained in London culture and on London's streets as much as the watchman or the waterman. Nonetheless, as Margaret Hunt has discovered, women in seafaring communities had 'an unusual degree of legal and moral authority' when their menfolk were at sea. This was due to the fact that sailors were able to designate a landlady, a family member or 'wife' to be given their 'power of attorney' when they were absent at sea for long periods of time. As Hunt notes, in the East End this 'power of attorney' was known locally as having a 'power'.³³ This would account, in part, for the

²⁹ LMA, MR/LV06/44, List of the Victuallers, inn holders, coffee houses and all other retailers of distilled liquors in the parish of Whitechapel, Jan 3rd 1735/6.

³⁰ George, *London Life*, pp. 183-184.

³¹ Earle, 'The female labour market', p. 340.

³² George, *London Life*, pp. 183-185.

³³ Margaret R. Hunt, 'Women and the fiscal-imperial state in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London', in Kathleen Wilson, (ed.), *A new imperial history: culture, identity, and modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge, England and New York, 2004), pp. 30-32.

higher numbers of women in charge of small local businesses in this area, including money lending and pawn broking. Numbered tickets were given to the person having the sailor's 'power' enabling them (in theory) to collect a portion of their husband's wages from the Navy Board. However, as Hunt adds, the Navy was continually short of money, especially during periods of war. Many of these women and their families suffered real hardships due to the fact that naval wages and prize money were paid intermittently, if at all.³⁴ Naval wives and family members had little choice but to work in order to survive. Thus, it was not uncommon for sailors and soldiers to arrive home from long spells at sea or war to find their wives living with other men through necessity.³⁵

What is more, women who held the 'power' could also buy and sell property, they could sue in court and conduct business in their husband or male relative's name.³⁶ As a result, many women in this particular neighbourhood just north of the port, were already accustomed to a large measure of freedom and equality that was rare in this patriarchal society.

Despite this 'power', work was essential and underemployment was common, with seasonal variations and economic downturns, creating serious insecurity. Many women had little choice but to turn to other occupations including prostitution and theft.³⁷ Again this was a centuries-old problem that the authorities were clearly aware of and it

³⁴ Hunt, 'Women and the fiscal-imperial state', pp. 29-47.

³⁵ John R. Gillis, *For Better or Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present*, (New York, 1985), p. 218.

³⁶ Hunt, 'Women and the fiscal-imperial state', p. 33; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, 'Insights into Plebeian Marriage: Soldiers, Sailors, and their Wives in the Old Bailey Proceedings', *London Journal*, 30, 1, (2005), p. 220.

³⁷ Beattie, 'The Criminality of Women', p. 95.

is one that did not end in the eighteenth century. Police reports from the nineteenth century confirm that 'seamen's wives used prostitution out of economic necessity'.³⁸

Prostitution

As Anna Clark has convincingly argued, 'women whose low wages or unemployment forced them to resort to part-time sexual commerce did not consider themselves to be prostitutes'.³⁹ Prostitution was rife in several enclaves in London including Drury Lane, the Strand, Covent Garden and St Giles.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly this neighbourhood in common with every other port town already had a long association with prostitution.⁴¹ As seventeenth century clergyman Donald Lupton wrote, 'Petticoat Lane and Rosemary Lane' housed a population of women, who 'traded on their bottom'.⁴² He argued that prostitution became more concentrated in those areas to the east of the City, including East Smithfield, Rosemary Lane, Whitechapel and Shadwell.⁴³ Of course this is hardly surprising considering its proximity to the Thames. One of the most notorious prostitutes of the late seventeenth century, Damaris Page, 'The Great Bawd of the Seamen', kept a bawdy house on Ratcliff Highway for ordinary seamen and dock workers, and another house on Rosemary Lane closer to the City for 'sailors of rank'.⁴⁴

³⁸ Hurl-Eamon, 'Insights into Plebeian Marriage', p. 27; Gillis, *For Better or Worse*, p. 234.

³⁹ A. Clark, 'Whores and Gossips: Sexual reputation in London 1770-1825', in A. Angerman, G. Binnema, A. Keunen, V. Poels and J. Zirkzee, (eds.), *Current Issues in Women's History*, (1989), p. 236.

⁴⁰ Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women, in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*, (1999), pp. 58-60.

⁴¹ There are many similarities between the portside in London and portside Bristol including prostitution and an Irish crime element. See Steve Poole, Introduction and Matt Neale, 'Crime and Maritime trade in Bristol 1770-1800', *A City Built on Water, Maritime Bristol 1750-1900*, Steve Poole (ed.), (2013), pp. 21-24, pp. 76-93.

⁴² Donald Lupton, *London and Country Carbonated and Quartered into Several Characters*, (1632), cited in John McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld, 1550-1700*, (Rutgers, New Jersey, 1984) p. 61; Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 58-60.

⁴³ McMullan, *The Canting Crew*, pp. 60-62.

⁴⁴ E. J. Burford and J. Wotton, *Public Vices – Public Virtues, Bawdry in London from Elizabethan Times to the Regency*, (1995), pp. 70-84.

The transient population of sailors from nearby ships ensured at least one source of a steady demand for the services of local women.⁴⁵

Richard Adair's case study of early modern St Botolph Aldgate supports the contention that there were large numbers of active prostitutes in and around Rosemary Lane. He suggests an 'unusually persistent, recording of base births resulting from adulterous relationships, prostitution, and sexual relationships between unmarried servants'.⁴⁶ Henderson also notes that 'Rosemary Lane was home to a considerable population of prostitutes', this is endorsed by findings by Ian Archer for the sixteenth century, John McMullan and M. Dorothy George for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁷ While the evidence for this theory is open to question, it chimes with the record of both anti-prostitution initiatives, and the area's colourful reputation.

But lumping prostitutes together as a single group would be misleading. Many worked in lodging houses, alehouses and bawdy houses situated in this area, on a more or less full-time basis; but many others worked on the streets, and in a more casual manner – as the economics of life demanded. Francis Place recalled how Rosemary Lane in the 1780s was 'Inhabited ... by whores and sailors... a dangerous place for any decent person to have gone into'.⁴⁸ Place described his forays as an apprentice in the 1780s into the local taverns, and 'dirty public houses' of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair, and was particularly struck by the girls who:

... had ragged dirty shoes and stockings and some no stockings at all,
...many of that time wore no stays, their gowns were low round the neck
and open in the front...to expose their breasts, this was a fashion that the

⁴⁵ Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France*, p. 355.

⁴⁶ Richard Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England*, (Manchester, 1996), p. 218.

⁴⁷ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 58-60; McMullan, *Canting Crew*, p.60, George, *London Life*, p. 92; I. W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 212.

⁴⁸ BL. Add. MS, 27, 828, Place Papers. Vol. XL, Manners and Morals, Vol. IV, [fol.118], Friday, Sep 3, 1824.

best dressed among them followed...drunken bold women, some with black eyes who could have easily been found fighting with men as with women.⁴⁹

Prostitution in this neighbourhood was not restricted to the wives of absent seamen, and their clientele was not limited to visiting sailors.

Many of the men and women who ran the 'disorderly or bawdy houses' earned their keep by taking a cut from their street walking clientele, or as Henderson argues 'they welcomed them for the money they spent on drink or for the male customers that they attracted'.⁵⁰ As Tony Henderson has noted, many prostitutes seem to have preferred the comparative freedom of street walking to life in a structured bawdy house, as they were often more able to retain a higher share of their earnings for their own use.⁵¹ The many trials heard at the Old Bailey, involving prostitutes who worked around Rosemary Lane, would seem to support his conclusion.

At the same time, running a bawdy house was a natural progression from prostitution, and women were thought to have been in the majority as keepers of bawdy houses.

Widow women who were licensed victuallers appeared regularly in court records. In the Portsoken Wardmote Inquest minutes of 1684, Elizabeth Dobbey and three compatriots were presented for keeping a bawdy house on Little Tower Hill (Rosemary Lane), 'whereby much mischief passes and doth dayly and so by said persons or most of them'. In 1685, William White, a Combmaker of little Tower Hill made a complaint to the Beadle, Edward Parker concerning a disorderly house in the neighbourhood.

Charges were brought against 'Widdow Fear, Margaret Peacock and Roberta

⁴⁹ BL. Place Papers, fol.119.

⁵⁰ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 51.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.51. See also Penelope J. Corfield, 'Walking The City Streets: The Urban Odyssey in Eighteenth Century England', *Journal of Urban History*, 16, (1990), pp. 132-174.

Reans...persons not without cause, suspected of keeping a bawdy house... whereby much mischief doth dayly arise...'.⁵²

The economy of street trading, and the economy of prostitution, ensured that Rosemary Lane remained a vibrant, and female-dominated neighbourhood. But it also had a reputation to live down to.

ROSEMARY LANE WOMEN IN LITERATURE

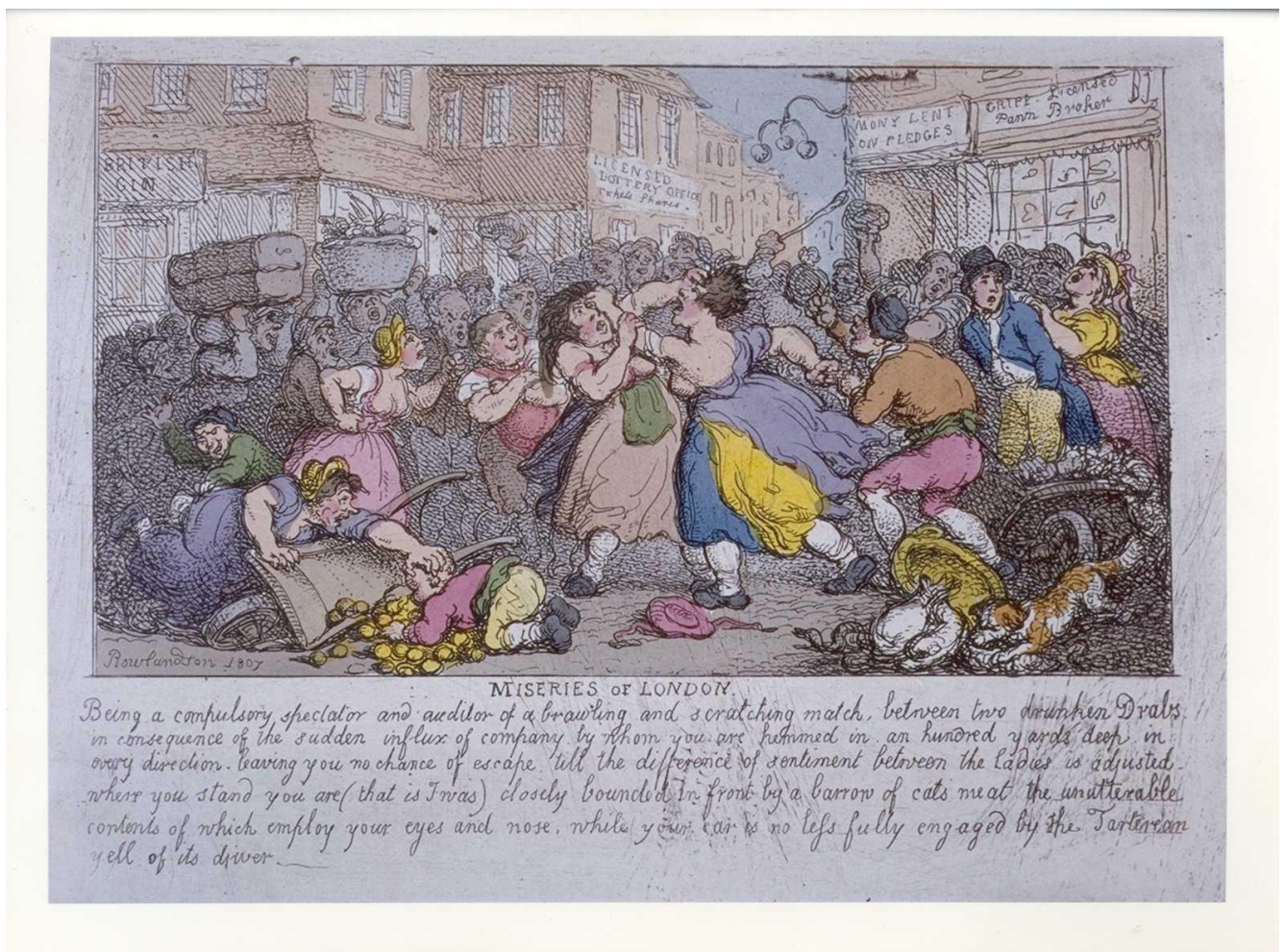


Fig. 6.2: Thomas Rowlandson, *Miseries of London*, 1807. BM Satires 10825. Courtesy of the British Museum, www.britishmuseum.org

⁵² LMA, MS 2649/1-2, Portsoken Wardmote Inquest Minutes, 1684-1798 returns for 1684 -5.

Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair was to some extent 'disorderly', but its representation in literature, substantially overstated the issue. Early modern women simply did not have to do very much in order to be labelled disorderly.⁵³

In 1684, the 'disorderly' women of Rosemary Lane provided the misogynist butt of the kind of humorous material, endlessly reproduced by the hacks of Grub Street through the early eighteenth century. A poem called the *Parliament of Women*, begins with 'Mother-Damnable' and a 'Jovial Crew' of women complaining about their 'strange' husbands not giving them 'any relief'. It all starts as the women gather together to discuss their problems:

To *Rosemary-Lane* they all was Sent, they thought that place most fit....
My Husband he is grown a Sot,
I can't tell what to do,
He nothing minds, but Pipe and Pot,
And can't give me my due;
When he's in Bed, he falls asleep,
Then I am very sad,
Therefore a Friend I'll keep,
He will make my heart full glad.

If they do prate, then we will glout,
Let them say what they will,
If they do Curse, then we will pout,
And say we are ill.
Then they will run and fetch some Sack,
Thinking to make us well,
'Tis something else that we do lack,
Which will make our bellies swell.⁵⁴

According to the poem, the women of Rosemary Lane were all insatiable and dominating. As Laura Gowing has reasoned, the 'political pornography' contained in satires such as *The Parliament of Women*, 'imagined a grotesque polity where the world

⁵³ Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 7-25.

⁵⁴ *The Parliament of Women Now sitting in Rosemary Lane* printed for A. Chamberlain, (1684) (BL) 1876.f.1 (27).

was ruled by women, and where women were ruled by desire'.⁵⁵ The women of Rosemary Lane served to epitomise this dystopia. Early modern men seemed terrified that women might gain the upper hand and overturn the patriarchal applecart rendering them impotent. In reaction the women of Rosemary Lane became symbolic of chaos and urban disorder.

In 1699, *The Protestant Mercury* printed an anecdote entitled '*The Great and Famous Scolding Match between Four Remarkable Scolding Women of Rosemary Lane and their like number of Basket Women of Golden Lane*' - 'A battle between working women who were well versed in the 'Tongue -Tallant Art'. This female contest of words, fought between street women in Rosemary Lane is described as a humorous battle between two lewd scolds, and reflects in full the misogyny of the period. The broadside records one protagonist, Bess Pierce, saying:

Faith better to have a Butt of Beer at my back and the Tapster before me ready to Tap it, than to be had on a heap of Dung on Tower-hill, with a *Pocky Tom Turdman* playing on my Dulcimer.⁵⁶

Although crudely amusing, this passage also reminds us that men, who wrote most of the pamphlets and ballads of the period, used their word craft to highlight their fears and worries regarding 'working' street women as immoral and loud mouthed.

This humour was lent some credibility by the larger than average number of females who lived and worked in this area of London. But, the vast majority of women were law-abiding, decent people, whereas the literature and humour sought to single out a specific

⁵⁵ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp. 83-85.

⁵⁶ 'The Great and Famous Scolding Match between Four Remarkable Scolding Women of Rosemary Lane and their like number of Basket Women of Golden Lane', *The Protestant Mercury*, 1699, held at the British Library, BL, 816.m.19, (63).

stereotype. Nonetheless, the printed texts confirm Rosemary Lane as a venue of lewdness, a place that decent women would not frequent.⁵⁷

Whatever way we look at it, the die was cast. The countless pamphlets and broadsheets made sure this street ended up with a reputation for feisty, disorderly women, for prostitutes and thieves. Even a hundred years on, in the work of Rowlandson, and his fellow caricaturists, it remained a venue for female disorder (see Fig. 6.2). Rowlandson's image of bare-breasted female pugilists simply reproduces once more a tired, but enduring stereotype. From Ned Ward to Francis Place and Thomas Rowlandson, Rosemary Lane was really a synonym for emasculation; an attack on self-sufficient women who by working in a public place, drinking in alehouses, running their own stalls or shops upset the patriarchal applecart - a world turned upside down. The response of patriarchy was a Reformation of Manners.

REFORMATION OF MANNERS

If prostitution continued to form a substantial part of the 'economy of makeshift', and if government efforts seem half-hearted and ineffective, there was one reform movement which did substantially impact on the lives of London women - at least for a time.⁵⁸ In addition to the historic links with the navy, this area east of the Tower had a history of radical Puritanism which in part explains why the first Society for the Reformation of Manners (hereafter SRM) was formed in Tower Hamlets in the early 1690s.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁷ Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 7-25.

⁵⁸ Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France*, pp. 69-127.

⁵⁹ Robert B. Shoemaker, 'Reforming the City' in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn, R.B. Shoemaker, (eds.) *Stilling The Grumbling Hive, The Response To Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750*, (Stroud, 1992), p. 106, pp. 108-11; T.C. Curtis & W.A. Speck, 'The societies for the reformation of manners; a case study in the theory and practice of moral reform', *Literature & History*, 1976, 3, pp. 45-64; See also M. Ingram, 'Reformation of manners in early modern England', in P. Griffiths, A. Fox, Adam, and S. Hindle,

prime task of the Societies was to suppress immoral behaviour, however their main focus in this area was on street walkers and the bawdy houses. Moreover, the growing number of arrests and prosecutions stemming from the SRM reflected the contemporary belief that 'loose' women endangered a broader social order.⁶⁰ If Ned Ward found humour in the world of Rosemary Lane, the men of the Societies found nothing but corruption.

The SRM were created by a group of Tower Hamlets inhabitants in order to suppress the numerous brothels in the area.⁶¹ A description of the perceived problem was provided by an anonymous writer in 1691 who claimed that 'the bawdy houses of Tower Hamlets were the 'Nurseries of the most horrid Vices, and sinks of the most filthy Debaucheries...'.⁶² The SRM campaign focused on the frequenters of bawdy houses and those thought guilty of '...lewdness and debauchery... drunkenness, swearing, cursing and profanation on the Lord's Day'.⁶³ Then again by publicizing this neighbourhood as a place for prostitution and disorderly houses helped to enhance its reputation. Arguably, one of their chief intentions was also to suppress women: women who they believed had too much freedom and who were causing disorder. This is evident in the numbers of women prosecuted by the SRM. At its peak in 1708, 3,299 people were charged with moral offences in the London area.⁶⁴ Robert Shoemaker's influential work on the Societies reveals that the offence that reformers prosecuted most frequently was that of

(eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, (Basingstoke, 1996); Tina Isaacs, 'The Anglican hierarchy and the reformation of manners, 1688-1738', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 33, No. 3, (July 1982), pp. 393-4; Faramerz Dabhoiwala, 'Sex and societies for moral reform, 1688-1800', *Journal of British Studies*, xlvii, (2007), pp. 290-319.

⁶⁰ Shoemaker, 'Reforming the City', pp. 104 -11; See also Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 7-25.

⁶¹ Curtis & Speck, 'The societies for the reformation of manners', pp. 45-64; Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 86-89.

⁶² Anon., *Antimoixeia: Or, the Honest and Joynt Design of the Tower Hamlets for the General Suppression of Bawdy Houses, as Encouraged by Publick Magistrates* (1691) s.ss. fol, cited in Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 167.

⁶³ Curtis & Speck, 'The societies for the reformation of manners', p. 46.

⁶⁴ Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, (Cambridge, 1999), p. 28; Shoemaker, 'Reforming the City', p. 105.

'lewd and disorderly practices', or in other words, prostitution. An average 1,330 women were charged each year between 1708 and 1724.⁶⁵

Although primarily an Anglican movement, by 1694 the SRM had also attracted a large dissenting membership, and thereafter strove to remain independent from the established church. Followers actively anticipated and promoted a widespread fear of immorality, and claimed that their main purpose was not just to revive a religious consciousness, but also to enforce secular statutes against swearing, public drunkenness, lewdness, blasphemy and profanation of the Sabbath. They were active from around 1690 until 1738 and during this time were responsible for an estimated 100,000 prosecutions for moral offences in the London area.⁶⁶

This large number of prosecutions reflected their methods. As they walked the streets of London, the Societies' members and informers carried with them blank warrants, and when they spotted someone committing a 'crime against God' they informed a constable who could then arrest the suspects and take them to the local justice of the peace.⁶⁷ Reforming constables were in turn members of the Association of Constables, who met every Tuesday at 5.00 p.m. at Hamlin's Coffeehouse, where each member had 'to furnish an account of his week's efforts for the cause'.⁶⁸

The prominent place of Rosemary Lane as a centre of decadence and depravity in so many pamphlets printed by the Society helped to reaffirm the district's reputation, and the Societies' focus on the area. Many pamphlets carried warnings against lewd, immoral women and the frequenters of bawdy houses, some with 'scare stories' and dire

⁶⁵ Shoemaker, 'Reforming the City', p. 104.

⁶⁶ Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 28.

⁶⁷ Isaacs, 'The Anglican hierarchy', pp. 393-394.

⁶⁸ Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 34.

warnings of the consequences of the ungodly actions reported. Rosemary Lane features prominently in SRM publications. It was particularly targeted in 1694 by the Societies when they printed their anonymous pamphlet advertising *A National Reformation of Manners*, and including 'A Bloody Slaughter House Discover'd in Rosemary Lane', with a 'Black-Roll' attached filled with the names of 'Notorious Offenders'. There followed a harrowing – and titillating - story of immorality, recounted by Anthony Miles, a reforming constable.⁶⁹

These semi-factual accounts were used to try and coerce the poor into morality. Miles records that in 1692 as he was walking his usual rounds in Rosemary Lane, the constable passed the house of Mistress Smith, who was known to entertain 'Whores and Thieves'. Hearing a commotion coming from Smith's house, 'with many *Oaths* and *Cursings*' and people 'thrusting one another down stairs', he stopped. Gaining entrance to the property he found 'three naked men and three naked women dancing and revelling'. Miles apprehended them and took them to the Watch house in Rosemary Lane. The next morning they were committed to Bridewell by Justice Underhill where they were whipped.⁷⁰

This pamphlet was reprinted many times by the Society. It named and shamed Rosemary Lane as a place full of lewdness and immorality; a disorderly neighbourhood where people lived in sin and degradation. Furthermore, because of its reputation, Rosemary Lane became the *bête noire* of the Society publicity machine; it became synonymous with immorality and all that was bad in London. Accompanying this story, was a so-called 'black list' that included the printed names of those (mainly women) who

⁶⁹ Societies for the Reformation of Manners, *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners*, (1694), Accessed at *Early English Books On-line*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> accessed 22 June 2010.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

had been charged for being blasphemers, common streetwalkers and frequenters of bawdy houses. How this list was then read is more difficult to determine. Daniel Defoe, in his *Reformation of Manners, A Satyr, Va Vobis Hypocrite* (1702) criticised the Society and their 'black list' for not treating all those guilty of immoral conduct in the same way:

The mercenary Scouts in every Street,
Bring all that have no Money to your Feet,
And if you lash a Strumpet of the Town,
She only smarts for want of Half a Crown:
Your Annual lists of criminals appear,
But no Sir Harry or Sir Charles here.⁷¹

Society supporter John Dunton, a London bookseller and printer, was also fervent in his exposé of London's prostitutes with his, *The Nightwalker: Or, Evening rambles in search After Lewd women, With the Conferences Held with Them', Etc. To be publish'd Monthly, 'Till a Discovery be made of all the chief Prostitutes in England, from the Pensionary Miss, down to the Common Strumpet'*.⁷² As we have noted, women who were accused of prostitution were usually charged with the accompanying crimes of theft, vagrancy and idleness and possibly assault. Shoemaker argues that one reason for the Societies' policy of targeting women was a concern to address the problems of poverty, crime and disorder: '...street prostitution being perceived to be both a symbol and a cause of these problems'.⁷³

The Society's misogynistic zeal to bring women to the courts is reflected in the number of charges brought in and around Rosemary Lane. Women were targeted here possibly

⁷¹ Daniel Defoe, *Reformation of Manners, A Satyr, Vae Vobis Hypocrite*, (1702).

⁷² John Dunton, *The Nightwalker: or, Evening rambles in search After Lewd women, With the Conferences Held with Them', Ect. To be publish'd Monthly, 'Till a Discovery be made of all the chief Prostitutes in England, from the Pensionary Miss, down to the Common Strumpet'*, October 1696 cited in Melissa Mowry, 'Dressing up and dressing down: prostitution, pornography and the seventeenth century textile industry', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.11, No. 3, (Autumn, 1999), pp. 78-103.

⁷³ Shoemaker, 'Reforming the City', p. 106.

because they lived a 'public' life. This zeal is further reflected in the numbers of cases that came before the City justices and from the minutes from court of Governors at Bridewell Hospital. The minutes reveal how women were followed and some were tempted into committing 'immoral' acts by the reforming constables. In 1697 Patience Hancock and Jane Pavier were charged 'for being drunk and enticing a stranger into the Queen's Head Tavern at Aldgate and debauching him, being caught in the act'.⁷⁴

Similarly Elizabeth Deakins of St Botolph Aldgate was also arrested by the reforming constables. She was accused of being a 'lewd, idle & disorderly woman taken in an indecent posture in a reputed house of bauderye about tenne a clock in the night'.⁷⁵

The reforming constables were extremely diligent at their jobs. Elizabeth Nicholls was arrested on the warrant of the more than assiduous constable Nath Hobson. He told the justice that she had been with him at a tavern at eleven a clock at night, 'being strangers she beginning a health to what he had in his breeches, kissing him severall times provoking him to lewdnesse, being a comon night walker'.⁷⁶

In 1695, Elizabeth Osborne and Anne Wayman were charged by Bodenham Rouse (Rewse) and Thomas Billington two prominent constables 'to be lewd idol & disorderly women being taken in the night in a publick house where they behaved themselves very rudely and with great impudence and immodesty'.⁷⁷ In 1696 Mary Smith and Susannah Stephens were arrested on the warrant of Sir Thomas Lane charged by Richard Hemmings and Nath Hobson 'for being lewd idle women taken in a coffee house supposed to be a baudyhouse where they offered to let them lye with them and Smith,

⁷⁴ Bridewell Hospital, Minutes of the Court of Governors, LL, ref: BBBRMG202010114, 12 February 1697.

⁷⁵ LMA, 'Court of Governors, Bridewell and Bethlem Minutes, 23 August 1695 - 2 May 1701, MS 3301, 1-17.

⁷⁶ Bridewell Minutes, LL, BBBRMG202020061, 1 May 1696.

⁷⁷ Bridewell Minutes, LL, BBBRMG202020026, 23 August 1695.

being taken in the Act of Adultery'.⁷⁸ On the 15 July 1714 Elizabeth Clayton was arrested, 'For being an idle disorderly bold woman lying about the streets and taken up at midnight in a dark alley with a man unknown & for want of sureties'.⁷⁹ This catalogue of arrests was more about keeping disorderly women under control, and once more it reflected early modern male beliefs that saw 'loose' women as a danger to society.⁸⁰

Rewse, Billington, Hemmings and Hobson were paid informers for the Societies, patrolling the streets in and around the City and in particular on Rosemary Lane. However, not everyone was in favour of the 'informers'. They received a hostile welcome from some the Middlesex Justices who did not like interference in their areas. They were also hated by ordinary city dwellers who were openly antagonistic to the 'Reformers' on the streets, calling them 'spies and informers'.⁸¹

This hostility was reflected in an incident on the 12 May 1702. John Cooper an SRM constable was attacked and subsequently killed when he tried to arrest some 'common women' during the annual May Fair. His attacker was sword wielding Thomas Cook, 'a Prize-Player, called the Butcher of Gloucester'. Cook was incensed when reforming constables arrested his 'wife' on suspicion of being a prostitute; he was then reported as shouting that 'he would have the blood of some of them before he left the fair'.⁸² Cook along with a gathering mob were then said to have 'fell upon the civil officers and their assistants, with their swords in their hands... while the constables were endeavouring to prevent the abominable disorders that were there committed'.⁸³ Cook was not alone in

⁷⁸ LMA, MS 3301, 1-17, Bridewell minutes, 20 Mar. 1695/6.

⁷⁹ LMA, Bridewell minutes 15th July 1714, MS 3301, pp. 1-17.

⁸⁰ Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 7-25.

⁸¹ Hunt, *Governing Morals*, pp. 49-50.

⁸² *OBP*, Thomas Cook, 7 July 1703, t17030707-2.

⁸³ *OBP*, Thomas Cook, 7 July 1703, t17030707-2.

his condemnation of the reforming constables. Along with Daniel Defoe, Ned Ward remarked that the reforming constables were:

...only Encouragers of what they intend to suppress, Protecting those People, for Bribes, which they should Punish; well knowing each Bawdy-House they break in is a weekly stipend out of their pockets.⁸⁴

In the same year Jonathan Swift also attacked the Society:

Religious Societies, though begun with excellent intention, [have]... become a trade to enrich little knavish informers of the meanest rank, such as common constables and broken shopkeepers.⁸⁵

To some observers the SRM had become part of the very disorder that was clearly evident on the streets and especially in Rosemary Lane. Although blasphemous persons and Sabbath breakers were also targeted, there is no doubt that the sermons given by members of the SRM show an almost misogynistic, fervent antagonism towards women. Richard Smallbroke in a sermon given on Wednesday 10 January 1727 exemplifies this when he congratulated the justices for their work:

It is no doubt a very pleasing Reflection at present and will be an unspeakable consolation in the last moments of life of all good and active Magistrates, that they have used their authority in suppressing several Lewd Houses and Infamous Nurseries of Debauchery or in contributing to clear the street of their Greatest Nuisances, the *Soliciting Night-Walking Strumpets*, those shameless scandals of their own sex and country...and that those abominable wretches are guilty of the Unnatural Vice have been frequently brought to condign justice is very much owing to the Laudable diligence of the Society for the Reformation of Manners...⁸⁶

Josiah Woodward, foremost apologist for and member of the Societies wrote several sermons and pamphlets on the 'Rise and Progress of The Religious Societies in 1712':

For they were Instrumental in putting down several markets on the *Lords-day*; And in Suppressing some Hundreds of Houses of ill-fame, bringing the Frequenters of them to due Shame and Punishment. And by the Means of this Society alone above 2,000 Persons have been legally Prosecuted and Convicted either as keepers of Houses of Bawdry and

⁸⁴ Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 53.

⁸⁵ Ibid., cited in Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 52.

⁸⁶ Guildhall Library (hereafter GL), Pam 687, *Reformation Necessary to Prevent Our Ruine*, Richard Smallbroke, (1728); See also Pam 5434, Joseph Denham 'A Sermon Preached to the Society for the Reformation of Manners at Salters hall, (London, June 29th 1729).

Disorder, or as Whores, Nightwalkers, and the like; and the Names of these Delinquents are set down in the Black-lists...⁸⁷

The SRM may have wanted to reduce the levels of public vice, however, this meant that they customarily targeted the poor. The rich who could afford to commit what the SRM saw as immoral practices usually did so behind closed doors in private.⁸⁸ The SRM were notably more concerned with public displays of fornication. Dr Barton's sermon preached at St. Mary-le-Bow on the 2nd Oct 1699 emphasises that the aim of the Society was to,

...suppress the Works of Darkness or at least to cause those that will practice'em to keep themselves within their own proper sphere and act'em in Private Corners. What they do there we must leave to the judgement of God....⁸⁹

Even towards the end of their active history, in 1730, the SRM were responsible for a remarkable number of prosecutions. In that year they successfully prosecuted 251 persons for lewd and disorderly practices, 30 people for keeping disorderly houses, and 424 people for 'exercising their trades and callings on the Sabbath'.⁹⁰ And many of these people were arrested in Rosemary Lane or the courts and alleys running off it. It seems clear that Rosemary Lane was seen by the SRM as a major site of immorality and disorder and their literature suggests that was the case.

Notwithstanding the work of the SRM, throughout our period the Middlesex Session Papers reflect a number of people arrested for keeping disorderly houses in this

⁸⁷ GL, Joseph Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London and their Endeavours for the Reformation of Manners*, 4th ed, (1712).

⁸⁸ Curtis & Speck, 'The societies for the reformation of manners', pp. 45-64.

⁸⁹ GL, PAM 678, *Dr Barton's Sermon preached at St. Mary-le-Bow*, October 2, 1699.

⁹⁰ S. J. Rogal, 'The selling of sex: Mandeville's modest defence of the stews', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 1976, 5, p. 142.

neighbourhood and across London.⁹¹ For example and as noted in chapter 5, Sir Samuel Gower was admonished for appearing to own several disorderly houses in and around Goodman's Fields. In 1750 The Turk's Head Bagnio, the Goodman's Fields Play house and the Taphouse Wells were presented for 'Houses being so notorious wicked & disorderly'.⁹² Jon Miller at Ye Sign of the George and William Reed was of The King's Head, Rosemary Lane, were prosecuted in 1731 for keeping a 'notorious Bawdy house [and the] entertaining of thieves and vagrants'.⁹³ In 1751 John Grainger, Distiller, James Hilton, Chair Maker, John Grims, Peruke Maker, were all arrested for keeping disorderly houses around Well Close Square and Ratcliffe Highway.⁹⁴ In 1762 James Braybrooke a thief-taker from Rosemary Lane was arrested and imprisoned for keeping a disorderly house.⁹⁵

At the same time and as noted above, this was not a popular movement among all the judiciary, as the societies declined many magistrates showed their disapproval by discharging street walkers back to the street. Penelope Corfield quotes Lord Chief Justice Holt, who when faced with a disturbance that broke out after the confinement of a street woman accused of being disorderly, blasted the court, 'What! Must not a Woman of the Town walk in the Town Streets? ... Why, a light Woman hath a right of Liberty as well as another to walk about the Streets'.⁹⁶ Moreover, as Corfield notes, 'streetwalking was not

⁹¹ Middlesex Sessions Papers, LL, show 142 presentations for the keeping of disorderly houses from 1680 (when they start) and 1765. This figure was found using "disorderly houses" as a search term.

⁹² Middlesex Sessions Papers, LL, LMSMPS504090049, 16 October 1750.

⁹³ Middlesex Sessions Papers, LL, LMSMS502740020, 26 April 1731.

⁹⁴ Middlesex Sessions Papers, LL, LMSMPS504080004, January 1751.

⁹⁵ Middlesex Sessions Papers, LL, LMSMPS505120080, 1 May – 1 July 1762 (Braybrooke has several different spellings.)

⁹⁶ Corfield, 'Walking the city streets', p. 5.

in itself illegal, although both men and woman committed a common law offence if “grossly indecent” and a statutory one if “disorderly and riotous”.⁹⁷

The SRM eventually declined, and were wound up in 1738. Prostitutes may no longer have been depicted with the misogynistic, religious and moral bigotry that was so characteristic of the SRM’s literature, but this did not prevent their continuing harassment by the authorities, nor did it remove the neighbourhood’s reputation as a disorderly one. At the same time, the many women who worked as part-time prostitutes were and remained members of the community they lived and worked in, and were largely accepted as such. As Tony Henderson argues:

prostitutes were not geographically separated by the mass of the population....they were regular patrons of those essential centres of plebeian leisure and entertainment, the gin-shops and the public house.⁹⁸

However, having begun as a direct judicial assault on disorderly women, the relationship between the local Societies and the women of the neighbourhood gradually became more complex. As the Society fell into decline from the 1730s, many of the men who had acted as reforming constables, became ‘thief-takers’, earning a living by catching forgers, thieves and robbers and claiming the bounties offered by the authorities.⁹⁹ In the process, they drew the disorderly women of Rosemary Lane into an increasingly complex system of corrupt justice that had many of the characteristics of gangland power relations. The Societies’ informers rapidly became untrustworthy bounty

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 5, n 9.

⁹⁸ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 45, p. 90.

⁹⁹ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 232-3, pp. 226-56; Wales, ‘Thief-takers and their clients in later Stuart London’, pp. 67-84; Dabhoiwala, ‘Sex and Societies’, p. 306.

hunters in the pay of the Government and had become themselves a major part of an inherent disorder.

PROSTITUTION AND CRIME

Prostitution was not a crime in itself.¹⁰⁰ The majority of prostitutes tried at the Old Bailey were usually charged with robbery or violent robbery and assault. Francis Place may have slightly exaggerated the harshness of the women in this area at the end of the century, but the myriad of dark alleyways and passages that characterised the district were a haven for rogues, thieves and women such as Sarah Birk, prostitute and robber who was intent on making money by whatever means necessary. Birk appeared at the Old Bailey on 28 April 1742 charged with theft with violence, following an attack on Robert Davis, a local man, as he travelled home from Hackney one evening. Davis told the court that he had been accosted by two women who pushed him into a house in Well Street, just by the sugar-bakers at the end of Rosemary Lane. Birk and an unnamed accomplice stripped Robert Davis of his clothing and robbed him, before dragging him into a bawdy house. Davis giving evidence to the court pointed at Birk:

I have belong'd to the Tower these 30 years, and she used me barbarously and threatened my Life, - there she is, and she has used her Brags that she robb'd me of every Thing, and has made me scandalous all over the Tower.

Sarah Birk newly released from the London Bridewell, bragged that she had 'stripp'd him [Davis] of his watch and all his Clothes, and left him naked, claiming he was not a gentleman but *'an old foolish Son of a Bitch....'* Davis brought the case to court in an attempt to rescue his offended masculinity. Sarah Birk earned her money by dishonest and violent means and she had little respect for her customers/victims or the criminal

¹⁰⁰ Corfield, 'Walking the city streets', p. 5, n 9.

justice system. Despite the evidence against Birk she was acquitted on this charge; though she was found guilty on a further charge of stealing a peruke later in the same sessions and was sentenced to transportation.¹⁰¹

William Fife had a similar encounter with the disorderly women of Rosemary Lane as he was walking over Tower-Hill on a dark January evening. At around 6 o'clock, he was stopped by Katherine Ely who 'desir'd him to make her a drink [as] it was very cold'. Fife declared in court that he was 'not acquainted with such, sort of persons', but complied with her request and was led by Ely to a house in Church Lane by Rag-Fair, where they drank some strong drink and Geneva.¹⁰² Ely was soon joined by her accomplices, Elizabeth White and Anne Bartley, who then proceeded to ask Fife for money. When Fife refused and tried to leave he was prevented from doing so by White, who threatened him with a knife and 'swore that she would cut his throat if he made any resistance'. She then cut his silver buckles from his shoes before pushing him out the door. All three women were indicted to appear in court where they vehemently denied the charges of violent theft and robbery. The courts tended to treat the prosecutors in cases such as these as victims of their own making, but on this occasion they found all three women guilty of the felony sentencing them to be branded and declaring Ely to be '*a most impudent Prostitute*'.¹⁰³

On a late afternoon in September 1736, John Guy, a black sailor who had just been paid off from his ship, *The Newcastle*, was walking along Rosemary Lane when he met two women, Sarah Jones and Mary Smith. He proceeded to enquire of them about local

¹⁰¹ *OBP*, Sarah Birk, 28 April 1742, 17+53, t17420428-15.

¹⁰² *OBP*, Sarah Birk, 28 April 1742, 17+53, t17420428-15.

¹⁰³ *OBP*, Katherine Ely, Elizabeth White, Anne Bartley, 13 January 1716, t17160113-29; Beattie, 'The criminality of women', p. 95.

lodgings and they took him to the house of Edward Whitcher. Guy swore to the court that after eating some salmon and drinking some punch and brandy, Mary Smith made advances on him. 'She pulled up her Coats, and bid me look at it – and told me it was as black as my Face...'. In his evidence Guy said he refused Smith's offer and went to bed and slept till the morning when he found that his breeches were missing, along with 8 guineas and 4 shillings. Subsequently, Guy took the women before Justice Richard Farmer and had them charged with robbery. When they appeared at the Old Bailey, Smith and Jones denied stealing the money saying that 'the Black had gave it to them'. Lack of evidence and most likely lack of sympathy for the duped John Guy meant that Smith and Jones were subsequently acquitted.¹⁰⁴

The women above were just a small sample of those who were endeavouring to make a living from robbery and prostitution in this neighbourhood. They were drawn to Rosemary Lane because of its reputation and because of a ready market of sorts with the navy and military men who thronged the streets. Moreover, following in the reforming footsteps of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners it was surely not a coincidence that the first charitable organisation to 'save penitent prostitutes' the Magdalen Hospital for repentant prostitutes, opened in 1759 in the old London Infirmary Building, just yards away from Rosemary Lane.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, prostitutes took their chances with the courts because they believed they would more than likely be treated leniently. Poor policing and somewhat lenient sentencing meted out by the courts was not unusual, as Mary Clayton has established in

¹⁰⁴ *OBP*, Sarah Jones, Mary Smith, 8 Sep 1736, t17360908-39.

¹⁰⁵ Sarah Lloyd, 'Sex and gender: 'pleasure's golden bait': prostitution, poverty and the Magdalen Hospital in eighteenth-century London, *History Workshop Journal*, , 1996, (41), pp. 50-70, but particularly pp. 52-6; Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 178; Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680-1780*, (Guildford, 1998), pp. 39-74.

relation to the experience of prostitute and thief Charlotte Walker. She was arrested and charged on thirty separate occasions. However, from those thirty charges she appeared at Old Bailey just twelve times, being acquitted on eleven.¹⁰⁶ As we have seen fear of prosecution or fear of the reformation societies did not stop local prostitutes in Rosemary Lane continuing to ply their trade.

RAG FAIR WOMEN AND THE THIEF-TAKERS

Rosemary Lane could boast any number of its own Charlotte Walkers, who appeared repeatedly on charges of theft and receiving at the Old Bailey. But local conditions added a unique twist to this story. Local women had a distinctive relationship with the neighbourhood thief-takers, that Walker did not have. One such character was Margaret Poland alias Eaton, alias Tweed, alias Mayfield, alias Fosset otherwise known as 'Irish Peg'. Peg was just one of many women who worked buying and selling clothes on Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair. She lived just off Rosemary Lane at the Windsor Castle alehouse in Well Street with landlord John Kisby.¹⁰⁷ Her first appearance at the Old Bailey was in 1730 when she was accused of assaulting and robbing John Cooper of his watch as he was walking through the Minories. Cooper told the court that Peg had threatened him that 'if he did not deliver his Money...he was a dead Man'. Peg was subsequently charged with violent robbery when she tried to sell Cooper's watch for 20 shillings at Plummers' pawn shop in Rosemary Lane.¹⁰⁸ Peg was found guilty and

¹⁰⁶ Clayton, 'The lives and crimes of Charlotte Walker', pp. 3-19.

3. For a further discussion on court decisions see Peter King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820*, (Oxford, 2000).

¹⁰⁷ *OBP*, Ordinary's Account OA17371005 (hereafter OA) Robert Barrow, 5 October 1737.

¹⁰⁸ *OBP*, Margaret Eaton, (alias Irish Peg), 14 October 1730, t17301014-76.

sentenced to seven years transportation, but was soon back on the Lane. We will return to her story below.

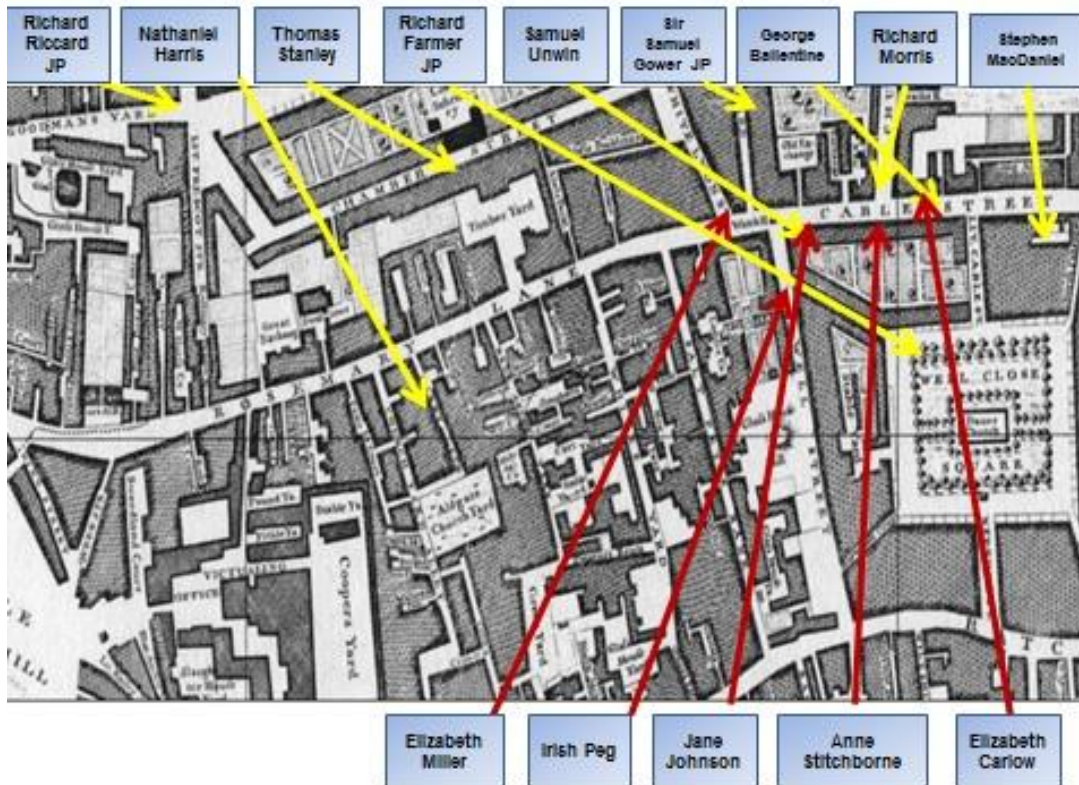


Fig. 6.3: Map showing location of criminal women, thief-takers and local JP's.
John Rocque's map of London and Westminster. © (Motco Enterprises Limited, ref: www.motco.com).

For many of London's poorer residents committing petty crime in order to survive was a simple necessity. Certainly, the women of Rag Fair had few qualms regarding the buying and selling of stolen goods or using prostitution as a means to survival. Moreover, as Heather Shore argues, 'crime may not only have been an occasional resource, but a necessary adjunct to their makeshift economy'.¹⁰⁹ But if the women of the Fair participated in an economy of theft and receiving, the thief-takers were at the very

¹⁰⁹ Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks', p. 147.

centre of a network of criminality. On the pretence of aiding victims and the authorities they were in fact using crime to make money for themselves. Moreover, while some of the women thieves and receivers on Rosemary Lane were under their protection, some got in their way such as rape victim Sarah Main, discussed in Chapter Five.¹¹⁰

Choosing your 'friends' on this street could mean the difference between life and death. As we heard in the previous chapter, there is some evidence that a feud or gang war was going on between the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane and Elizabeth Carlow and her compatriots. Moreover, Ruth Paley has revealed a string of related cases 'involving charges of assault, keeping disorderly houses...perjury and conspiracy'.¹¹¹ The relationship between the women of Rosemary Lane and the thief-takers was a complex and fraught one, awkwardly balanced between collusion, competition and survival. We will never know the full extent of this association; though we do know it involved running of gangs of thieves, and keeping of rival brothels and disorderly drinking houses around Rag Fair.¹¹² Unfortunately, we can only glimpse this rivalry through the lens of court records and newspapers, but nevertheless that sideways glance reveals a lot about the local street women and the nature of Rag Fair.

Despite its urban character people knew each other well in this neighbourhood. The shopkeepers knew many of the thieves and the thieves knew the thief-takers - their lives overlapped continually.¹¹³ Just like the proverbial bad penny, Irish Peg returned to Rosemary Lane in 1737 living in Well Street (see Fig. 6.3).¹¹⁴ Her next appearance in court confirms her relationship with the thief-takers. This time she was accused of

¹¹⁰ *OBP*, George Haggis, Richard Keeble, Thomas Gibbons, 21 February 1739, t17390221-31.

¹¹¹ Paley, 'Thief-takers in London', p. 313, n39, pp. 313-315.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 305 - 306, n11.

¹¹³ Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks', p. 145; Griffiths, 'Overlapping circles', pp. 115-6.

¹¹⁴ *OBP*, Robert Barrow, 5 October 1737, OA17371005.

feloniously receiving a 'flowery mantua silk gown', stolen from Jane Draper's shop on Rosemary Lane. Draper giving evidence to the court said:

On the 29th of May I had six Gowns stole out of my Shop ... I went down Rosemary-Lane, to describe them to the Shop-keepers, and there I saw the Prisoner delivering the Gown out of her Apron to another Person, in a Hugger Mugger Manner. I charg'd the Prisoner with having got my Goods; D - mn your Eyes (said she) did you see any with me? I told her yes, and went for an Officer; when I return'd, she was gone; but I found her in Harris, the Thief-taker's House, who is her Bail. She was eating with Harris's Wife...I took hold of her, and tho' she beat me and bit me, I got her into an Alehouse...

This story of professional and repeated thievery becomes more complex in light of the role that notorious thief taker, Nathaniel Harris, then took in Peg's affairs. In this instance, when she was apparently guilty of a crime that could have easily resulted in a death sentence, Harris paid her bail and spoke for her in court. He was her protector.

James Warrener clerk to local JPs Richard Farmer, William Withers and Sir Samuel Gower is reported to have told the courts that 'the thief-takers would never let him alone till she [Peg] was bail'd'.¹¹⁵ The relationship between Nathaniel Harris and Irish Peg was a fragment of a larger story. In December 1740 Peg was indicted to appear at the Old Bailey accused of stealing three pairs of leather breeches, value 7 shillings, the goods of John Evans. Once more she was acquitted. Despite her acquittal on that occasion, in the Ordinary of Newgate's accounts three differing convicted felons describe her as someone who kept company with thieves and as a 'lock': someone who bought and sold stolen goods.¹¹⁶ Irish Peg appears in court records on several occasions,

¹¹⁵ For further information on Gower's reputation as a JP see Paley, p. 314; Norma Landau, '*Law, crime and English society*', (1986), p. 53; *OBP*, John Richardson, 6th July 1737, t17370706-8; Margaret Poland, alias Margaret Mayfield, alias Margaret Tweed, alias Margaret Fosset, alias Margaret Eaton, alias 'Irish Peg', 28 June 1738, (t17380628-14); *OBP*, Margaret Poland (alias Irish Peg), 4 December 1740, (t17401204-51); *OBP, OA*, (OA17371005), Joseph Isaacs (McCoy), 17 February 1744; *OBP*, OA17440217, John Burton, 17 February 1744; *OBP*, 7 September 1737, John Cotton, (t17370907-29).

¹¹⁶ *OBP*, Joseph Isaacs (McCoy), 17 February 1744, OA17440217; *OBP*, John Burton, 17 February 1744 OA17440217.

including various appearances at the Middlesex sessions.¹¹⁷ However, Peg was well known around this street and it is more than likely that she was brought before the local justice on other occasions of which we are unaware. Peg was indicted to appear at the Old Bailey on at least four occasions. Nonetheless, despite her reputation, and possible culpability, she was found guilty by the courts in only one instance; this was possibly in part because of her friendships with the thief-takers and other thieves on Rosemary Lane.

Elizabeth Carlow's close associate, Elizabeth Miller, alias Van Hop, alias Betty Barefoot also dealt in old clothes at Rag Fair.¹¹⁸ A former companion of Nathaniel Harris, Miller changed her alliance from Harris and the thief-takers to Elizabeth Carlow's faction and paid the price for it. Miller lived for some time in Norman's court, Rag Fair where she also enjoyed a reputation as someone who would buy stolen goods with no questions asked. Richard Hooper giving evidence against his fellow thieves John Sharpless and William Disney noted that both Barefoot (Miller) and Jane Johnson of Shorter Street, Well Close Square were always willing to buy stolen goods.¹¹⁹ Miller, originally from Ireland, achieved notoriety for herself and for Rag Fair when the *Daily Advertiser* reported:

...Elizabeth Miller, otherwise Barefoot the most noted Dealer in Rag Fair, or perhaps in England, for receiving and buying stolen goods (knowing them to be stolen) ...was committed to New Prison....she has been guilty of numberless facts of this Kind, and has been several times taken, in order to be tried but has been as often rescued as taken, having a desperate Gang belonging to her in and about Rag Fair. ¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ LMA, Middlesex Sessions Instruction Book, MJ/SB/J/002, 1736-1744, Margaret Poland (Irish Peg) Indicted to appear on theft charge, p. 22, p.78, 81.

¹¹⁸ *OBP*, John Fosset, alias Powell, William Sylvester, 11 October 1738, t17381011-4.

¹¹⁹ *OBP*, John Sharpless, William Disney, 16 April 1740, t17400416-25.

¹²⁰ *Daily Advertiser*, 12 November 1743.

Three weeks later Miller appeared in court, this time accused of stealing a gold and diamond watch belonging to William Pitt Esq. Piecing together information from the session papers it seems likely that Miller was set up on this occasion by the thief-takers. Miller had been accused of stealing the watch in question from Isaac Duhammel's shop in the Strand two years previously. The watch left at Duhammel's shop for mending disappeared along with Miller. She was eventually questioned and charged with stealing the watch but was discharged when the prosecutor failed to turn up at court. Consequently, shop-keeper, Duhammel, offered thief-taker Nathaniel Harris twenty guineas to arrest Miller again. However, the transcripts suggest that Harris was having a relationship with Miller at the time and therefore she remained free.

Two years on, Harris was no longer Miller's protector and Miller's new husband John, a former Turnkey of New Prison, had been transported. Subsequently, the thief-takers turned against Miller and, in order to claim a reward, thief-taker John Berry arrested Miller on the outstanding theft charge. He exclaimed to the Old Bailey courtroom that 'she [Miller] had so many thieves about her, that if we went into Rag Fair to take her we should be knocked on the head'. Elizabeth Carlow was also in court on that day in December 1743 providing a 'good character' for her neighbour Miller, whom she described as 'a Child's-Coat Maker' and that she had 'never heard of any Dishonesty by her in my life'.¹²¹

Elizabeth Miller was acquitted on the charge of shoplifting, which carried the death penalty, but was found guilty of the lesser charge of simple theft. She was sentenced at

¹²¹ *OBP*, Elizabeth Miller, otherwise Barefoot, 7 December 1743, t17431207-24.

the Old Bailey to 7 years transportation by Richard Riccards JP (Fig.6.3) of Goodman's yard.¹²²

Jane Johnson of Shorter Street, Well Close Square associate of Carlow and Miller was another member of this loose female alliance. In 1740, Johnson was accused in court of buying stolen handkerchiefs from small time thieves, John Sharpless and William Disney, for half a crown. The handkerchiefs had been stolen from Sarah Stumper who kept a small shop in Leman Street, Goodman's fields. Johnson was taken into custody but when the trial reached court the jury heard that she had escaped from custody with the help of her friends.¹²³

Johnson turned up again in a burglary case in 1741 involving thief John Lupton. The court heard that Johnson had purchased a stolen silver-handled cup and a silver spoon for four pounds from Lupton and his friends. However, although cited in court as the buyer of the stolen goods, Johnson was not charged with the crime.¹²⁴ Johnson kept an alehouse/disorderly lodging house next door to thief-taker Samuel Unwin in Shorter Street, Well Close Square. It seems clear from the small amount of evidence contained in the trial transcripts that there was a feud between Johnson, and thief-taker Unwin. In 1743 Jane Johnson was again indicted this time for 'feloniously receiving' 26 pounds of stolen chocolate. She was a second time indicted for 'feloniously receiving' a selection of brass ware and steel buckles from thieves John Read and David Shields. The 'evidence' (Shields) gave information that he had sold Johnson the goods, telling the courtroom, 'she keeps a very bad House - there none resort to the House but a parcel of Boys who go out a robbing and picking of Pockets...there are two Rooms on a Floor, 2or 3 Beds in a

¹²²*OBP*, Elizabeth Miller, otherwise Barefoot, 7 December 1743, t17431207-24.

¹²³ *OBP*, John Sharpless, William Disney, 16 April 1740, t17400416-25.

¹²⁴ *OBP*, John Lupton, 14 May 1741, t17410514-11.

Room, and 3 or 4 of these Boys lie in a Bed'.¹²⁵ In her defence Johnson informed the court that thief-taker Samuel Unwin had persuaded Shields to give evidence against her in order that he could get her house, 'because it was a Corner- House, and it has good trade'.¹²⁶ Miraculously, Johnson was acquitted on both counts. In all Jane Johnson was cited in at least a dozen cases heard at the Old Bailey. On three occasions she appeared in court as a defendant accused of feloniously stealing or receiving stolen goods. She was acquitted on all three occasions. It seems bizarre that a group of tough men such as the thief-takers and their accomplices would feel threatened by a group of women but they were. This in itself is an indication of the influence that these women held on this street.

Finally, in addition to Johnson and Miller, there was also Ann Stitchborne. Stitchborne was a fellow fence and another close associate of Elizabeth Carlow. She also kept a disorderly lodging house used by local thieves and again here they could freely sell their stolen goods with no questions asked. Stitchborne was at the centre of a powerful collection of women.¹²⁷

Anne Stitchborne lived at the end of Rag Fair (see Fig. 6.3) just past the watch-house on the south side of Cable Street and just a few houses away from Johnson, Stephen MacDaniel and Samuel Unwin who lived on the corner of Shorter Street.¹²⁸ Clearly, Stitchborne was making a good living from her criminal activities. The house rented by her husband Charles had a rental value of £10 per annum, indicating that it was a

¹²⁵ *OBP*, John Read, 13 April 1743, t17430413-14.

¹²⁶ *OBP*, John Read, 13 April 1743, t17430413-14; *OBP*, Jane Johnson, 19 May 1743, t17430519-18.

¹²⁷ *OBP*, John Young, Jane Price, Mary Hughs, 3 July 1751, t17510703-7; *OBP*, John Studder, William Newman, 15 July 1747, t17470715-4.

¹²⁸ (Charles Stitchbourne), LMA, Land Tax Tower Division, St George in the East, MS6016/16-28, 1751; (Samuel Unwin), LMA, Land Tax Tower Division, Royalty of Well Close Square, MS6004, 1-56A, 1745. At various times Unwin kept the Ship Tavern, Well Close Square and for a period in 1749 The Magpye Tavern, Tower Hill. He returned to Well Street Square in 1750 to keep the Dolphin alehouse; *OBP*, John Lupton, 14 May 1741, t17410514-11; *OBP*, John Read, 13 April 1743, t17430413-14; *OBP*, Jane Johnson, 19 May 1743, t17430519-18.

sizeable house for this area. In the same year thief-takers Nathaniel Harris and Stephen MacDaniel were paying less than half that amount for houses just yards away in Derby Street and Back Lane South (an alley between Cable Street and Well Close square).

Moreover, Anne Stitchborne was also in charge of the money in this family business.

When questioned in court regarding the whereabouts of her lodger, thief John Studder, she replied 'this was of a Saturday Night, for my Husband came to me and wanted Money of me'.¹²⁹ In common with most of these women, while Stitchborne had a husband, she was always referred to as the dominant partner. These women did not just exist in the margins, they were living life to the full, albeit on the wrong side of the Law.

Stitchborne's disorderly reputation and that of Elizabeth Carlow were further confirmed by the *General Evening Post* in June 1751. 'Anne Stitchborne and Elizabeth Carlow of Cable Street, Rag Fair, were...

charged on the Oath of the above said George Hall...for buying and receiving divers Quantities of goods feloniously obtained. These women are notorious Criminals and have for many years followed this ubiquitous trade. They keep notorious Brothels for the Receipt of the most desperate Housebreakers and Robbers, and have for many years escaped Justice with impunity.¹³⁰

However, this case was eventually discharged without going to trial, and it is likely that it was a clumsy attempt to remove Stitchborne and Carlow from the street. The evidence (informer) in the case was George Hall, a known thief most likely in the employ of the thief-takers at this time.¹³¹ He was later found guilty of a burglary on the evidence of thief-takers Charles Remington (Long Charles) and James Brebrook (Braybrook), and

¹²⁹ *OBP*, John Studder, William Newman, 15 July 1747, t17470715-4.

¹³⁰ *General Evening Post*, Thursday, 20 June 1751 ; *OBP*, 26 October 1752, Ann Stitchbourne, Titchborne,(various spellings), t17521026-50; *OBP*, John Young, Jane Price, Mary Hughs, 3 July 1751, t17510703-7. For an informed comment on the attitude of London's press towards local criminals see Shore, 'The reckoning', p. 412; For George Hall see *OBP*, George Hall, George Basset, 8 April 1752, t17520408-43; *OBP*, George Hall, Marmaduke Watkins, Joseph Huney, 27 February 1751, t17510227-4; *OBP*, William Hatton, 23 May 1751; *OBP*, Russel Parnell, 4 December 1751, t17510523-20.

¹³¹ See *OBP*, William Hatton, otherwise Forrister, 23 May 1751, t17510523-20.

hanged in April 1752.¹³² Nevertheless, the *General Evening Post's* description of Stitchborne was a fair one. In July 1751 she was referred to in court when John Young was found guilty of burglary. Joseph Mey, prosecutor, told the court that the 'boy', Young, lived at an 'ill' house in Cable Street belonging to Stitchborne.¹³³

The thief-takers however, were determined to break up this group of women. In 1752, two more of Stitchborne's guests, Randolph Branch and William Descent, were charged with 'violently stealing' a silver watch and money from Brewer's clerk Joseph Brown, leaving him dying on the street. Branch and Descent were arrested at Stitchborne's house by Steven MacDaniel, Nathaniel Harris and Thomas Stanley. Descent told how,

...they had applied to Mrs. Tytchburn, [Stitchborne] ... to know if she would take any Thing if they got it; and she said, she would take whatever they got. So as soon as they had done the bloody Deed, they carried the Watch to her, which she bought of them, and they divided the Money between them.¹³⁴

As Peter King has argued 'individuals and communities were highly selective in their approach to the law and its institutions'.¹³⁵ Moreover, the thief-takers clearly had their own way of implementing the law, which is summed up in Branch's defence,

I came into Mrs. Stitchbourne's house in the evening, there was Bett Thomas...I went to bed with her, and remained there till seven the next morning; then came in Nat Harris, and said, 'Your servant'; after that came in Thomas Stanley and Macdonald [MacDaniel], and laid hold on me. Macdonald pulled out a pistol and said, D - n you, if you don't confess I'll blow your brains out. Then they took me to a spunging house¹³⁶ and got me very much in liquor, so that I don't know what I said.'¹³⁷

¹³² *OBP*, George Hall, George Bassett, 8 April 1752, t1752040853.

¹³³ *OBP*, John Young, Jane Price, Mary Hughs, 3 July 1751, t17510703-7.

¹³⁴ *OBP*, Randolph Branch, William Descent, (OA17520922) 22 September 1752.

¹³⁵ Peter King, 'Decision-makers and decision-making in the English criminal law, 1750-1800', *The Historical Journal*, 27, (1984), pp. 33-34.

¹³⁶ 'A victualling house where persons arrested for debt are kept for twenty-four hours, before lodging them in prison. The houses so used are generally kept by a bailiff, and the person lodged is spunged of all his money before he leaves', taken from E. Cobham Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, (1898).

¹³⁷ *OBP*, Randolph Branch, William Descent, (OA17520922) 22 September 1752.

Branch and Descent were found guilty of theft and murder and were sentenced to be hanged at Tyburn.¹³⁸ The story, however, does not end there. Stitchborne was also arrested and held by Stephen MacDaniel at his house, where he stripped and searched her before being taking her to Justice Boulton Mainwaring who was also the justice involved in the John Young trial.

Stitchborne was clearly guilty of this and much more, but she was not arrested because she had bought the stolen watch or because she ran a house full of stolen goods and thieves. She was arrested because the thief-takers wanted her out of the way. What is more, the majority of the thief-takers were seasoned criminals including MacDaniel, Ralph Mitchell, Richard Morris and Thomas Stanley. They rarely arrested thieves and receivers out of some moral obligation, they did it for the money. This was a bogus crime with Branch and Descent set up so that the thief-takers could claim the reward and remove Stitchborne at the same time.¹³⁹ They had already removed Miller. By removing Stitchborne, they would be eliminating a major rival and an associate of Elizabeth Carlow.¹⁴⁰ The thief-takers clearly had some sort of protection racket involving disorderly houses and sponging houses around Goodman's Fields.¹⁴¹ This included the alehouses run by Thomas Stanley, Richard Morris and George Ballentine. Johnson, Stitchborne and Carlow were to all intents and purposes taking money that the thief-takers wanted for themselves. They had already failed in one attempt to have Carlow and Stitchborne charged with receiving, as noted above. On the other hand as we saw in the previous chapter, bogus crimes were a common way for the thief-takers to get rid of their enemies and make some money from the reward system. By the mid-

¹³⁸ *OBP*, Randolph Branch, William Descent, 14 September 1752, t17520914-70.

¹³⁹ *Reads Weekly Journal (or British Gazetteer)* Saturday, April 17, 1756.

¹⁴⁰ *OBP*, Anne Stitchbourne, 26 October 1752, t17521026-50.

¹⁴¹ Paley, 'Thief-takers', p. 330.

century the thief-takers frequently used their authority in the community to 'protect some and exploit others'.¹⁴²

On the 26 October 1752, Anne Stitchborne was found guilty of being an accessory and sentenced to fourteen years transportation.¹⁴³ Despite legislation passed in 1691 targeting receivers, they could only be charged with being an accessory.¹⁴⁴ In the early eighteenth century receiving stolen property, was as Heather Shore has noted, not considered to be a felony. The thief had to be convicted of the felony before the receiver could be charged.¹⁴⁵ It was not until 1706 that a 'receiver' could be charged without the conviction of the thief; however, the charge was still classed as a misdemeanour.¹⁴⁶ New legislation in 1718 ensured that a conviction for receiving, or being an accessory to a felony could carry a conviction of transportation for up to fourteen years.¹⁴⁷

It was not a coincidence that the London thief-takers Stephen MacDaniel, Nathaniel Harris, Samuel Unwin and George Ballentine among others chose to live in Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair around the mid-eighteenth century. If Rag Fair attracted 'disorderly' prostitutes, thieves and pickpockets - its reputation ensured that it also attracted the thief-takers who fed on that disorder. With their disorderly alehouses, sponging houses and brothels they were building their own criminal domain.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 331.

¹⁴³ *OBP*, Anne Stitchbourne, 26 October 1752, t17521026-50.

¹⁴⁴ 3 & 4 Wm and Mary, c. 9 (1691) cited in Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, on pp. 250-251; Robert Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in Rural Middlesex*, (Cambridge, 1991) p. 133; Heather Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks and the survival strategies of the poor in early eighteenth century London', in King, Steven, and Tomkins, Alannah, (eds.), *The Poor In England, 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, (New York, Manchester, 2003), pp. 153-4.

¹⁴⁵ Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks', pp. 153- 154.

¹⁴⁶ 1 Anne, stat. 2, c.9 (1702), s.2: 5 Anne, c. 31(1706), ss.5-6 cited in Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 250-251.

¹⁴⁷ Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 250-251; Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks', pp. 153-154.

The final member of this assembly of eighteenth century female ‘entrepreneurs’ was Elizabeth Carlow, the pivotal figure in this story, who also kept a disreputable lodging house with a rental value of £8 per year directly across Cable Street from Stitchborne. Carlow lived next door to thief-taker George Ballentine and just yards from Richard Morris, former Black Boy Alley Gang member who ran the Punch Bowl alehouse on Church Lane. In the midst of her thief-taking neighbours the evidence suggests that Carlow was in fact successfully running a small criminal empire of her own.¹⁴⁸ She ran brothels, other disorderly lodging houses and she was a major fence, buying stolen goods from anyone who would sell them. Carlow was also implicated in two robberies committed against lodgers at her house on Cable Street. On both occasions she was acquitted. In 1750, as noted above, Carlow was prosecuted for running a disorderly house. This prosecution was most likely at the instigation of the thief-takers, although again it is hard to demonstrate conclusively.¹⁴⁹

The tit for tat accusations and charges brought by both groups provide us with a strong indication of the growing animosity between the thief-takers and the women dealers. Alongside her criminal exploits Carlow dealt in Flanders lace and old clothes at Rag Fair. John McMullan argues that receivers were a ‘patron –sponsor’ figure ‘overseeing and directing various forms of crime’. And as Heather Shore comments receivers usually occupied essential community trades; ‘the pawnbrokers, the old clothes sellers,

¹⁴⁸ LMA, Land Tax Tower Division, St George in the East, MS 6016/28, 1751; LMA, MR/LV6/79 1750; (George Ballentine various spellings), LMA, Land Tax Tower Division, St George in the East, MS 6016/16-28, 1751; *OBP*, Mary Fletcher, 17 October 1750, t17501017-27.

¹⁴⁹ LL, City of London Session Papers, Justices working documents, Elizabeth Carlow and George Carlow, LL ref: LMSMPS504070084, December 1750; Samuel Unwin thief-taker was prosecuted May 1749 for keeping a disorderly house, the Magpye tavern, Tower Hill, LL, LMSLPS150600014, May 1749; Paley, *Thief-takers in London*, p. 313 n39, pp. 313-15.

publicans and lodging house keepers'.¹⁵⁰ This image holds true for the women who were accused of being receivers on Rosemary Lane. In addition, Carlow also had her own gang of thieves of all ages that brought her stolen goods to sell. As thief-taker John Berry reported to the Old Bailey courtroom, 'Mrs. Carlow has forty or fifty Thieves about her always, and they get these Things for her.' Not that a thief-taker with a grudge can be relied on to tell the truth. However, Carlow also lived up to the accusations made against her.¹⁵¹ She was further mentioned in court when two boys aged 14 and 12 were accused of stealing silk handkerchiefs from a shop on Little- Tower- Hill. They claimed that they sold them to 'Mrs Carlow for 5 shillings'.¹⁵²

Clearly this was nothing new in Rosemary Lane. When caught stealing in 1730, Thomas Coleman, a young orphan boy gave evidence regarding a Mrs Katherine Collins of Blue Anchor yard, Rag Fair. Collins reportedly kept a house full of young boys who were sent out to steal and pickpocket every day in return for their bed and board. Coleman, in a statement to Justice George Welham reported that Collins: 'harbours theeves and buys stolen goods, who inticed [him] to goe a thieving...'¹⁵³ As Tim Hitchcock notes Mrs Collins was not dissimilar to Charles Dicken's character Fagin; and on Rosemary Lane it is clear that some women were adept as 'receivers' and also at keeping gangs of young thieves in their employ.¹⁵⁴

Carlow may have been thief and receiver, but she also knew how to make money. On one occasion the court heard that she had 'gone to France'. This was most likely to buy the Flanders lace that she sold at Rag Fair. Not only was Carlow's Cable Street

¹⁵⁰ Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks', p. 154.

¹⁵¹ *OBP*, Elizabeth Miller, otherwise Barefoot, 7 December 1743, t17431207-24.

¹⁵² *OBP*, James Perkinson, John Plastow, 7 June 1753, t17530607-20

¹⁵³ Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth Century London*, (2004), pp. 42-45.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

establishment a place where thieves lodged or sold their stolen goods, but the women who worked there as servants also worked as prostitutes in order to steal from legitimate lodgers. In 1746 John Torn/Thorn a soldier newly returned to town took lodgings at the Carlow's house only to find that his money had been stolen from his breeches pocket. Torn/Thorn had servants Mary Bell, Elizabeth Read and the mistress of the house Elizabeth Carlow, indicted for receiving stolen money. Bell was found guilty and transported; however, Read and Carlow were acquitted.¹⁵⁵ In 1743 Robert Legrose was accused of stealing various items of clothing belonging to one John Clack. Legrose was abetted by Margaret Frame who lodged in Carlow's house and who was accused of receiving the stolen goods. Valentine Harman, sometime thief-taker, gave evidence that Frame had described Elizabeth Carlow's house as containing 'many more stolen clothes'. Carlow was not charged and Frame was subsequently acquitted; however, Legrose was found guilty of the theft and hanged.¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Carlow subsequently had a long career managing to outwit the thief-takers and escape conviction; she died in 1774.¹⁵⁷

By the mid-century the Rosemary Lane thief-takers were vying for control of the criminal network in this neighbourhood. Local criminals including the Rag Fair women had to choose which faction they belonged to. Some, like Irish Peg may have enjoyed good fortune for a time working with and being protected by the thief-takers, but many others, like rape victim Sarah Main, Stitchborne and Miller were not so lucky.¹⁵⁸ It is not unreasonable to suggest that this group of women and their friends were seen as a threat to the criminal livelihood of the thief-takers. In addition, the women of Rag Fair

¹⁵⁵ *OBP*, John Thorn, 17 January 1746, t17460117-12, *OBP*, John Torn, 9 April 1746, t17460409-43; Matt Neale, 'Crime and Maritime trade in Bristol 1770-1800, pp. 86-87.

¹⁵⁶ *OBP*, Robert Legrose, Margaret Frame, 4 December 1740, t17401204.

¹⁵⁷ Will of Elizabeth Carlow, Widow of Saint George, Middlesex, 1774, PROB 11/994/359.

¹⁵⁸ *OBP*, Randolph Branch, William Descent, 14 September 1752, (t17520914-70). See also, *OBP*, John Studder and William Newman, 15 July 1747, (t17470715-4); Paley, 'Thief-takers', p. 312.

speak to a larger issue and narrative that suggests that some plebeian women in London were decision makers and decision takers; able to navigate the margins of society at least for a time, to make a livelihood for themselves that was not always dependent on a husband or a partner.

The experience of these women also suggests that there was a series of criminal networks in existence on this street and in the alleys that surrounded it particularly from the early 1720s to the late 1750s. We have only discussed a few of the women who had confronted or befriended the thief-takers; however, the evidence suggests that the Rag Fair women both benefited and suffered from these relationships and the corruption they brought in their train.

CONCLUSION

The area around Rag Fair contained a legitimate community of working people; a 'community' of thief-takers, and a 'community' of disorderly women making money in any way they could. They shared many similarities. Thus, as Heather Shore and Paul Griffiths have succinctly argued, lives overlapped, 'a neat split dividing the worlds of criminals and citizens did not exist'.¹⁵⁹ And just as the thief-takers appear to have worked in concert with each other, there is also evidence that the women who lived in Rag Fair acted collaboratively on occasion; forming a sort of gang able to work with, if not rival, local thief-takers.¹⁶⁰ Certainly as Shore has pointed out, 'locality and community are hugely important in how we think about these interactions'.¹⁶¹ What is

¹⁵⁹ Paul Griffiths, 'Overlapping circles: imagining criminal communities in London 1545-1645', in A. Shepard and P. Withington, (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England*, (Manchester, 2000), pp. 115-133.

¹⁶⁰ Walker, 'Women, theft', p. 86.

¹⁶¹ Shore, 'The reckoning', p. 411.

more, locality is intrinsically significant here as the majority of our protagonists lived just yards away from each other on this street.

The women discussed above benefited from Rosemary Lane's history and its notoriety. This neighbourhood contained higher than average numbers of women, including many single women, and despite regulation it had some tolerance towards bawdy houses, prostitution, foreigners, radicalism, and religious dissent. In addition, most of all, they benefited from the Rag Fair. This chapter has suggested that while our understanding of eighteenth-century London is focused on the metropolis as a whole, and largely created from the evidence provided by the well-to-do, we also need to encompass the varied neighbourhoods of the capital, and the voices of 'irregular' and 'disorderly' Londoners.

Many of the women in this neighbourhood were viewed by the authorities and local altruists as trouble, hence the Societies for the Reformation of Manners clean-up campaign and the later opening of a reforming hospital for penitent prostitutes. However, the women of Rosemary Lane are also representative of a wider community, a neglected community that was in conflict with both the thief-takers and the evolving criminal justice system. Perhaps not all the women on this street deserved Ned Ward's description of 'Ill-favoured sluts' of Rag Fair, but women such as Birk, Carlow and Stitchborne also represent a powerful and self-conscious sub-group of London's plebeian women; who, as a result of their residence in Rosemary Lane, were brought into a direct and intimate relationship not only with the criminal justice system, but with some of the most infamous thief-takers of the eighteenth century.

This chapter has also shown that 'working' women played a major role in London life in the late seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century. It has shown that women, even those women pushed to the margins, made a contribution to the economic fabric of London. They were working women, with an assortment of jobs who cooked, washed clothes, cleaned, wound silk or made sailor's slops or kept boarding houses or sold fruit or rags on the street to make ends meet. Furthermore, those women on the other side of the law, who persevered running their alehouses and shops without licence, brothel keepers, prostitutes and thieves and receivers of stolen goods – whether saint or sinner - they all did what they had to do to make a living. These women did not accept a life on the margins, while they may not have been treated as equals to men, they had agency and they stood their own ground in this community. Their stories are a hugely important component in our understanding of the lives of the ordinary and poorer members of early modern London Society.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

This micro-history of Rosemary Lane has provided a new perspective on both this locality, and more broadly, on the role of 'neighbourhood' in the lives of eighteenth-century Londoners. The only way to further our knowledge of early modern Londoners is to study individual suburbs and the people who lived and worked there.¹⁶² As noted in the introduction despite London's importance as one of the foremost cities in the world there remains a dearth in historical writing concerning its social history. Little is known about the people who populated its parishes and wards, the people who worked in the shops, in local industries and as servants in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁶³ This study of a London Street, Rosemary Lane will hopefully be the first of further studies that will tell us more about the everyday lives of the average citizen. Using a 'history from below' methodology to write this thesis has allowed for an engagement with the inhabitants who actually lived and worked there.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² See Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life, Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century*, (Berkeley, 1992); John Brewer 'Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life', *Cultural and Social History*, Volume 7, Number 1, March 2010, pp. 87-109; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, (New York, 1984); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, (Cambridge, MA, 1975); Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, (trans. Barbara Bray), (New York, 1978).

¹⁶³ Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 4-6; Tim Hitchcock, *Down And Out in Eighteenth Century London*, (2004); Jerry White, *London in the Eighteenth Century, A Great and Monstrous Thing*, (2012); Jeremy Boulton, 'Double deterrence: settlement and practice in London's West End, 1725-1824', in Anne Winter and Steve King, (eds.), *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe, 1500–1930s: Comparative Perspectives*. (New York, 2013), pp. 54-80; Jeremy Boulton and Leonard D, Schwarz, "'The comforts of a private fireside": the workhouse, the elderly and the poor law in Georgian Westminster: St Martin-in-the-fields, 1725-1824' in Joanna McEwan and Pamela Sharpe, (eds.), *Accommodating poverty: the housing and living arrangements of the English Poor, c.1600-1850*, (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 221-245; Francis Calvert Boorman, *The Political Space of Chancery Lane, c.1760 – 1815*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2013). See also Mark Latham, *The London Bridge Improvement Act of 1756: A Study of Early Modern Urban Finance and Administration*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2009);

¹⁶⁴

This neighbourhood was by turns colourful, cheerful and ‘disorderly’.¹⁶⁵ It was a neighbourhood that from its outset encouraged licentiousness, prostitution and crime mixed with religious fervour. However, at the same time, it was set within an orderly framework of parish and ward governance. A framework that proved occasionally to be stretched but one that never broke down. Sixteenth and early seventeenth-century commentators described this place as a ‘naughty’ neighbourhood, a place with errant ways and errant people, and this portrayal was still viable by the mid-eighteenth century. Additionally, as shown above, it had not yet descended into the nineteenth-century rookery or slum it would become fifty years after the end of the period covered by this dissertation.

In the early eighteenth century, some parts of the neighbourhood were certainly poor and rundown but generally the area contained a wide range of housing from very good housing stock to poor. The inhabitants were mostly poor but there was also a fair sprinkling of well-off and middling people. It suggests that this area had more in common with a seventeenth century ‘mixed’ neighbourhood, than the dark, cholera and typhoid ridden East End of so many nineteenth-century nightmares.

By exploring this neighbourhood through a variety of methodologies, this dissertation has sought to combine an analysis of space, place, people and governance in a new way. It has re-focused our understanding of the history of London onto the poor and the marginal. The lives of ordinary working Londoners tend to be ignored by many historians; this thesis shows, as Tim Hitchcock has argued, the ‘importance of the actions

¹⁶⁵ See LMA, CLA/048/PS/01/065, Proclamation issued by Mayor Thomas Barnard, January 1737, Rep 142, fo. 153.

and lives of working people'.¹⁶⁶ Using criminal records and session rolls, pauper letters, tax records, victualling records, wills and newspapers this dissertation has sought out the voices of the poor; to find individuals in the fragments of lives recorded in these seemingly arid administrative records. In the process, it has been established that while every single London enclave had its own character, Rosemary Lane stands out as an exemplar of a 'disorderly neighbourhood' of a peculiarly eighteenth-century stamp.

The foundations for this analysis were laid in Chapter 2. This provided a detailed description of how the authorities managed this area and the problems that were involved; how a patchwork of parishes, wards and liberties managed a neighbourhood defined by its residents, rather than by administrative boundaries. Importantly, it demonstrated that there remained a fundamental and robust orderliness, beneath the disorder, based on a complex, but working systems of local government. In the first instance, this analysis was based on an examination of the parishes that made up the 'neighbourhood', St Botolph Aldgate and St Mary Whitechapel. But it also emphasized how the personnel of local government, the people who served on the vestries and Ward Inquests, were crucial in maintaining the fabric of the community – how they acted as a kind of human network upon which all other systems of authority were built.

In addition, Chapter Two sought to illustrate how the infrastructure of local government worked to help to maintain urban civility. The Church, the hospital, the charity schools and workhouses formed loci of activity and participation, and in doing so helped maintain a sound urban community. While these elements did not stop the inherent disorder associated with Rag Fair, they provided a basic safety net. To that end the

¹⁶⁶ T. Hitchcock, *Down And Out in Eighteenth Century London*, (2004), pp. 233-234.

chapter also explored the legacy of puritanism, to suggest that a measure of religious freedom existed into the late seventeenth century that helped shape the character of this expanding neighbourhood.

It also concluded that the maintenance of basic social amenities by the parishes and wards, in the form of pensions and payments to the poor and needy, were a significant factor in keeping order overall. Douglas Hay argued in *Albion's Fatal Tree* that the 'criminal law more than any other institution made it possible to rule eighteenth century England without a police force and without an army'.¹⁶⁷ For London, it is clear that it was a combination of social policies – particularly poor relief – in addition to the law that kept the metaphysical lid on major disorder. It also described how the Wards and Leet Courts brought their own forms of order to the neighbourhood. How they sought – and managed - to keep the pavements clear of obstructions, checked the weight of bread, licensed alehouses, inspected meat and adjudicated in neighbourhood squabbles. And while, as M. Dorothy George maintained, local government may have been chaotic; there is little doubt that between them, the parishes, the wards and the Leet courts at least attempted to look after the neighbourhood's own residents.¹⁶⁸

Finally, this chapter explored the character of local policing; how the nightly watch worked, and who manned it. The watch may not have been entirely competent, but it did provide a neighbourhood policing of sorts. While jurisdiction issues played a major role in policing; it is hard to escape the conclusion that the orderliness of this neighbourhood was located more firmly in local culture, than in an effective 'police'.

¹⁶⁷ Douglas Hay, 'Property, authority and the criminal law', in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E.P. Thompson and Cal Winslow (eds.), *Albion's Fatal Tree, Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century*, (1975), p. 56.

¹⁶⁸ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (Peregrine reprint, 1987, [1925]), pp. 9-10.

In the process of describing these systems and how they worked it attempted to juxtapose the 'neighbourhood' – the collection of streets and alleys on either side of Rosemary Lane defined by the inter-action of the residents - with the patchwork of authorities that were charged with the neighbourhood's governance.

Chapter Three sought to extend this analysis to look directly at the individuals who collectively defined the 'neighbourhood'. By focusing on residential patterns it showed that the rich were not segregated from the poor. Using the wealth of material available from land and parish tax records, it demonstrated that many of the rich and middling sort could be found living next door to the poorest residents. Moreover, this study revealed the diversity of shops available in the area, selling everything from brassware to bread and much more. By taking the analysis down to street level, this chapter was able to identify the names of many of the shopkeepers along with the type goods they sold and the services they provided: butchers, apothecaries, hairdressers and upholsterers. A micro-geography of residence and economies was gradually built up, street by street; which in turn, could be related to evidence from the records of local government. It showed who served on the vestries and who appeared at the Old Bailey.

This chapter also identified that the poorest areas, such as St Katherine's and East Smithfield, were badly built, with cheap housing. However, they provided accommodation for many of London's humblest citizens. More importantly, it identified that a higher than average percentage of women rate payers and women residents were living in this area. From this study we now also know that Rosemary Lane itself was in part a mixed area with the most expensive houses and shops lining the left side of the street and the cheapest housing in the back streets surrounding Rag Fair.

Chapter Four focussed on the phenomenon at the heart of the neighbourhood - Rag Fair. By looking at the sheer numbers of proclamations and warnings concerning Rag Fair, the centrality of the Fair to the anxious imaginations of the City and county authorities was established. One of the central contentions of this dissertation has been the enormous value placed on clothing by people at this time. It also noted that whether they were impoverished or from the more comfortable middling classes; old clothing remained an important component of the material world of eighteenth-century London. This has been widely accepted by historians including John Styles, Beverly Lemire and Garthine Walker.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, for the impoverished and for clothes thieves it equated with ready cash. Clothes theft at Rag Fair has been explored briefly by a few historians, but what has not been acknowledged is the sheer scale of clothes theft on this particular street. This chapter illustrated that Rosemary Lane contained both the largest old clothes market in London and suffered the largest number of clothes thefts recorded in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* of any of the several small 'rag fairs' held in London.

In addition, it showed that women stood out among the most prolific clothes thieves in this neighbourhood. Most significantly, this chapter revealed that ill-educated street women were among the principal buyers and sellers of stolen second hand clothing and other goods on Rosemary Lane at this time – that neither education nor class were determinants in success in this area. Moreover, it highlighted the fact that women in this neighbourhood were often the managers of the family budget practising a somewhat

¹⁶⁹ John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth Century England*, (2007), pp. 168, 176, 312; Beverly Lemire, 'The theft of clothes and popular consumerism in early modern England', *Journal of Social History*, 24, 1990, pp. 258 – 260; Garthine Walker, 'Women, theft and the world of stolen goods' in J. Kermode and G. Walker, (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, (1994), p. 89; Lynn MacKay, 'Why they stole: women in the Old Bailey, 1779-1789', *Journal of Social History*, 32.3 (1999), pp. 623-639.

precarious 'economy of makeshift'.¹⁷⁰ And that while it was not unusual for the poor to pawn their goods to attain money to eke out the family budget each week, many women in this neighbourhood and most likely across London, took this a stage further by 'borrowing' clothes from their employers to pawn. Many women did this with the hope that they could return the clothes before they were found to be missing; performing a dangerous juggling act that could easily result in transportation or the death penalty.

This analysis of Rag Fair sought to bring together differing historical perspectives, including material consumption, crime and gender studies to enable us to view this street through a broad historiographical lens. The overall conclusion was that Rag Fair normalised disorder and theft; or perhaps simply blurred the boundaries between expectations of material culture, at odds with the brutal assumptions of the criminal law.

Finally, by carrying out a close study of this neighbourhood it allowed 'Rag Fair' – to be identified both a moveable phenomenon with no clear geographical boundary, and a fixed area called 'Rag Fair' located securely on Rosemary Lane close to Cable Street.

While the actual Rag Fair, with its stalls and carts selling goods could physically move anywhere from Little Tower Hill to Cable Street, this analysis illustrated for the first time that its centre of gravity, lay just at the end of Rosemary Lane, close to Well Close Square and Blue Anchor Yard, just yards away from the watch house and the homes of several significant thief-takers and local judiciary. Ironically, the project of creating a micro-history of the neighbourhood, throws up the limits of geography's ability to define a moving event such as Rag Fair.

¹⁷⁰ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France*, (Oxford, 1974), pp. 69 -127; Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720*, see chapter 5, 'The Makeshift Economy', (Oxford, 1998). See also King and Tompkins, (eds.), *The Poor in England*, p. 1.

Chapters Five and Six use the details exposed in the preceding three chapters, to contextualise in a precise locale, a story of thieves and thief-takers that has traditionally been told from the perspective of London as a whole. Chapter Five confirmed that Rosemary Lane was home to the majority of the most notorious thief-takers of the mid-eighteenth century. This is the first time that they have been geographically placed together as a gang in a London neighbourhood. Rosemary Lane was the centre of thief-taking and it is from there that Stephen MacDaniel and John Berry made their final dubious arrests before being brought to trial by Joseph Cox, High Constable of Blackheath.¹⁷¹ While there is a substantial literature on thief-takers most notably by Ruth Paley and John Beattie they have never before been placed in one area of London.¹⁷²

Only a close study of this neighbourhood could reveal their central location. The thief-takers used the disorder and crime associated with Rag Fair to form the axis of their network of criminality. This is important to our understanding of early policing and detective work in London. Whether or not we agree with their methods, it could be suggested that the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane were an organised group of evolving proto police detectives. Moreover, they were operating from Rosemary Lane, east London not Bow Street, Westminster.¹⁷³ They sustained a web of criminal intrigue, disorderly alehouses, brothels and sponging houses for debtors while forming inauspicious relationships with the local judiciary and local thieves. They moved freely

¹⁷¹ Joseph Cox, *A Faithful Narrative of the most Wicked and Inhuman Transactions of that Bloody Minded Gang of Thieftakers, alias Thieftmakers, MacDaniel, Berry, Salmon, Eagan alias Gahagan....(1756)* passim, British Library 1416.9.12 (2).

¹⁷² Ruth Paley, 'Thief-takers in London in the age of the MacDaniel gang, c.1745-1754' in Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder, (eds.), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750-1850*, (Oxford, 1989), pp. 301-341; J.M. Beattie, 'Detection and prosecution : thief-takers, 1690-1720', in Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, pp. 226-256.

¹⁷³ J.M. Beattie, *The First English Detectives: The Bow Street Runners and the Policing of London, 1750-1840*, (Oxford, 2012).

from this place around London and its suburbs but their main work was on and from this street. The thief-takers encouraged by the authorities to 'police' the crime that surrounded Rag Fair found a fundamental place from which they could operate on both sides of the law.

In addition, it was suggested that the jurisdiction issues that dogged this street, in combination with its distance from the City walls, were significant factors in the evolution of this neighbourhood business. It proposed that, one of the main reasons that they assembled in this area was because this was a part of London that the City wanted to forget. Consequently, the disorderly Rag Fair was both a product of its complex administrative framing; and provided a perfect ecology in which the thief-takers could operate – charging criminals for the reward, without too many questions being asked.

Finally, it implied that Henry Fielding was aware of the criminal practices of the thief-takers, but chose to ignore them. And that in doing so, and by incorporating the thief-takers into his nascent system of Runners; Fielding effectively gave the Lane a central place in the origins of the modern police. The subsequent trials of some of the thief-takers of Rosemary Lane caused shock across the capital, and brought an end to the local system in the 1750s, but these trials did not undermine their influence on the evolution of policing.

Chapter Six built on the observation that much of the day to day activity on this street involved women. It argued that the profusion of mostly poor women, who worked at the Fair and on the Lane, altered the whole dynamic of the neighbourhood. They were an overwhelming presence at Rag Fair, and yet little has been written to date concerning

the exploits of London's women in the eighteenth century. This dissertation sought to rectify this, in some small measure. The women of Rosemary Lane may not have been educated, but they had a degree of street sense, they were 'active agents'¹⁷⁴ they were not seeking power as such but it has been shown here that it was at least possible for poor women to actively navigate in the margins of London life despite the strictures of eighteenth-century patriarchy. This study has also highlighted the ability of some very poor women to use the courts; as in the case of Sarah Main, who has been featured throughout this study, a poor woman from Rag Fair who lived in lodgings paying a penny a night.¹⁷⁵ In this neighbourhood some poor women whether criminal or legitimate were active contributors to the local economy.

Finally, this chapter demonstrated that there existed a complex symbiotic relationship between the thief-takers and an active group of women thieves and receivers. In a turf-battle in which Rag Fair itself seems to have been at stake; the likes of Nathaniel Harris, Elizabeth Carlow and Irish Peg fought for dominance. And because these protagonists used the criminal courts, and most importantly the Old Bailey, as weapons; the fraught character of their inter-relationships was exposed to both contemporaries and historians.

The overarching conclusion of this dissertation is that for many residents the 'neighbourhood' was the all-important centre of their lives. The women and men discussed above benefited from Rosemary Lane's history, its notoriety as a 'liberty'; its higher than average numbers of women, including many single women, and its broad

¹⁷⁴ Anna Clark, 'Wild Workhouse Girls and the Liberal Imperial State in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ireland,' *Journal of Social History*, 39, no. 2, (2005), p. 392.

¹⁷⁵ *OBP*, George Haggis, Richard Keeble, Thomas Gibbons, 21 February 1739, t17390221-31.

tolerance of bawdy houses, prostitution, foreigners, radicalism, and religious dissent. In addition, most of all, they benefited from the Rag Fair.

This study has also shown that poor people in eighteenth century London did not live a prescribed life ruled by the ideals of conduct manuals, or directives from government or contemporary commentators. They may have been 'disorderly', but they nevertheless lived according to rules. For some of London's citizens theft to make ends meet formed a kind of 'tolerated illegality'. It was woven into the fabric of local lives. In some respects this was 'social crime' as discussed in the introduction - crimes 'sanctioned by community opinion'.¹⁷⁶ There is no doubt that some crime on this street was accepted and acceptable. While the majority of people living on and around this street were law abiding, to many ordinary people there was a blurred line that they sometimes chose to cross or interpret in their own way. As thief-taker John Berry said in court regarding receiver Elizabeth Miller [Betty Barefoot], 'She buys such Things - I know they all buy these Things - I don't know any Harm of them - I know nothing of their Characters, but that they deal that way'.¹⁷⁷

This dissertation has used a wide combination of historical sources to build a more comprehensive image of a 'neighbourhood' that simply does not exist in any single archive. Some of the sources consulted have been woefully under used by historians – including the Court of Aldermen Repertories, the parish tax records and licensed victuallers records. Others are more familiar. Online resources such as the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and *London Lives* make research easier in some respects; but more

¹⁷⁶ J.G. Rule, 'Social crime in the rural south in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Southern History*, 1, (1979), pp.135-153. See also John Lea, 'Social crime revisited', *Theoretical Criminology*, vol.3, no.3, (1999), pp. 307-311. Many thanks to Anne Murphy for this reference.

¹⁷⁷ *OBP*, Elizabeth Miller, otherwise Barefoot, 7 December 1743, t17431207-24.

importantly, they allow fragments of evidence to be assembled in a new way.¹⁷⁸ These sources, in their new online guise, do not magic into existence the evidence of inner lives, and motivations; but they do allow us to build fragmented histories of men and women, who would otherwise exist as little more than a line or two on innumerable lists of names. In addition, by probing the records of City and the county bench, we find evidence of the attempts to curb the crime and social disorder clearly evident on the streets. And while the authorities essentially failed in some respects, the existence of the 'neighbourhood' in their mind's eye was clear.

This thesis has shown that by supplementing electronic sources with material from the archives we come up with a much broader picture of life at this time. This combination of sources and the methodology employed in this thesis has enabled a new understanding of a London neighbourhood in the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century. Our knowledge of early modern London, its people and places would only be enhanced by further neighbourhood studies of this type.

To date and with few exceptions, our understanding of eighteenth-century London is framed by the metropolis as a whole, and largely created from the evidence provided by the well-to-do.¹⁷⁹ By 1700 London was an extremely large populous City. No one could know it all, or live in it as a single community. This dissertation has thus moved back

¹⁷⁸ LMA, Repertories of the Court of Alderman 1659-1750, COL/CA; St Botolph Aldgate Poor Rate Assessment Books, 1744-5, MS 2534/1-20; St Botolph Aldgate Church Rate Assessments Books, 1744-5, MS 2545/1-20; Portsoken Ward- Wardmote Court and Inquest: Minutes, 1664-1840, MS 2649/1-2; St Mary Whitechapel Licenced and Unlicensed Victuallers, 1735-6, MR/LV06/44; Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 1674-1913, (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 24 March 2012); Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *London Lives*, 1690-1800, (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1. 24 April 2012).

¹⁷⁹ White, *London in the Eighteenth Century*; Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750*, (1994), p. 117; Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London*, (Cambridge, 1991); A.L. Beier and R. Finlay, (eds.), *The Making of the Metropolis, London 1500-1700*, (1986); Roy Porter, *London, A Social History*, (1994); Jeremy Black, *London: A History*, (2009).

from the overarching picture that general histories of London have created to recapture the life of a single neighbourhood, the life most Londoners experienced. This micro-study by focusing on a single neighbourhood has allowed us to glimpse at how ordinary Londoners lived in east London in the period c.1690-1765. In turn it completely transforms our understanding of London and its inhabitants in this period. Hopefully, it has created a path that other social historians of the metropolis will follow and replicate. Further close studies of London's early modern neighbourhoods can only enhance our knowledge of the city overall.

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