# CONTENTS

*Preface* vii  
*Abbreviations* ix  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘Why London? Why Now?’ The Swinging Moment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Death of the Sixties, Part 1: Soho—Sixties London’s Erogenous Zone</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Death of the Sixties, Part 2: The Fall of the House of Biba</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>‘Now That Londoners Have Discovered the Delights of the Palate’: Eating Out in 1960s and 1970s London</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘Hot Property—it’s Mine!’ The Lure and the Limits of Home Ownership</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>‘You Only Have to Look at Westway’: The End of the Urban Motorway in London</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Conservation Consensus</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>East End Docklands and the Death of Poplarism</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The London Cabbie and the Rise of Essex Man</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Protecting the Good Life: London’s Suburbs</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Containing Racism? The London Experience, 1957–1968</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Unquiet Grove: The 1976 Notting Hill Carnival Riot</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CONTENTS


14 Strains of Labour in the Inner City 365

15 Selling Swinging London, or Coming to Terms with the Tourist 387

16 Becoming Postindustrial 407

Notes 435

Bibliography 525

Index 555
London was repeatedly discovered in the mid-1960s. More accurately, the West End of London was discovered by several writers and journalists, most of them from overseas. They were looking for the source of the British innovations in fashion and popular music which had recently permeated North America and western Europe. They found a metropolitan centre less straight-laced than they had taken Britain to be, with cutting-edge popular culture and a vibrant nightlife enjoyed by young pleasure-seekers. They concluded that London was ‘the most swinging city in the world at the moment.’

Britain’s pop-music revolution—by now centred in London—was the principal reason for the fixation, but this new bout of Anglomania was driven by a comprehensive enthusiasm for London’s innovative culture, embracing fashion, design, food and lifestyle generally, as well as music. Across the Atlantic, at least, London fashion had been noticed before Beatlemania arrived. Glamour magazine of New York featured the British model Jean Shrimpton on its cover as early as April 1963, and Mod women’s fashion became a staple of US women’s magazines over the following months. A feature in US Vogue in September 1964 focused specifically on the ‘new rush of Bright Young People in Britain’—‘Britain’ meaning London, a city ‘filled with these young women, their right-up-to-the-minute look, their passion for doing things, their absolute talent for fun.’ Six months later the US teenage magazine Seventeen, responsible for introducing the designer
Mary Quant to American fashion followers in 1961, produced a special issue promoting ‘The London Look’.¹³

Seventeen’s readership consisted largely of American teenage girls, most of whom would have had little prospect of visiting London in the near future. Its immediate aim was to promote sales of London designs in the US, strengthening the tie-up that the magazine had established with a manufacturer; it did so by ‘capitaliz[ing] on the British fever the magazine helped to induce.’⁴ In August 1965 the Hamburg teen periodical Star Club News published a well-informed piece on the London youth scene for readers who stood a better chance of experiencing it than did American teens, concentrating on Mod style and entertainment and describing in detail a performance by The Who at the Marquee Club.⁵ The German teenage magazine Bravo carried a feature on the Mod fashion fulcrum Carnaby Street, in West Soho, in February 1966.⁶ Bravo was a teenage lifestyle publication, chiefly concerned with pop music. It was the fusion of fashion and pop which produced the ‘youthquake’ in British popular culture in the sixties, and a similar effect became evident internationally as the Beatles and other British groups became global brands during 1964. It produced an interest in Britain and British modernity which focused on London as the world’s ‘only truly modern city’.⁷

The American columnist John Crosby, working as London correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune, did more than most to project the city to Americans as a ‘place to be’, though he eventually distilled his impressions of ‘The Most Exciting City’ not in the Tribune but in the London Daily Telegraph’s new weekend magazine in April 1965. ‘London is where the action is’, he wrote, as Paris and New York had been after the war and Rome in the midfifties. He identified a new magnetism in Britain’s capital city, as a young, vibrant London pulled Britain out of the ‘long Dark Age’ which had begun in the thirties and continued through the years of war and austerity. It was being led by a self-confident generation of young creatives, fun-loving and irreverent but still driven by ‘a steady pulse of serious purpose.’ Crosby interviewed several of them, including thirty-year-old John Stephen, who had effectively created Carnaby Street as the world’s hippest menswear centre; Rupert Lycett Green, twenty-six-year-old creator of the expensive but modishly elegant clothes sold in the Dover Street boutique Blades; the Mod designer Caroline Charles, already a millionaire having started her own label little more than a year earlier at the age of twenty-one; Mark Birley, a veteran of thirty-four, who had founded the up-market Annabel’s nightclub in Berkeley Square two years earlier; and
Brian Morris, aged thirty, the manager of the exclusive and fashionable Ad Lib Club off Leicester Square. Morris told Crosby that ‘this is a young people’s town. The young have suddenly become visible.’ Observing an Oxford graduate swathing himself in brown corduroy in Blades and working-class boys ‘splurging on suede jackets’ in Carnaby Street, Crosby concluded that youth had trumped class in the new England and that ‘the caste system is breaking down at both ends.’

Crosby’s was an American view of London, carried in a British publication. It was not until a year later that London was projected directly across the Atlantic in the encomium to the city by Piri Halasz in *Time* magazine’s issue for 15 April 1966. The feature would become one of *Time*’s most famous pieces, but it was the result of a spur-of-the-moment editorial decision and was researched and written in nine days, with material supplied by the magazine’s London bureau. At its core were five vignettes, or ‘scenes’, depicting an evening at the Clermont gaming club in Berkeley Square, during which ‘the handsome son of a peer’ lost $450,000; a Saturday afternoon in Chelsea’s King’s Road, featuring Mick Jagger and the Mod queen Cathy McGowan in the Guys and Dolls coffee bar; an ‘in-crowd’ lunch at Le Rêve restaurant in Chelsea, involving Terence Stamp, Michael Caine, David Bailey and the Chelsea tailor Doug Hayward; an account of the recreational life of the twenty-three-year-old fashion writer and stylist Jane Ormsby Gore; and a Kensington house party given by the actress Leslie Caron for Marlon Brando, Barbra Streisand, Warren Beatty and others (‘Dame Margot Fonteyn is due’). Halasz in New York then worked up the story to incorporate some of her own ideas—that the young were becoming more influential in the modern world and that people from humble backgrounds, with provincial accents, were becoming more influential in London. The colour illustrations helped complete the image of ‘the Swinging City’: vinyl-clad girls in the King’s Road, fashionable youth in Carnaby Street, a striptease artiste at the Sunset Strip club in Soho, revellers at the exclusive Scotch of St James nightclub, a *chemin de fer* session at the still more exclusive Crockford’s gaming club. The result was, as Halasz acknowledged, ‘a collage, pastiche, composite, or synthesis of words and ideas contributed by many people’, but it was a pastiche which produced a lasting image.

A ‘passionate Anglophile’, Halasz saw London as an optimistic place and its youth as a force for good. Aged thirty herself, she had recently filed reports on youth movements in Cuba, the Netherlands and Indonesia, and she warmed to London as ‘yet another situation where a new generation
was playing a key role.' During the midsixties lull in youth activism in Britain, however, between the waning of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the explosion of student protest later in the decade, it was difficult to present a similar degree of political engagement in London. Instead the article’s emphasis on consumerism and clubbing reinforced another of Halasz’s convictions—that the retreat from empire ‘had enabled England to regain the free and easy spirit that had been crushed out of it by the weight of commanding the globe’, liberating London in particular ‘to share pleasure with its workers and its youth.’ A reference to the ‘pot parties of Chelsea’ was removed before publication, but *Time’s* London appeared unserious, an impression reinforced by the illustration of a bowler-hatted City type forging across London Bridge ‘to manage the affairs of a suddenly frivolous city.’

Halasz’s editor urged her ‘to be sure and get that good stuff about decadence into the story.’ As the Wilson government struggled to defend the pound in the summer of 1966, external commentators drew easy connections between London’s self-indulgence and Britain’s economic plight. Two weeks before the *Time* article, Pierre Joffroy in *Paris Match* had written a sympathetic piece on London, which nonetheless ended by asking (quoting the *Times* and ultimately Oscar Wilde) whether Britain was dying beyond its means. The American evangelist Billy Graham launched his month-long Greater London Crusade in May, ‘bent on saving this city from its excesses.’ Like many tourists, he made his way to Soho—‘the sleazy “Square Mile of Sin”’—though police, concerned about the crowds, stopped him bringing Jesus’s love to Old Compton Street. As the summer’s sterling crisis mounted, the treatment of London’s swingers became increasingly censorious. ‘The pound trembles, the gold runs out, Britain’s ships stand in the docks’, wrote Anthony Lewis in the *New York Times* in June, ‘but at Annabel’s they come and go, talking of how short the skirts can go. The atmosphere in London today can be almost eerie in its quality of relentless frivolity. There can rarely have been a greater contrast between a country’s objective situation and the mood of its people.’ The US men’s magazine *Esquire* published an enthusiastic set of pieces on the ‘London Charivari 1966’ in July, but many observers saw the austerity package imposed in that month as calling time on the city’s self-indulgence. ‘“Swinging London” swings on, but the swinging lacks conviction,’ Dana Adams Schmidt told *New York Times* readers in October. At the end of the year Gene Farmer wrote a lachrymose ‘Special Report’ in *Life*, yearning for the poor but honest London he had known in the early fifties, when meat and
eggs were almost unobtainable and people burned ‘nutty slack’ to fend off the cold. By contrast, London’s new incontinence was illustrated by underdressed bunny-girls serving blackjack-playing gamblers at the recently opened Playboy Club in Park Lane. ‘“Swinging”, Farmer wrote, ‘has got out of hand because it is the kind of fun only a rich nation can afford—and England is no longer a rich nation.’

Londoners, ‘partly appalled by the speciousness, partly amused by the attention,’ reacted with knowing scepticism to what the journalist Maureen Cleave called ‘the tedious swinging London that foreigners are always going on about.’ This picture of relentless hedonism, constructed largely by outsiders, was at best unreal, at worst offensive. It was based almost entirely on the West End, which was, for many Londoners, a place to visit rather than the focus of their lives. As the Evening Standard’s theatre critic Milton Shulman noted in October 1966, local television news programmes depicted a very different urbanity, portraying London as ‘a vast suburb where rows about rates, higher rents, snarls, and grocery prices . . . dominate the souls and imaginations of the capital’s inhabitants’—a metropolis as mundane as ‘Swinging London’ was exotic. This might have been just as myopic a view—Shulman thought so—but it is true that a researcher today, reading only the local newspapers covering the London beyond the glossy centre, would struggle to recognise the world’s ‘most exciting city.’

Sixties London was a place in which most public transport stopped by 11.00 p.m. and many West End stores closed for the weekend at 1.00 p.m. on Saturday. Sundays were so inert that the author Betty James wrote a guide in 1964 to help Londoners relieve the tedium of their Sabbath. It is routine now for memoirs of Londoners who grew up in the sixties to stress that their part of the capital—whether comfortable suburb or decaying inner-city area—was not really very swinging at all.

But to point out that ‘Swinging London’ meant little to the average Londoner is not to say much. Of course Swinging London, as depicted, was largely mythical, just as the received images of ‘belle époque’ Paris, Weimar Berlin, la dolce vita Rome and the two analogues suggested by both Crosby and Joffroy—1920s Paris and post-1945 New York—were mythical. The myth emerged from stylised accounts which privileged the exotic over the routine, leisure over work, the centre over the periphery, producing a city portrait which was inevitably overdrawn. The question is why it was drawn at all: What magnetism made London an ‘in’ city, however briefly? We should be asking not whether ‘Swinging London’ was real but rather the question posed by the author of the Esquire piece: ‘Why London, why now?’
6 CHAPTER I

The Unswinging City

In the early sixties much of London—and most of its Victorian core—could best be described as an ageing industrial city scarred by war. Only in 1963 was the last bomb site in the City of London built over. Outer London was still pockmarked by bomb damage, while the East End and other targeted industrial areas remained disfigured throughout the decade. The prefab units introduced in the last year of the war to provide emergency—and supposedly temporary—housing were still a common feature of inner London in the sixties: indeed, the London County Council (LCC) initiated a new four-year prefab-building programme in 1964 to plug some of the gaps in South and East London’s housing stock. Much of the regular housing was substandard, enfeebled by decades of rent control.

London displayed the familiar environmental problems of an industrial city, which were being tackled by the sixties but would not be dispelled before they were exacerbated by those of the modern age. Thus the Thames was cleaner than it had been in the 1950s, when it had officially been declared ‘biologically dead’, but the Thames estuary still received some five hundred million gallons of sewage effluents every day in 1962. Only a tenth of that amount entered the river above London Bridge, but that was enough to ensure that the Thames did not smell very swinging even in the centre of town. The growing volume of household detergents in waste water meant that parts of the river surface carried a regular ‘head’ of foam; the effect on the oxygen balance was equivalent to the discharge of crude sewage from a million people. Industrial pollution and domestic coal fires had combined to take four thousand lives in the smog of 1952, and although that catastrophe prompted the 1956 Clean Air Act, which mitigated the problem, the smog reappeared, albeit on a smaller scale, in 1960 and particularly in December 1962, when visibility fell to less than five yards, the concentration of smoke and sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere rose to fourteen times normal levels and bronchitis deaths increased. In any case, the 1956 act did nothing to combat the growth of hydrocarbon pollution caused by rising traffic volumes. Even by 1967 a quart of London air was said to contain ‘about 10 million particles of soot or dust in addition to various unhealthy gases.’ It left its mark on the urban fabric: the two million or so tourists coming to London annually in the mid-1960s gazed on ‘some of the scruffiest buildings in the world.’
the *Standard*’s planning correspondent, Judy Hillman, assessed the condition of several public buildings, awarding ‘black hand’ ratings to the worst afflicted—the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey, the nearby Middlesex Guildhall and the church of St Clement Danes, exposed to traffic exhaust on two sides on its island site.32 Traffic also exacerbated noise pollution: in 1961 one in six Londoners claimed that traffic noise had made their house shake, one in four that it kept them awake.33 Cars and lorries were the main culprits, transforming what had once been a domestic problem into an environmental one and creating an ambient noise nuisance: where once householders had been as much disturbed by noise from neighbours as from outside, ‘it has been found now [1963] that only 14 per cent notice indoor noises, while 50 per cent complain about the traffic.’34

In the nineteenth century such disamenities in urban Britain had been accepted as the price payable for the higher standard of living that manufacturing cities offered. Since the outbreak of war in 1939, however, inner London had seen a steady outflow of people looking to escape the drawbacks of the inner city and enabled to do so by a similar outward movement of employment, to outer London, to the postwar New Towns or beyond.
Greater London in the 1960s was in fact only halfway through a population fall which had begun on the outbreak of war and would continue until the late 1980s. The capital was shedding cockneys. Initially the postwar decentralisation of population was public policy, rooted in prewar concerns about London’s strategic vulnerability and more recent anxiety about congestion of the central area and pressure on the housing stock and public transport. Only in the 1970s would depopulation become a matter of public concern; before then the assumption was that movement out of the inner city—and perhaps out of London altogether—offered the most reliable means of securing an improved quality of life.

Those who left London were replaced by incomers who ranged from people driven from their previous homes by war, political upheaval or economic collapse to those for whom a move to London was necessary to develop their careers, with a large group in the middle who had judged, rightly or wrongly, that their prospects would be better in the city. The geopolitical upheavals of the mid-twentieth century accounted for the
arrival of German and central European refugees from Nazism, for the postwar Polish refugees from communism, for the Chinese who came, via Hong Kong, during and after the Chinese Civil War and for the Cypriots—Greek and Turkish—who left their island to escape the communal hostilities of the fifties and sixties. Other ethnic minority communities were augmented by assisted migration schemes: London’s Maltese population expanded from the late forties, prompted by financial assistance from the British government.35 Migrants from South Asia and, particularly, the West Indies were encouraged to move to Britain from the late forties to offset labour shortages on public transport and in the National Health Service.

These were all arrivals from overseas, contributing to London’s developing diversity. They were the mid-twentieth-century equivalents of the men
and women who had migrated from country to town during the industrial revolution, seeking and generally gaining an improved standard of living at the cost of often squalid living conditions, with the added drawback of receiving frequently uninhibited racist hostility from those who were longer established in London. Perhaps the most misleading aspect of the ‘Swinging London’ stereotype was the undiverse nature of the city that it depicted. Crosby noted briefly that ‘the Flamingo [Club], a beat spot, caters to the West Indians’, but otherwise the American commentators, who might have been expected to be alert to urban racial issues in the mid-sixties, were so set on projecting London as a carefree place that the possible recurrence of racial tension in a city that had seen serious race riots as recently as 1958 passed unmentioned.

Nonetheless, most of London’s in-migrants had come, as always, from the British Isles, including the Republic of Ireland, which was still exporting around forty thousand people to London annually in the late 1950s. Many of these British or Irish migrants had come to London with less assured prospects than, for example, the West Indians recruited to work on the buses, and many found themselves consigned to the lower reaches of London’s employment and housing markets. The journalist Melanie
Phillips interviewed the residents of what was then a slum in Cambridge Street, Pimlico, shortly before their eviction in 1977. Of the eight whose origins were specified, all came from the British Isles, but only three were Londoners. The others were a twenty-four-year-old from Bangor who had briefly worked as a waitress, an unemployed porter from Tipperary, an unemployed baker from the Isle of Wight, a casual catering worker from a village in the Trossachs and his partner, from Stirling, who had just walked out of a job as a cinema usherette.38 To them and many similar incomers London offered only ‘insecure, non-unionised, low-paid work combined with insecure, low-standard accommodation.’39

‘Is only rubbish-people come to this town’ claimed a Greek Cypriot coffee grinder in Camden Town, interviewed by Jonathan Raban in 1973. He had come to London in 1956 so that his children could receive an English education: ‘next year, maybe year after, I go home.’ A compatriot, Helena Petrou, had found herself alone in London after her husband divorced her, with a child, little English and no money. She lived by making up twenty dresses a day by artificial light in her basement flat in Tufnell Park. In the city but not of it, she nonetheless clung to London: ‘I want to stay here for a moment. Life changes from today to tomorrow. Who knows?’ Her memory of Cyprus—‘the Eden from which, long ago . . . she was expelled’—became steadily more distant and more rosy.40

London’s diverse and complex economy had always absorbed large numbers of such people without conferring security or comfort on them. Helena Petrou experienced Tufnell Park in much the same way as sweated immigrant tailors had experienced Whitechapel in the 1880s. If anything, the position of the most precarious worsened during the years covered by this book; in 1977 one of Phillips’s Pimlico subjects spoke of his London life as ‘a question of survival’, weeks before he lost his home.41 Overall, though, London was a prosperous city and one in which an evolving ‘growth services’ sector offered opportunities not to be found—or not to be found in such abundance and offering such rewards—elsewhere.

In a 1966 Evening Standard piece about the allure of London, Angus McGill interviewed four incomers from points north: a market researcher from Middlesbrough, a public relations man from South Shields, a BBC producer from Sheffield and the Carnaby Street mogul John Stephen, from Glasgow. All were representatives of the new London, benefiting from opportunities which they could not have enjoyed in the London of twenty years earlier. None wished to return. Stephen, who had arrived from Glasgow in 1952 with ‘£13 in a burgundy leather wallet and nowhere to go’,
exemplified those who were enriched by London’s new economy. ‘London is where the opportunities are’, he told McGill.42 Similarly Tom Benson, who rode from Liverpool on his scooter to take a job washing up in Ray Parkes’s Chelsea restaurant, ended up cooking the food and eventually running Parkes at its fashionable sixties peak.43

There were many more, though, who, though not exactly rich, were comfortable enough to enjoy experiencing the city in a way that a Cypriot seamstress trapped in a Tufnell Park basement could not. The novelist A. S. Byatt, Sheffield-born, who ‘likes to think of herself as a northerner, although she prefers living in London’, enjoyed the diversity of the mothers’ group at her children’s nursery in Bloomsbury, where she encountered ‘doctors’ wives, actors’ wives, a striptease artist, university wives, Indians, Italians, Cypriots.’ Her previous home in Durham had been beautiful, but ‘the orderliness of society weighed on [her].’44 Martin Holmes, market researcher from Middlesbrough, told McGill, ‘[Back home] I’d have a far higher standard of living. I’d live in a house with a garden rather than a flat without one. But London holds you. You feel that you are closer to things happening.’45 An anonymous stripper interviewed by Anne Sharpley in 1965 explained that she had come to London from Yorkshire with a job offer as an assistant manageress, which she had rapidly dropped, feeling that ‘this is not like London’: ‘I wanted something more glamorous, wanted to get into the West End.’46 The gays who spoke to Sharpley in a ground-breaking series of articles in 1964 expressed ‘the relief they have at first coming to London from country districts to find “there were hundreds like me, all more than understanding”’; the prosecution rate for what was still an illegal act was only half that in the rest of the United Kingdom.47 Sharpley herself, from Cheshire, appreciated the ‘stiff course in urbanisation’ that cosmopolitan Balcombe Street, near Dorset Square, gave her: ‘it has become an engrossment, an arena, a listening post, a liability, an insight—and an everlasting instruction that people, after all, are more important than trees.’48 Anne Ward, a twenty-four-year-old personal assistant, loved ‘the feel of the town’ and got ‘a tremendous kick out of merely walking around on those fabulous misty days’: ‘It’s so romantic—the bomb sites and the church spires looming up. It sounds very provincial, but I walk down Fleet Street and I think: “I wouldn’t go back to Chesterfield for the world.”’49 Valerie Warden, a twenty-six-year-old fashion artist from Liverpool, believed that had she stayed at home, she would have drifted into marriage rather than a career; ‘just when she thinks she’s had enough of London, something happens to convince her she can never
leave it.’ For Mary Taylor, a nineteen-year-old secretary, ‘things are much more exhilarating in London. Even the top jobs in Bristol go at half the speed.’ Taylor, who had left Bristol at fifteen because she thought she might as well ‘join the herd’, explained that ‘girls come to London to have a good social life, two holidays a year and earn a lot of money.’

Secretaries like Taylor were beneficiaries of the office boom that was transforming the capital. The Conservative government had lifted controls over commercial development in 1954, enriching a small group of men who had had the foresight and nerve to buy Central London property during the war. Their efforts reshaped the face of the capital, providing most Londoners with their first—and starkest—illustration of the changing nature of the metropolitan economy, as office towers sprouted in what had always been a low-rise city. Few welcomed their assault on London’s fabric. Most postwar building in the West End and, particularly, the City did little to capture public imagination. Observing the first signs of the City’s postwar transformation in 1954, Harold Macmillan feared that ‘a lot of very confused and unworthy building will ultimately replace what the Germans destroyed.’ Tension built up until 1959, when public anger was vented at the clumsy stump designed by John Poulson for the developer.
Jack Cotton on the Monico site at Piccadilly Circus. Poulson’s design was approved by the LCC but subsequently shot down after a public inquiry.\textsuperscript{54} Though Cotton responded by engaging Walter Gropius as a kind of consultant,\textsuperscript{55} there was not the incentive that exists today for developers to use prestige architects as a means of gaining planning permission. Generally permission was gained as a result of hole-and-corner negotiation with the LCC in which developers agreed in return to help the LCC attain one of its own development objectives. The indispensable skill of the architect consisted rather of extracting the most profitable outcome from the LCC’s system of plot ratios and height restrictions rather than endeavouring to beautify London; the arcane and clandestine nature of these negotiations meant that the London public became aware of most projects only when they began to be built.\textsuperscript{56}

As the supply of bomb sites dwindled from the late 1950s, much development entailed the destruction of familiar landmarks. These included West End theatres and railway termini, targeted in the late fifties and early sixties by private developers promoting the replacement of an existing Victorian building by a supposedly more efficient successor, buried under an office tower.\textsuperscript{57} The bomb-damaged stations at Holborn Viaduct and Cannon Street and, more controversially, the Doric Arch and Great Hall at Euston and the St James’s Theatre in King Street were victims of these initiatives;\textsuperscript{58} many more buildings were threatened. It is hard to convey today the unsettling effect on Londoners of the constant threats to and recurrent removal of a familiar townscape. Byatt, conscious that ‘things are disappearing and decaying’ in Georgian Bloomsbury in the early 1960s, described it guardedly as a good place to live ‘for now.’\textsuperscript{59} Bette Spektorov, an Oxford graduate interviewed by Maureen Cleave for the Standard in 1964, had come to London for its theatres, exhibitions and museums but thought it ‘fearfully ugly’: ‘And what beautiful things there are, they are pulling down. It brings tears to my eyes. Very soon it will be ghastly to live here.’\textsuperscript{60}

But the office boom brought jobs. Companies sought mostly to recruit school leavers: the director of one plastics company was said to have declined to rent a new block outside London because ‘there isn’t even a pop record shop nearby.’ Sixty-five percent of office staff were women, most of them secretaries.\textsuperscript{61} Many of them found secretarial employment unstimulating.\textsuperscript{62} It displayed many of the features of a casual trade. Skill levels were low—a 1960 survey found that the average London typist averaged only 1,648 words a day\textsuperscript{63}—and training was often limited or nonexistent.
Turnover rates were high, with both the women and their bosses assuming that their employment would end upon marriage. Few secretaries remained in the job beyond their twenties—nearly 70 percent of London secretaries were aged twenty-nine or younger. Opportunities for career development were limited, and promotion was more likely to arise from a transfer to a higher-status boss than from any enhancement of professional expertise. Old-school secretaries, with learned skills, feared that their trade was being debased by the flood of new entrants. A ‘secretary’ in sixties London might be anything ‘from shorthand-typist to private scribe to glorified personal assistant’. Indeed, the term ‘personal assistant’ was said to have been adopted by senior secretaries as a means of distinguishing themselves from the unskilled mass. For all that, though, the rapid expansion of London’s commercial sector meant that unlike most casual workers, secretaries were in demand and startlingly well paid. ‘These days a good secretary can virtually write her own ticket’, Karin Hart wrote in 1966; by then around a quarter of the secretaries in the City were earning more than £1,000 a year, when the national average wage for all employment was below £900. Even sixteen-year-old school leavers could command £9 a week in the City. The Town and Country Planning Association found in 1962 that the pay for an unskilled female office worker had risen...
by 180 percent since 1950, against a 60 percent increase in the price level.67
‘The worst economic freeze does not touch the pockets of secretaries,’ as Jonathan Aitken put it.68

There were approaching half a million secretaries in London by the mid-sixties.69 Most came from London, and many continued to live at home, earning well and paying little or nothing in rent.70 But many came from outside—‘typists from Bradford and Hull, secretaries from Newcastle, audio-typists from Leeds and female clerks from Doncaster come hot-footing to London as fast as their parents will allow.’71 Many lived in bedsits—single rooms, usually in houses shared with other young women. Barbara Griggs described this milieu in 1963: ‘This home from home will be furnished with a divan bed in one corner, a minute electric cooker in another corner, assorted bits of uninspired secondhand furniture, and a decoration scheme that you loathe at sight but can’t afford to modify by any more decisive means than the introduction of a couple of jolly red and orange cushions on the divan to counteract the prevailing note of smoggy fawn and fern green, and an Impressionist print on the walls.’ For most young women in the city, this was merely a base in which an outgoing social life could be planned: ‘bedsitter life makes you gregarious from necessity.’72

Gregariousness could lead to babies. Lamenting the number of illegitimate births to London teenagers in 1964, the London Diocesan Council for Moral Welfare noted that ‘a large proportion of the girls are commercial or office workers who live alone in bedsitters.’73 London’s illegitimacy rate grew steadily from the mid-1950s. It became a talking point in the early 1960s, when it was usually attributed to pregnant girls coming from the countryside or, stereotypically, Ireland, to give birth in the anonymous setting of the big city.74 Over the course of the decade, though, it became evident that the rise reflected changing conditions in London more than circumstances elsewhere. In 1969 James Weir, medical officer for Kensington and Chelsea, advanced a sociological explanation for his borough having the highest illegitimacy rate in Britain: it was characterised by a large number of people living in lodgings, an extraordinarily high percentage of women in the ‘at risk’ years of fifteen to twenty-nine, ‘abundant temptation’ and the social pressures pushing young people into extramarital sex.75

Weir’s counterpart in Redbridge noted in 1969 that a rise in illegitimacy had been accompanied by a fall in the occupancy of homes for unmarried mothers, suggesting that as ‘society is becoming more permissive, unmarried mothers can remain with their parents.’ The Greenwich medical officer
observed in his 1971 report that illegitimacy could no longer be assumed to reflect ‘low social standards.’ It was ‘to be found in all walks of life. Indeed, on occasions, it would appear to be sought by certain types.’

‘London is the easiest city in the world to find a partner’, the English writer Al Alvarez told American readers in September 1967. If the partner sought was young and female, he may have been right. Women formed 55 percent of the population between fifteen and twenty-four in the ‘Greater London Central Conurbation’ identified in the 1966 Sample Census. The idea that these women had turned London into the global capital of recreational sex owed much to Crosby and his male interviewees. A January 1964 piece in the New York Herald Tribune described seductively sassy ‘Chelsea girls’ empowered by fashion, ‘striding along in their black leather boots, their capes, their fur hats, their black stockings with wild designs.’ In the Weekend Telegraph fifteen months later Crosby suggested that ‘young English girls take to sex as if it’s candy and it’s delicious.’

Interviewed in 1967, Helen Brook, who had founded the Brook Advisory Service in 1962 to advise young Londoners in matters of sex and contraception, painted a different picture, of widespread ignorance and insecurity about sex, noting that neither innate intelligence nor an educated family guaranteed sexual awareness. Inner London’s numerous young women had to gain wisdom in an environment where sexual opportunity was greater and social constraints weaker than anywhere else in Britain. ‘What I hate to see is a young girl coming to London and hopping from bed to bed just because her friends do. It happens to a lot of young girls’, Jenny Randall, a secretary sharing a Belsize Park flat with five other young women, told Maureen Cleave in 1964. Randall’s six years in London had instilled caution, but as Cleave pointed out, ‘for what [young single women] suffer in loneliness, shortage of money, horrible food and terror of the big city, they are rewarded in freedom’—and freedom might include sexual freedom.

Six anonymised but unusually frank interviews in the magazine Look of London in February 1968 give an idea of the variety of strategies adopted by young single women in the capital’s sexual jungle. One respondent had avoided sex until she was twenty but after embarking on a serious relationship felt free to have affairs with men she believed could ‘help her with her natural development.’ After ending the relationship and going onto the pill, she became more eclectic and claimed to have had forty partners—some of them women—by the time of the interview. Another, who had jettisoned her virginity at the age of sixteen ‘because she felt that it was time...
to do something about it’, had had about ten men since, on a serial monogamy basis, ending each relationship herself, and only when a replacement had been identified. One, admitting that ‘she is very keen on sex and finds it beneficial to her health’, nonetheless ‘found great pleasure in leading people right to the brink and then refusing them’; ‘she found herself easily infatuated but just as easily bored by a man.’ One, initially repelled by sex after being ‘half-raped’ at fifteen, had subsequently had flings with men she found physically attractive, but ‘now realises she cannot go to bed with men casually.’ Another had had two lengthy relationships during which she was not entirely faithful, admitting that she had practised casual flings ‘partly in order to run a check on the physical prowess of her main partner.’ The peer pressure felt by young single women is suggested by one who had resisted sleeping with her boyfriend for three years until she was eighteen but admitted that before then ‘she used to pretend she’d had fantastic affairs to anyone who happened to be interested’ and by another who ‘feels shame at admitting that she is still a virgin.’

Even she, though, was evidently prepared to countenance sex outside marriage, like most in her generation.

Randall’s view was clear: ‘I disapprove very strongly of adultery and divorce. Once you’re married, that’s it. But I disapprove of the attitude of the women’s magazines that sex is a miracle that happens the moment you get a gold band on your finger, and before that it’s disgusting and filthy.’ The very finality of marriage made sexual experimentation beforehand acceptable. We cannot know how widely Randall’s attitude was shared, but we can see it as a rational response of a young woman to London’s opportunities and pitfalls. It may well be that young men were more predatory, as Randall suggested, but the result was to diminish the number of young people of both genders believing that premarital sex was wrong. A 1970 survey of Londoners’ sexual attitudes for the Standard showed a pronounced generational divergence in attitudes to premarital sex, with 60 percent of those aged between sixteen and twenty-four believing that ‘young people today should . . . have sex before marriage’, compared to 29 percent in all age groups.

Men were less evident beneficiaries of the office boom, but they were beneficiaries nonetheless. The median wage for young male clerical staff in the lowest grade rose by 142 percent between 1950 and 1960, against a
52 percent increase in the price level.‘The young office workers who filled the new office towers rising around the city’ sustained the thirty-six betting shops which sprang up in the City of London (a square mile with a minuscule resident population and expensive rents) within three years of the legalisation of gambling in 1960. They fuelled the menswear boom of the early sixties: ‘You could be a bank clerk and people would think “There’s a smart young lad,” but you could also be fashionable,’ Pete Townshend told Shawn Levy. But there was also an indirect effect. Office expansion widened the horizons of working-class boys entering the labour market. In the early 1950s, as the East End community activist Patrick Hanshaw later recounted, jobs had been plentiful close to home, but the local economy offered ‘full employment with only a restricted choice of direction’: ‘We were what loosely could be described as “factory fodder”,’ and ‘as they had done for generations, the Docks were already lifting that beckoning finger.’ The singer Tommy Steele remembered being summoned to see the headmaster on leaving his Bermondsey school in 1952 to find ‘a grumpy old soul’: ‘[His] one object was to put us off what we wanted to do and stick us into a factory.’

Ten years later, however, 15–20 percent of boys and the majority of girls leaving East End schools went into office work: ‘The office seems to be regarded as the acme of working life’, as Poplar’s Youth Employment Officer put it. This undermined traditional industrial recruitment and the idea of the heritable trade. The Thames lighterman Dick Fagan noted in his 1966 memoir that ‘fewer and fewer recruits to the trade come from lightering families. . . . This is the reason why there are so many “nonnies”, that is to say, men from non-lightering families, to be found on barges today.’ He regretted the change but understood the reason for it: ‘Why put a boy into it—even if he was prepared to go)—when there’s so much other work going with higher pay, better conditions, more security, a more certain future?’ During the 1962 postal workers’ strike, J. W. M. Thompson of the Standard, noting that the union leader, Ron Smith, had followed his father into the service, asked, ‘How many boys are eager to do the same today?’ and answered, ‘Very few.’ He concluded that ‘the loss of that tradition of esteem and continuity’ would continue to damage the service even after the dispute had been settled. Nevertheless, the pull of office work created labour shortages and high wages for those who chose to remain in industry. The memoirs of Alfred Gardner, describing his life in the East End garment trade, are illustrated by two views of Stepney factories in the late fifties, plastered with posters advertising jobs for machinists. On leaving school
in 1956, Gardner felt sufficiently confident to turn down work in a cabinet maker’s modern factory because its production-line techniques would have been ‘too tedious, . . . the atmosphere was too depressing.’ Within a few years the shortage of skilled workers would accelerate the deindustrialisation of Gardner’s East End, but in the early 1960s general affluence kept many inner-London industries afloat. Those benefiting from the tides of fashion, such as the garment trade, were buoyant.

In April 1962, as Teddy Boys evolved into Mods, the Standard’s Angus McGill spoke to some of ‘the modernists [who] earn more money than teenagers have ever earned before—and . . . spend it with frank enjoyment on themselves.’ Roy Pope, a nineteen-year-old plumber from Battersea, earning £15 a week, bought three new suits a year and had shirts made to measure. Pete Smith, an eighteen-year-old butcher from Wandsworth earning up to £30 a week, owned eight suits. Keith Smith, earning around £20 per week, also bought three suits a year, ‘each different from the last to keep abreast of the mutations of modernist fashion.’ They were dressed by two Clapham tailors, Brian Hoddinot and Richard Press—‘the Dior’s of the modernist set’—who had devised a suit known as the Sackville in response to the Mod demand. This direct relationship between young working-class men and responsive tailors—as close as that between any Savile Row couturier and his clients—had begun with the Teddy Boys, whose prescribed mode of dress had formed a kind of uniform, devised on the street. By extension, as Jane Wilson described, ‘Mod fashions evolved in a curious untraceable way, mostly in the south and east of London where there were enterprising tailors and shoemakers who had once catered for the Teddy Boys and could still produce goods to order from customers’ own messy sketches. The kids had the money and they knew what they wanted.’ John Stephen’s dominance of the youth menswear market owed much to his readiness to produce to order in this way, getting goods made up overnight in the workshops of the small tailors who had moved to Soho from the East End during the Blitz. ‘Mod fashions can change overnight’, McGill explained, ‘but mods know that John Stephen will be there next morning with the new thing.’ In 1964 Stephen opened the John Stephen Custom Made shop as part of his Carnaby Street empire, where customers could bring in their own designs to be made up on the premises.

The revolution in women’s fashion did not as clearly come from the streets, but it did derive from young, freelance designers’ frustration with established couturiers. Barbara Hulanicki, who would found Biba in Kensington in 1964, explained that ‘the shops in England at this time [1960]
were full of matronly clothes—either direct copies of Paris clothes or deeply influenced by the Paris collections. There was little specifically designed for the young.102 Mary Quant believed that ‘the young were tired of wearing essentially the same as their mothers.’103 She had initially envisaged her Bazaar boutique, opened in the King’s Road in 1955, purely as a retail operation and only began to design her own goods when she could not find enough off-the-peg stock that appealed to her.104 What started as the recognition of a gap in the market became, though, a kind of generational battle cry: ‘the young must never on any account look like the old.’ In a 1967 interview Quant described with candid horror what the old looked like: ‘Women . . . wore stiletto heels and corsets. They had no bottoms, you remember, but seats. They didn’t have nipples but great appendages of bosom and none of these things fitted together: the bosom came into the room first and the woman would follow. They looked like tarts really, with their bottoms all over their toes because of the stilettos. And you
never wanted to touch their hair because it might sting or burn. On my thirteenth birthday I cried because this horror was getting closer to me.\textsuperscript{105} Her creations consequently came in gamine form, to the discomfort of even moderately buxom customers, but with sales rising more than elevenfold (passing £4 million in 1966), it became clear that Quant had found a gap in the market.\textsuperscript{106}

Quant had a difficult relationship with the ‘frankly beastly’ fashion industry.\textsuperscript{107} So did most cutting-edge designers, both in women’s wear and menswear. As Stanley Adams, who opened in Kingly Street in 1965, put it, ‘Buyers don’t know their arse from their elbow. They have no identity with, or understanding of, the sort of people they are attempting to provide for.’\textsuperscript{108} Designers could, though, function with a fair degree of autonomy, hoping that hard work and the serendipity of public taste would see them succeed. Quant initially put together her designs in her own bedsit; Biba began as a mail-order business, with a single design.\textsuperscript{109} Premises suitable for boutiques—characteristically intimate and underlit—could be rented relatively cheaply even in Central London at least until the middle of the decade. Most boutiques began with very little capital—a weakness which would undermine many of them in the harsher climate of the 1970s, but which mattered little during fashion’s boom years.\textsuperscript{110}
Barriers were higher in the music industry. At the grassroots, music was characterised by a do-it-yourself approach similar to that in menswear. The skiffle boom of the 1950s involved homemade instruments in the hands of amateurs. The autobiography of Alan Johnson, growing up poor in Notting Hill in the 1950s, has a subplot recounting a musical career which began with his mother buying him a Spanish guitar from the proceeds of a pools win and ends with him performing in a band before sizeable audiences in pubs and clubs.¹¹¹ Many trod a similar path, particularly as the rewards of pop stardom became clear. ‘There’s so many groups it’s getting ridiculous’, the manager of the Tiger’s Head dance hall in Catford told Jane Wilson in November 1965: ‘we’ve had three in already this evening looking for work.’¹¹² Most would fail for lack of talent, but some were blocked by the industry’s innate conservatism. Eddie Rogers’s 1964 account of London’s Tin Pan Alley (Denmark Street, off the Charing Cross Road) lamented that the street, once the home of the professional songwriter, was now ‘a Mecca for the unskilled amateur’ and that ‘the old hands . . . either cannot get the feel of the songs that are selling today, or else they don’t want to try.’¹¹³ Though Rogers himself spoke warmly of the Beatles, many of those whom he interviewed evidently saw the new generation of pop musicians as charlatans—‘amateurs’ heedless of the industry’s standards. To judge from the book’s illustrations, few of Rogers’s interviewees would see fifty again; arguments over the value of new music were sharpened by generational hostility. ‘I don’t like the old people in this teenage business because they don’t know what it’s about’, the prolific twenty-six-year-old producer Mickie Most complained to Maureen Cleave in 1964: ‘I don’t interfere with Bing Crosby records.’ Noting that the establishment had sought to warn him off producing the Animals’ number-one “House of the Rising Sun,” he aspired to make the charts with ‘a record that only dogs can hear.’¹¹⁴

Two years earlier, Decca had rejected the Beatles. The idea of a middle-aged establishment blind to trends in youth taste is now a commonplace, both in fashion and in music. In reality it is unsurprising that the more iconoclastic aspects of the new culture disturbed those who saw their job as to target the median customer rather than the trendsetter and nationwide rather than just in London. Not every woman, after all, felt comfortable in a miniskirt. John Stephen was ‘designing essentially gay clothes for straight men’,¹¹⁵ with his use of colour and tight-fitting designs, which many straight men thought risqué. When Decca turned down the Beatles, the company was in good commercial health, with profits generated by Tommy Steele, Anthony Newley and Mantovani.¹¹⁶ Neither industry was
oblivious to the power of the teenage pocket: the difficulty lay in reading the trends in teen taste. In the spring of 1966 Carnaby Street was said to be full of ‘buyers from the more staid clothes retailers who have come to spy out what the young are buying next. They must often leave completely baffled.’\textsuperscript{117} Even Mary Quant, who shaped fashion far more than she was shaped by it, admitted as she entered her thirties that she and her husband watched ‘all the young television programmes’ and that they went ‘to places like the Ad Lib where you can see the early signs of some new fad or craze beginning to develop amongst the most up-and-coming trend-setters.’\textsuperscript{118} Both Dick Rowe, who turned down the Beatles for Decca, and George Martin, who signed the group for EMI/Parlophone, were men in early middle age trying to gauge teenage musical appetites. ‘The young will not be dictated to’, as Quant put it: it was difficult to ‘anticipate a mood before people realize that they are bored with what they have already got.’\textsuperscript{119}

Inevitably the advantage lay with those who were closer to the age group in question, which accounts for one distinctive feature of sixties London, the twenty-something plutocrat. Andrew Loog Oldham was in fact only nineteen when he became manager of the Rolling Stones in 1963: ‘Five years ago’, he told Maureen Cleave in 1964, ‘they wouldn’t have let me make tea, let alone record.’\textsuperscript{120} Still more striking, perhaps, was the trajectory of Oldham’s onetime bodyguard, Reg King, who rose from working as a butcher’s slaughterman to managing the group Thee. This group made no great mark on musical history, but King could still afford at the age of twenty-two to drive a white Lincoln convertible round Stanmore, where he lived with his mother.\textsuperscript{121} Mickie Most, installed in a new house in Wembley Park by 1964, drove a Porsche and claimed to have been making at least £100 per week since he was seventeen.\textsuperscript{122} In 1962 the twenty-eight-year-old John Stephen became the youngest man in Britain to own a Rolls Royce, but luxury cars soon became standard issue for the Carnaby Street moguls: ‘we each have a Rolls-Royce as a status symbol’, the twenty-eight-year-old Warren Gold, co-owner of the boutique Lord John, told Rodney Bennett-England in 1967.\textsuperscript{123} By then Stephen had bought his second car, a Cadillac.\textsuperscript{124}

Such opulence elevated these men to the swinging aristocracy. More significant, though, was the evidence it provided that youth culture was becoming commercially and socially pervasive. In the 1950s Teddy Boy gangs had been aggressively exclusive. In the early sixties Mods and Rockers were tribal and territorial. McGill described in 1963 their finely delineated
pitches in Northeast London: ‘Mod strongholds are Dagenham, Ilford, Tottenham, Manor Park, Hackney, Stratford East, Mile End, East Ham, Stoke Newington, Stamford Hill. Rocker strongholds are Finsbury Park, Highbury, Holloway, Enfield, Bethnal Green, Dalston, Finchley Road, Hoxton Market. “No Mod would dare walk through Hoxton Market on his own”, one rocker told me this week.’\textsuperscript{125} Mods, like Teds before them, helped broaden the range of men’s fashion, but clothes were tokens of their exclusivity. Music produced its own, less violent, tribes: trad jazz, modern jazz, folk revival and even early rock and roll were essentially cultish, but by the midsixties these distinctions were being blurred. The Beatles’ development of a widely accessible musical idiom had much to do with that. They have been targets of a revisionism bent on depicting the 1960s as the least culturally eventful decade of the century, but to suggest that they ‘appealed primarily to girls between 10 and 14’ is to understate their appeal to almost everybody else below the age of thirty.\textsuperscript{126} ‘Beatlemania’ was in itself an adolescent cult, but the Beatles were instrumental in developing musical modes which—in many hands—had an extraordinary appeal to teenagers and young adults. The same effect became apparent in menswear. McGill reported in 1962 that Stephen’s customers were ‘entirely teenagers’, but two years later he noted ‘a growing number of adult customers’ in
Stephen’s shops.127 ‘Two years ago in 1965 we were just catering for the kids’, said Warren Gold: ‘Today everyone comes here.’128

The New Boy Network

As Frank Mort has argued, ‘the social elites were more than simply a residual presence in post-war London: they featured as active and frequently dynamic players in metropolitan culture’.129 London’s aristocracy had not been ‘levelled’ by the years of war and welfare. It had evolved, but the effect of that evolution had been to root the elites more firmly in metropolitan society.

In London’s Victorian heyday, its aristocracy had been a caste. It lived an insular existence, focused on the noble mansions of Mayfair and limited to the months of the Parliamentary sessions. The London ‘Season’ was a tightly programmed series of social occasions designed to insulate the elite from wider metropolitan society.130 Its schedule of events covered much of the Home Counties, with some of them—the Derby, Royal Ascot, Henley Regatta—not in London at all. By contrast the Season’s parties and dances were restricted to a very limited area of Mayfair, centred on Park Lane, Brook Street, Grosvenor Street and Grosvenor Square.131 This world began to crumble after the First World War, when higher direct taxation and death duties undermined the financial security of the ‘upper ten’, and Mayfair’s mansions began to pass from residential into commercial use.132 The proportion of the Grosvenor estate in private occupation peaked in 1914;133 thereafter the commercial penetration of the West End proceeded steadily, bringing the demolition of the grander houses, from Devonshire House in 1924 to Londonderry House in 1965.134 London lost its Marais.135 By 1960 Berkeley Square had ‘finally lost a long battle with Big Business’, and none of its houses remained in private occupation; five years later one estate agent declared Mayfair ‘finished’ as a residential area.136

The cost of maintaining a London establishment was the force behind this collapse, and many aristocratic families simply abandoned their London base altogether.137 Those who stayed moved south and westwards, to Belgravia or to Chelsea, where the number of peers rose from twelve in 1935 to forty-three in 1965 despite a drop in the resident peerage in London as a whole in that period.138 Chelsea particularly attracted what Peter Thold calls ‘the young—the expectant rich’, drawn by the area’s unpretentious but elegant early nineteenth-century town houses and the smaller cottages built for working-class occupation. The latter ‘provided exactly the right
amount of accommodation for young families, with an au pair and probably someone to do the cleaning, but without traditional servants.'

Those who moved into Chelsea were occupying London’s Montmartre, an area with an artistic tradition running from J. M. W. Turner to Augustus John. The fusion of artistic Bohemianism and aristocratic libertinism gave birth to what became known as the ‘Chelsea Set’ in the 1950s. In a valedictory 1965 account of twenty years in Chelsea, the King’s Road bookseller Francis Marsden described the coalescence of the ‘Set’ in the Fantasie coffee bar, opened by Quant’s backer Archie McNair in 1955, after which ‘the night air was soon loud with the richly modulated cries of the “debs” and their “delights” as, clutching bottles of red wine, they sped to parties in their noisy little cars.’ These were the figures whose antics intrigued the Evening Standard, the Daily Mirror and any other paper with a gossip column to fill, but they were a noisy minority. More significant was the evolution of the area’s young middle class. Marsden described the change in street style as the war receded, with ‘long black Civil Defence greatcoats and ex-Navy duffel coats’ yielding to ‘duffel coats . . . that had never been nearer the sea than the Charing Cross Road. These were worn with the New Statesman and the Times Literary Supplement tucked under one arm.’ The Canadian sculptor Maryon Kantaroff, arriving in Oakley Street in January 1958, found that the people she met in Chelsea ‘were all very, very busy being writers or painters or would-be intellectuals’, while ‘passing sleeping partners around. “You must meet so and so, he’s a fantastic lover.”’ They lived off baked potatoes because ‘nobody had any money.’ In the spring of 1959, though, Robin Douglas-Home observed that ‘the artists, sculptors and musicians living simply in their studios and attics’ were retreating before well-heeled invaders from Belgravia and Mayfair. Soon Chelsea ceased to be a haven for penniless creatives. By 1961 ‘property prices had risen with obscene regularity since 1945, causing great hardship to artists’, as the sculptor Anthony Grey told a public meeting called to form a Chelsea Studio Protection Society. The society was formed but had no discernible effect in shielding poor artists from rising rents. They would move down the road to Fulham, beginning that area’s overspill gentrification, or across the river to Putney, where Edna O’Brien described in 1964 an ‘outpost for Bohemians’ that had formed in the quirky houses of Deodar Road, comprising the painter Sidney Nolan, the sculptor Anthea Alley and the writers Nell Dunn, Jeremy Sandford and O’Brien herself.

‘The only artists likely to be found in Chelsea today are . . . interior decorators’, as one local noted in 1961. Priced out of Bohemia, Chelsea’s
artists gave way to successful and fashionable practitioners of what Anne Sharpley called ‘the near-arts of photography, interior decoration, journalism, stage and dress design.’ They conformed to a now familiar gentrifier image—well-heeled, liberal in outlook and aesthetically aware, ‘spend[ing] their money on holidays, food, paintings, not on large houses, big cars, servants or gadgets.’148 They could afford to live in sixties Chelsea—and, indeed, contributed to house-price inflation there—because these ‘near-arts’ were lucrative to those who had founded their success on the expansion of London’s creative economy. The fashion boom enriched not only designers but also fashion photographers. The rise in TV ownership—naturally most marked in the capital—and the arrival of commercial television benefited not only telejournalists, editors and presenters but also the advertising industry, with ‘London’s Madison Avenue’ developing in Eastbourne Terrace near Paddington.149 Gentrification itself stimulated the demand for interior designers since, as the designer David Mlinaric explained, ‘people have no self-confidence about their decorating. They don’t mind risking a bold seven-guinea dress and chucking it away if their friends don’t like it, but they can’t chuck away a room.’150

The melding of this ‘new aristocracy’ with the old one, creating a ‘new boy network’ or ‘new class’, became clear to the world in February 1960 when Buckingham Palace announced the engagement of Princess Margaret to a commoner. Antony Armstrong-Jones—a barrister’s son, Belgravia born, Eton and Cambridge educated—was not actually very common, but he cultivated classlessness. His friends had never seen him wearing an Old Etonian tie: ‘he prefers denim trousers and a suede jacket.’151 As a fashion and portrait photographer who had once operated from Archie McNair’s King’s Road studio, he was a representative member of London’s ‘near-arts’ corps. His engagement helped place this group in the public eye. Within days of the announcement, the Evening Standard produced a series of five profiles of members of what it called ‘The New Elite.’152 All the subjects were exponents of the arts or ‘near-arts’: the theatre director Peter Hall, the choreographer John Cranko, the interior decorator David Hicks, the art director of Queen magazine Mark Boxer and Armstrong-Jones himself. Apart from the South African Cranko, all went to English public schools (Hall as a scholarship boy). Hall, Boxer and Armstrong-Jones went to Cambridge. At the time of Armstrong-Jones’s engagement, he was living in a gentrified house in ‘a somewhat run down area of Pimlico’, affording ‘an excellent view of the working-class flats at the bottom of the Armstrong-Jones back yard.’153 Boxer was one of the colonisers of World’s End, the
shabby extremity of the King’s Road; his home, Sharples noted without further comment, ‘formerly housed four working-class families.’

Hicks was described as ‘not unique’ but rather ‘a very successful example of a type that has moved elegantly into Belgravia and Chelsea in the last 10 years.’

By the midsixties these people needed less introduction, many being celebrities in their own right. Collectively they formed what Anthony Haden-Guest labelled the ‘New Class’ (‘bred from the Affluent Arts out of the Consumer State’) in a caustic, insightful semiparody in Queen in 1965. They provided the core of Jonathan Aitken’s interviews for his 1967 study *The Young Meteors*. They clustered in the young professions. Television was ‘stuffed with highly ambitious and talented young men who will be contemptuously discarded or rapidly elevated between 30 and 35’; Desmond Wilcox, editor of the BBC’s current affairs programme *Man Alive*, felt ‘incredibly old and defeated’ when he turned thirty in 1961. Interior design had expanded so rapidly as to be effectively a new industry in the sixties. Mlinaric had founded his own firm at the age of twenty-five in 1964 and had twenty jobs under way when *London Life* interviewed him in 1965. His staff of five were all aged under twenty-seven. Journalism, though hardly new, was also turning to youth at the time. Several of the opinion formers prominent in the *Evening Standard* in its late-sixties heyday under Charles Wintour were in their twenties: Jonathan Aitken (born 1942), Valerie Grove (née Jenkins, 1946), Max Hastings (1945), Simon Jenkins (1943).

The twenty-nine-year-old film director Michael Winner told Haden-Guest that a ‘medium-good film script writer should turn in £50,000 a year’, at a time when the prime minister’s salary was only £14,000. The nine fashion and advertising photographers whom Aitken interviewed for *The Young Meteors* claimed to be making between £25,000 and £60,000 a year. The writer Nik Cohn made £10,000 from freelance journalism at the age of twenty, while Haden-Guest himself made the same amount at the age of twenty-nine. In the ‘near-arts’ few starved. Few made the kind of money claimed by the photographers, of course, but careers in these young or rapidly expanding industries also offered responsibility at a young age and the chance to be creative. Michael Beaumont, a twenty-six-year-old account executive for the advertisers Mather and Crowther, was interviewed by Maureen Cleave for an *Evening Standard* series on London’s bachelors in 1964. As he was a product of Eton, Oxford and the Coldstream Guards, his trajectory might have been expected to have carried him into the City. He chose advertising instead because ‘it sounded tough and therefore exciting’, though it paid him a relatively modest £1,300 a year.
30 CHAPTER I

The City itself, conservative and clannish,\textsuperscript{162} was no place for the ambitious young. Michael Burns left his stockbroking firm after receiving a Christmas bonus equivalent only to the expenses claimed by one senior partner in a weekend. Tellingly, he became a TV cameraman and later a producer and, like Beaumont, a Labour voter.\textsuperscript{163} ‘Don’t be young’, Diana Mallory warned in a hostile account of the City in 1963; ‘you can just about get away with 35.’\textsuperscript{164} Aitken found few ‘meteors’ in the square mile. An entrenched ‘bias in favour of the gentleman amateur’ deterred them, particularly when reinforced by insistence on the kind of outmoded dress code that offended the swinging: at Cazenove’s throughout the decade ‘all partners still wore bowlers, almost all men still wore stiff collars and no female member of staff dared to wear either trousers or too provocatively short a skirt.’\textsuperscript{165} Aitken saw not only the City but also medicine, the civil service and the church as professions tainted in the eyes of the young meritocracy by their inbuilt barriers to talent.\textsuperscript{166} In the law, the Inns of Court had long imposed a protracted impeccious traineeship on would-be barristers, while the system of articled clerkships for solicitors was creaking in the mid-sixties, creating ‘a permanent pool of young trainees who cannot find articled vacancies.’ A twenty-four-year-old trainee solicitor could expect to earn only £1,200 a year—little more than a competent secretary—and many looked elsewhere.\textsuperscript{167} Just as career-path dependency was disappearing for postmen and lightermen, so it was for those who were once destined for the conservative professions.

Women had never found plentiful openings in these old worlds—a ‘woman is tolerated in the City only as a handmaiden’, as Mary Murry, a typist-translator for one of the big banks, wrote in 1961.\textsuperscript{168} But they benefited from the greater flexibility of the younger trades. Journalism, broadcasting, advertising and the media all offered openings to career-minded young women, with glass ceilings still pitched some way above the heads of their generation. The TV producer Elizabeth Cowley had arrived in Britain from Canada in 1952, working in Harrods’ advertising department and for Woman magazine before landing a BBC job simply by writing to the producer Donald Baverstock. Josephine Douglas, producer of the first TV chart show, the Six-Five Special, maintained firmly that ‘it is no tougher being a woman in television than it is being a man.’\textsuperscript{169} Cowley and Douglas were career women in their thirties.

The career of Lucy Bartlett, daughter of another TV woman, the announcer Mary Malcolm, reveals the more happy-go-lucky approach of a well-connected twenty-four-year-old in the mid-sixties, sampling all that
Swinging London offered. After art school, Bartlett worked briefly as a restorer for an antique dealer and a public relations officer for a wine company, before writing for Teen Scene on the BBC’s Light Programme. A walk-on part in Richard Lester’s film The Knack and an appearance on the TV pop show Juke Box Jury followed before she borrowed £100 from her father, the actor Sir Basil Bartlett, to start an interior-design company. She drove a Mini Cooper and spent £15 a week on clothes. In London, she felt, ‘you push all the doors marked pull, and you get what you want.’ Jack Wilton, who profiled Bartlett for London Life, believed that this type of new woman ‘thinks of herself as an entrepreneuse’ with a ‘candidly mercenary’ attitude to money. Her friends would be writers, artists and photographers rather than stockbrokers, barristers, merchant bankers or young Tories, ‘all of whom she will find gruesomely boring.’ She ‘would far rather make £10,000 for herself than marry a man with £50,000 in stocks’ and would augment her regular income from office work by occasional modelling or by designing clothes for a boutique.\[^{170}\]
Fiona MacCarthy’s account of the last debutantes to be presented at court (in 1958) indicates a consistent aspiration, even among those who did marry men with £50,000 in stocks, to lead independent lives. The group included the first woman on the board of Anglia TV, a future editor of the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, a deputy secretary of the Royal Academy, a professional interior decorator working with David Hicks, the fashion editor of the *London Evening News*, one of the founders of the classy Kensington boutique Annacat and a record-breaking helicopter pilot, as well as MacCarthy herself, a distinguished journalist and author. Most of them remained within the general ‘creative’ milieu but rejected the life which the London Season conventionally prescribed, of ‘arranging another bowl of flowers and organising another dinner party *ad infinitum*.’ In the early sixties debutantes began to distance themselves from the principal purpose of the Season (‘Debdom is a marriage market. Ugh!’), routinely expressing their disenchantment with the constricting etiquette and repetitious parties and balls that its rituals prescribed. ‘The season is ridiculous, idiotic, complete nonsense and a waste of time,’ pronounced seventeen-year-old Angela Berkeley-Owen in 1961, adding, ‘I am going to take part in it because my mother wants me to.’ In fact the Duke of Kent’s engagement earlier that year to Katherine Worsley, ‘the country girl who has never been a deb’, dampened many mothers’ enthusiasm for the substantial expenditure that the Season entailed. By 1967, as the journalist Godfrey Smith wrote bluntly, ‘the London Season carries on but no longer matters.’

The Season at its peak had enforced a finely calibrated definition of the social elite. Daughters of barristers but not of solicitors, of surgeons but not of general practitioners, could be presented at court. By the 1960s respect for such distinctions had dwindled; by the seventies it was even suggested that ‘the occasional well-born foreign name and the not-so-lofty merchant classes’ had infiltrated the Season. Haden-Guest stressed that his ‘New Class’ saw no need to ape the existing establishment, as ‘they have numbers, money, status’ already. As is well known, the profusion of new ways of getting rich in London allowed some working-class men and women to enter swinging society—the actors Michael Caine and Terence Stamp; the hairdresser Vidal Sassoon; the photographers David Bailey, Terence Donovan and Brian Duffy; those members of pop royalty willing to be initiated—but such upward mobility was unusual. A 1966 *London Life* feature on the photographer Patrick Lichfield, the queen’s cousin, with his assistant Viscount Encombe, his secretary Lady Elizabeth Ramsay and his model, former ‘Deb of the Year’ Rory Davis, reminds us that status and
money were advantageous even in the new trades. The slightest glance at *Queen* and *London Life*—‘the hymnal and psalter of the switched-on cult’, as Aitken called them, with their accounts of society weddings, expensive restaurants and foreign travel, and their adverts for country house property—indicates that these magazines did not court the unwashed. What they also show, though, is the easy absorption of the principal elements of the new popular culture. High culture was not displaced but augmented in this milieu: London’s new woman, Jack Wilton suggested, ‘will feel the same intensity of interest in, say, a new Beatles record and a visiting exhibition at the Tate.’ So would London’s new man.

The West End leisure culture that *Time* and the other outside observers documented in 1965–67 had been forged in the previous ten years, founded on a determination to spurn the ‘square.’ The gentlemen’s clubs of Pall Mall, with firm dress codes and no women, were shunned. By the sixties several were reduced to offering lower subscriptions to men aged under thirty, but with so little success that they were forced to accept ‘all sorts of people who would have been contemptuously rejected in the high days of clubland’ in order to stay afloat. The nightclub-cum-discotheque emerged instead, such as the short-lived Ad Lib, the very exclusive Anna-bel’s or, above all, Sibylla’s, founded by two advertising copywriters and a property developer in Swallow Street in 1966. Sibylla’s was partly funded by Beatle George Harrison and intended as a refuge for ‘the current young meritocracy of style, taste and sensitivity.’

Just as nightclubs supplanted gentlemen’s clubs, Italian trattorie became modish in these circles at the expense of haute cuisine French restaurants. The Trattoria Terrazza, opened by Mario Cassandro and Franco Lagattolla in Romilly Street, Soho, in 1959, became stiflingly fashionable in a city striving to find new ways to eat. Similarly, boutiques threatened the fashion departments of the great stores: by the early 1960s it had become clear that boutiques provided ‘scope for the shopping individualist’ in women’s fashion which the stores were slow to match. *Queen’s* survey in July 1962 shows the wide range of boutiques available even by then, in Mayfair as well as Chelsea, catering for ‘those with a smart but straightforward approach’, for those ‘with more taste than money’ or simply ‘for the very few.’ The smart-modern tailoring of the menswear boutique John Michael, opened by John Michael Ingram in the King’s Road in 1957, was trendsetting in a way that Oxford Street recognised only slowly and Savile Row initially eschewed. Ingram acknowledged his initial uncertainty about whom he was targeting—‘I suppose it was my own age group—between
twenty and thirty’—but he knew that he could not have started out anywhere other than in Chelsea.¹⁸⁷

In 1960 Antony Armstrong-Jones, newly ennobled as Lord Snowdon, turned up at the Trattoria Terrazza in a roll-neck shirt and without a tie. Initially reluctant, the coproprietor, Mario Cassandro, admitted him, having received a briefing on the dress etiquette of London’s new élite. Thereafter ‘Mario would hardly let in anyone wearing a tie.’¹⁸⁸ This seismic moment in London’s social history heralded a general rejection by the ‘new élite’ of the class-coded trappings of West End convention. In a 1971 study of postwar men’s fashion, Nik Cohn noted that from the midfifties the sons of gentlemen stopped going automatically to the same tailors as their fathers: ‘They thought Savile Row humbug, all those fittings and adjustments, all that obsequience, and at the end of it, what? Another dark grey suit.’¹⁸⁹ Received pronunciation was another rejected inheritance. ‘Now public schoolboys talk with a Cliff Richard accent’, Simon Napier-Bell remarked in 1966,¹⁹⁰ Haden-Guest saw ‘disc-jockey’s mid-Atlantic and David Frost-Midlands’ as ‘the two great voices of the television age.’¹⁹¹ Outside observers interpreted this and other elements of inverted snobbery as a sign that the English class system had been subverted in modern London, which was to mistake generational sparring for social levelling. The impression was reinforced, though, by the coming together of London’s new tribes in the West End.

Convergence

In 1960 Tommy Steele recalled that as a teenager in early 1950s Bermondsey he had ‘never ventured into the West End’: ‘We had heard rumours about getting lost and never coming back. The bus in our street said Piccadilly, but we thought that was miles away and we never got on it.’¹⁹² The office boom ended that, drawing young Londoners into the City and the West End to work and, by extension, to play. The introduction of the espresso machine to the Italian quarter of South Soho in 1953 established the coffee bar as a modish social venue for those who were too young to enter pubs legally (though coffee bars were said frequently to offer clandestine alcohol and amphetamines).¹⁹³ Soho subsequently became a magnet for London youth: Steele himself launched his career performing at the 2is coffee bar in Old Compton Street (‘London’s most powerful teen magnet’ in the late 1950s).¹⁹⁴ London’s first two skiffle clubs were in Soho, in Wardour Street and Gerrard Street.¹⁹⁵ The 1950s transformation of
Soho, an area ever reinventing itself, was serendipitous. Proximity to theatreland accounted for the presence of a long-established gay community, which in turn provided the market for the adventurous menswear sold in Bill Green's Vince Man's Shop, where John Stephen was an employee. Soho's Italian community nurtured the coffee-bar craze, which attracted clothes-conscious Mods to the area. The relocation of East End tailors to the streets behind Oxford Street after the Blitz allowed Stephen to have his own designs made up locally, undercutting Green's imports, and to cultivate a Mod market large enough to obscure the original gay connotations of his designs. Thus established, Stephen became the 'King' of his new territory, the West Soho backwater of Carnaby Street, owning nine shops in the short street at his peak. By around 1962 a Carnaby Street location had become such an indispensable asset in the menswear business that Stephen's rivals were ready to lease property for which he owned the freehold, paying rents which, by the midsixties, had risen tenfold over five years. The Gold brothers, Irvine Sellar, Sidney Brent and Stanley Adams, all moved from the outer East End into shops in or near Carnaby Street.

Every week the Mod invasion would begin on Thursday or Friday, after payday. On Saturdays Carnaby Street was 'a kind of teenagers' Play Street when the mods arrive from all over London.' A Mod-oriented club scene grew up to accommodate them, centred farther east, in Wardour Street—'the most peachy place. The most Modernist street in the world', as one eighteen-year-old told Anne Sharpley in February 1964. The Marquee Club's move from Oxford Street to Wardour Street in the following month completed its evolution from a jazz to a pop venue and a celebrated Mod centre. The management of Tiles Club, at 79 Oxford Street, just north of Soho Square, was said to have discouraged anyone aged over twenty-five from entering. The development of this West End 'scene' undermined suburban dance venues, just as the rise of Carnaby Street had weakened the 'Diors of Clapham.' Surveying the suburban dance halls in November 1965, Jane Wilson found that while the Streatham Locarno and the Wimbledon Palais still prospered, lesser venues provided a picture of cavernous, underoccupied interwar halls, unknown bands and an anachronistically restrictive dress code. 'I reckon they come specially to have a miserable time', the lead singer of 'Mr Bean and his Runners' suggested of his audience at the Tiger's Head, Catford. Suburban cinemas suffered a similar decline. Norwood lost all its film houses between 1956 and 1971, as a host of interwar picture-palace names—the Royal, the Central, the Astoria, the Albany, the Regal, the Rialto and the Odeon—passed into
The principal cause was, of course, the spread of television, but the effect was again to underline the primacy of the West End even where a cinema did survive. The separate development of Chelsea’s leisure scene had reflected the social composition of the area. What became famous as Mary Quant’s Bazaar was not originally envisaged as a showcase for her designs but as part of a venture uniting boutique and restaurant in the same building—a combination carefully aimed at West London’s \textit{jeunesse dorée}. John Michael, whose men’s boutique opened two years after Bazaar, ‘[did] for the young executive what John Stephen had done for the working-class boy.’ The profusion of restaurants opening in or near the King’s Road in the late 1950s and early 1960s—the tally of eating places in Chelsea was estimated to have risen from a dozen to around two hundred in these years—clearly signified opulence. So did the plethora of antique shops: significant as the King’s Road obviously was as a platform for new fashion, by weight of numbers it was primarily an antiques centre, sporting forty-one antique shops by 1966. The two poles of the new London were thus initially comparable but distinct: Soho was a Mod gathering ground and a melting pot for the capital’s European immigrant groups. Although the gang warfare of the 1950s had subsided, it remained an edgy area, where at night the police patrolled in pairs with Alsatians and where, according to the A6 murderer James Hanratty in his 1962 trial, ‘[you] can get a gun for £10 or £12 any day of the week.’ Chelsea and Kensington, by contrast, catered to the young, well-heeled fashion-conscious: ‘[Mary Quant’s] Bazaar was for rich girls’, in the model Twiggy’s blunt words. A pinafore dress featured in \textit{Vogue} in 1960 cost three weeks’ wages for an office girl. In menswear the \textit{Standard’s} Angus McGill distinguished between ‘\textit{le style King’s Road}’ , meaning ‘the leisure clothes that we have suddenly become so good at—handsome, beautifully made and rather expensive’—and ‘\textit{le style Carnaby Street}’: ‘cheap, stylish, sexy clobber for the kids.’ Each had its place. By the midsixties, though, the distinction between the two areas was being blurred. The trattoria craze had drawn all and sundry into Soho, making it less outré: ‘Opera singers, princesses, hairdressers, crooks, boxers, surgeons, parsons, they all dine in Soho at some stage of the year’, and few of the customers of Soho restaurants came from Soho itself. In 1966 Alvaro Maccioni, manager at the Terrazza, led the Italian escape from Soho by establishing Alvaro’s trattoria in Chelsea, where Italian restaurants had been thin on the ground: ‘Something new was happening, every time I
went down the King’s Road’, he explained; ‘Soho was for the older generation, a continuation of the fifties and I was younger.’ Barbara Hulanicki’s first Biba shop, which opened in Abingdon Road, Kensington, in August 1964, brought affordable, imaginative women’s wear to West London and, like Stephen’s shops, became popular with both the classes and the masses. In the space of a few pages in her autobiography, Hulanicki listed the celebrities who patronised her second (Church Street) shop at its height—Mia Farrow, Princess Anne, Brigitte Bardot, Marianne Faithfull, Yoko Ono and others—while also complaining that ‘the glossy establishment press’ ignored her because her shop ‘sold to real people and not just jet setters.’ The juxtaposition appears jarring but was not misleading: like Stephen, Hulanicki demonstrated that the key to success lay in combining modishness with affordability. By the mid-sixties several cheaper boutiques had appeared in the King’s Road. John Stephen himself opened two branches there in 1963–64, combining Soho style and Chelsea décor—‘it’s all coach lamps, brass and quality.’ Meanwhile the modishness of Carnaby Street attracted fashionable customers to mingle with the teens: at the eponymous John Stephen boutique in 1967 ‘the clientele includes all the usual pop personalities, and you may see such celebrities as Lord Snowdon, The Duke of Bedford and Peter Sellers.’ In consequence Mod dominance of the street was diluted; indeed Stephen’s biographer sees 1967 as the point at which Mods began ‘to do a vanishing trick from mainstream fashion.’ This was accelerated by the spread of hippie eclecticism in menswear. The eccentric purveyor of ex-military uniforms I Was Lord Kitchener’s Valet, founded in the Portobello Road in 1966, moved to form branches in both the King’s Road and Carnaby Street. Rodney Bennett-England argued in 1967 that events had overtaken Carnaby Street, which now ‘cater[ed] for tourists with frivolous and poor quality merchandise resembling fancy dress.’ ‘We are not trying to dress exhibitionists’, Bill Green of the Vince Man’s Shop in Newburgh Street told him: ‘they can go to Carnaby Street.’

*Rave* magazine’s April 1966 map of ‘in’ places depicted a London consisting entirely of Soho/Piccadilly and Chelsea/Kensington. Halasz’s *Time* piece in the same month was accompanied by a map showing virtually the same London, and neither magazine suggested that one area was less accessible than the other. By the mid-sixties, differentiation within the ‘scene’ depended less on locale and more on price or less tangible forms of social filtration. Thus even within Stephen’s Carnaby Street empire, a two-piece suit at ‘John Stephen’s Man’s Shop’ (49 Carnaby Street) could cost
up to sixty guineas, while an off-the-peg suit at ‘John Stephen’ (52–55 Carnaby Street) could be had for twelve guineas.  
While the Trattoria Terrazza established itself as one of the most chic restaurants in early sixties London, cheaper Soho restaurants such as Bianchi’s, La Capannina and the Trattoria Da Otello provided younger, poorer gourmands with what was probably very similar food.  
Even within the Terrazza, the proprietors encouraged the notion that the downstairs Positano Room was more exclusive than the rest of the restaurant.  
Their former manager, Maccioni, at his new King’s Road restaurant, deployed a ‘skilful exploitation of the hideous snobbery of the English’, as Quentin Crewe put it, suggesting that the phone number for reservations was ex-directory and known to only around two hundred people in London, although it was actually freely published in restaurant reviews.
Similarly, Kevin Macdonald, one of the promoters of Sibylla’s discotheque, told Aitken that ‘anyone who had to ask how to get into Sibylla’s wouldn’t be a member’—the strategy of the gentlemen’s club through the ages. Discotheques were in fact quite exclusive in the midsixties, charging five pounds for admission and a further pound as cover charge. Jane Wilson suggested in 1967 that ‘it’s possible to
live through several days in London without encountering a single soul who has ever set foot in a discothèque.’ 227 The former Mod Ken Browne, interviewed by Terry Rawlings in 2000, remembered that while ‘the upper-class kids’ might set foot in the affordable Tiles (‘they had the moves, and they could afford to dress a bit better’), the average Mod would not be seen in such chic spots as the Scotch of St James or the Cromwellian—’it was also about seven quid to get in or something ridiculous which was unbelievable in those days. There was a whole different scene going on in those places.’ 228

Swinging London thus had its pecking orders. They are best seen, though, as social responses to the homogenising potential of a commercialised youth culture which appeared to transcend social divisions and which was increasingly concentrated in a relatively small area of Central London. By the mid-sixties the West End had developed an elaborate recreational ‘scene’, focused on music, clubs, fashion and eating out and dominated by young adults and teenagers. Nothing quite like it had existed in 1960. It was what foreign observers came to observe.

‘Why London? Why Now?’

The subeditor for John Crosby’s Weekend Telegraph piece suggested, ‘We [Londoners] may be living too close to the revolution to recognise it, we need a foreigner to do that.’ 229 It was a compelling suggestion but unconvincing. The ‘revolution’ that London’s many overseas observers recognised in the mid-sixties was largely conveyed as pastiche. They were journalists rather than social anthropologists, and they followed a journalistic imperative to produce a coherent story from the random material they had to hand: Halasz saw her job for Time as ‘the presentation of “Swinging London” as a single unified phenomenon.’ 230 Taken as they were by the idea of dukes shopping in Carnaby Street and secretaries shopping in Chelsea, they constructed an image of classlessness that could not stand very close scrutiny. Taken as some of them were by the idea of young London ‘chicks’ taking to sex like candy, they developed a picture of sexual eclecticism that was misguided even in this relatively liberal milieu. Almost all their accounts were shaped by presuppositions about Britain’s condition—first the benign view that London was providing a colourful escape from the nation’s natural grey austerity but later, as financial and industrial problems mounted in the summer of 1966, that the city displayed
feckless escapism in the face of economic crisis. Both the benign and the censorious reading of Swinging London assumed a degree of self-indulgence at odds with the lived experience of most ‘real’ Londoners who had to eat, sleep, commute and work in the city. The writers’ understandable emphasis on the West End then reinforced this effect by drawing in two minority leisure pursuits that happened to be concentrated there, in the strip clubs of Soho and the casinos of Mayfair.

Both phenomena were real enough. Soho was already well established as London’s erogenous zone, but its seedy reputation was reinforced from the late 1950s as Paul Raymond and others exploited the ambiguity of controls over public nudity.231 This development comprehensively thwarted the efforts of local traders in the Soho Association to make the area more respectable;232 in 1963 the writer Wolf Mankowitz, a native and resident, described Soho appositely as ‘an industrial centre for the manufacture of strip and trattoria.’233 The Metropolitan Police were sufficiently concerned about the impression made on tourists coming to London for the 1966 World Cup to mount a cleanup of Soho clip joints before the tournament,234 but striptease in itself continued to be treated as risqué but harmless in the midsixties. Halasz’s piece in Time included an illustration of a performer at the Sunset Strip club in Dean Street: she posited as a selling point that ‘dozens of nightclubs offer totally uninhibited striptease.’235 And while betting shops sprang up everywhere, the casinos had their origins in gentlemen’s gaming circles and were consequently fixed in aristocratic London, mostly in Mayfair. Crockford’s Club—one of Halasz’s ‘Scenes’—was in St James’s Street, Quent’s in Hill Street, Curzon House in Curzon Street, Les Ambassadeurs in Hamilton Place and John Aspinall’s Clermont Club in Berkeley Square. Both striptease and casinos depended significantly on overseas visitors, whether tourist voyeurs or high-rolling gamblers, who were drawn more readily to the West End than to Enfield or Lewisham. The casino world, in which ‘a famous peer’ could lose £125,000 in a single session at Les Ambassadeurs, was hardly typical even of the affluent society. It was an exclusive milieu, with entry tightly controlled236 and conduct governed by the quasi-chivalric codes of honour that came to light in 1974 when the Lord Lucan affair opened a window on the Clermont Club. ‘Membership compulsory and very exclusive’, London Life’s listing for Curzon House announced: ‘prospective members vetted before joining.’237 The strip clubs and the casinos appealed to limited—and almost entirely male—clienteles, but they were rooted in the West End and shared that limited space with the nightclubs, the trattorias and the
boutiques. Outside observers, inevitably focusing on the West End, conflated them all, creating a composite picture of a London recreational life—a trip down the King’s Road to blow half a week’s wage on clothes, followed by a flutter in a black-tie casino and an evening in a strip club—that no Londoner actually lived.

Faced with this image of decadence, ‘real’ Londoners, at the time and since, have constructed a counterorthodoxy to the effect that the sixties cultural revolution, if it happened at all, was limited to the Chelsea set or similar hedonists and that ‘nothing very swinging happened in Streatham.’ To dismiss the ‘revolution’ altogether, though, is as dangerous as to take it at face value. Aitken’s 1967 verdict remains valid: ‘The changes in tastes, behaviour and attitudes of the younger generation over the last few years have at least to a small extent influenced the lives of every Londoner under the age of 35. Whether these changes have anything to do with “swinging” is a matter of semantics, but the fact remains that without these changes today’s younger generation would be imperceptibly different from their parents, whereas in fact they are enormously different.’

When pressed, most of those who claim today that the swinging sixties passed them by will acknowledge having owned Beatles records or, indeed, heard the group live—in their touring days they played several unprepossessing suburban venues as well as grander central ones. They may have shopped in one of John Stephen’s boutiques or in Hulanicki’s ‘exclusive, inexpensive’ Biba. They may have danced at the Marquee or eaten at Fiddlers Three in Chelsea or Cranks in Soho. These pleasures were accessible and affordable in a way that many of those depicted by Crosby and Halasz—the nightclub Annabel’s, the Ad Lib Club, where one table was ‘more or less permanently reserved for the Beatles’—were not. The new popular culture was indisputably popular, even if its delights were almost exclusively enjoyed by teenagers and young adults.

Halasz’s instinctive belief in the influence of youth in London was not misplaced. In 1966 almost a quarter of all residents in what the Census called the ‘Conurbation Centre’ were aged between fifteen and twenty-nine. In Greater London as a whole, the proportion of residents aged between fifteen and twenty-four was, at 15 percent, higher than in any Census since 1931. The young of 1966 were, of course, significantly more opulent than the young of 1931, and without reducing the cultural phenomenon of Swinging London purely to a matter of purchasing power, it was the youth pound which created the new aristocracy whose antics so fascinated foreign observers. ‘In the early 1960s,’ as an otherwise rather close-focused
Greater London Council (GLC) research report on Carnaby Street put it in 1975, ‘the affluent young were beginning to assert their economic power, a power to make world celebrities out of pop groups, fashion models and clothes designers.’242 If these world celebrities then lived at a level of self-indulgence unimaginable to the young consumers who had made them, that does not mean that Swinging London was completely elitist or negate its foundations in broadly based youth affluence. It reflected an age structure—particularly in inner London—skewed towards youth and, above all, the sheer prosperity of the city in the early sixties.

Seen in a longer-term perspective, London’s economy was undergoing a process of change by which the newer service industries described earlier expanded and much of its traditional manufacturing industry declined. These two processes did not occur in step, though. For a decade or so from the midfifties, the office economy grew rapidly with little effect on manufacturing beyond creating labour shortages which raised wages. As a result, if anywhere epitomised the affluent society, it was mid-sixties London. Looking back from the turbulent midseventies, one GLC research report concluded that in London 1966 had been ‘an extremely prosperous year when the demand for labour was unusually high’; all but two of the thirty-two boroughs showed increased economic activity from the already high levels of 1961.243 This was strikingly demonstrated by Colin Crofts’s 1983 analysis of Family Expenditure Survey returns for London, which depicts the movement of the top and bottom income quartiles, and of median incomes, over the period 1961–79, in constant (1980) prices.244 The early sixties emerge as years of steady improvement for all groups. If Londoners were indeed guilty of ignoring the nation’s balance-of-payments problems while they partied, it was probably because most of them had never had it so good.

Thereafter, though, the situation became more complex. The balance of payments caught up with London’s pleasure-seekers with the Wilson government’s credit squeeze in the winter of 1966–67. In October Charles Lyte in the Standard noted a drop in discretionary spending in London: sales of pop records had fallen, and there was ‘a general decline in the restaurant trade.’245 Jonathan Aitken looked specifically at ‘Swinging London’ in November. Though he was not entirely pessimistic, concluding that ‘unless things get very much worse, the talented and hard working swingers will survive easily, and only the floss will have been removed from the candy floss society’, he recognised that there was much floss to remove. On the club scene, while expensive venues like Annabel’s and cheap ones like the Marquee still flourished, there was ‘an embarrassing acreage of empty tables’ in many
once-buoyant clubs. The overstretched gambling world was inevitably vulnerable: Aitken recorded the collapse of ‘dozens of smaller gaming clubs’ and even contraction at the Clermont. Fashion was struggling. The previously lucrative market for fashion photography had collapsed, and the designer Alice Pollock told him that ‘everybody’s miserable in the King’s Road. . . . The scene has quietened down and everyone feels low.’

The 1966–67 ‘squeeze’—a belt-tightening exercise by which the Wilson government sought to stave off the devaluation of sterling—in itself said little about the strengths and weaknesses of the London economy. That winter would, though, bring early hints of the process of deindustrialisation that would transform inner London over the next two decades. The two boroughs which had fallen back between 1961 and 1966 were Newham and Tower Hamlets, presaging—even before the dock closures of the late sixties—the industrial contraction that would eviscerate the East End in
The ‘in-crowd’ magazine *London Life* smiling in the face of the Wilson government’s economic ‘freeze’ in November 1966, barely six months after *Time* christened London ‘the Swinging City.’ (Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans)
the next few years. From 1967, in fact, unemployment rose across the inner-London boroughs.

For almost a decade the London economy had been stimulated by the boom in office and commercial employment, without being greatly afflicted by the decline in traditional manufacturing industry that was its natural concomitant. From the late sixties, though, deindustrialisation proceeded apace. Between 1971 and 1974 manufacturing employment fell by 14 percent in Greater London, against a drop of only 2 percent in Great Britain as a whole.247 The most visible victims were those of upper-middle age who had spent their lives in the docks or ancillary riverside trades and could not retool, but industrial contraction also hit the young hard. By 1971 the economic inactivity rate for persons aged between fifteen and nineteen in London had more than trebled, against a doubling of the rate for the working-age population as a whole.248 The exuberance of the midsixties, fuelled as it had been by youth spending power, was a thing of the past.

This development made London’s traditional industrial areas highly vulnerable to the severe economic turbulence that followed the oil shock of 1973–74. Crofts’s analysis shows the results. Between 1970 and 1979 London’s lowest quartile suffered a startling 12 percent drop in real incomes, as the combination of unemployment and very high inflation rates hit those who were least able to resist—mostly pensioners, school leavers and the unemployed. In these years the capital’s inner-city problem became inescapable, and the London press and much business opinion was suffused with pessimism, as a declinist orthodoxy took root concerning the city’s future.249 What Crofts’s figures also show, though, is a 16 percent rise in the real incomes of the top quartile across the decade. The seventies brought not general decline to London but growing inequality. And in the midst of that inequality, median real incomes rose by 6 percent, buffeted by the alarming inflation rate but not permanently depressed. Despite everything, the ‘median Londoner’ was becoming steadily more comfortable, as the rich grew richer and the poor poorer.

Conclusion

Although London’s fabric had obviously been battered during the Second World War, the London of the late fifties had been, in its patterns and processes, a city which the late Victorians would have recognised. London had
been the nation's principal manufacturing centre in the Victorian age, and it still was. The port of London had been a global entrepôt, and it still was. London's social topography was broadly that of the classic industrial city, with a working-class core around the Central Business District and affluence levels rising the farther one got from the centre. The private landlord still accommodated around half the city’s households—significantly more in the older parts of the city, where the quality of much of the housing stock was low. Late-Victorian London had been ethnically complex but overwhelmingly white, which was still the case. Most people then had traversed the city by means of public transport: in 1960 they still did.

By the late seventies much had changed. The upriver docks had closed or were about to close. London's manufacturing industries had suffered an unexpectedly sharp contraction. Though the office boom had slowed after 1966, the faster contraction of industry meant that offices accounted for 40 percent of London’s employment in 1976. London’s economy could no longer be said to rest on its industry, and the capital was more evidently a city of consumers than of producers. The private rental market was shrinking, and the owner-occupied house was fast becoming the ultimate consumer durable. Gentrification had refreshed much of the older housing stock while making London's social map more complicated. While car-ownership levels were still slightly below those of the rest of the United Kingdom, at around 50 percent of London households, they were sufficient to call into question the appropriate balance between public and private transport in the modern city. The characteristically postindustrial creeds of urban environmentalism and building conservation coloured this debate, but other consequences of the contraction of traditional industry were less benign. London's inner-city problem had intensified during the 1970s, with conventional poverty morphing into multideprivation and something akin to social exclusion. Within the inner city racial tension had been intensified by new commonwealth immigration and by the coincidence of deindustrialisation with the coming of age of the first generation of British-born Blacks, who were consequently alienated as profoundly as any minority ethnic group in London's history.

London’s 'swinging moment' should be seen in this context—as a transient element in a deeper and broader transformation of the metropolis, played out over two decades. That transformation is described by means of a series of case studies in the chapters that follow. This approach might appear episodic, and this work does not claim to be a comprehensive
history of London in the sixties and seventies; but the cumulative impression created by the sixteen chapters is, it is argued, that of a city evolving in these decades in ways which anticipated strikingly the Britain of the 1980s. The foundations of ‘Thatcher’s Britain’ were laid in the nation’s dominant economic centre and opinion former before Margaret Thatcher came into power. They owed virtually nothing to her.
INDEX

(Italics indicate references to figures and illustrations)

Abdul Malik, Michael, political activist, 301
Abel Smith, Brian, economist, 346
Abercrombie, Sir Patrick, town planner, 161–63, 165, 173, 175, 177, 185, 201, 208, 213, 215, 428, 433, 470n117. See also County of London Plan; Greater London Plan of 1944
Abingdon Road, W8, 37, 86
Acklam Road, W10, 321, 336
Action Group on London Housing, 151, 288, 290
Adams, Stanley, fashion designer, 22, 35, 77
Ad Lib Club, Leicester Place, 3, 24, 33, 41
Age Concern, charity, 281
Aims of Industry, lobby group, 257
Ainley, Daphne, restaurateur, 103
Aitken, Jonathan, journalist, 16, 29–30, 33, 38, 42–43, 79
Akropolis restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Albert Hall Mansions, SW7, 192
Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens, 192
Aldgate, EC3, 231
Aldridge, Alan, writer, 409
Alexander, Claire, fashion journalist, 89
Alexandra Road Estate, NW8, 195
Alfriston Avenue, North Harrow, 271
Algarve restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Alley, Anthea, sculptor, 27
Alma Street, NW5, 461n80
Alvarez, Al, writer, 17
Alvaro’s restaurant, King’s Road, 36, 98, 422
American tourists, 171, 397, 400, 402
Amery, Julian, Minister for Housing, 1970–72, 141
Amsterdam, 59, 73, 239, 391
Andalucia restaurant, Hampstead, 117
Andrea restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Anemos restaurant, Charlotte Street, 109, 112
Anglia Television, 32
Angus Steak House restaurants, 107, 265
Animals, The, band, 23
Annabel’s, nightclub, Berkeley Square, 2, 4, 33, 42
Annacat boutique, Brompton Road, 32, 80, 91, 408
Anne, Princess, Princess Royal, 37
Annoute, Roger, taxi driver, 250
Antiques, antique trade, 36, 93, 139, 393, 424–25
Antonine restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Apicella, Enzo, interior designer, 97, 102
Apple Boutique, Baker Street, 90
Arbour Square, E1, 360
Ardagh, John, journalist, 98, 100, 116
aristocracy, 26–29, 439n137
Armstrong-Jones, Anthony, First Earl of Snowdon, 28, 34, 97
Arundel Square, N7, 137, 423
Ascot, Royal, 26
Asher, Jane, actor, 101
Ashford, Kent, 412
Aspinall, John, gaming club proprietor, 40

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association of British Travel Agents</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au Caprice des Dieux restaurant, Holland Park Avenue</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au Père de Nico, restaurant, Lincoln Street</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au Savarin restaurant, Charlotte Street</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin, J E, local government officer</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian tourists</td>
<td>253, 396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenues Unlimited, youth charity, Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>349, 354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey, David, photographer</td>
<td>3, 32, 409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey, Ron, housing activist</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baine, Sean, community activist</td>
<td>372–73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker Street, W1</td>
<td>90, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balcombe Street, NW1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldock, Peter</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balfe, Richard, local politician</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balfron Tower, LB Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balham, LB Wandsworth/LB Lambeth</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>436n37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>93, 389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardot, Brigitte, actor</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkantine Estate, E14</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barking and Dagenham, London Borough</td>
<td>136, 268, 269, 463n135, 510n22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barlow Report. See Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population</td>
<td>1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes, LB Richmond upon Thames</td>
<td>130, 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes, Peter, Bexley resident</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes, Ron, taxi driver</td>
<td>251, 253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnet, 285</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnet, London Borough</td>
<td>268, 269, 292, 431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnsley, LB Islington</td>
<td>130, 138, 140, 141, 142, 164, 169, 195, 196, 198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnsley Association</td>
<td>169, 170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnsley, 72, 448n147</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartlett, Lucy, actor</td>
<td>30–31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartlett, Sir Basil, actor</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basildon, Essex</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battersea, LB Wandsworth</td>
<td>309, 341, 461n82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battersea Metropolitan Borough</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battersea North parliamentary constituency</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battersea Park</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baverstock, Donald, television producer</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baylis, Harry, taxi driver</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayliss, Bill, local politician</td>
<td>371, 377, 510n28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bazaar boutique, King’s Road</td>
<td>21, 36, 91, 422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beardsmore, Michael, property developer</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beasley, Paul, local politician</td>
<td>238, 378, 412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatles, Beatlemania</td>
<td>1, 2, 23–25, 33, 41, 90, 101, 387, 390, 442n239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatty, Warren, actor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauclerk Buttery restaurant, Beauchamp Place</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauclerc Place, SW3</td>
<td>93–95, 94, 100, 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauclerc’s restaurant, Beauchamp Place</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaumont, Michael, advertising executive</td>
<td>29–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaumont’s Cottage, Pinner</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckenham, LB Bromley</td>
<td>124, 285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckton, LB Newham</td>
<td>235, 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becontree Estate, LB Barking and Dagenham</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beddington, LB Sutton</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford, John Ian Robert Russell, Thirteenth Duke of</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford College, University of London</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford Park, LB Hounslow</td>
<td>171, 199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford Square, WC1</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bedsits</td>
<td>16, 154, 403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beechwood Gardens, South Harrow</td>
<td>489n14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer, Samuel, political scientist</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgravia, City of Westminster/RB Kensington and Chelsea</td>
<td>26, 27, 28, 29, 76, 102, 133, 198, 253, 316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell, D. Wallace, Council of Christians and Jews</td>
<td>305, 307, 310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellamy Drive, Stanmore</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belsize Park, LB Camden</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belson, W A, criminologist</td>
<td>328, 330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belvedere Estate Residents Association, Wimbledon</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bendall, Vivian, politician</td>
<td>261, 489n138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali community</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett, Hubert, LCC officer</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett-England, Rodney, fashion writer</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDEX 557

Benson, Tom, restaurateur, 12, 93, 94, 102
Benson's restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Bentley's restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Berkeley-Owen, Angela, debutante, 32
Berkeley Square, W1, 2, 3, 26, 40
Berkmann, Joseph, restaurateur, 100
Berlin, 5, 389, 391
Bermondsey, LB Southwark, 19, 34, 253, 318, 367–68, 377, 383, 483n128, 512n96
Bermondsey Constituency Labour Party, 367–68, 377, 383, 512n96
Bertoldi, Silvio, journalist, 391
Bertorelli's restaurant, Charlotte Street, 109, 112
Berwick Street, W1, 54–55, 66, 67, 68
Bethnal Green, LB Tower Hamlets, 25, 67, 217, 218, 222, 231, 249, 413, 417, 483n128
Betjeman, John, poet, architectural writer, 99
Beveridge, Sir William, social reformer, 156, 299, 346, 347, 355, 363
Bexley, London Borough, 124, 268, 269, 286, 424
Bexley Arts Council, 286
Bexley Civic Society, 286
Bexley Council of Social Service, 286
Bianchi's restaurant, Frith Street, 38
Bibas, boutique, Abingdon Road, Kensington Church Street, Kensington High Street, 20, 22, 37, 41, 74–92, 211, 407, 408, 424. See also 'Big Biba'
Bienvenue restaurants, 108
'Big Bang', 1986, 434
Big Ben, Palace of Westminster, 392
'Big Biba', department store, Kensington High Street, 85–92, 424. See also Biba
Biggs, G W, Ltd, wholesale butchers, 107
'Big Linda', striptease artiste, 60
Bins, Irene, community activist, 374
Birley, Mark, club proprietor, 2
Birmingham, 148, 276, 404
Birrane, John, property agent, 137
Bishop Ken Road Residents Association, Harrow, 282, 493n12
Bistro d'Agran restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94–95, 100, 102
Bistros, 95, 98–100, 101, 102, 106, 107
Blackfriars railway station, 473n16
Blackheath, RB Greenwich/ LB Lewisham, 130, 164, 169, 171, 194
'Black House, The'. See Harambee
Black Power, 323, 326, 331–34
Blackwall Tunnel, RB Greenwich/ LB Tower Hamlets, 164
Blades, tailors, Dover Street, 2, 3, 422
Blandford, Linda, journalist, 102, 103
Blenheim Crescent, W1, 311
Blomfield, Reginald, architect, 185
Bloom, Samuel, strip club proprietor, 54
Bloomsbury, LB Camden, 12, 14, 133, 192, 204, 378
Board of Trade, 84, 388, 450n57
Booker, Ilys, social worker, 356
Booth, Charles, social observer, 347
Borshtch'n'Tears restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94, 111
Bottomley, Virginia, social scientist, 413
Bouligne restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Bourne, J C, artist, 192
Boutique, boutique, Fortis Green Road, 218
boutiques, 2, 22, 33, 38, 74–92, 95, 120, 218, 388, 389, 391, 398; in Chelsea, 36, 37, 79, 100, 393, 407; in Soho, 21, 24, 37, 75, 401, 409
Bouzouki by Night restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Bow, LB Tower Hamlets, 222, 233, 236, 469n76
Bow Group, Conservative Party, 405
Bowley, Marion, economist, 150
Bow Street Magistrates Court, 59
Boxer, Mark, editor, cartoonist, 28, 137
Boxhall Street, Becontree, 149
Brack, Harry, local politician, journalist, 144, 222, 233, 236
Bradford, 16
Brady, Anthony, police constable, 75
Brady Street Buildings, Whitechapel, 222
Braganza Street, SE17, 135
Brampton, Freddie, tourist guide, 399
Brando, Marlon, actor, 3
Brandon-Jones, John, architect, 473n33
Bravo, 2, 389

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
Brent, London Borough, 153, 268, 269, 310, 377, 465n201
Brent, Sidney, fashion designer, 35, 77, 79
Brent Cross shopping centre, LB Barnet, 273, 274, 424
Brentford, LB Hounslow, 424
Brentwood, Essex, 233
Brewer Street, W1, 62, 115
Briar Road, Kenton, 490n38
Brick Lane, E1, 109
Bristol, 13
Briar Road, Kenton, 490n38
Buckingham Palace, 28, 402
Buckland, Robert, taxi driver, 250, 251, 252
Buckland Rise, Pinner, 265
Bulgaria restaurant, Brompton Road, 118
Bunning, J B, architect, 183
Burnley, 60
Burns, Michael, stockbroker, television producer, 30
Burns, Wilfred, local authority planner, 173
Busabong Thai restaurant, Fulham Road, 115
bus drivers, 416
Bush, Mel, entertainments promoter, 426
Butler, R A, politician, 314, 318
‘butterboys’, newly qualified taxi drivers, 253
Butterworth, Ruth, political scientist, 365, 366, 367, 370, 371, 509n13
Byatt, Antonia (A S ), novelist, 12, 14
Bygrave, Mike, restaurant critic, 104, 107, 109, 116, 118–119
Bynoe, Frank, carnival organiser, 339
Byrne, Father Paul, Shelter Housing Advice Centre, 159
Byzantium Room restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Cable Street, E1, 222, 232
Cadbury, George, philanthropist, 428
Café Portugal restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Caine, Michael, actor, 3, 32
Caithness Road, Cambridge, 268
Camberwell, LB Southwark, 130, 312
Cambridge Gardens, W10, 339
Cambridge Road, North Harrow, 264
Cambridge Street, SW1, 11
Brown, Neave, borough architect, 195
Brown, Ronald, MP, 416
Brown ban’ (on office building in central London), 210, 394
Browne, Ken, Mod, 39
Browne, Kenneth, illustrator, 189
Brush and Palette restaurant, Queensway, 103
Brussels, 391
Buchanan, Colin, town planner, 163, 164, 165, 186, 187, 189, 203, 208, 209, 213, 470n117
Buckingham Palace, 28, 402
Buckland, Robert, taxi driver, 250, 251, 252
Buckland Rise, Pinner, 265
Bullying, J B, architect, 183
Burger King restaurants, 107
Burger King restaurants, 95, 107, 108, 120, 121, 123
Burnley, 60
Burns, Michael, stockbroker, television producer, 30
Burns, Wilfred, local authority planner, 173
Busabong Thai restaurant, Fulham Road, 115
bus drivers, 416
Bush, Mel, entertainments promoter, 426
Butler, R A, politician, 314, 318
‘butterboys’, newly qualified taxi drivers, 253
Butterworth, Ruth, political scientist, 365, 366, 367, 370, 371, 509n13
Byatt, Antonia (A S ), novelist, 12, 14
Bygrave, Mike, restaurant critic, 104, 107, 109, 116, 118–119
Bynoe, Frank, carnival organiser, 339
Byrne, Father Paul, Shelter Housing Advice Centre, 159
Byzantium Room restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Cable Street, E1, 222, 232
Cadbury, George, philanthropist, 428
Café Portugal restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Caine, Michael, actor, 3, 32
Caithness Road, W14, 501n102
Camberwell, LB Southwark, 130, 312
Cambridge Gardens, W10, 339
Cambridge Road, North Harrow, 264
Cambridge Street, SW1, 11

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INDEX 559


Cammers, Benny, club proprietor, 66

Caruana, George, club proprietor, 59

Casino de Paris, strip club, Denman Street, 61, 67

casinos, 40–41, 407

Cassandro, Mario, restaurateur, 33, 34, 97, 105, 114

Cassidy, Brian, local politician, 71

Castle, Barbara, politician, 204

Catford, LB Lewisham, 23, 35, 84, 322

Cathay restaurant, Glasshouse Street, 111

Catherwood, Sir Fred, construction executive, 214

‘Cathy’, peepshow artiste, 60

Cathy Come Home, television drama, 147, 346, 352, 358

Cator Estate, Blackheath, LB Lewisham, 194–95, 197, 285

Cauchi, Anthony and Cauchi, Michael, club proprietors, 66–67

Cause for Concern, television documentary, 326

Cavana, Dale, fashion designer, 76

Cave Kebab Rooms restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112

Cayley Street, E14, 480n49

Cazenove, stockbrokers, 30

Census of Population, 1961, 124, 162

Census of Population, 1971, 249, 490n36

Census of Population, Sample Census, 1966, 17, 41, 413, 437n78, 467n39

Census of Traffic, 1966, 165

Central Office of Information, 389

Centre ‘70 Community Association, West Norwood, 357

Centre Point, WC1, 88

Chamberlain, Joseph, politician, 276

Chamberlain Way, Pinner, 155

Champagne Inn restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113

Chancery Lane, WC2, 97

changing of the guard, 392, 402, 517n114

Charco’s restaurant, Bray Place, 103, 433n38

Charing Cross railway station, 415, 473n16

Charing Cross Road, WC2, 23, 27, 49, 51, 210

Charity Organisation Society, 299, 349.

See also Family Welfare Association

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
560  INDEX

Charles, Caroline, fashion designer, 2, 81
Charlotte Street, W1, 109–12, 114, 456n142
Chariton Place, N1, 137
Chase, Louis, Race Relations Board, 344
Chaudhuri, D P, club proprietor, 51
Cheap Eats in London, restaurant guide, 119
Chelsea, RB Kensington and Chelsea, 4, 17, 22, 34, 39, 76, 77, 132, 164, 268, 269, 311, 437n78; fashion in, 3, 17, 33, 37, 81, 407–408; gentrification in, 26–29, 129–31, 133–34, 137, 138, 140, 157, 195, 198, 422, 459n28; restaurants in, 3, 12, 36, 41, 95, 98–100, 102, 104, 106, 108; tourism in, 393–95. See also boutiques; 'Chelseafication'; King's Road 'Chelseafication', 128, 130, 139, 149, 423
Chelsea Football Club, 340
Chelsea Nuthouse restaurant, Langton Street, 104
'Chelsea Set', socialites, 27, 41, 129, 393
Chelsea Studio Protection Society, 27, 439n144
Cheng Looi, restaurateur, 111
Cheshire, Paul, economic geographer, 188
Cheshire Street, E2, 222
Chesterfield, 12
Chez Gerard restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Chez Noel restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Chicago, 400
Child, the Family and the Young Offender, The, White Paper, 1965, 355
Child Poverty Action Group, charity, 346, 355, 357, 361, 372
China Garden restaurant, Brewer Street, 115
Chinatown, Soho, 109, 111, 116, 210
Chinese community, 9, 107, 111, 116, 119, 253, 350, 427
Chinese food, 111, 114, 115–18, 119, 122
Chinese Lantern restaurant, Thackeray Street, 111
Chiswick, LB Hounslow, 170–72, 199, 287
Chizu restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
chop suey, 114
Christ Church, Spitalfields, 230
Christensen, Terry, political scientist, 429
Christian Action, charity, 231, 351–53
Chu Chin Chow restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Churchill, Sir Winston, politician, 253
Church Lane, Pinner, 266
cinemas, 36, 276
City and Central Investments, Ltd, 394
City Centre Properties Ltd, 186
City Industrial Ltd, 80
City of London, 4, 13, 15, 19, 29, 34, 80, 211, 243, 256, 263, 265, 268, 269, 348, 349, 420, 421; Corporation of, 213; development in, 6, 13–14, 193, 213; as financial centre, 30, 234, 434; restaurants in, 108
City Parochial Foundation, 348, 350, 356, 357
Civic Trust, 186
claimants unions, 358, 369, 372, 508n50
Clapham, LB Lambeth, 20, 35, 164
'Clare', striptease artiste, 55–56, 60, 62, 63
Clark, Kenneth Mackenzie, Baron Clark, art critic, 206
Clarke, Judge Edward, 333
Clarke, Nick, restaurateur, 100
Clarke, Tom, writer, 375
Clean Air Act, 1956, 16, 178, 192
Cleave, Maureen, journalist, 5, 14, 17, 23, 24, 29
Cleaver Square, SE11, 130, 139, 196
Clerkenwell, LB Islington, 67, 210
Clermont Club, Berkeley Square, 3, 40, 43
Clore, Charles, property developer, 188, 394, 473n16
Coal Exchange, Lower Thames Street, 183, 184, 205, 213
Cochrane, Kelso, carpenter, 309
Cockburn, Cynthia, writer and activist, 360
coffee bars, 3, 27, 34–35, 331, 349, 441n193
Cohen, Abner, social anthropologist, 343
Cohen, 'Jack from Mons', taxi driver, 250, 252, 487n76
Cohen, Reuben, taxi driver, 249
Cohn, Nik, writer, 29, 34, 75
Colebrooke Row, N1, 197
Colenutt, Bob, planning writer and academic, 376
Cole Park, LB Richmond upon Thames, 273, 285
Cole Park Residents Association, 273
INDEX 561

Collins, Canon John, 352–53
Colville Ward, RB Kensington and Chelsea, 335
Commission for Racial Equality, 322
Committee on Housing in Greater London (Milner Holland Committee, 1965), 127, 131, 139, 156, 159, 353, 416, 436n37, 458n4, 461n95, 480n43
Committee on Local Government Finance (Layfield Committee, 1976), 282
Committee on the London Taxicab Trade, Departmental (Maxwell Stamp Committee, 1970), 250, 258
Community Action, 179, 374
Community Charge (‘Poll Tax’), 295
Community Development Programme, 1969, 147, 354–56, 362, 374, 413, 417
Community Development Programme, Inter-Project Report, 1973, 362
Community politics, 208, 242, 358, 361, 372–75
Community Relations Commission, 325, 326
Communion, 40, 258, 270, 415
Condition of London’s Housing survey (1967), 360
Conegate Developments Ltd, property company, 70
Conference on Accommodation, London County Council, etc (1956), 395
Conference trade, 239, 397, 400, 404
Connaught Hotel Restaurant, Mayfair, 105, 452n13
Connolly, Danny, community activist, 243
Conrad Jameson Associates, market researchers, 322
Conran, Terence, designer, 409
Conservation, 183–216, 243, 281–88, 433, 477n121, 477n124
Conservation areas, 46, 70, 170, 179, 199–201, 204, 205, 209, 215, 285–87, 427
Conservative governments, 1951–64, 13, 125, 307
Consumerism, 4, 120–22, 423, 424, 433
Containment of Urban England, The (Hall et al.), 288–89
Cooper, Henry, boxer, 265
Copenhagen Place, E14, 480n49
Copers Cope Residents Association, 285
Corbin’s Lane, South Harrow, 269
Cossacks restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94–95
Costa coffee chain, 92
Costa del Sol restaurant, Fulham Road, 115
Cotton, Jack, property developer, 14, 186–88, 473n16
council housing. See housing
Council of Christians and Jews, 305
County of London Plan (Abercrombie & Forshaw, 1943), 185, 215, 224, 241
Covent Garden, City of Westminster/LB
Camden, 72, 182, 201, 204–9, 428, 429, 477n121, 477n124
Covent Garden Community Association, 208
Covent Garden Market, 201, 204
Covent Garden Public Inquiry, 1971, 205, 208
Coventry, 279, 404
Coventry Street, W1, 107, 215
Cowan, Jock, trade unionist, 315
Cowin, Alistair, boutique proprietor, 83
Cowley, Elizabeth, television producer, 30
Cox, Jack, former docker, 412
Cramps restaurant, New King’s Road, 102
Cranko, John, choreographer, 28
Cranks restaurant, Carnaby Street, 41
Craven, Chief Inspector W, Metropolitan Police, 338, 506n122
Credit Lyonnais building, Cannon Street, 194, 474n41
Cressall, Nellie, local politician, 368
Crewe, Quentin, restaurant critic, 38, 96, 99–103, 105, 108, 115, 117, 120, 122
Crichlow, Frank, restaurateur, 331–32
Crichlow, Victor, 331

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX

Crisis—BIT Trust, 349
Crockfords gaming club, St James’s Street, 3, 40, 442n36
Crofts, Colin, economist, 42, 45
Croham Valley Road, Croydon, 283
Cromwellian Club, Cromwell Road, 39
Crosby, John, journalist, 2–3, 5, 10, 17, 39, 41, 48, 437n80
Crosby, Theo, architect and writer, 206–7
Crosland, Anthony, politician, 288, 417
Crossman, Richard, politician, 190, 199
Crouch End, LB Haringey, 294
Crown Jewels, 402
Croydon, London Borough, 164, 169, 171, 201, 268, 269, 272–73, 283, 291, 295, 467n39, 496n183, 497n198; hostility towards, 280, 296; redevelopment of, 275–78
Croydon Advertiser, 291
Croydon College of Art, 276
Croydon Flyover, 278
Crystal Palace Triangle, 282
Cuckoo Hill Drive, Pinner, 282, 493n112
Cunningham, Bill, journalist, 388–89
Cunningham's Oyster Bar restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
curry, 103, 116, 122
Curry Centre restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Curzon House gaming club, 40
Curzon Street, W1, 40
Cutler, Horace, local politician, 144, 148, 150, 156, 237, 261
Cypriot community, 9, 11–12, 114, 118, 298
Cyrenians, charity, 351

Dagenham, LB Barking and Dagenham, 25, 96, 164, 268, 269, 432
Dagenham parliamentary constituency, 432
Daily Mirror, 27, 77, 281
Daily Telegraph, 281, 384, 398
Dalberg Road, SW1, 501
Dale, Anthony, Chief Inspector of Historic Buildings, 211
dalrymple, Suzu, striptease artiste, 60
Dalston, LB Hackney, 25, 171
Dame Street, NI, 189
Dania restaurant, Railton Road, Brixton, 115
Daniel, W. W., social scientist, 410
Daniels, Muriel, boutique owner, 81
Dankworth, Johnny, musician, 265
Daphne's restaurant, Draycott Avenue, 103
Daquise restaurant, Thurloe Street, 111
Darbourne and Darke, architects, 195
Darby, Madge, Wapping Community Association, 219
D'Arcy, Bill, Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association, 257
'Darlene', striptease artiste, 67
Dash, Jack, dockers’ leader, 218, 221, 236
Davis, Rory, model, 32
Dean, Sir Patrick, diplomat, 387, 390
Dean Street, W1, 40, 48, 55, 56, 67, 68, 98, 103
Death and Life of Great American Cities, The (Jacobs), 171, 205, 215
Debdene, Essex, 233
De Beauvoir Town, LB Hackney, 155, 196
De Blank, Justin, restaurateur, 101, 104
Debutantes, 'Debs', 31, 32, 390, 440n175
Decca Records Ltd, 23–24
deindustrialisation, 20, 43–45, 46, 404, 406, 410–13, 511n50, 511n50, 520n48; in East End, 234–36; effects on ethnic minorities, 321, 343; and the inner city, 410–13, 429, 432–33; effects on Labour Party, 366, 369, 374–75, 385–86; in Woolwich, 410
Delafons, John, civil servant, writer, 199
De Marco’s restaurant, Langton Street, 104
De Marinis, Lisa, ‘slave girl’, Roman Room restaurant, 453n52
Denham, Buckinghamshire, 164
Denman Street, W1, 61
Denmark Street, WC2, 23
Deodar Road, SW15, 27
Department of the Environment, 142, 152, 200, 208, 240, 268, 269, 280, 288, 293, 400, 419
Deptford, LB Lewisham, 139
Derby, horse race, 26
Dericks, Gerard, economist, 188
Derry and Toms, department store, Kensington High Street, 74, 86
Detroit, 404

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX 563

Development of Tourism Act, 1969, 393
Deerson, Jane, writer, 270, 296, 490n42
Devlin Committee Report, 222, 234
De Wet, Hugh, journalist, 396
‘Dialect’, 324
Diamond, Gillian, voluntary worker, *After Six*, 464n180
Dimson, Gladys, local politician, 292
Dingemans, Jenny, journalist, 77
discotheques, 33, 38, 39, 95, 336, 422
Diski, Jenny, writer, 426
Disorderly Houses Act, 1751, 53, 65
Dock Labour Scheme, 1947, 219
docks, 4, 19, 45, 218–221, 411, 412–13; closure of, 46, 233–36, 240–44, 374, 403, 411, 412, 413. See also docks
Docklands Joint Committee, 245
docks, 217–45, 362, 374, 378, 403, 413, 419, 428–29, 480n54, 481n63, 482n100, 512n94, 518n21. See also docks
Docklands Survey (Travers Morgan), 1973, 240
Dudding, A F, GLC officer, 180
Dunning, John, economist, 420
Dunstan Buildings and School House Lane Tenants Association, Stepney, 232
Durgan, Ray, film critic and writer, 58, 62, 64
Dyson, Stan, Silvertown resident, 221, 232

e
Ealing, London Borough, 168, 175, 268, 269, 275, 277, 294, 467n47, 497n198, 499n47
Ealing Draft Plan, 277
Earl’s Court, RB Kensington and Chelsea, 171
Eastbourne Terrace, W2, 28
Eastcheap, EC3, 211–13
Eastcote, LB Hillingdon, 288
East End, 6, 35, 43, 149, 217–45, 264, 269, 300, 302, 341, 347, 412, 431; employment in, 19–20, 374–75, 414; housing in, 143; and taxi trade, 249, 251, 258, 261
East End Docklands Action Group, 241–43
East Ham, LB Newham, 25, 136, 225, 442n239, 509n14
East India Dock Road, E14, 231
East London Advertiser, 233, 234
*Economist, The*, 74, 417
Edginton, John, writer, 349
Edgware Road, W2, 97
Edinburgh, Prince Philip, Duke of, 225
Educational Priority Areas, 353
Edwards, Bronwen, geographer, 76
Elections, Borough Council, 142, 169, 287, 293, 314, 365, 369, 380, 381
Elections, Greater London Council, 180, 182, 224, 236, 261, 308
Elections, London County Council, 365
Elections, Parliamentary, 125, 261, 307, 309, 383, 384, 432
Elephant and Castle, LB Southwark, 130

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX  565

Folies Bergere, Green Court, 67
Folies Bergère, Paris, 51
Fonteyn, Dame Margot, ballet dancer, 3
Foreign Office, 387
Foreign Office building, SW1, 203
Forte Group, 95
Fournier Street, E1, 196
Fox, Harry, boutique proprietor, 450n57
Foyle, Christina, bookseller, 96
Franks, Myer, taxi driver, 486n54
Frank's Café, Neal Street, 114
Fraser, Frankie, gangster, 56
Fraser, Sir Hugh, 2nd Baronet, retail executive, 82–83
Freedman, Michael, taxi driver, 251
Freeman, Fox and Partners, 202–3, 278
French, Inspector David, Metropolitan Police, 337–38
French tourists, 390, 395, 397, 402–3
Frendz, 60
Friends of Old Iseworth, 279
Frognal, LB Camden, 192
Frost, David, satirist, 34
Frye, Vanessa, boutique proprietor, 81
Fuel Food, restaurant guide, 104, 118–119;
  Fulham, LB Hammersmith and Fulham, 27, 132–33, 138–40, 141, 158, 268, 269, 370
Fulham and Chelsea Trades Council, 311
Fulham Constituency Labour Party, 367
Fulham Metropolitan Borough Council, 133
Fulham Road, SW3, 115, 121
Fulham Study (Taylor Woodrow), 132–33, 138–40, 158
Fuller, John, catering industry analyst, 119
Furneaux Jordan, Robert, architectural critic, 194–95
Furze Street, E3, 480
Gale, V, taxi driver, 486n47
Gallati, Mario, restaurateur, 96, 109, 114
gambling, 19, 40–41, 43, 218, 407, 438n88
Ganges restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Gardiner, Wilfred, strip club proprietor, 66
Gardner, Alfred, garment worker, 19–20, 217–18, 231, 478n4
Gargoyle Club, strip club, 51, 65
Garrison, Len, writer, community activist, 324
Garside, Patricia, urban historian, 231
Garton, S. J., historic buildings investigator, 192–93, 473n33
Gatt, Joseph, strip club proprietor, 444n40
Gaudi, Antoni, architect, 93
Gault-Millau guide, 106
Gay Hussar restaurant, Greek Street, 111
Gay News, 401
Gayton Road, Harrow, 270, 490n41
Geake, Walter, taxi driver, 251
Geddes, Patrick, town planning advocate, 428
General Improvement Areas, 140–41
general practitioners, 32, 414–15
Genevieve Group, 100
Georgiou, Stavros, restaurateur, 115
German community, 19, 49
German restaurants, 109–11
German tourists, 391–92, 395–97
Gerrard restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Gerrard Street, W1, 34, 109, 111, 113, 116
Get Stuffed restaurant, Langton Street, 104
Gibson, Ashton, hostel manager, 323
Gilmore, James, economist, 92
Girls Alone in London, charity, 350
Girouard, Mark, architectural historian and critic, 473n33
Glamour, 1
Glasgow, 11, 84, 108, 390
Glass, Ruth, sociologist, 128, 461n95
Glassberg, Andrew, political scientist, 368, 377
Glasshouse Street, W1, 111
Glassman, Minnie (Minnie Lansbury), local politician, 223
Godfrey Street, SW3, 129–30

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX  567

Guide de Londres en Jeans, guide, 402
Guild of Guide Lecturers, 399
Guru Nanak’s Conscious Cookery restaurant, All Saints Road, 102–3
Guys and Dolls coffee bar, 3

Hackney Gutter Press, 380
Hackney Metropolitan Borough Council, 196
Haden-Guest, Anthony, writer, 29, 32, 34, 440n156
Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, 401
Hain, Peter, community activist, 358, 361
Halal Centre, Gerrard Street, 113
Halasz, Piri, journalist, 3–4, 39–41, 435n11
Hall, John, geographer, 3–4, 39–41, 435n11
Hall, Peter, geographer, 267, 288, 420, 427–28
Hall, Peter, theatre director, 28
Halsey, A H, sociologist, 354
Ham, LB Richmond, 274
Hamilton Place, W1, 40
Hammersmith and Fulham, London Borough, 81, 136, 268, 269, 370, 424, 442n339
Hammersmith North parliamentary constituency, 383
Hammitt’s, poulterers, Rupert Street, 69
Hampton Street, NW1, 8
Hampstead, LB Camden, 80, 102, 109, 117, 130, 164, 169, 172, 182, 316
Hampstead Garden Suburb, LB Barnet, 402
Hampstead parliamentary constituency, 182, 309
Hanratty, James, murderer, 36
Hanshaw, Patrick, community activist, 19
Hanway Street, W1, 103
Harambee (‘The Black House’), Holloway Road, 223
Hardcastle, Leslie (Soho Society), 69
Hardman Report on Dispersal of the Civil Service, 421
Hardwick, Philip, architect, 183
Hare Krishna Curry House restaurant, Hanway Street, 103
Haringey, London Borough, 152, 178, 268, 269, 310
Harland and Wolff, ship repairers, 235
Harlesden, LB Brent, 154
Harley Street, W1, 213
Harrington, Illyd, 403
Harrison, George, musician, 33
Harrison, Ivy, social worker, 302
Harrow before Your Time (1973), 283
Harrow Council of Social Service, 266
Harrow Observer, 263–72, 291
Harrow-on-the-Hill, LB Harrow, 263
Harrow Road, W10, 7, 126, 328, 332
Harrow Weald, LB Harrow, 263
Hart, Karin, journalist, 15, 437n69
Haslemere Estates Ltd, 211
Hassall, John Henry, Mod, 74–75
Hastings, Max, journalist, 29, 139, 396, 424
Hatch End, 265, 266, 280
Hatch End Association, 280
Hatton Garden, EC1, 210
Havering, London Borough, 268, 269, 287, 291, 293, 416
Hawaii Club, strip club, Smith’s Court, 67
Hayes and Harlington parliamentary constituency, 383
Haymarket, SW1, 115, 454n94
Haynes, Pat, borough councillor, 370–71, 376
Hayward, Doug, tailor, 3
Hayward Gallery, 183
Hazzell, Pauline, receptionist, 77
Headstone Lane estate, Harrow, 291
healthcare, 414–15
Healy, Gerry, socialist, 384
Heath, Edward, Prime Minister, 1970–74, 434
Heath government, 1970–74, 89, 190, 210, 237, 239, 380, 382, 421, 431, 434
Heathrow Airport, taxi journeys from, 484n2
Hendon, LB Barnet, 77, 292
Henley Regatta, 26, 137
Henney, Alex, housing administrator, 152, 158
INDEX

Herne Hill, LB Lambeth/LB Southwark, 315
Heston, LB Hounslow, 271
Heston Ratepayers Association, 271
Hicks, David, interior designer, 28–29, 32
Highbury, LB Islington, 25, 198
Highbury Grove School, 510n28
Hightgate, LB Islington/LB Camden/LB Haringey, 130, 169, 171
Hills, HP, 127, 142, 145–47, 151, 322–23
Horton, Geoff, political scientist, 382, 384
Hornsey, parliamentary constituency, 384
Hornsey Journal, 317
Hornsey, LB Haringey, 130, 169, 171
Housing Act, 1969, 317
Housing Act, 1974, 320
Housing Finance Act, 1972, 320
Hostels: for vagrants, 230, 237; for young homeless, 323; for youth tourists, 395, 396, 403
Hotels, 100, 154, 194, 239, 393–95, 396, 398, 402, 406
Houghton, Sarah, journalist, 376
Hounslow, London Borough, 268, 269, 271, 279, 281
House of Commons Expenditure Committee, 141, 235
House of the Rising Sun song, 23
Houses of Parliament, 402
Housing Act, 1969, 140
INDEX 569

Housing Act, 1974, 142
Housing Finance Act, 1972, 237, 380, 381, 383
Housing the Homeless Central Fund, 351
Howard, Anthony, journalist, 365–67, 369, 385
Howard, Ebenezer, 428
Howe, Darcus, political activist, 322, 332–33
Hoxton, LB Hackney, 25
Hughenden Avenue, Kenton, 490n37
Huguenots, 49
Hulanicki, Barbara, fashion designer, 20, 37,
76–79, 78, 82, 85–92, 422
Hull, 16, 404
Hull, William, taxi driver, 250
Humperdinck, Engelbert (Arnold George Dorsey), singer, 265
Humphreys, James, strip club owner, 59, 67, 69
Humphreys, O T , civil servant, 209
Hungarian Csarda restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Hung on You boutique, Cale Street, 407
Huntley Street, WC1E, 378
Hyams, Harry, property developer, 86, 437n56
Hylton, Jack, musician, 96, 106
Ibiza, 381
Ilford, LB Redbridge, 25, 249
Ilford North parliamentary constituency, 261–62, 489n138
Ilford South parliamentary constituency, 261–62, 489n138
illegitimacy, 16–17, 437n75
Il Regalo restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Immigrants Joint Committee, 350
improvement grants, 141–42, 197
Ince, Angela, journalist, 79, 81
Indian community, 12, 58, 350
Indian restaurants, 95, 109, 111, 115–17, 119, 120,
122
Ingram, John Michael, fashion designer, 33,
76, 84, 85
Inner London, 6, 20, 42, 191–92, 321, 350,
362–63, 364–85, 412–27; community
development in, 147, 223, 354–56, 362, 367,
374, 413, 417; deindustrialisation in, 43–45,
316, 321, 362, 369, 403; depopulation of,
7–8, 226, 233, 290, 292, 293, 366, 403, 412;
healthcare in, 414–15; housing in, 124, 136,
138–40, 146, 147–48, 150, 152, 156, 158, 360,
414; Labour Party in, 365–86; public
services in, 414–16; social problems in,
302, 310, 316, 321, 350, 414, 419, 425
Inner London Education Authority, 327, 395,
416
Inner London Sessions, 53
Inner Urban Areas Act, 1978, 419
Inns of Court, 30
Institute of Community Studies, 346–47
Institute of Race Relations, 308–9, 499n47
Inter–Hotel Ltd, 396
Ireland, Irish Republic, 10, 16
Irish community, 218, 234, 298, 302, 304, 306
Irving Street, WC2, 51
Irving Strip Club, Irving Street, 51
Isle of Dogs, LB Tower Hamlets, 171, 218, 222,
226, 227, 236, 242
Isle of Dogs, Unilateral Declaration of
Independence in (1970), 242
Isle of Dogs Action Group, 241–42
Isle of Wight, 11
Isleworth, LB Hounslow, 279
Islington, London Borough, 142, 189, 195, 323,
375, 376–80, 384, 412, 419, 422–23, 430,
437n78, 467n39; Borough Council, 148,
153, 190–91, 197, 350, 419, 431; gentrification
in, 136–42, 157, 169, 178, 422–23; housing
in, 142, 144–45, 148, 153, 157, 189, 190–91,
197, 430; Labour Party in, 144, 365–71,
376–77, 384
Islington Central parliamentary constituency,
432
Islington East parliamentary constituency, 365
Islington East Young Socialists, 371
Islington Gutter Press, 373, 376, 377
Islington Metropolitan Borough Council,
144–45, 191, 365–67, 369, 370
Islington Society, 169
Isow’s restaurant, Brewer Street, 69
Italian community, 12, 34–35, 49, 50, 114
Italian restaurants, 33, 36–37, 95, 97, 103, 106,
109, 114, 115, 116, 121, 122

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX

Italy, 84, 388–89, 391
Ivens, Michael, 257, 488n105
I Was Lord Kitchener’s Valet, boutique, Portobello Road, 37
Jabberwocky restaurant, Ebury Street, 102
Jacobs, Jane, writer, 171–72, 205–6
Jacobs, Jimmy, strip club proprietor, 65
Jagger, Mick, musician, 3, 99
James, Betty, writer, 5, 400
James Sherwood’s London Guide, guide, 105, 106
'Jane', striptease artiste, 64
Japanese restaurants, 117–19
Japanese tourists, 253, 402
Jarrow, 347, 380, 410
Jean Junction, fashion chain, 426
Jeffrey, Pansy, community activist, 326
Jenkins, Hugh, MP, politician, 369, 383
Jenkins, Simon, journalist, 29, 101, 109–10, 224, 229, 267, 395, 419; on conservation, 188, 192, 208, 210, 215; on Greater London Development Plan, 165, 177, 181–82; on housing, 150–51; on Notting Hill, 338, 343
Jenkins, Valerie, journalist, 29, 119, 407–8
Jeune, Hugo, property developer, 137
Jewish Chronicle, 249
Jewish community, 49, 249, 261
Joffrey, Pierre, journalist, 4–5
John, Augustus, painter, 27
John Knight, soap manufacturers, Silvertown, 232, 235
John Laing Ltd, construction firm, 214
John Michael boutique, King’s Road, 33, 36, 76, 82, 85
Johns, Fred, local politician, 377
Johns, Ted, local politician, community activist, 236, 242
Johnson, Alan, MP, politician, 23
Johnson, Paul, journalist, 431
John Stephen boutique, Carnaby Street, 21, 37–38
John Stephen boutique, King’s Road, 37
John Stephen Custom Made shop, Carnaby Street, 64
John Stephen’s Man’s Shop, Carnaby Street, 37–38
Joint Docklands Action Group, 241–43
Jones, Colin, photographer, 323
Jones, David, social worker, 356
Jones, Michael, journalist, 384
Jones–Lecointe, Althea, community activist, 332
Joseph, Sir Keith, Minister of Housing and Local Government, 1962–64; Secretary of State for Social Services, 1970–74, 213, 350–51
Joseph, Tony, North London resident, 322–23
Josephine restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Jowell, Tessa, MP, politician, 308
Judd, Dennis R, urban economist, 401–2
Juke Box Jury, television show, 31
'Julie', striptease artiste, 60
Kantaroff, Maryon, sculptor, 27
'Katy', striptease artiste, 60
Keatley, Patrick, journalist, 308
Kebab and Humous restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Kellett Road, SW2, 501n101
Kelly Street, NW1, 129
Kemp House, Berwick Street, 68
Kennington, LB Lambeth, 130, 135, 137, 196, 378
Kennington Park Road, SE11, 135
Kenrick, Rev Bruce, social activist, 352–53
Kensington and Chelsea, Royal Borough, 3, 176, 252, 256, 268, 269, 276, 356, 398, 431, 437n73, 437n78, 501n102, 504n81, 516n76; Borough Council, 16, 393, 394, 395; boutiques in, 20–21, 32, 36, 37, 74, 80, 83–87, 89, 92, 93; historic buildings in, 198–99; housing in, 132, 154, 303; and Notting Hill Carnival, 340; restaurants in, 93–95, 97, 98, 103, 105, 108, 111, 117, 118; rioting in, 308–12, 320–345. See also Chelsea; Kensington Royal Borough Council; King’s Road; North Kensington; Notting Hill
Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council, 340, 393, 394, 395
Kensington Church Street, W1, 84–85, 86

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
Lambeth Citizens Advice Bureau, 299
Lambeth Inner Area Study, 152, 412–14
Lambeth Labour Party, 370–71, 381, 384–85
Lambeth Metropolitan Borough Council, 130
Lancaster Gate, W2, 198
Lancaster Road, W1, 304, 311
Langan, Peter, restaurateur, 101, 106, 118
Langley House children’s home, East India Dock Road, 222
Langton, Robert, journalist, 154, 211, 394
Langton Street, SW10, 104
Lansbury, George, MP, politician and editor, 223, 236, 384
Lansbury Estate, Poplar, 225
Lapping, Anne, journalist, 417
La Reserve restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Laslett, Rhaune, community activist, 333–34
La Toque Blanche restaurant, Abingdon Road, 105
Lauff, Ingard, journalist, 390–91
laundrettes, 273, 522n93
law centres, 357, 431
Lawns, The, Hatch End, 255–56
Laws, Courtney, community organiser, 322
Layfield, Sir Frank, lawyer, committee chair, 176
Layfield Committee. See Committee on Local Government Finance
Layfield Inquiry into the Greater London Development Plan, 176, 177, 180, 471n120
Lea, river, 224
Leander, Terry, youth worker, 327, 504n81
Le Carrosse restaurant, Elysian Street, 108
Lee, Roger, social geographer, 219, 238
Leeds, 16, 97, 520n48
Lee Ho Fook restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Leicester Square, WC2, 3, 51
Leigh, Vivien, actor, 101
Leman restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Leman Street Police Station, E1, 231
Le Rêve restaurant, Chelsea, 3
Le Routier restaurant, Langton Street, 104
Les Ambassadeurs club, Hamilton Place, 40
L'Étoile restaurant, Charlotte Street, 105, 109
Lévy, Maurice, taxi driver, 251–53, 258
Lévy, Albert, taxi driver, 252
Lévy, Joe, property developer, 187, 211, 378–79
Lévy, Shawn, writer, 19
Lewis, Anthony, journalist, 4
Lewis, Arthur, local politician, 275–76
Lewisham, London Borough, 40, 171, 268, 269, 322, 360–61, 370, 413, 442n239, 497n198; historic buildings in, 194–95, 200; squatters in, 377–78
Lewisham North by-election, 1957, 125
Lewisham Society, 171
Leyton, LB Waltham Forest, 350
Licensed Taxi Drivers Association, 256–57, 259
Lichfield, Patrick, photographer, 32
Lido restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Life, 4
lightering, 19
Limehouse, LB Tower Hamlets, 116
Lincoln’s Inn Fields, WC2, 163
Lincoln Street, SW3, 99, 459n128
Lindsay, Katherine, writer, 270, 296, 490n42
Lipton’s bacon merchants, Soho, 69
Lisboa restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Lisle Street, WC2, 111
Listener, The, 137
listing, buildings of historical or architectural interest, 185, 192–94, 197–201, 204, 209, 211, 213, 215
Little Akropolis restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Little Rock, Arkansas, 298, 317
Liverpool, 12, 51, 108, 404, 520n48
Livingstone, Ken, politician, 376–77, 379, 384–85
Local Authority Social Services Act, 1970, 355
Local Government Act, 1888, 275
local taxation, 150, 271, 282, 291, 293–95, 297, 400, 408, 417, 431, 433
Location of Offices Bureau, 420–21
Locke, Sue, boutique proprietor, 83
London: The Heartless City (1977), 420
Lester, Richard, 31
L’Étoile restaurant, Charlotte Street, 105, 109
Levinson, Maurice, taxi driver, 251–53, 258
Ley, Albert, taxi driver, 252
Levy, Joe, property developer, 187, 211, 378–79
Lévy, Shawn, writer, 19
Lewis, Anthony, journalist, 4
Lewis, Arthur, local politician, 275–76
Lewisham, London Borough, 40, 171, 268, 269, 322, 360–61, 370, 413, 442n239, 497n198; historic buildings in, 194–95, 200; squatters in, 377–78
Lewisham North by-election, 1957, 125
Lewisham Society, 171
Leyton, LB Waltham Forest, 350
Licensed Taxi Drivers Association, 256–57, 259
Lichfield, Patrick, photographer, 32
Lido restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Life, 4
lightering, 19
Limehouse, LB Tower Hamlets, 116
Lincoln’s Inn Fields, WC2, 163
Lincoln Street, SW3, 99, 459n128
Lindsay, Katherine, writer, 270, 296, 490n42
Lipton’s bacon merchants, Soho, 69
Lisboa restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Lisle Street, WC2, 111
Listener, The, 137
listing, buildings of historical or architectural interest, 185, 192–94, 197–201, 204, 209, 211, 213, 215
Little Akropolis restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Little Rock, Arkansas, 298, 317
Liverpool, 12, 51, 108, 404, 520n48
Livingstone, Ken, politician, 376–77, 379, 384–85
Local Authority Social Services Act, 1970, 355
Local Government Act, 1888, 275
local taxation, 150, 271, 282, 291, 293–95, 297, 400, 408, 417, 431, 433
Location of Offices Bureau, 420–21
Locke, Sue, boutique proprietor, 83
London: The Heartless City (1977), 420

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX 573

London Amenity and Transport Association, 170
London Bridge, 4, 6, 179
London Bridge station, 473n16
London Chamber of Commerce, 417
London Convention Bureau, 400
London Council of Social Service, 299, 300, 301, 354
London County Council, 124, 172, 182, 213, 223, 239, 365, 366, 395, 405; Historic Buildings Sub–Committee, 197, 199; and entertainments licensing, 50–51, 54–55, 64–65, 446n89; and historic buildings, 194, 196–99, 213; and housing, 6, 138, 143, 149, 236, 243; and Piccadilly Circus, 14, 186–88, 205; planning policy, 14, 161, 181, 224–6; Town Planning Committee, 225
Londonderry House, 26
London Diocesan Council for Moral Welfare, 16
London Docklands Development Corporation, 244
London Docks, 234, 412
London Free School, 333
London Government Act, 1963, 55, 64, 491n69
London Guide School (for taxi drivers), 251
London Labour Party, 125
London Life, 29, 31–33, 44, 79, 115
London Motorway Action Group, 169
London Pavilion, Shaftesbury Avenue, 215
London Property Letter, 130–32, 137–38, 140, 142, 154, 155, 319, 501n102
London Restaurants Training Group, 101
London School of Economics, 82, 170, 256, 366–67, 421
London Season, the, 26, 31–32, 440n175
London Taxi Guides, 251
London Tourist Board, 251, 397–401, 404, 405
London Traffic Survey, 162, 164–66
London Transport, 178, 416
London Union of Youth Clubs, 350
London weighting, 415, 519n38
Look of London, 17
Loon Fung restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113, 116
Lopez, Eddie, Labour Party agent, 385
Lord John boutique chain, 24, 91
Lorentzen, Anne, geographer, 120
Los Angeles, 171–72
Lower Square, Isleworth, 279
Lower Thames Street, EC3, 183
Lucan, John Bingham, 7th Earl of, 40
Lucky restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Luder, Owen, architect, 276
Luigi’s restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Luscombe, Special Constable, 327
Luso restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Lyall, Neil, strip club manager, 52
Lycett Green, Rupert, tailor, 2
Lyle, Janet, boutique proprietor, 80, 408
Lyte, Charles, journalist, 42
Lyttelton, Humphrey, musician, 109
MacCarthy, Fiona, writer, 32
Maccioni, Alvaro, restaurateur, 36, 38, 98, 422
Macclesfield Street, W1, 67
Macdonald, Ian, barrister, 332
Macdonald, James Ramsay, MP, politician, 379
Macdonald, Kevin, club proprietor, 38
Mackay–Lewis, Jeremy, architect, 194
Macmillan, Harold, MP, Minister of Housing and Local Government, 1951–54, Prime Minister, 1957–63, 13, 183, 193, 472n1
Macpherson, Mary, journalist, 412
Madam Cadee’s saucepan shop, Soho, 69
‘Maggie’, striptease artiste, 62
Maison Prunier restaurant, Paris, 96
Maizels, Joan, social observer, 304, 309, 313, 319
Major, John, MP, Prime Minister 1990–97, 434
Malaysian restaurants, 117, 119
Manchester, 97, 520n48
Mandarin restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Mangrove restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Mallory, Diana, journalist, 30
Mallory, Diana, journalist, 30
Maltese community, 9, 56, 59, 64, 298
Man Alive, television programme, 29
Manchester, 97, 520n48
Mandarin restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Mangrove restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
INDEX

Mankowitz, Wolf, writer, 40
Manor Park, LB Newham, 25, 74–75
Mantovani, Anunzio Paolo, musician, 23
Marcella, J M, taxi driver, 261
Marcuse, Herbert, political philosopher, 361
Margaret, Princess, Countess of Snowdon, 28, 97, 118
Mark, Robert, Commissioner, Metropolitan Police, 69, 339
Marks and Spencer, department store, 74, 90, 273, 423
Marquee Club, Oxford Street, Wardour Street, 2, 35, 41, 42
Marquess Road, N1, 195
Marshall, Chief Superintendent Peter, Metropolitan Police, 335
Marshall, Honor, writer, 347, 357
Martin, George, record producer, 24
Martin, Leslie, architect, 203–5
Martinez restaurant, Swallow Street, 111
Marylebone Mercury, 307, 310, 311, 315, 316, 318
Mary Quant Ginger Group, 81
‘Mast’, 334
Masruf Ali, 59
Mason, Ronald (‘John’), pornographer, 69
Massey’s Chop House, Beauchamp Place, 94, 95
Mates, fashion retailers, 85
Mather & Crowther, advertising agency, 29
Mattson, Barbro, fashion buyer, 389
Maugham, Robin, writer, 134–35
Maxim’s restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Maxwell Stamp Committee. See Committee on the London Taxicab Trade, Departmental
Mayfair, City of Westminster, 26, 27, 33, 40, 91, 96, 129, 194, 271
Mayne, Roger, photographer, 303
McColl, James, MP, politician, 306
McDonald’s restaurants, 107, 109
McGill, Angus, journalist, 11–12, 20, 24–25, 36, 75, 76, 122
McGowan, Cathy, television presenter, 3, 452n13
McLeish, Gordon, community activist, 206
McNair, Archie, entrepreneur, 27, 28, 91
Medical Practices Committee, 414
Mellish, Robert, MP, politician, 135, 367, 383, 512n94
Melting Pot hostel, Brixton, 323
Mendez, Julie, striptease artiste, 52–53
Menkes, Suzy, journalist, 408
Merricks, Commander Frank, Metropolitan Police, 330
Merritt Point, tower block, Newham, 143, 227
Mervan Road, SW2, 501n102
‘Metroland’, 263, 265
Metropolitan Board of Works, 49
Metropolitan Police, 40, 69, 148, 163, 321, 416; A7 Branch, 329–30, 335; B Division, 327, 335, 504n80; and Blacks, 321, 326–30, 333, 334–39, 343–44; and strip clubs, 52, 55–56, 62, 64–65, 67, 69; and taxi drivers, 246, 251
Metro youth club, Notting Hill, 504n81
Mexican restaurants, 119
Michael Chow’s restaurant, Knightsbridge, 118
Michelin Guide, 105, 116, 122
Middlesbrough, 11, 12
Middlesex Advertiser, 275
Middlesex Guildhall, 7
Midland Grand Hotel, St Pancras, 192–93, 207, 210, 473n16
Mifsud, Frank and Joseph, strip club proprietors, 56
Mile End, LB Tower Hamlets, 25, 222
Mile End Road, E1, 224
Miles, Sue, restaurant critic, 111, 115
Militant Tendency, 385
Milkwood Tavern, Herne Hill, 315
Mill, John Stuart, 250
Miller, Millie, local politician, 370
Millwall Dock, 242
Milter Holland Committee. See Committee on Housing in Greater London
Minicabs, 248, 254–57

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 132–33, 149, 202, 211, 224, 285; and historic buildings, 185, 192, 196, 199–201; and strategic planning, 161–62, 289; and ‘twilight’ areas, 132, 140, 158
Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Circular, 61, 1968, 200
Ministry of Transport, 162, 164, 202
Minshall, Paul, ‘mas’ man, 341
Mintz, Philip, taxi driver, 251
Mirabelle restaurant, Curzon Street, 96, 452n13
Miss Selfridge, fashion retailer, Oxford Street, 82–83
Miss S Liddell restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Mitcham, LB Merton, 273
Mitchell, Frank, criminal, 469n76
Mlinaric, David, interior designer, 28, 29, 102, 409
Mod, Mods, 1, 20, 24, 25, 35, 37, 74
Monaghan, Jim, community activist, 207
Monico site, Piccadilly Circus, 14, 186–88, 205, 206
Montpelier Row, SE3, 194, 197
Moody, Alfred (‘Bill’), Detective Chief Superintendent, Metropolitan Police, 69
Moore Park, LB Hammersmith and Fulham, 139
Moor Park, Hertfordshire, 184
Morden, LB Merton, 272, 273
Morgan, David Andre, company director, 84
Morley Crescent East, Stanmore, 265
Morley Crescent West, Stanmore, 266
Morrell, Derek, civil servant, 362
Morris, Brian, club manager, 3
Morris, Mel, fashion entrepreneur, 426
Morrison, Lionel, journalist, 323, 324–26
Mort, Frank, historian, 26
Mosley, Sir Oswald, MP, politician, 308
Most, Mickie, record producer, 23, 24
Motorway Box (Ringway One), 164, 165, 167, 168, 169, 172, 181
Moulin Rouge, ‘Moulin Rouge 2’ club, Great Windmill Street, 58, 445057
‘Mr Bean and His Runners’, band, 35
Mr Fish, boutique, Clifford Street, 91
Mr Freedom Group, fashion retailers, 84–85
Mrs B’s Pantry restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Mulberry Housing Trust, charity, 350
Mulligatawny and Song restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94, 95
multiple deprivation, 355, 413, 433
Muntaz restaurant, Haymarket, 115
Munby, Denys, economist, 217, 231
Mundey, Jack, community activist, 375
Munich, 109, 389
Murdir, Lynda, journalist, 155
Murphy, Kevin, journalist, 154
Murray, Peter, diplomat, 390
Murry, Mary, typist–translator, City, 30
‘mushes’ (owner-driver cabbies), 257, 258
music industry, 1, 2, 23–25, 387–388
Mussington, David, Police Constable, 327
Naked City strip club, Tisbury Court, Greek Street, 54, 55, 57, 58
Napier–Bell, Simon, record producer, 34
National Assistance Act, 1948, 148, 149, 317
National Association of Outfitters, 76
National Association of Stevedores and Dockers, 221
National Catering Inquiry, 1966, 114, 455127
National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, 301, 310, 315
National Council for Civic Liberty, 361
National Council of Social Service, 305, 358
National Dwelling and Housing Survey, 1978, 266–69
National Federation of Housing Societies, 351
National Federation of Self–Employed, 359
National Front, 319
National Gallery, 399
National Health Service, 9, 158, 215, 364, 415, 419
National House Condition Survey, 1967, 140
National Institute of Social Work Training, 356
Natraj restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112, 456142
Natural History Museum, 192
Neal Street, WC2, 114
Neasden, LB Brent, 424
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INDEX 575

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX

Needlecraft boutique, Hammersmith, 81
Nell Gwynne Theatre, Dean Street, 56
Nesbitt, Clayton, Police Constable, 327
Newberry, E W, LCC/GLC officer, 65, 446n96
Newburgh Street, W1, 37
New Burma Orient restaurant, St Giles High Street, 118
Newcastle–upon–Tyne, 16, 173
‘new class’, the (Haden-Guest), 28, 29, 32
New Cross, LB Lewisham, 139
Newham, London Borough, 43, 233, 268, 269, 310, 413, 478n13, 509n14, 510n22; Borough Council, 223–28, 235, 237, 244, 367–68, 377; community politics in, 355, 367, 373, 374, 375, 417; deindustrialisation in, 232–36; housing in, 136, 140, 143, 223–26, 228, 244; Labour Party in, 381–84
Newham Action Committee, 375
Newham Community Development Project, 223, 235, 355, 367, 374, 413, 417
Newham North–East parliamentary constituency, 381–84
Newington, LB Southwark, 355
New Kebab House restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
New King’s Road, SW6, 102
Newley, Anthony, singer, 23
Newman, Otto, sociologist, 218
Newport, 357
Newport Place, WC2, 111
New Scotland Yard, 194
New Society, 235
New Towns, 7, 233, 235, 240, 245, 289
New York, 1, 2, 3, 5, 84, 171, 302, 333, 388, 391
New York Herald Tribune, 2, 17
New York Times, 4
Nicholson, George, local politician, 376
Nick’s Diner restaurant, Ifield Road, 100
Nigger–Hunting in England, pamphlet, 326
9 Berwick Street Club, posing club, Soho, 54, 66, 68
Norman, Philip, writer, 92
North Circular Road, 164
Northedge, Richard, journalist, 154
North Harrow, LB Harrow, 263, 264, 265, 271
North Kensington, RB Kensington and Chelsea, 176, 303, 305, 312, 318, 326, 398, 437n75, 504n81, 516n76; 1959 general election in, 308–11; social work in, 300, 349, 354, 356. See also Notting Hill; Notting Hill Carnival; Notting Hill riots, 1958
North Kensington Citizens Advice Bureau, 326
North Kensington Family Study, 1965, 356
North Kensington Labour Party, 318
North Kensington Neighbourhood Law Centre, 431
North Kensington parliamentary constituency. See Chelsea, RB Kensington and Chelsea; North Kensington
North Kensington Project, 356
North London railway line, 177
Northolt, LB Ealing, 164
North Woolwich, LB Newham, 221, 375
Norwood, LB Croydon/LB Lambeth, 35, 282–84, 357, 385
Norwood Society, 282
Notting Dale police station, 332
Nottingham, 299, 310, 312
Notting Hill Carnival, 320–45
Notting Hill Community Workshop, 373
Notting Hill Housing Trust, 142, 352–53, 373
Notting Hill Neighbourhood Law Centre, 357
Notting Hill People’s Association, 373
Notting Hill police station, 332
Notting Hill Social Council, 334, 373
Notting Hill Summer Project, 357
Nureyev, Rudolf, dancer, 99

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
Oakley Street, SW3, 27
Oakwood, LB Enfield, 267
O’Brien, Edna, novelist, 27
Observer, 326
Octopus restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Odd One Out, garment manufacturers, 84–85
O’Fado restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Oggì illustrato, 391
O’Grady, John, local politician, 377, 383
Old Chiswick Protection Society, 287
Old Compton Street, W1, 4, 34, 54, 66, 68, 107
Oldham, Andrew Loog, record producer, 24
Oldham Estates Ltd, 88
Old Houses into New Homes White Paper, 1968, 140
Olivier, Laurence, actor, 99
O’Malley, Jan, community activist, 359, 372, 373
O’Malley, John, community activist, 223, 357–58, 367–68, 381, 384
O’Neill, Ian, chemist, 521n76
Ono, Yoko, artist, 37
Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), 87, 288
Original Geisha Club, Greek Court, 64, 446n96
Ormsby-Gore, Jane, interior designer, 3
Orwell, John, local politician, 222, 224, 229, 237–38, 378
O’Shea, Kathleen, Harrow resident, 266
Osteria San Lorenzo Restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94, 95
Owen, Robert, industrialist and philanthropist, 428
Owner Drivers Association, 250, 253, 254
owner-occupation. See housing
Oxford Gardens, W10, 176
Oxford Street, W1, 33, 35, 77, 82, 85, 170–71, 423
P & O (Peninsular and Oriental, Ltd), 235
Packington Estate, LB Islington, 189–91, 195
Paddington, City of Westminster, 7, 28, 156, 198, 199, 256, 372; gentrification in, 130, 137, 196; race relations in, 299–302, 305–307, 310–12, 314, 315
Paddington and St Marylebone Trades Council, 312
Paddington Chapel, Old Marylebone Road, 310
Paddington Council of Social Service, 300
Paddington Labour Party, 314
Paddington North Parliamentary Constituency, 156
Paddington Overseas Students and Workers Committee, 299, 305
Paddington Project, The, 1955, 299
Paddington South Young Conservatives, 311
Pahl, Ray, sociologist, 158
Paine, Ingeborg, Newham resident, 145
Pall Mall, SW1, 33, 252
Palmer, Leslie, carnival organiser, 335–41
Paradise Sex Gardens, Soho, 69
Paraguay restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94, 95
Paris, 2, 5, 21, 76, 120, 267, 389, 390, 391
Paris Match, 4
Parkes, Ray, restaurateur, 93, 100
Parkes restaurant, 12, 93–95, 105, 106, 454n81
Parkin, Ben, MP, politician, 156
Park Lane, W1, 5, 26, 257, 316, 394
Parsons Green, LB Hammersmith and Fulham, 102
Paterson, Chief Superintendent Ronald, Metropolitan Police, 340–42
Patterson, Sheila, social anthropologist, 302–3, 306, 310, 324
Paul’s Place restaurant, Kensington High Street, 457n164
Pavilion Road, SW1, 95, 100
Peachey Property Corporation, 126
Pearce, Sid, taxi driver, 256, 259
Peckham, LB Southwark, 142, 164, 378
Pelican Club, Soho, 56
Pendlebury, John, architectural historian, 477n124
INDEX

Pentonville Road, N1, 118
People and Planning (Skeffington Committee) Report, 1969, 172–75
People and the Car, The (Birmingham University, 1964), 165
People’s War Sound System, 503n100
Percy Street, W1, 111, 118
Peter Evans’ Eating House, Brompton Road, 119
Peter Mario restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Peterou, Helena, seamstress, 11
Pevsner, Nikolaus, architectural critic, 211, 473n33
Phillips, Alan, Metropolitan Police Constable, 336
Phillips, Col Harry, rent tribunal officer, 132
Phillips, Melanie, journalist, 10–11
Phoenix Club, Old Compton Street, 68
Picoasso, Pablo, artist, 103
Piccadilly, W1, 53, 60, 82
Piccadilly Hotel, Piccadilly, 53
Pimlico, City of Westminster, 10–11, 28, 78, 131
Pine, Joseph, economist, 92
Pinner, LB Harrow, 155, 263–66, 267, 281–83
Pinner and Hatch End Workers Education Association, 283
Pinner South Residents Association, 281
Pinter, Harold, playwright, 99
Pitt, David, local politician, 330
Pizza Express restaurant chain, 107
Pizza Hut restaurant chain, 107
Pizzaland restaurants, 107
Pizza Oven restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Pizza restaurants, 107–8, 120, 121, 123
Plaistow Wharf, LB Newham, 235
Planning Advisory Group, Ministry of Housing, 162, 172–73
Playboy Club, Park Lane, 5
Playboy Club, Warden Street, strip club, 56, 63, 66
Plowden Report (Children and Their Primary Schools), 1967, 353–54
Plummer, Desmond, local politician, 144, 241, 399
Plunket Greene, Alexander, fashion entrepreneur, 81
Pocock, Tom, journalist, 229
Policy for the Inner Cities, White Paper, 1977, 294
Policy Studies Institute, 328
Polish community, 9, 111
Polish restaurants, 101, 111, 119
Politiken, 390
Pollock, Alice, fashion designer, 43
poll tax, 295, 297
pollution, 6–7, 9, 178, 231
Polski, Joe, taxi driver, 250, 251
Pope, Roy, plumber, 20
Poplar, LB Tower Hamlets, 144, 223, 225, 228, 229, 231, 235, 236, 360, 368, 374, 380. See also Poplar rates protest, 1921
Poplar Labour Party, 368
Poplar Metropolitan Borough Council, 223–24, 243
Poplar rates protest, 1921, 223–24, 243, 380
Poplar’s Youth Employment, 19
pornography, 68–70, 72
Portman, Synove (‘Suna’), ‘Chelsea Set’ socialite, 393

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
Index

Portnall Road, W9, 307
Portobello Project, charity, 349
Portobello Road, W10, 311, 320–21, 324, 349
Port of London Authority, 219
Portuguese restaurants, 95, 119
Postgate, Raymond, writer and restaurant critic, 107, 120
Post Office Tower (BT Tower), Cleveland Street, 110, 194
Postgate, Charles, taxi driver, 251
Postgate, John, architect, 13–14
Powell, John Enoch, MP, Minister of Health, 1960–63, 315–16, 319, 370
Prentice, Reg, MP, Secretary of State for Education, 1974–75, Minister of State for Overseas Development, 1975–76, 381–84
Press, Richard, tailor, 20
Prices and Incomes Board, 254
Princes Road, Richmond, 459n35
Priory Way, North Harrow, 489n13
Priscilla Road, E3, 480n49
Private Eye, 250
Private Eye restaurant, Radnor Walk, 454n65
Prunier, Simone, restaurateur, 96, 101, 104, 105
Prunier restaurant, St James’s Street, 105
Public Carriage Office, 248
'Purlbridge' (Devery and Lindsay), 270, 296, 490n42
Putney, LB Wandsworth, 263, 264
Putney Constituency Labour Party, 369, 383, 384
Putney Constituency Labour Party, 369, 383, 384
Pylypec, Irene, squatter, 107
Quadrant, Regent Street, 185, 472n4
Quant, Mary, fashion designer, 2, 21, 76, 77, 81, 82, 409, 522n101; and Bazaar, 36, 76, 91; and export drive, 84, 388–90; and fashion industry, 22, 24, 81, 84–85, 422
Queen, 28, 29, 33, 98, 102, 109
Queen Charlotte’s Ball, 31
Queenhithe, EC4, 10
Queen’s Theatre Club, strip club, Berwick Street, 67
Queensway, W2, 103
Quent’s Club, gaming club, Hill Street, 40
Raban, Jonathan, writer, 11, 137–38
Race relations, 10, 298–318, 319–45, 347, 376, 429
Race Relations Act, 1965, 376
Race Relations Act, 1968, 376
Race Relations Board, 325, 344
Raichman, Peter, landlord, 127, 156, 159, 193, 356
Racism, 253, 298–318, 319–45
Radio Rentals Ltd, 458n14
Railways Sites Ltd, 473n16
Rainey, Michael, boutique proprietor, 407
Rainforest Café restaurants, 458n88
Raingold, Sam, taxi driver, 251
Ramsay, Lady Elizabeth, 32
Randall, Jenny, secretary, 17–18
Rank Organisation, 305
Rasmussen, Steen Eiler, writer, 171
Raspberry, William, journalist, 326
Rastafarianism, 324–25
rates. See local taxation
Rave, 37, 38
Raven Row, E1, 231
Rawlings, Terry, writer, 39
Raybeck, Ltd, garment manufacturers, 91
Rayleigh, Essex, 233
Raymond, Paul, strip club proprietor, 51–56, 59, 68, 72–73
Raymond Revuebar, 49–56, 58, 59, 63, 65, 67–68, 72
Rayners Lane, LB Harrow, 263, 264
Raynes Park, LB Merton, 139, 285
Rea, Philip Russell, Second Baron, 183
Réalités, 390
Redbridge, London Borough, 16, 258, 268, 269, 361
'rediscovery of poverty', 346–47, 355, 425
Red Mill strip club, Macclesfield Street, 67
Reed, David, Conegate Ltd, 70
refugees, 8–9, 111, 249, 298
Regent Street, W1, 49, 85, 111, 395
reggae, 324, 336
Rent Act (1957), 125–28, 139, 313
Rent Act (1965), 131–32, 159

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
Rent Act (1974), 153–54, 159
rent arrears, local authority, 493n166
rent control, 6, 125–28, 131–32, 136, 153–54, 159, 313, 458n4
Renton, Andrew, architect, 241
Resource Allocation Working Party (NHS), 1976, 419
restaurants, 33, 36–37, 49, 69, 91–123, 273, 393, 398, 424, 427
Rey, Loris, sculptor, 439n147
Ribbentrop, Joachim von, German Ambas-
sador to London, 1936–38, 250
Richard, Cliff, singer, 34
Richardson, Charles, gang leader, 56
Richardson, Eddie, gang leader, 56
Richardson, Eve, artiste, 52
Richmond Ratepayers Association, 295
Richmond Rendezvous restaurant, Paradise
Road, 116
Richmond Society, 286
Richmond Study, Freeman, Fox and Partners
(1966), 278
Richmond upon Thames, London Borough,
130, 177, 256, 268, 269, 272, 274, 275, 278, 285,
286, 292
Rigg, Diana, actor, 99
Ringways, orbital urban motorways, 161–82,
428
Rio Coffee Bar, Westbourne Park Road, 331
Rippon, Geoffrey, MP, Secretary of State for
the Environment, 1972–74, 209, 210, 215,
240, 477n124
Ritz restaurant, Piccadilly, 252, 452n13
Rix, Brian, actor, 99
Roberts, Nickie, striptease artiste, 56, 60, 62,
63–64
Roberts, Tommy, fashion designer, 84–85
Robertson, Howard, architect, 206
Robin Hood Gardens estate, LB Tower
Hamlets, 228
Robinson, Emily, historian, 430, 523n120
Robinson, Police Constable W D, Metropoli-
tan Police, 343–44
rockers, 24–25, 74–75
Roehampton, LB Wandsworth, 250
Rogers, Eddie, music writer, 23
Rogers, George, MP, politician, 308, 318, 372
Roland, William, journalist, 136
Romanian restaurants, 118
Roman Room restaurant, Brompton Road, 103
Rome, 206, 389, 391, 486n58
Romford, LB Havering, 442n239, 491n70
Romford Ritz, 442n239
Romilly Street, W1, 33, 97
Ronan Point, LB Newham, tower block, 143,
145, 226–27, 360
Ronay, Egon, restaurant critic, 93
Rose, Hilary, sociologist, 358
Rose v Welbeck, 255–56
Rothschild, Victor, Third Baron Rothschild, 96
Roumieu, Robert Lewis, architect, 211–13
Rowe, Dick, record producer, 24
Roxeth Grove, South Harrow, 264
Royal Academy, 32
Royal Albert Hall, 184, 192, 400
Royal Commission on the Distribution of the
Industrial Population, 1940 (Barlow
Commission), 417
Royal Crescent, W1, 198
Royal Docks, LB Newham, 234, 235
Royal Exchange, 192
Royal Festival Hall, 400
Royal Fine Arts Commission, 186
Royal Institute of British Architects, 206
Royal Lancaster Hotel, 198
Royal Town Planning Institute, 178, 428
Royal Victoria Dock, 235
Ruislip, LB Hillingdon, 164
Rules restaurant, Maiden Lane, 105
Ruocco, Alfonso, café proprietor, 114
Rupert restaurant, Park Walk, 102
Rupert Street, W1, 215
Saint, Andrew, architectural writer, 185, 200
Saliba, Romeo, 66–67
Salonika restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Salter, Tom, boutique proprietor, 389
Salut e Hind restaurant, Holborn, 111
Salvation Army, 231
Samaritans, 349
INDEX

581

Samuda Estate, LB Tower Hamlets, 222, 227, 480n52
Sandelson, Neville, MP, 383
Sanderstead, 283–85, 286, 295
Sanderstead News, residents' association newsletter, 286
Sanderstead Preservation Society, 283
Sanderstead Residents Association, 282
Sandford, Jeremy, writer, 27, 63
Sandford, John Edmondson, Second Baron, 215
Sandles, Arthur, journalist, 397
Sandy, Duncan, MP, 199, 285
Sargant, Malcolm, conductor, 99
Sassie, Victor, restaurateur, 111
Sassoon, Vidal, hairdresser, 32
Satay House restaurant, Sussex Gardens, 117
Saumarez Smith, Otto, historian, 208
Savile Row, W1, 20, 33, 34
Savoy Hotel restaurant, 105, 106, 452n13, 454n69
Scandinavian restaurants, 115
Scandinavian tourists, 395
Schendel, Peter, taxi driver, 259
Schmidt, Dana Adams, 4
Schmidt's restaurant, Charlotte Street, 109, 110, 111
Scritter Street, E1, 231
Scotch of St James's club, Mason's Yard, 3, 39
Scott, George Gilbert, architect, 192
Scott's restaurant, Piccadilly, 105
Seaton Street, Chelsea, 134
secretaries, 13–17, 30, 32, 39, 59, 60
Sebohm, Frederick, 355
Seifert, Richard, architect, 188
Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, 326
Selective Employment Tax, 101
Selfridge, department store, Oxford Street, 82
Sellar, Irvine, fashion entrepreneur, 35, 85
Sellers, Peter, comedian, 37
Selsdon, LB Croydon, 281
Selsdon Residents Association, 281
Selsdon Stagers, amateur dramatic society, 281
service sector, 11, 92, 93, 213–14, 418
Settles Street, E1, 231
Seventeen, 1
sex trade, 40–41, 48–73, 407–8, 427
Shadwell, LB Tower Hamlets, 234, 410
Shafi restaurant, Gerrard Street, 111, 113
Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2, 49, 50, 111, 115
Shahzada Tandoori restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Shankland–Cox Partnership, 519n39
Sharp, Dame Evelyn, 202
Sharpe, L.J., political scientist, 308
Sharpeville Massacre, 1960, 317
Sharpley, Anne, journalist, 12, 27–29, 35, 60, 82, 137, 402
Sharr, Adam, 204
Shaw, Norman, architect, 199
Shaw, Sandie, singer, 96, 122
Sheffield, 11, 12
Shelter, homelessness charity, 145, 147, 150–51, 159, 346, 352–53, 361, 372
Shepherd, Peter, architect, 206
Shepherd's Bush, LB Hammersmith and Fulham, 268, 341, 501n102
Sherman, Alfred, 309, 398, 516n76
Sherrick, Gary, taxi driver, 251
shoplifting, 81–83
Shore, Peter, MP, 230, 419
Shoreditch, LB Hackney, 249, 416
Short, Don, strip club proprietor, 55, 59, 62
Shot Tower, Belvedere Road, 183
Shrimpton, Jean, model, 1
Shulman, Milton, journalist, 5
Siam restaurant, St Alban's Grove, 117
Sibylla's nightclub, Swallow Street, 33, 38, 422
Sidcup, LB Bexley, 270–71, 290–91
Sidney Smith, women's fashion store, King's Road, 408
Silkin, John, MP, Minister of Public Buildings and Works, 1969–70, 396
Silver, Bernie, pornography dealer, 69
Silver Close, Harrow Weald, 263
Silvertown, LB Newham, 221, 232, 235, 242
Simon Community, charity, 231, 351
Simpson, Sir Joseph, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, 329

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX 583

Steering Wheel, taxi trade journal, 249, 259, 261
Stentiford, John, bank manager, 424, 427
Stephen, John, fashion designer, 11–12, 23–26, 41, 81–85, 91, 392, 408, 514–13; and Carnaby Street, 2, 20–21, 35–38, 76–77; and export drive, 388, 390
Stephenson, Paul, community activist, 320–21
Stepney, LB Tower Hamlets, 19–20, 217–19, 222, 224–26, 229–32, 235, 237, 269, 360, 374, 479n18, 480n52. See also Stepney–Poplar Comprehensive Development Area
Stepney–Poplar Comprehensive Development Area, 224–25, 229, 231, 236, 480n47
Stepney Reconstruction Group, 217
Stevenson, Dennis, business manager, 322, 325
St Giles High Street, WC2, 118
Stifford estate, LB Tower Hamlets, 230
Stimpson, David, local politician, 370, 371, 384
Stirling, 11
St James’s, City of Westminster, 40, 96, 252
St James’s Park, 204
St James’s Street, SW1, 40
St James’s Theatre, King Street, 183
St John’s Dramatic Society, Selsdon, 281
St John’s Wood, LB Camden, 249
St John’s Wood Preservation Society, 169
St Katharine’s Dock, LB Tower Hamlets, 234, 241, 242
St Martin’s Lane, WC2, 120
St Mary Magdalene, Bermondsey, 318–19
St Michael, Ladbroke Grove, 339
Stock Conversion Ltd, property developers, 378, 437n56
Stock Exchange, 252
Stockholm, 267, 389
Stockwell, LB Lambeth, 139, 327, 412, 420, 519n39
Stoke Newington, LB Hackney, 25
Stoke Newington parliamentary constituency, 383
Stott, Peter, GLC officer, 162–66, 172, 176, 180
St Pancras, LB Camden, 178, 192–93, 207, 210, 309, 470n100
St Pancras Civic Society, 178
St Pancras North parliamentary constituency, 309
St Pancras railway station, 192–93, 207, 210, 473n16
St Paul’s, Covent Garden, 204
St Paul’s Cathedral, 13, 170–71, 195
St Paul’s Road, NI, 365
Strand, The, WC2, 49, 105, 353, 396
Strategic Centres (Greater London Development Plan), 296, 497n98
Strategic Housing Plan for London, GLC, 1974, 292
Strategic Plan for the South East, 1970, 412, 418
Strategic Plan for the South–East, Review, 1976, 412, 418
Stratford, LB Newham, 25, 424, 316
Stratford Express, 316
Stratford–Upon–Avon, 399
Strath, Charles Smith, Superintendent, Metropolitan Police, 52
Strawberry Hill Residents Association, 277
Streatham, LB Lambeth, 35, 41
Streatham Locarno, 35
‘Street Where You Live’ (Harrow Observer), 263–65, 269, 271
Streisand, Barbra, singer, 3
Stride, Rev Eddie, 488n141
strip tease, 3, 12, 40–41, 48–73, 265, 407, 443n11, 445n57, 446n89, 96
St Stephen’s Gardens, W2, 304
St Stephen’s Walbrook, 449
St Ursula Grove, Pinner, 155
Sullivan, David, pornography entrepreneur, 70, 72
Summer House Tenants Cooperative, Poplar, 360
Sun, The, 281
Sunbury–on–Thames, Surrey, 164, 171
Sunday Times, 58, 92, 152, 384
Sunset Strip strip club, 3, 40, 49, 55, 59–60, 62, 64, 67, 68
Sun Wah restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Surrey Docks, LB Southwark, 234, 240, 241, 411
Surrey Docks Action Group, 241
Susan Locke boutique, King’s Road, 83
Sussex Gardens, W2, 117

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX

Sutton, London Borough, 124, 288, 290, 292, 467n39
Swallow Street, W1, 33, 111
Swan Inn, Isleworth, 279
Swanley, Kent, 164
Swinbrook Road, W10, 335
Swinging London, 1–5, 10, 30–32, 38, 46, 48–49, 74, 84, 89, 95, 121, 137; decline of, 42–44, 74, 407–10; Londoners and, 5, 41–42, 422; overseas observers and, 1–5, 10, 39–41, 48; as symptom of decadence, 4–5, 40; and tourism, 387, 389–90, 393, 396, 401, 405
Szechuanese restaurants, 122, 456n148
Taboo, strip club, Dean Street, 67
Take 6 boutique, Wardour Street, 79–80
Taming of a Stew restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
tandoori oven, 116, 456n142
Tatchell, Peter, activist, 383
Tate and Lyle, sugar refiners, 235
Tate Gallery, 33
Tavistock Crescent, W11, 333–34
Tavistock Institute for Human Relations, 421
taxi drivers, 53, 218, 246–62, 265, 268, 426–27, 488n112
Taxi Trader, trade journal, 259
Taylor, Barbara Anne, journalist, 131
Taylor, Benny, restaurateur, 111
Taylor, Elizabeth, actor, 97
Taylor, Frank, developer, 241
Taylor, Mary, secretary, 13
Taylor, Nicholas, writer, 205–6
Taylor, Robert, parliamentary candidate, 309
Taylor Woodrow, Ltd, constructors, 132–33, 138–40, 241
Teddy Boys, 20, 24, 310–11, 313
Teen Scene, radio programme, 31
television, TV industry, 5, 24, 28–30, 34, 36, 174, 324, 132, 335, 353, 417
Tefer, Junior, club manager, 323–24
‘Tempest Storm’, striptease artiste, 59
Tenants’ associations, 148–49
Tenten, Chief Superintendent Anthony, Metropolitan Police, 338–39
Tevet, Shoula, model, 83
Thackeray Street, W8, 111–14
Thames, river, 6, 10, 19, 224, 234, 240, 242, 403, 421, 482n100
Thames and General Lighterage Co, Ltd, 234
Thames Television, 417, 420
Thatcher, Margaret, 47, 71, 151, 246, 261–62, 296–97, 364, 426, 432–34, 488n137
theatres, theatreland, 5, 14, 28, 35, 50–51, 62, 163, 183, 188, 256, 275, 278, 279, 422
Theatres Act, 1968, 50, 446n89
Thomas, David, writer, 356–57
Thomas, Steven, shop designer, 87
Thompson, J W M, journalist, 19, 270–71, 290–91
Thomson, J M, transport economist, 170
Thornton, Stephen, architectural historian, 204
Thornton Heath, LB Croydon, 153–54
Thorold, Peter, historian, 26, 439n137
Three Colt Street, E14, 480n49
three–day week, 1974, 87
Tickell, Crispin, diplomat, 390
Tiger’s Head Dance Hall, Catford, 23, 35
Tiles club, Oxford Street, 35, 39
Time Out, 115, 117, 118, 120, 122, 333
Times, 4, 117, 176, 329, 400
Times Higher Education Supplement, 32
Times Literary Supplement, 27
‘Tina’, striptease artiste, 54, 55, 58, 60, 62
Tin Luk restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
‘Tino’, restaurateur, 115
Tin Pan Alley (Denmark Street), 23
Tipperary, 11
Tisbury Court, W1, 54, 57
Tite, William, architect, 192
Tivoli Gardens, proposal for Docklands, 403
Tokkos restaurant, Maple Street, 117
Tolmers Square, NW1, 207, 211, 379
Tom Cat, boutique, Carnaby Street, 409
Tomney, Frank, MP, politician, 383
Tooting, LB Merton/LB Wandsworth, 273, 442n39, 490n42
Tottenham, LB Haringey, 25
Tottenham Court Road, W1, 88
tourism, 40, 58–59, 87, 206–7, 251, 253, 387–406, 516n76, 516n84, 517n109, 517n114
tower blocks. See housing
Tower Bridge, 401–2
Tower Hamlets, London Borough, 217–45, 268, 269, 310, 349, 354, 368, 437n78, 478n3, 511n50; Borough Council, 147, 158, 222–24, 229, 236–38, 360, 368, 370, 377, 378, 510n22; deindustrialisation in, 43; dependency ratio in, 237–38, 414, 483n116; hostels in, 230–31; housing in, 140, 147, 158, 227, 229–30, 244, 378, 412, 414, 431; Labour Party in, 368, 370, 377; social problems in, 230–31, 237–38
Tower Hamlets Council of Social Service, 222–23, 229
Tower of London, 87, 183, 207, 243, 392, 399, 402, 408, 514n33
Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, 215
Town and Country Planning Act, 1968, 172
Town and Country Planning Association, 15, 178
Town and Country Planning Bill, 1944, 185
Townsend, Alf, taxi driver, 249, 251
Townsend, Peter, sociologist, 346
Townshend, Pete, musician, 19
Trafalgar Square, SW1, 203–4, 402
Traffic in Towns (Buchanan Report, 1963), 163–64, 186, 189, 215
transport, public, 5, 8, 9, 46, 164, 165, 177, 178, 180, 242, 393, 398, 405, 415, 416
Transport and General Workers Union, 240, 487n99
Trottoo restaurant, Abingdon Road, 97
Trattoria Da Otello, Dean Street, 38, 98
Trattoria dei Pescatori restaurant, Charlotte Street, 109, 112
Trattoria Grotta Azurra restaurant, Gerrard Street, 113
Trattoria La Bocca restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94
Trattoria Terrazza, Romilly Street, 33–34, 36, 38, 97, 105–6
tattorie, 33, 95, 97–98, 100, 102, 105–6, 114, 422
Travers Morgan and Partners, 240, 483n122
Treasury, 141, 152–53, 203–4
Tredegar Terrace, E3, 222
Treff Tips, guide, 392, 514n41
Tremlett, George, local politician, 151
Trenchard, Thomas, Second Viscount, 410
Trend boutique, Simpsons of Piccadilly, 82
Trinidadian community, 322–23, 331–32, 334–36, 339, 341
Tripp, Alker, traffic engineer, 163–64
trousers, prohibition of women wearing in restaurants, 452n13
Troyina, Barry, sociologist, 344
Trust for London, 348, 497n6
Tucker, Lorraine, Tower Hamlets resident, 233
Tudor Room, AD 1520 restaurant, St Martin’s Lane, 120
Tufnell Park, LB Camden/LB Islington, 11–12
Turkish restaurants, 115, 119, 122
Turner, Betty, GLC officer, 173–74
Turner, J M W, painter, 27
Turner, John, political scientist, 367–69
Tuset, Calle, Barcelona, 389
Twelve Tribes of Israel, 324
Twenn, 388–89, 391, 513n5
Twickenham, LB Richmond upon Thames, 273, 285
‘Twiggy’ (Lesley Hornby), model, 36
Twilight London (Marshall), 357
235 Kings restaurant, King’s Road, 99
2is coffee bar, 34
unemployment, 44–45, 266, 269, 379, 410–12, 418, 425, 508n50, 519n39; in the East End, 235, 374–75; and ethnic minorities, 304, 306, 312, 316, 322, 343; in the interwar years, 250, 346–47, 410
Unemployment and Homelessness report (Community Relations Commission), 1974, 322
INDEX

Union Movement, 308, 311, 319
United States of America, 87, 97, 132, 216, 298, 314, 317, 332, 400; the city in, 171–72, 205, 329; exports to, 388; race relations in, 298–99, 300, 302, 356; views of London, 1–3, 10, 84, 387. See also American tourists
Universities Appointments Board, 104
Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, 375, 380
Upper Richmond Road, Barnes, 273
Use It!, GLC guide for young tourists, 401
Uxbridge, LB Hillingdon, 275
Valori, Frank, demolition contractor, 184
Varah, Rev Chad, 349
Varner department store, Oslo, 388–89
Vaughan, Gerard, local politician, 175
Veerawasmy restaurant, Regent Street, 111
vegetarian restaurants, 102–3, 116
venereal disease clinics, 401–2
Venus Kebab House, restaurant, Charlotte Street, 110
Verbanella restaurant, Beauchamp Place, 94, 95
Via Margutta, Rome, 84, 389
Victoria, City of Westminster, 80–81
Victoria and Albert Museum, 228
Victoria Embankment, SW1, 163
Victorian architecture, 6, 14, 129, 130, 133, 137, 139, 183, 190, 217, 264, 423, 490n42; reputation of, 192–95, 198–99, 210–13, 283–85
Victorian Society, 221, 283
Victoria station, 473
Victoria Street, SW1, 193–94
Vietnamese restaurants, 118
Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, 372
Vietnam War, 358, 361, 372
Vigars, Robert, local politician, 167, 173–74
Villa Carlotta restaurant, Charlotte Street, 112
Vince Man’s Shop, Newburgh Street, 35, 37
Virgo, Commander Wallace, Metropolitan Police, 69, 447n127
Visby, Børge, 390–91, 514n23
Vogue, 1, 36, 435n1
Voysey, Charles, architect, 475n75
Vreeland, Diana, fashion writer and editor, 435n1
Waghorn Road, Kenton, 489n14
Waldron, Sir John, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, 329
Waley–Cohen, Sir Bernard, magistrate, 74–75
Walker’s Court, W1, 51
Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, 299
Wallich–Clifford, Anton, charity organiser, 351
Wallis, Peter (Peter York), management consultant, 322, 325
Wall Paper Manufacturers Ltd, Bow, 233
Waltham Forest, London Borough, Waltham Forest Borough Council, 153, 280, 293, 350, 376
Walthamstow, LB Waltham Forest, 442n239
Walton Drive, Harrow, 266
Walton–on–Thames, Surrey, 164
Wandsworth Common, LB Wandsworth, 140
Wapping, LB Tower Hamlets, 219, 222, 243, 412, 481n64
Wapping Community Association, 219, 481n64
Wapping High Street, E1, 243
Ward, Anne, personal assistant, 12
Warden, Valerie, fashion artist, 12–13
Wardour Street, W1, 34, 35, 70, 77, 122, 215, 436n36
Warwick Avenue, W9, 198
Warwick Street, W1, 120
Washington, D C, 171, 387
Washington Post, 326
Waterhouse, Alfred, architect, 192
Wates, Nick, community activist, 207
Watford, 272
Watson, Margaret, local politician, 378
‘Way In’ boutique, Harrods, Knightsbridge, 82–83
Waymouth, Nigel, boutique proprietor, 90
INDEX

Wealdstone, LB Harrow, 263, 272, 491n55, 495n168

‘Wear the Badge of Courage’ (Metropolitan Police recruitment campaign), 1973, 416

Webb, Mary, novelist, 516n84

Webb, Sidney, social critic, 350

Weir, James, Medical Officer of Health, 16

Weitzman, David, MP, politician, 383

Welbeck Motors, 254–56

welfare state, 215, 237, 346–64, 372, 385, 413, 425, 427, 429, 430, 432–34; and ethnic minorities and, 299, 350; housing and, 153, 156; taxi drivers and, 250

Wellesley Road, Croydon, 276

Wellesley Road, Harrow, 489n6

Wells, Chief Inspector Richard, Metropolitan Police, 339

Wells, Dee, journalist, 424

Wembley, Empire Pool, 442n239

Wembley, LB Brent, 124, 275

Wembley Central station, 275

Wembley Park, LB Brent, 24

Wembley Stadium, 58, 338

Wembley Town Hall, 251

West, John, restaurant critic, 114, 456n142

Westbourne Grove, W2, 116, 312

Westbourne Park Road, W2

Westbourne Terrace, W2, 137, 199

Westbury Hotel, Conduit Street, 393

West Cross Route, 467n43

West End, 1, 12, 13, 188, 206, 218, 239, 256, 420, 421, 422, 424; and aristocracy, 26–27, 129; as entertainment centre; 14, 33, 34–39, 40–41, 48–49, 51–52, 68, 72, 446n89; as Fashion centre, 34, 81, 91; and gambling, 40–41, 407; as restaurant centre; 93, 96, 97–98, 100, 108, 111, 122, 272, 454n94; sex trade in, 60, 69, 71–73; as shopping centre, 5, 76; and tourism, 154, 162

West End Lane, Pinner, 267

West Ham, LB Newham, 136, 224, 225, 235–36, 509n14

West Ham Borough Council, 136, 224

West Ham Trades Council, 235–36

West India Dock, 232, 242

West Indian community, 910, 298–319, 320–45, 437n75

West Indian Standing Conference, 326

West Indian World, 325

West Indies Federation, 300

West London, 37, 279, 307

West London Observer, 307, 311, 312, 316

Westminster, City of, 7, 68, 193–94, 201, 214, 268, 269, 353, 395, 408, 435n22, 437n78, 467n39; and sex trade, 68, 71–73; and tourism, 395, 399–400, 402. See also Westminster Abbey

Westminster, Palace of, 7

Westminster Abbey, 7, 183, 207, 399, 400, 402, 408

Westminster Chamber of Commerce, 435n22

Westmorland Road, North Kensington, 175–76, 179, 320, 336

Westwood Avenue, South Harrow, 264

Wheatstone Road, W1o, 304, 311

Wheeler’s restaurants, 106–8, 123

Where to Go guide, 114, 119, 451n1

White, ‘Chalkie’, Detective Sergeant, Metropolitan Police, 266

White, David, journalist, 235–36

White, John, property developer, 137

Whitechapel, LB Tower Hamlets, 11, 237, 478n4

Whitechapel Road, E1, 224

White City stadium, 340–42, 505n122

Whitehall, SW1, 192, 201, 203–6, 210, 260, 353, 428

Whitehall Public Inquiry, 1970, 206

Whitelaw, William, MP, 71

White Tower restaurant, Percy Street, 111, 118

Whitfield, James, writer, 328–30

Whitfield Street, W1, 109

Whitgift Centre, Croydon, 276

Whitmore, Tim, shop designer, 87

Who, ‘The, band, 2

Whybrow, A S D, civil servant, 418–19. See also ‘Future of London’

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.
INDEX

Widgery, David, general practitioner and activist, 217
Wilcox, David, journalist, 288, 417
Wilcox, Desmond, television producer, 29
Wilder, John, Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, 478n1
Willesden, LB Brent, 116, 122, 164, 304, 306, 308, 309, 312, 313, 319
Willesden Borough Council, 312
Willesden International Friendship Council, 306
Willig, Harry, Newham resident, 228
Willmott, Peter, sociologist, 417
Wilson, Des, housing activist, 352–53, 358
Wilson, Harold, MP, politician, Prime Minister, 1964–70, 1974–76, 383, 416
Wilson, Jane, journalist, 20, 23, 35, 38–39
Wilton, Jack, journalist, 31, 33
Wilton’s restaurant, 96–97, 105
Wiltshire, Joe ’Rubberface’, taxi driver, 485n31
Wimbledon, LB Merton, 35, 130, 273, 279, 284
Wimbledon Broadway, SW19, 273
Wimbledon News, 273
Wimbledon Palais, 35
Wimbledon Village Association, 273
Wimpole Street, W1, 213
Wimpy Bars, 95, 107, 108
Windmill Theatre, Great Windmill Street, 50–51, 446n89
Windsor, Edward, Duke of, 253
Winn, Eva, strip club proprietor, 56, 66
Winner, Michael, film director, 29
Winterton House, Stepney, 480n52
Wintour, Charles, newspaper editor, 29
Wittich, John, tourist guide, 400
Woman, 30
women’s groups, 372
Wood Green, LB Haringey, 424, 497n198
Woolf, Myra, housing analyst, 157
Woolwich, LB Greenwich, 410, 442n239, 454n94
Woolworth’s, department store, 319
Workers Revolutionary Party, 384
World Cup football tournament, 1966, 40, 58, 395
World’s End, RB Kensington and Chelsea, 28–29, 83, 84, 90, 134–35
World’s End One restaurant, Langton Street, 104
World Trade Centre, St Katharine’s Dock, 242
Wormwood Scrubs, LB Hammersmith and Fulham, 340
Worsley, Katherine, Duchess of Kent, 32
Wortley, Richard, writer, 54–55
Wyvenhoe Road, South Harrow, 264
Yeoman, Inspector William, Metropolitan Police, 55
York, Peter. See Wallis, Peter
York, Susannah, actor, 99, 114
Yorkshire, 12, 72, 93
York Way, N7, 107
Young, Ken, political scientist, 292
Young, Michael, sociologist, 483n128
Young, Sir George, local politician, MP, 398–99, 405–6, 518n128
Young, T H, restaurateur, 116
Young Meteors, The (Aitken), 29, 407, 426, 522n101
youth fashion, 20–21, 24–26, 35–38, 74–92, 388–93
youth tourism, 388–96, 401–3
Zia Sophia restaurant, Langton Street, 104

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