

CHAPTER II

Immigration – Soho – Building the Canals – The Great Exhibition – The Railway Age – Street Sellers – Chimney Sweeps - Sutton Street - London's economy – Factory Acts – City Life – The Metropolitan Railway – Servant Life.

When C Thomas arrived in London, he settled in Soho, which was a popular living area and meeting place for the immigrant Irish. He had to take care not to be exposed to 'the Irish fever', probably typhus, which one thousand Londoners died from in 1847. Epidemics occurred several times between 1840s and 70s. It was this health risk which persuaded Thomas to up sticks and move to Holborn still working as a whitesmith. Holborn then was a far more congenial place. As was the custom his eldest son was called Thomas. His brother Alfred was born in 1854... to become my grandfather.

Most of the meat bought and sold came from the principle market at Smithfield - where in two days of trade 5,000 cattle, 30,000 sheep and 2,000 pigs traded. They all had to walk there and depart, when sold, through the streets whether in frost or snow, sun or rain, driven with shouts and calls by the drovers - to the excited screams of the watching children keeping clear of the long horned cattle and butting rams.

In Regents Park and Hyde Park, opened to the public in the 1840s, the wealthy drove along the avenues in their carriages served by powdered attendants displaying their beautiful horses and splendid equipment... past herds of cattle, sheep and goats and the populace going about their normal business, with elegant women in satin and lace twirling their parasols. A scene that emphasised the difference, not only between the several layers of social structure in England, but also demonstrated the uncaring attitude they had for what was happening in Ireland - in a land controlled by accident, birthright, eviction and brutality.

Back in Ireland in the mid and latter part of nineteenth century, the state was still 'a source of great anxiety to the English parliament.' Ireland had been invaded and conquered several times but never mastered... it was still hostile to England, even more so after the famine. The remaining clan members based around the ancient family lands in the Ormond's' suffered like everyone else by the potato famine. Bands of starving men roamed the county, begging for food, trying to find work. In Nenagh, County Tipperary, the Board of Works' Inspecting Officer reported on October 31st. "Gentlemen from Relief Committees are continually filling up places for work to the extent that there are no places left and people are dying from hunger". Mr Bayly, Chairman of the Board of Guardians, was attacked... and now fearful of being shot! The town was in uproar. The 8th. Royal Irish Hussars provided an escort for the Judge of Assizes; they were only allowed to pass through the barricades one at a time. The Bishop of Killaloe refused to take action and led twenty parishes, amongst them Kilkeary, into armed insurrection.

The full force of the potato famine was experienced in Ireland, not only did this checked the recent population growth but further prompted immigration. The potato blight left much of the agricultural community without their basic food. The British government's efforts to bring about relief were very inadequate and between one and 1.5 million people died. Queen Victoria was averse to declaring a public Day of Fast in 1847 for the famine in Ireland. The Government decided to advise her that it would be a proper gesture. The 1854 Day of Humiliation was the only Fast Day.

In the later half of the nineteenth century, Kilkeary Parish covered an area of 2,272 statute acres, which provided for a population of 345 inhabitants made up out of 59 families. Prior to the Great Famine, as numerated, there were 698 persons all told divided up from an equal number of families. The old Kilkeary School stood on land owned by the Cash family less than half a mile from Kilkeary Cross.

Between 1841 and 1911, 1 million individuals left Ireland for British cities. There was little choice: it was either selective depopulation by frantic emigration or fever and death by staying put. Eventually many of the remaining Keary clan left as immigrants - boarding ship to Liverpool... eventually move to London, which held the greatest number, followed by Glasgow and Cardiff. The remainder boarded ship bound for the new colonies. Children of nine or ten still worked a full twelve hour day and women worked on the land, their children looked after by the workers in turn even in the vilest of weathers.

After the worst of the potato famine was over the reduced population became better able to support itself. Gradually the harvests improved as the land became reworked. The number of children born to a marriage in Ireland was always high. The couples were mostly young which gave rise to high fertility. After the Famine, the rate of marriage fell, as did the fertility – well below that of Britain. The later marriage and greater control spaced children apart. Couples making joint decisions about the size of their families according to what they could afford bought about this. Increased health education and a greater knowledge about illnesses improved the mortality rate. Some people were now living to fifty and it was felt morbidity started to increase as the mortality rate decreased.

There was a move towards starting a new life abroad, particularly to America. Eventually America held a greater number of Irish - more than Ireland itself...and this was particularly true of the Kearey clan. Still, we are concerned here with that part of the family, which chose England to make a new start, those who used the 'K' and 'ey' form of spelling the name.

My grandfather Alfred Kearey was born 13th. April 1854 in Sutton Street, Kensington. He was the third son of H Thomas and Hannah, nee Raybould. His eldest brother was named ... Thomas in accordance with family tradition, which went back many centuries, [he was the last 'eldest son' to be so named].

Giving up this tradition demonstrates the need to cast off any connection with the past. Any recognition or acceptance of past allegiances washed away - to start afresh and take onboard a new life, which London had to offer.

It was during Alfred's time at school that he witnessed the almost total development of the entire railway network servicing London. It was this expansion of the railways, after the building of the canals, which soaked up the Irish migrant workers. Steam tugs started to arrive on the Thames in 1848. The hay and straw for London's vast horse population came down the river in barges with the tide. Those same barges were loaded with manufactured goods to take them to the ships lying beyond the bridges in the Pool of London, where clipper ships were moored.

The mainline stations were like palaces catering for vast crowds of excited travellers. The railways became a conduit of communication and commerce. One hundred thousand people were displaced in the process of construction. When he left school, he was apprenticed as a house painter and stainer, a skill that was in great demand... London was experiencing a massive growth in land development.

It was only a few years before that London Bridge Station was opened shortly before Euston. It was a time of enormous expansion to the extent that 6.7 per cent of British income was invested in railway shares. Fenchurch Street station was the first station to be built within the city. By 1852, King's Cross was opened sixteen years before St Pancras and by 1870 the main railway network had spread all over England.

In 1861, there were one hundred and seventy eight thousand Irish immigrants in London - nearly all of them were Catholics accommodated in concentrations based around Holborn, St. Giles, Whitechapel and Southwark. Nine years later, there were more Catholics in London and Rome than in Dublin. Engles described London as having 'indescribable', 'countless ships', 'endless lines of

vehicles', hundreds of steamers', and hundreds of thousands of 'streets, classes, alleys and courts', all with a 'nameless misery'. In the 1871 census, there were nearly two million servants in London.

It is not surprising to learn that the railways ran where the poor lived. The inhabitants were suddenly uprooted...whole streets were dispossessed...no suitable accommodation was available. The Metropolitan Railway destroyed 1,000 houses in the slums, which made homeless 20,000. This caused considerable unrest until housing societies were started. Peabody Building were opened in 1864, they were five-stories high round a central courtyard. Later there were estates in Islington, Shadwell and Chelsea and more built during a ten-year period.

The first water closets were installed around the time of the Great exhibition in 1851...within half a dozen years 200,000 were flowing – previously earth closets or buckets were used to be emptied by the night-soil men who emptied the cesspits selling the contents to farmers on the outskirts of the city. Like the dustmen, the job could be financially worthwhile and sometimes double the rate charged for night's work. Refuse was removed by the two-man teams shouting 'dust oy-ch' loading up their high-sided carts to be deposited at the dust-yards. It was at the dust-yards that sifters worked; teams of women, sorting out the rubbish for the result to be sold-on, nothing thrown away.

Men ruled the household and set the standard... women carried the plan through. Men were out at work whilst their partners maintained the home and family - made the decisions that made up their social circle. Both Hannah, my great grandmother, and Martha my grandmother, were strong characters and strict disciplinarians who supported their husbands. The houses their large families lived in were rented, as were the majority of properties. People either paid weekly rents or were offered leases. 90% of all accommodation was lived in under these conditions and it was considered 'useful' to be able to move at a moments notice. The houses were small, which demanded good housekeeping and a disciplined order - pattern to life.

This was a time of expansion in all trades for more houses were being built to house the vast numbers of new city dwellers and these houses in the main were terraced, where you could not tell one house from the next. There was a gradual movement away from the city centre into the suburbs not only to seek fresh air but 'a better way of life'. Victorian life was one of segregation and classification; home was seen as apart, private and guarded. Local municipal regulations stipulated certain standards for street planning, parks, community amenities and building details. There was an enormous difference between the social classes all living within a few hundred yards of each other.

This was a time the streets were filled with an incessant stream of horse-drawn, motor driven and steam propelled traffic all limited to twelve miles per hour. There were no traffic lights, one-way streets circles or rights-of-way it was all subject to the rate of the horse and its vagaries. The omnibuses were mainly for the middle-classes where women travelled inside and the men climbed a ladder to sit on a bench seat on the top...later versions had a staircase inside which led to the exposed roof.

There were two kinds of omnibuses, the light-green Atlas and the dark-green City Atlas. The light green, with two horses in hand, served particular routes with a first class compartment. The dark-green ran a return journey every hour...both had iron-shod wheels and curtains at the windows. The driver clad in his old-fashioned cape and tall felt hat, driving three horses abreast in bad weather, carried a load of twenty-two passengers under cover from Paddington, via the Yorkshire Stingo, to the Bank. A newspaper was provided to pass the time of day and the conductor called the route. He stood to the left of the door holding onto his strap signalling to the driver by banging on the roof. One of his jobs was to bend down and help women with their whalebone hoops onto the step and through the narrow doorway. A women's clothing weighed almost forty pounds and when it became saturated with rain, it was difficult to walk. The men passengers who climbed the iron ladder and sat on the 'knife-board' a central bench running lengthways either side

of a backrest. Passengers sat back-to-back with their feet against the roof's edge, on a footboard. It was no joy for women either: they had to contend with parasols, umbrellas, sticks, canes, and numerous parcels. The rumbling, swaying, jerking and jolting set your-teeth-on-edge: the possibility of fleas, nits, colds, crushed toes and pickpockets all contributed to an uncomfortable experience. There were a number of turnpike gates that had to be negotiated – one at Marylebone another at Lisson Grove and a third at Great Portland Street. It was possible to stop the omnibus at any point along the route. There was no fixed charge and speed sacrificed for profit. 'pea-souper' fogs – which were plentiful – which further slowed progress continually interrupted what timetables were attempted. Even when there was no visible fog the soot, particles in the air created a diffused light and soiled clothing.

Traffic jams were a daily nuisance. The passage of animals and scurrying cabs made reasonable progress impossible. Paths and pavements were forever congested to the extent that they became so smooth that workers were engaged to roughen them. There were nearly eighty main toll-bars and a hundred minor ones – charges mainly paid by tradesmen; tolls were not removed until 1864. The main roads were faced with granite blocks [setts] later replaced with tarred blocks, which proved dangerous under water or in winter frosts.

Street sellers abounded selling baked-potatoes, oysters, sheep's trotters or stewed eels. The butchers and their assistants were always recognisable in their stripped, blue and white aprons and smocks. They would be taking their orders for the day. Later, the butchers' boys would deliver the order with the customer's name skewered to the joint. The baker delivered his pies, buns and bread daily and the milkman conveyed his milk by yoked pail; potboys sold beer. There were orange sellers near theatres, pie-men, sherbet sellers, muffin-men, cockles and mussels, cats meat men, watercress [came from Camden Town and watered by running water from the River Fleet], cherries and strawberry girls, herbs, apples, matches, sandwiches and flower girls. It was normal to have eight-year-old girls clad in a thin cotton dress, with an equally thin shawl round her shoulders, out in all weathers selling produce off a tray slung round her neck. Shoeblocks, dripping sellers and knife-grinders; chairs were mended on the street, pots were beaten and soldered and sweeps shouted that their boys 'climbed narrower chimneys'. Many of these vendors had their own calls by voice and bell. The street sweepers were employed by the parish - to give some employment to otherwise idle youths, foundlings and those poor unfortunates who were disabled. Sometimes they worked in pairs sweeping the horse droppings and waste into piles to be picked up later by a horse and cart. All roads were attended to for the waste was sold to farms skirting the city boundary.

By the 1880s barrel organs, piano organs and the hurdy-gurdy man accompanied by his monkey, played in the streets. Dancing bears and performing dogs and the one-man-band who clashed his cymbals. The Punch and Judy man, puppeteer visited their pitch on a set rotation. The organ grinder travelled to wherever a crowd gathered - outside the theatres.

Water was only piped for mass use in the mid-c19th. It came from the mains supply in the street by lead pipes into the scullery or kitchen. The supply was intermittent - early on in its inception, the water ran for only one hour every day, three days a week and never on Sundays. It was not until the turn of the century that a constant supply was available on demand.

Many children went bare footed sleeping in alleyways, beneath bridges and under railway arches. The Metropolitan or Underground railway had carriages lit by gas lamps, the tracks provided a smooth and comfortable journey compared to the swaying jerking progress of a horse drawn carriage. The stations, platforms and bridges mainly built of brick, as were the embankments and tunnels. The provision of construction material carted to the various sites for railways use competed with material for house construction. It was a massive undertaking making the already overcrowded city into an even greater hive of industry.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the middle and upper classes could not have existed without servants... from maids-of-all-work upwards to cook, governess and housekeeper... for men: both in or out of livery, gardener, footmen, coachmen and butler. One in six women was servants and a high percentage hired on a daily basis.