

## PREFACE

By 1800 London had spawned along its riverside east of the Tower one of the world's great industrial complexes. It built and furnished ships and equipped the men who sailed them to every known and unknown quarter of the earth. The river's north bank in particular was London's Sailortown, a straggling bustling district quite different from any other part of the capital, yet known the world over by seafaring men. For long it was a district buried in obscurity and clouded by myth. But in recent years this part of the East End during its formative period has been expertly recovered for us in a revelatory multi-volume survey. It has previously explored the parishes of Mile End Old Town, Whitechapel, and Wapping, and now completes the riverside with Shadwell and the hamlet of Ratcliff.

Revelatory is not too strong a term for the work undertaken here. The popular understanding of the East End of London at any time up to the First World War is of a uniformly bleak, often terrible, place of desperate poverty. This monochrome picture has been challenged by historians who have stressed the importance of an indigenous merchant and industrial class, especially in the years before 1800. But we have never before had revealed to us in such immense and convincing detail just how prosperous, diverse and cultured this East End heritage was in fact. And we have never been given such a picture before because no one had undertaken the sheer hard work of uncovering a history long buried in land tax returns, rate books, wills, deeds and insurance policies.

Anyone interested in London's extraordinary history owes a true debt to Derek Morris and Ken Cozens. In many ways it is not surprising that their background is different from the academic traditions in which most historians are presently schooled. These volumes are a labour of love, and love of a subject is not readily nurtured in a climate where books have often to be written for their effect on careers and institutions rather than for enlightenment of the reader. Derek Morris is a scientist by training who returned to an early passion for history in retirement; Ken Cozens is now a specialist in maritime history but who made a living in banking and event catering. They eloquently prove that anyone can become a historian: anyone, that is, who is passionate and inquisitive and dauntless enough, and prepared to put in endless hours at the desk. That this has been no thankless task is shown by the admiring reception among many general readers and academic historians that the first three volumes in this series elicited at home and abroad.

This fourth volume triumphantly extends their enterprise. The greatest revelation for the modern reader will be the depth and richness (in all senses) of the cross-class complexity of this district during the period under review. The poor are not ignored, far from it, and the vibrant culture of sailors ashore is much in evidence. Unlike many other studies the lives of women come strongly to the fore – no one is 'hidden from history' here. But most surprising will be the exploration of the lives and connections of the 'middling sort of people'. Laid before us are the merchants, ships' captains, manufacturers, contractors, clergymen, doctors and other professionals who helped make the London riverside such an astonishingly diverse place. It was they who shouldered the burden of supporting their poor neighbours, and of paving, cleansing and lighting the streets and keeping them safe at night. As this book convincingly shows, that was no easy undertaking.

*London's Sailortown 1600-1800, Shadwell and Ratcliff* – is, then, a fitting conclusion to these same authors' study of the East End riverside. Given their past achievements that is praise indeed.

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