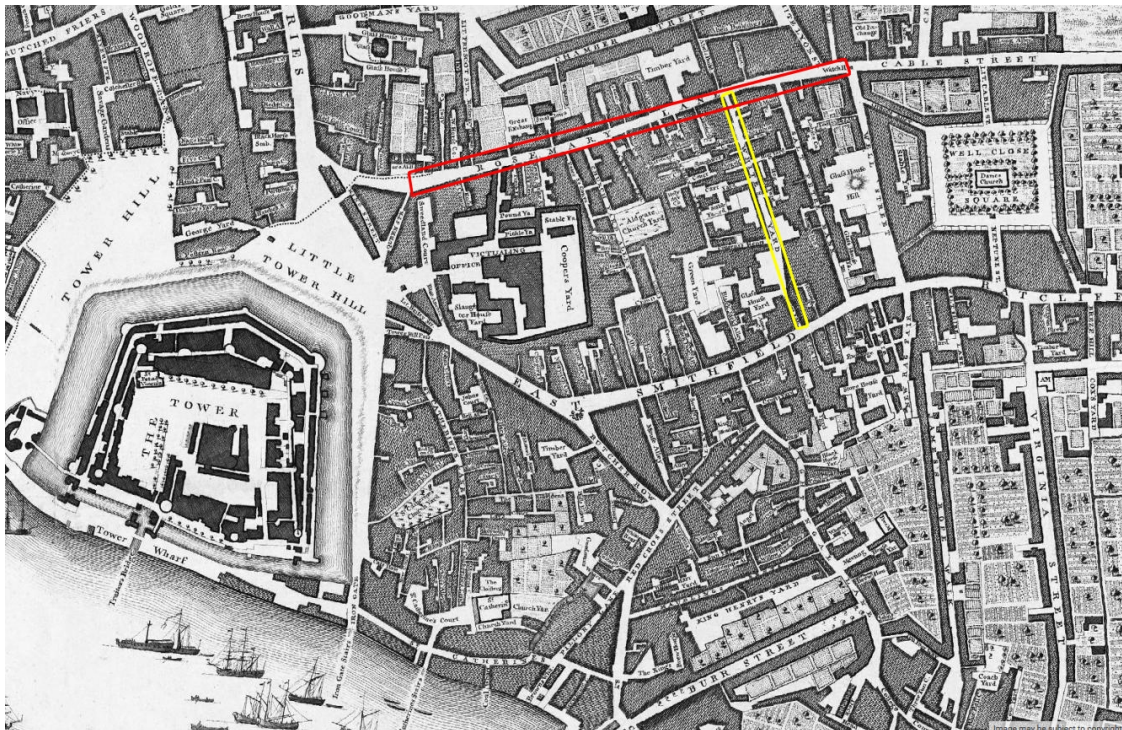


The Estall Family: A History in Three Acts

Our grandmother Bessie was born to William and Sarah Estall in 1891. This is a look back through time at the generations of Estalls who preceded her.

The family arrives on stage

In 1721 William Estall married Leah Holt in St. Mary’s Church on Whitechapel Street, marking the beginning of our Estall line in London’s East End.^a The couple took up residence in an area just east of the Tower of London. Their home, as shown in the baptismal records of their two children, Rebecca, born in 1722, and John, born in 1723, was on White’s Yard (current-day John Fisher Street) off of Rosemary Lane (current-day Royal Mint Street).



A 1746 map of London with Rosemary Lane highlighted in red and White's Yard in yellow

Act I: The tallow chandlers

William was a tallow chandler: a maker and seller of tallow (animal fat-based) candles. These candles were the main source of affordable lighting in London for centuries.¹ His son John followed in his father’s footsteps, entering an apprenticeship to the trade in 1739.²



A history of the Tallow Chandlers Company sheds light on the nature of their work and life. In *Let There Be Light – The City of London and the Tallow Candle*

Family Line	
William Estall	(-1750)
Leah Holt	(-1760)
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Mary	(-1810)
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John Estall	(1773-c1811)
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Henry Estall	(1809-1866)
Elizabeth Rice	(1808-1873)
William Estall	(1852-1906)
Sarah Hutchings	(1860-1899)

^a Much of the information on the Estall family of London’s East End is courtesy of the in-depth research of Mark and Kim Baldacchino posted to their “Estall Family” website <https://mbaldac.tribalpages.com>.

Trade, the company's website explains that "small workshops fronted with little shop fronts were used by candle makers to craft, display and sell their wares. Masters and their apprentices worked upwards of sixteen hours a day in these workshops, transforming tallow supplied by butchers into dipped and moulded candles."³

If the Estall family sold its own goods, it is likely they did so on Rosemary Lane. This "hub of commercial activity outside of the City"⁴ was a street of shops and barrows within steps of their home. "And there every afternoon, barring the Sundays, a Rag Fair was held in the street,"⁵ a fair that began around 1700 and lasted for over a century.⁶ It sold, among other things, used clothing to the city's poor.⁷



"Rag Fair," ca. 1800, by Thomas Rowlandson

*"The first thing you might have noticed was the smell – the flat, stale odour of old clothes and wet wool. Most days, you would also be confronted by an equally odiferous throng of people – hawkers, servants, sailors, prostitutes, housewives and merchants all lining a cobbled street that stretched for half a mile to Cable street and Well Close square. A sea of people obscuring the shops with their painted signs and varied wares on sale – this was London's Rag Fair."*⁸

*"The bakers' cry of 'diddle, diddle, dumplings ho!' competed with the rag woman's reply 'Old clo! Old clo!'"*⁹ Everything was for sale, peddled from the shops, the stalls, from baskets, even from blankets spread out on the pavement. And with the hubbub came an element of crime, primarily of thieves preying on the shops and shoppers on the bustling street. According to one study, "crime was endemic on this street and the Fair was thought to have been the prime cause."¹⁰

Off of Rosemary Lane were the "narrow courts and dark passages,"¹¹ one of which was White's Yard where William and Leah Estall raised their two children.¹²

White's Yard was in the lowest rung of tax assessments, indicating the street was very poor.¹³ It's hard to say what the financial condition of each individual family was, though, since the

neighborhoods contained mixed housing.¹⁴ Considering William Estall was employed in a trade and was probably a merchant, he likely was reasonably comfortable.^b

After 29 years of married life, working long days amidst the bustle of Rosemary Lane, and helping raise their children, William died in 1750. Leah passed away ten years later. Both were buried at All Hallows London Wall church along the old Roman wall that surrounded the city.

As mentioned, William and Leah’s son John apprenticed in his father’s trade starting at age 15, continuing both in his father’s occupational footsteps and neighborhood. He lived his entire life on White’s Yard, or more specifically in a rented home on Angel’s Court which ran off of it.¹⁵ We know that he insured his goods on White’s Yard in 1777 against fire for a value of £100, indicating he was reasonably well off.¹⁶

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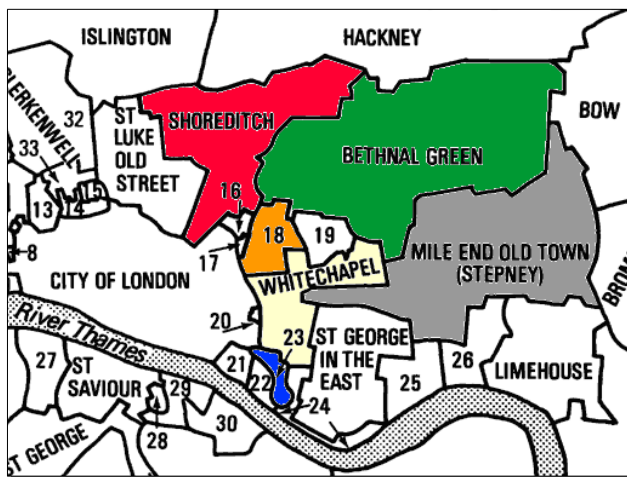
The St. Mary’s parish register recorded his baptism, his twelve children’s baptisms (eight sons and four daughters), and ultimately his burial at the advanced age of 86 in 1810 — two weeks after his wife’s.

We haven’t found a record of his marriage to Mary but their union was long and fruitful, and he didn’t long survive her loss.

The days of tallow candles were numbered, their usefulness superseded by oil lamps, paraffin candles, and street gas lighting. As a consequence John’s sons looked elsewhere for employment, with most of them taking up the plastering trade.

One of his sons, though, William, the third of his twelve children, took up weaving and began the

Estall migration a mile north into the Shoreditch and Bethnal Green parishes of the East End.



A map of eastern London showing parish boundaries.

- St. Botolph without Aldgate (#23 blue)
- Whitechapel (yellow)
- Spitalfields (#18 orange)
- Shoreditch (red)
- Bethnal Green (green)
- Mile End New Town (#19 white)
- Mile End Old Town (gray)

Act II: The weavers

William, born in 1749 to John and Mary Estall, was the first of our line of Estall men who worked at silk weaving.

Silk weaving was brought to London’s East End by French protestants – Huguenots – who emigrated to England after Louis XIV banned protestant religions in 1685. The industry became highly profitable after the English Parliament enacted a ban on the importation of foreign silk

^b In her doctoral thesis, Janice Turner says “the inhabitants were mostly poor but there was also a fair sprinkling of well-off and middling people.”

goods in 1773. The ban lasted about 50 years, and at the end of it there were 17,000 looms operating in Spitalfields, the East End's hub for silk weaving. Weaving continued to be economically viable until 1860, the year tariffs on French goods were eliminated and English weaving could no longer compete with less expensive and superior quality French silk goods.¹⁷

There were three generations of Estall men who lived through silk weaving's boom years and weaved for their supper, starting with William Estall, born in 1749, and ending with his grandson Henry Estall, who died in 1866.



*Spitalfields weaver's workshop, June 1885.
From Spitalfields Life, "Dickens in Spitalfields 4, the silk weavers"*

Silk weaving was predominately performed in the home, in the parishes of Spitalfields and Bethnal Green. Row housing with large upper-story windows was specifically built for weavers, designed to maximize the daylight illuminating their looms. The weavers obtained their raw materials from manufacturing firms and turned in their woven product for wages, which, unfortunately, were usually meager.

"Weavers typically worked at the looms for 14 to 16 hours per day, and yet many still couldn't make ends meet."¹⁸ Husbands, wives, and children would frequently work side by side to increase production, meaning there could be as many as four looms in a home, crowding out the available living space. The "jarring and clashing" of the looms was often accompanied by "a singing bird in a little cage, which trolls its song, and seems to think the loom an instrument of music."¹⁹ The entrapment and enjoyment of song birds was a widely reported trait of the East End silk weavers ... as were, of course, their fine damasks, velvets, satins, and brocades for both clothing and furniture.



Old-style boom box?

Scene I — William Estall

William Estall (born on White's Yard in 1749) married Sarah Bay in December 1770 at St. Botolph without Bishopsgate church. They had their first child six months later in southwest Bethnal Green and baptised him at St. Matthew Church. Their second child, John Estall, was born in 1773 a few blocks away in nearby Shoreditch and was baptised at St. Leonard Church. Their last child was born in 1780, again in Bethnal Green.

Other than the short-time residence in Shoreditch, the family lived in Bethnal Green in a three-block area bounded by Church Street on the north (current-day Bethnal Green Road), Bacon Street on the south, Club Row on the west, and Brick Lane on the east. They lived for 30 years of their marriage in a rented row house on Little Bacon Street (now gone), the first house off of Brick Lane.

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The Estall neighborhood of southwest Bethnal Green, from a 1792 map of London.

The red star marks the location of William Estall's home.

St. Matthew Church is on the far right of the map.

Their two older sons followed into the silk weaving trade like their dad. Their youngest son went into the English Army.

William's wife Sarah died at age 77 in 1829. We're not sure what year William passed away but he was still around for the 1832 tax survey, putting him in his mid 80s. Apparently he inherited his father's long-life genes.

With his wife's passing his world took a bit of a hit. His home of 30 years was not only quieted by Sarah's death, the block he lived on was taken over and William was forced to move a few blocks farther south. He returned a year later to Swan Street (now Cygnet Street), and then the paper trail goes cold, as perhaps did he.

Scene II — John Estall

I'd venture to guess that most of us can recall the local bustling shopping streets of our youth. William Estall had Rosemary Lane as a lad. His son John had Brick Lane. [And of course Paul McCartney had Penny Lane, but he's not in our play.]

John, born in Shoreditch but raised in Bethnal Green, was the second weaver of our generational act. He was born in 1773, undoubtedly learned his trade at the hands of his father, William, and at the age of 23, in 1796, married Elizabeth Tops at St. Matthew Church, a couple of blocks east of his home.

Elizabeth Tops bore him five children, four sons and a daughter, from 1798 through 1809. All were baptised at St. Matthew Church.

The four sons went into weaving and plied their trade in Bethnal Green.

John died around age 38; his wife reported that she'd been a widow for 29 years when she was at the Bethnal Green Workhouse in 1840, which would place his death in 1811. Elizabeth lived until age 68, passing away in 1843, apparently at the home of her oldest son John. Elizabeth's burial was from St. Matthew Church.

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A Dramatic Aside

George Estall — John and Elizabeth's fourth child — lived the quintessential life of a Bethnal Green silk weaver in its waning era.

He learned his trade from his father, and married a weaver's widow living in his boyhood neighborhood. The pair eked out a living by working side by side, he weaving while she and her children assisted as silk winders and braid makers (per the 1851 census). Ten years later she, too, was weaving. They'd moved by then to New York Street (current day Jersey Street) farther east in Bethnal Green.

As George aged and eventually fell ill he went to the Bethnal Green Workhouse for treatment. He shows up there in the April, 1871, census as an inmate, aged 64. (Strains of "will you still need me, will you still feed me?" echo in my mind's ear.)

As winter's cold weather set in he was still in the workhouse, much to his detriment.

Like many stories of the working poor in London's East End, George's ended badly — on Christmas Day of 1871 — when he died from exposure to cold in his unheated workhouse infirmary ward, rolling out of his bed and expiring on the floor. The scene could have come straight out of a Dicken's novel. Poor George became a ghost on, ahem, a Christmas past.

THE TIMES, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1871

BETHNAL-GREEN WORKHOUSE.— The coroner said he would now take the evidence in the case of George Estall, who had died on Christmas-day in the same workhouse ward. Catherine Estall, 17, New York-street, Bethnal-green, widow of the deceased, said that her late husband was a weaver, and he had become an inmate of the workhouse infirmary through illness. On Sunday last witness saw him, and he complained of the cold of No. 4 sleeping ward. He said that he was very cold in bed in the new building. William H. Melmus said that he, on Christmas morning, at 1 o'clock, saw the deceased roll out of his bed and fall on the floor of the ward as if he were "laid out for death." He died instantly. He had complained of the cold. The ward was a newly-built one, and was cold. Clara Searl said she was a nurse at the workhouse, and the deceased never complained of cold. The ward was a very large one. There was a firegrate in it, but no fire. Over and under each bed there was a zinc ventilator, which allowed the cold air to come in. The old men felt it so cold at night that they used to ask witness for "the spasm mixture." The deceased Davis said, "The cold will be the death of me." The old men used to say, "Nurse, give me a glass of spasm mixture; it is so cold." M. Rietar, a Frenchman, said he had been through the workhouses and infirmary wards in France, Italy, and Germany, and during the whole course of his experience he had never seen so cold a ward as that in which the deceased men died.

Excerpt from *The Times*, London, p. 7

Scene III — Henry Estall

The youngest child of John and Elizabeth was born in 1809 in Bethnal Green, almost eleven years the junior of his oldest brother and 2-1/2 years younger than George (above). Like his siblings before him, he followed in his father's silk weaving footsteps, but Henry was coming to the party late, with silk weaving soon to lose its tariff protection and the trade coming under pressure of industrialization (and its waning reliance on labor) and the vagaries of the silk market.

Perhaps as a consequence of this pressure, we see a pattern of frequent moves in this generation ... no longer staying 30 years or so in one place, we see them moving from neighborhood to neighborhood across the parish or even outside the parish, looking for work and affordable housing. I suspect whereas his father may have owned his own loom, thus staying in place, this generation — moving around a good deal — probably worked the looms of their employers in weavers' row housing.

Henry — or 'enry as his Cockney pals would have called him — married Elizabeth Rice, the daughter of a weaver who lived in Hackney, the parish to the north of Bethnal Green. Henry was 19, she was 20, when they exchanged vows in 1828. They began their family in Shoreditch, on Great Leonard Street, with the birth of Elizabeth in 1831, followed by eleven other children over the next twenty three years. Six of their children were girls, six were boys.

They stayed on Great Leonard Street for eight to ten years, then went through seven residences in a dozen years in Bethnal Green, Mile End New Town, and Shoreditch. With tenement housing

“I never went to school, and cannot remember beginning to wind and weave. I always had to work and sleep among the looms in my father's workshop. There were six of us children, and we were all taught to wind quills for the shuttles as soon as we could talk, and to weave as soon as we could sit in the loom. My mother used to weave as well, and only left off to bring up our food to us, so that we should not lose more time than could be helped in eating. We always had a holiday on Sundays, and mother used to clean up the house while we played about outside. On Sundays, too, we had a cooked dinner, but on other days we had only bread and perhaps a red herring or a piece of cheese.

Recollection of an East End woman born circa 1844, from The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development by Frank Warner, 1921.

weaving while the children, as young as age six, pitched in with spinning and other duties to keep production high.

Henry may have had health problems, as he sought treatment at the Bethnal Green workhouse infirmary at age 31, appeared again in 1847, 1852, and 1860, and passed away from bronchitis at age 56 in 1866.

Though sick, he had amazing staying power, evidenced by the 1871 census which showed him as still living five years after his death. Families seemed prone to shading facts for census takers, and one can only speculate why his widow reported living with what must have been another Estall ghost. He'd died in Bethnal Green and was buried in Victoria Park Cemetery, which today

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typically one to three rooms in size, the children probably slept two or three to a bed. Having the children spaced out over 23 years, though, and losing three in their youth,²⁰ meant that they only had to feed and sleep about five of them at any one time. Nevertheless, feeding them on a silk weaver's income would have been challenging at best, so Elizabeth helped with the

is a public park (Meath Gardens). His bones, if still there, are unmarked, but for a man who seemed to survive death, maybe he didn't need a resting spot anyway.

His wife Elizabeth remarried in 1870 and died three years later at age 64.

Henry was the last of the weavers in our family line.

Act III: The labourers

With the collapse of the weaving industry in the East End, Henry's sons were left without a trade and likely without an education, as mandatory schooling only began in 1880 in England.²¹ They are what I call the Labourers, but could also be aptly named the Lost Generation.



Dock worker, Illustrated London News, 1889

All four of the surviving sons, Henry, John, George, and William, were shown in censuses from the 1870s through the early 1900s as "general labourers," though other non-skilled work occasionally arose, such as grave digger, brick maker, match box maker, and waterside labourer. At least two of them depended on the local government for jobs.

Like their father before them, they moved around quite frequently, probably a sign of financial and job instability, as well as reactions to frequent rent raises. They tended to have large families, eleven children being the average among them. They lived in the downward spiraling slums of East London, mostly in Bethnal Green,²² but Henry and John also later in Bow and West Ham.

William, the youngest of the sons, was my grandmother Bessie's father. He was born on New Inn Yard in Shoreditch in 1852. He apparently inherited his father's poor health as he was separated from the English Army in 1879 due to frequent illness. He worked for the local council as

a general labourer, a waterside labourer, and ground labourer. He took up twice with single mothers, had children by both, and married the second one.

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He was in and out of workhouse infirmaries toward the end of his life, dying at the age of 53, even younger than his dad. Not hale to begin with, after the death of his wife on Christmas Eve in 1899 and a year's stay in the infirmary thereafter, he was probably unable to work steadily. Even if he was able to find work, he wouldn't have been able to simultaneously take care of his children, which led him to abandoning them in 1901. He died five years later after frequent visits to the Mile End workhouse infirmary.

William and his brothers — between the dislocation caused by industrialization, overpopulation/competition for jobs, and lack of education — were caught in a web of poverty they were ill-prepared to escape. For William, it led to a dismal end.

And with William's end we've come to the end of our ancestral historical play.

Curtains ... and a Coda

History shows our ancestors typically found work in the prevailing industries of their area: arsenal work in Woolwich, silk weaving in the East End of London, farming in rural Canada, auto factories in Detroit. They often worked in their father's trade if technology hadn't make it obsolete.

The Estall men followed that tradition, finding work that was typical for their place and time, and frequently following in their father's footsteps ... at least until technology or economics caused a major disruption.

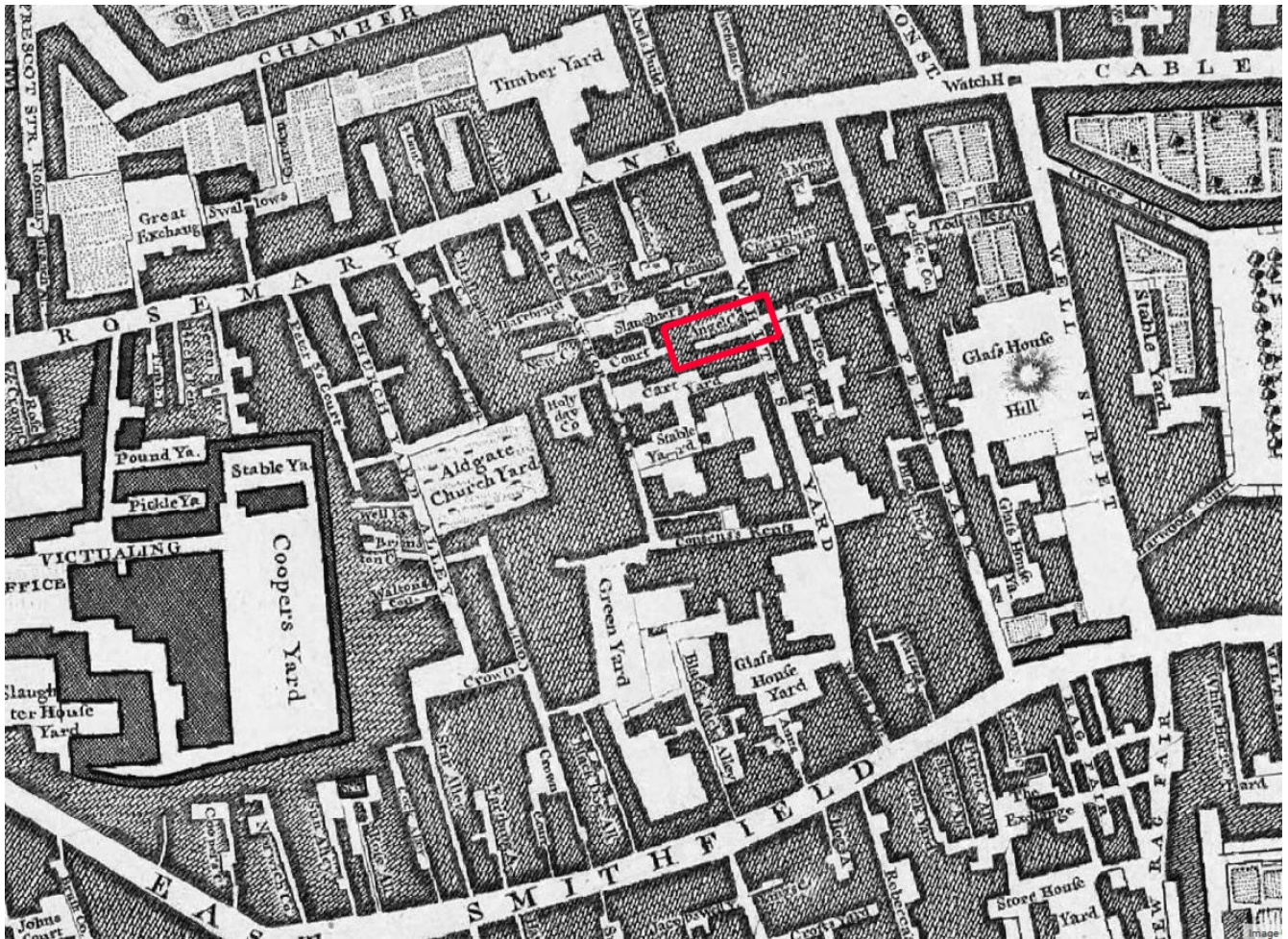
Bessie's generation, following one that was bereft of opportunity, benefited from England's institution of compulsory public education. That — and the poor laws and social adoption agencies — allowed them to generally fare better than their parents despite extremely rough starts in life.

We owe a debt to Bessie's ancestors for soldiering on and providing us the spark of life. And we're grateful our modern age has better working and living conditions and employment opportunities than they had.

We can't appreciate where we're at until we've seen where we've been. And we can't optimize the future until we've absorbed the lessons of the past. That's our three-act play in a nutshell.

- 1 The Tallow Chandlers Company, "Let there be light – The City of London and the Tallow Candle Trade," <http://www.tallowchandlers.org/let-there-be-light/>, accessed 5 Dec 2018.
- 2 The Estall Family, "Family of William Estall," <https://mbaldac.tribalpages.com/tribe/browse?view=0&rand=868971779&pid=23&userid=mbaldac>, accessed 8 December 2018. "William was a tallow chandler, with the London Apprenticeship Abstracts 1442-1850 stating: '1739 Estall John, son of William, Whitechapel, Middlesex, tallow chandler, to John Perry, 6 Jun 1739, Tallow Chandlers' Company.' We believe this is referring to William as the tallow chandler arranging an apprenticeship for his son John."
- 3 Tallow Chandlers Company, "Let there be light."
- 4 Janice Turner, "An Anatomy of a 'Disorderly' Neighbourhood: Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair c. 1690-1765," (PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2014), p13. See <https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/15307/97003633%20Turner,%20Janice-%20Final%20PhD%20submission.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed 5 Dec 2018.
- 5 Ibid, p9.
- 6 Ibid, p16.
- 7 Ibid, p151, quotes a Middlesex Bench order of 1745 which describes the Rag Fair:
"...a great Number of tumultuous people did in a riotous manner dayly assemble themselves together in great numbers, most part of them Strangers and Foreigners, as Scotch, Irish, French and many Vagrant Jews as well as English in a place called Rosemary Lane in the Parish of St. Mary Whitechapel in the Said County under colour of buying and Selling Old Cloaths, Raggs and Several other Commodities, By means whereof the Kings Highway in the Said Lane is dayly obstructed from about ten of the Clock in the Forenoon till Night each Day in the weeks (except Sundays) So that his Majesty's Subjects cannot without great Difficulty pass and repass with Coaches, Carts, Drays, Horses, or Persons with Burthens, and even Foot People cannot go about their lawfull Affaires, and the Inhabitants and Shopkeepers are often obliged to keep their Doors and Shops Shut in time of Publick Business to keep the Said Mobb, who are a parcell of disorderly People out of their Houses and Shops, and they greatly Suffer in their Trade and Business by hindering the fair Traders and Dealers from Nusance..."
- 8 Ibid, p9-10.
- 9 Ibid, p11.
- 10 Ibid, p28.
- 11 Ibid, p12.
- 12 Locating London's Past, "John Rocque's 1746 Map of London," <https://www.locatinglondon.org/>, accessed 17 December 2018. This map shows that directly off of White's Yard in the neighborhood of Angel Court (where we know John Estall lived) were "Slaughters Court" and "Hog Yard," which by their names indicate they were probable sources of raw material for the making of the Estall's tallow candles. See map at bottom of end notes
- 13 Turner, "Anatomy of a Disorderly Neighborhood," p119. Turner's overlay of tax assessments by street shows the area as not just poor, but "very poor."
- 14 Ibid, p136.
- 15 Ancestry.com. London, England, Land Tax Records, 1692-1932 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011. Original data: London Land Tax Records. London, England: London Metropolitan Archives. Records from 1782 to 1810 show John Estall living on Angel Court. However the parish records show White's Yard. He probably lived on the former, but being such a small alley, generally referred to his residence as White's Yard at Rosemary Lane. [Angel Court is highlighted in red at the map at bottom of the end notes, below.]
- 16 London Lives, "Fire Insurance Registers: Fire Insurance Policy Register, 1777-1786," https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div=fire_1775_1780_34_3430&terms=estall#highlight, accessed 8 December 2018.
- 17 Among other sources, Alison Baird, "Silk in England," a paper presented for the "Silk Unraveled!" symposium at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, in 2003, <https://www.smith.edu/hsc/silk/papers/baird.html>, accessed 5 Dec 2018.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Spitalfields Life, "Dickens in Spitalfields 4, the silk weavers," <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2010/02/16/dickens-in-spitalfields-4-the-silk-weavers/>, accessed 5 Dec 2018. This is also the source for the photograph used in this post.
- 20 Two of the three children who died young were named James. A fairly common practice was to reuse the name of a dead child for a later one. The first James was born in 1841 and died shortly after turning one. The second child was born in 1842 and died before his first birthday. The name was not reused a third time despite three more sons coming into the family.
- 21 Wikipedia, "History of Education in England," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_education_in_England, accessed 13 December 2018.
- 22 William Estall always lived within a few blocks of his brother George (1847-1924) during his residence in Bethnal Green. George's wife Ann was the informant on William's death certificate, showing that the family was close to him up

to the end of his life. We have nothing to indicate if their families socialized but it seems likely they would have.



John Rocque's 1746 map of London showing location of Angel Court off of White's Yard