

CHAPTER III

Kensington Gardens – Parochial Schools – Salem Gardens – Vicar of London – Lord Mayor's Vicar – The Sutton family in Sutton Place – The Working Class – The Royal Parks.

There are many accounts about the living conditions and make up of Victorian Britain. All are very interesting but far too general. We are more concerned about north London – north of the river Thames. To pin point the area more precisely, northwest London, around Bayswater and Paddington. In the period that introduces the Keareys' to this place, just after The Great Exhibition, it was on the outskirts of the city – there were green fields not far away... just up the street, with farms, hedges, woods, trees and all the delights of the country.

Still, we must not get ahead of ourselves - the picture filled out in more detail... Bayswater or Bayswatering as spelt on Rocque's 1748 map lies due south of Christ Church. St. James Church built and made parochial in 1845. It was new being partially rebuilt with the exception of the tower and spire. The pest house indicated so prominently on the map was almost on the site of Craven Terrace Chapel. Lord Craven gave a site at Soho to be used as a burial ground... and knowing the problems faced by the citizens during the plague of 1665, land for a cottage hospital too... The streets of Paddington were not conveniently built having to walk the whole length for the lack of a side street before moving to a parallel terrace. Further, northwards, on the west side of Petersburg Place is the church of St. Matthew, built with a very high spire consecrated on May 20th. 1882...the church had seating for 1,550 of which 355 were available free.

The borough boundary turns out of Kensington Gardens into Palace Gardens... crossing the Bayswater Road, it travels northwards, between Ossington Street and Clanricarde Gardens. North of Moscow Road, a Greek church stands impressively by. Given the name of St. Sophia, was built of red brick with a high central dome... It reminds one of a storybook picture of a Russian church. Close by, a small Baptist chapel, neat and compact fitted in, to be built at the back of Porchester Gardens. Moving across Queen's Road, there stands St. Matthew's Parochial School. Built in 1831, found not large enough, then enlarged, losing most of its playground in 1861. Further northwards in Queen's Road are the large buildings housing Paddington Public Baths and Washhouses.

Alfred Kearey courted and married Martha Sutton, named after her mother, born 11th. July 1857. Both of her grandfathers were vicars in London. In the first nineteen years of married life, they had ten children. They started out their married life in a small terraced house, 5 Salem Gardens, Bayswater, just off Moscow Road and Queensway [Queen's Road] - opposite Olympia.

Martha's father, William Sutton, was a trained carpenter His father, also named William, died in 1870, in office, as a Vicar in London. William had his carpenter's shop at the bottom of his garden, making doors and windows. They had two sons and seven daughters. One of the sons was also named William joined the Royal Marines at Deal and took part in the Egyptian War in 1883. He was wounded and invalidated out of the service, dying less than ten years after returning home. The remaining son and five of the daughters married at an early age, leaving daughters Emma and Tottie at home... to help their mother.

Martha had been a trained schoolteacher even though she was not paid a great deal. In Victorian society, it was frowned on for woman teachers to be married so she had to give up her job. Wishing to provide for an increasing family, she started and ran a successful hand laundry from home in a large washhouse in the garden. It required enough space on the range to boil the coppers of washing and sufficient room to do the ironing next to the drying room. She employed other women to do the large amount of washing and ironing that was taken in. Laundry work was labour extensive and for anyone wishing to use those facilities a major part of the family's budget. It was a known fact that infections from mixed washing were possible. In sensible laundries, the washing was

separated hung to dry and suitably aired. W H Lever began to sell soap in one-pound bars, ready wrapped, in 1885. Every large house in those days sent out for its laundry to be done - Bayswater was a fashionable part of London forming the North West corner of Kensington Park, so there was a ready business to satisfy close at hand.

The washing was sorted on Saturdays and Sundays and entered into the washing book; this was checked at the end of the process by my great-grandmother. Sheets and linens were covered with luke-warm water and a little soda and left overnight. On Monday, the fires to the boiler were lit two hours before the rest of the household came down to breakfast. As soon as the water was hot, the sheets and linens were taken out of the overnight soaking water, rinsed in hot water ladled out of the copper, rubbed, and beaten with a dolly or passing stick. The sheets were then wrung out, and the water reused - to be used for soaking-water. It was a long process from soaking, three washes, one boiling and a number of rinses. Within all of this were special stain removal processes and fabric conditioners – some items unpicked and re sewn after processing.

Once the first washing had been completed, it was hung out to dry or if wet hung under covered ways - this could take several days. The starching process was complicated in that all materials needed a particular treatment. Unconditioned linen or cotton quickly became creased and rumpled.

The ironing was done on tables. Flat irons were used in pairs – whilst one was in use the other was reheating. A dozen irons were arraigned on trivets over an open fire. Each iron before use was cleaned on a rubbing cloth, any adhering starch cleaned off; irons, which were still dirty, were rubbed on an emery board. Box-irons and goffering irons all had their special uses. Items for repair were set aside and all aired before wrapping - made ready for collection.

There is no doubt that Martha had to be extremely organized to run both the house, large family and family business. The fact that she had been a teacher indicates that her own education had been above average. Coming from a middle-class home gave her the spur to maintain her position for both herself and her children. The family owe much to this hard working woman.

Martha's grandfather, Samuel Elyas Pearce, was a Vicar of one of London's city churches and Chaplain to the Lord Mayor of London. "The patronage of the Lord Mayor included the appointment of a chaplain who lives and boards in the Mansion House have a suite of rooms and a servant rides in a state carriage and attends the Lord Mayor whenever required. He was presented to Queen Victoria at the first levee, and received fifty guineas from the Court of Aldermen, and a like sum from the Court of Common Council. His wife, my maternal great grandmother, often told my father, that when she visited her great grandmother she would be told many frightening things about events which happened before and after The Great Fire of London in 1666.

In Victorian times, the main reception room presented the public face of the family and it conformed to the accepted strictures of the society. It displayed, on shelves, tables, what-knots a variety of small object both expensive, and inexpensive which were reminders of people and places. Tablecloths came right down to the floor with plants in heavy pots and planters. Covers were placed to protect furniture from coal dust and fire-embers. Window curtains suspended from poles and rings were tied back to reveal net curtaining obscuring the view outside. Slip rugs positioned at the fireside left exposed the polished wood floor.

My grandmother Martha named after her mother, Martha Pearce, was the eldest child in the Sutton family. It was usual in those days that the eldest girls in the family took on a great deal of the housework by rota. This would include the cooking and work in the laundry. It was held as convention that this was the way a girl contributed to the home and was properly prepared to bring up her own family, when and if the time came. However, it is clear that there was little affection in the home especially by her mother. When grandmother showed independence by wearing a new hairstyle she was told to, 'leave the home and do not return'. This seems on the face of it a hard

thing to do but her mother had to control the situation. It was a small house and a large family and her mother could not afford for the situation to get out of hand and lose respect. [Fortunately, all came right in the end]

In the late nineteenth century, most women in England were excluded from political and economic power. Wives and daughters were legally subservient to husbands until the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1880s. Protecting women from beatings by the husband did not come about until 1891.

Martha sought help and comfort from a girl friend that lived not far away in Caroline Place. She was also a laundress and worked from home. It was not a large house and there was no more room for another person to sleep so a place was found for her under the ironing table. My grandfather Alfred Kearey who knew Martha before this event quickly saw in her a person he could befriend. Shortly after this, the Sutton family were reunited and they were married in 1878. A house found for them for lodging in Sutton Place. [The name is a coincidence]

The owner of Salem Gardens, who was incidentally the founder of the building firm William Whiteley, demolished the whole site – to prepare it for redevelopment. Whiteley was enormously impressed by the Great Exhibition and all that it offered as an introducer to new fashion and industrial development. He opened a shop in Bayswater, which was then considered in 1863 a fashionable district of London. This shop was a success and he gradually enlarged it, taking on more staff, whilst improving his stock. Eventually his stables were one of the largest in London having 145 vehicles and 320 horses able to deliver anything 'the same day'. It eventually became one of the new 'department stores' – he called it the 'Universal Provider', boasting that he could provide 'anything from pin to an elephant'. Thomas Lipton called his early shops 'Irish markets' probably because he sold Irish butter and eggs. There was a great deal of competition between Lipton and the others providers particularly those who catered for the working class and poor. These lower ends of the market traders did not worry Whiteley for he was looking to the middle-classes to make his fortune.

As a child, Whiteley had gone to school with my great grandfather, and therefore, well know to him. Unfortunately, William, who was married at the time, went out with one of his female staff. This was not an unusual behaviour pattern for him to do and caused great bitterness. Years later one of the children took revenge on the father - for bringing such unhappiness to his mother and family, and shot him.

My grandmother was very conscience of her grandfather's position in the church, of Christian principles towards other people who need help. Her own large family gave her knowledge and understanding about women in labour and child delivery. She became the local unpaid midwife taking on the responsibility not only being at the birth of neighbouring children but helped nurse them, and their mothers too. Martha did this not only to help the family budget but also to relieve the hardships found at that time in the surrounding streets. Her mother had been trained as a schoolteacher, which inculcated a desire for learning – passed onto her children. This prompted her to always take an interest in her children's education... in later life my father attributed to her his love of learning.

The 1870 Elementary Education Act was introduced to ensure all children would be eligible to go to school. This was the first time a school place was available in a building set aside for the purpose under a certified head teacher. Previously most children could only rely upon instruction by the main religious bodies from 1833 and philanthropic organizations such as the Anglian National Society in 1811, and the British and Foreign School Society in 1814.

The Victorians found pregnancy something to be hidden and not talked about. Fathers were ignorant as to what was happening and mothers too were unclear about the physical side to life.

Martha's visits and ministrations were much valued... it says much for her fortitude, knowledge and experience; in a time when these were hard to find... that, she did these things without payment.

In the middle to late 1800s religion was the all-permeating influence not only of the family but the greater society. The parish church was the centre of the social system – the keystone that propped up the government. The main creed was obedience. 'Honour thy father and thy mother' was to be heard every Sunday at church. Church was also a social gathering where everything was discussed, evaluated, and equated. The dissenter was an unsocial person, to be wary of. The average person was not so concerned about dogma but of difference. The clergyman was the father of the parish linked to a great system which had gone on for ages.

The landlord was the lawgiver the representative of the parliamentary system - one of their own – born in the district. He could be seen every day walking about in and out of their houses. He knew them and their troubles, their ideas, their wants, dreams and desires...after all, they were identical to his views as well. It was here that the word and philosophical understanding of 'rights' had a place. This influenced every living hour of their day. They knew where they stood and they knew their worth.

In the middle to late 1800s individuals still did not regularly bathe. Underclothes were worn as either summer clothes or winter and not removed except to replace. Strip baths were the only means of washing either at the outside sink or tin bath. Those elders who were considered fussy used the public baths which children were encouraged to use – mainly to remove vermin – to stop scratching. This state of affairs lasted until well into the 20th century.

This is how the working class understood the world they lived in and this is how the middle class saw their place in the grand scheme of things. It was based upon a rural foundation..., which was to change. It was not long ago after all that most were onetime hewers of wood, tillers of soil and drovers of stock.

In the second half of the nineteenth century London's rich and middle class moved away from the city centre, which was being swamped by immigrants, particularly Westminster, where the Irish, French, and Jews congregated. The rich preferred Sydenham in Kent and Barnes and Richmond on the Thames, the upper middle class: Hampstead and Ealing, north and west of the city and Penge, south. The lower middle class: Camberwell, Hammersmith, Leyton, and Balham. Those men who worked in 'city-offices' preferred Bayswater, Brixton and Clapham... All these were at the time the city's outskirts.

Bayswater lies at the top left-hand corner of Kensington Gardens. Kensington Palace is south, three quarters of a mile down the road and Notting Hill Gate about the same distance west. It was an ideal place to live, close to two royal parks.