

# Britain at Work

London project newsletter issue 7 March/April 2014



World War 1 and Wapping News International Dispute

Britain at Work London

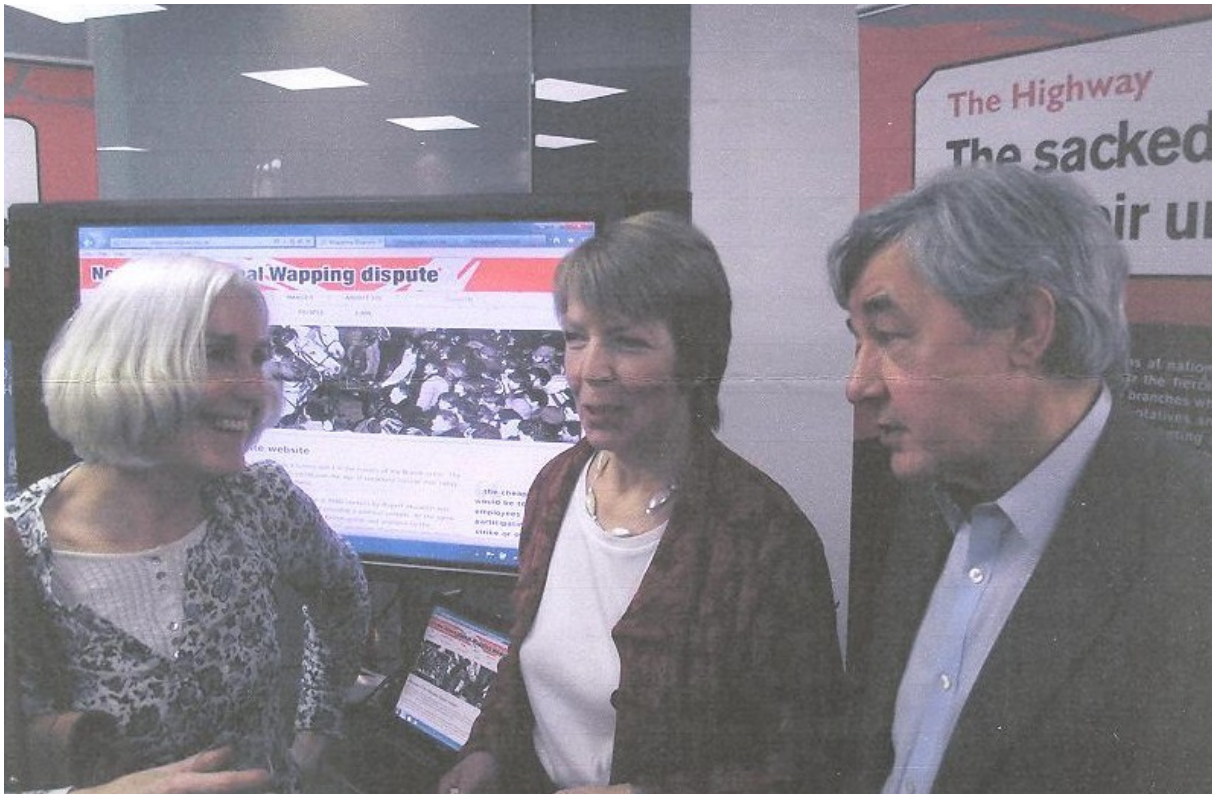
[www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork](http://www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork)



Barry Amiel &  
Norman Melburn Trust



## News International Wapping Dispute Website Goes Live

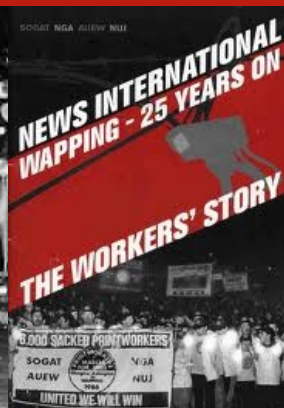
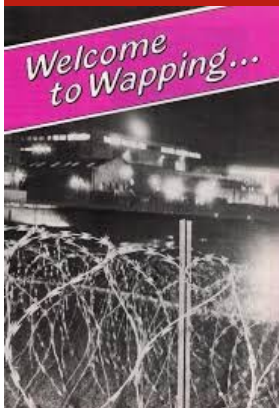


In January 1986 over 5,500 printworkers were sacked within minutes of beginning a strike over restriction of terms, conditions and trade union rights demanded by the company for relocation from Fleet Street to Wapping. The same night Rupert Murdoch moved his newspaper group to a new non-union printworks. The journalists were not sacked but more than 100—the “refuseniks”—took a stand on principle and walked out of their jobs. Murdoch’s vast resources, with Tory government support and its anti-union laws had enabled the company to build the London Docklands works, staff it in secret and dismiss the original workforce.

The year-long strike failed to win jobs and recognition, as the plant was staffed by strike-breaking labour recruited by the electricians’ union, the EETPU, in one of the greatest acts of treachery in labour movement history. The High Court ordered the sequestration of the funds of SOGAT, the largest union involved, following an instruction to members to refuse to handle Murdoch’s papers. Other unions were ordered by the courts to refrain from solidarity action and fined for contempt. Police attacks on demonstrations and picketing resulted in over 1300 arrests and hundreds of injuries to strikers and supporters. Complaints of brutality and unwarranted arrests led to investigations but no prosecution of any police. It was a crucial step in the concentration of UK media ownership and in the process ruined thousands of lives. It also marked a consolidation of the attacks on trade union rights which have remained in force ever since the 1980s.

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the dispute an exhibition toured England in 2011-12 and an accompanying 34-page brochure was published. Now a website has been created with documents, images, film clips and an oral history—a permanent record of the sacrifice of the 5,500 who lost their jobs. Books written by strikers are also available: ‘Wapping: The great printing dispute’ by John Trow, former News of the World linotype operator; and ‘Bad News’ by former Times Newspapers librarians John Lang and Graham Dodkins. The website continues the exhibition project started by the News International Dispute Archive with the aid of the principal supporting organizations Unite/GPM + IT sector, the NUJ, the Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom and the Marx Memorial Library. The Archive working party comprises unpaid volunteer veterans and supporters of the dispute including professional journalists and an historian. With valuable assistance from other supporting organizations and individuals a team of veteran printworker volunteers were recruited and trained to conduct the oral history interviews with former News International printworkers, journalists and others directly affected. The collection of photographs, personal papers, the voice recordings and the reminiscences enables those who lost their jobs, their livelihoods and their trade union and industry community to tell their side of the story. Clips and redacted interview transcriptions are published on the website, dedicated to the sacked workers and to the principles for which they fought, [www.wapping-dispute.org](http://www.wapping-dispute.org) **Ann Field** pictured above between Marie Alvarado and John Bailey at the launch

## Wapping 1986-87 Pat Healy/John Bailey/Marie Alvarado



**Pat Healy** By the time I joined the Times (as a Journalist), in 1966, I was 25 years old. I was probably the youngest person there as well but I had 7 years of newspaper and magazine work behind me, most of it in reporting. Throughout my career in journalism, I've always been an active member of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), and I'm now a 'Member of Honour'. So I was very much involved when Rupert Murdoch began the move towards the Wapping situation. We were told that what was going on at Wapping was the building of a new printing plant for a new newspaper, an evening paper in London... For us it ended in a horrendous night, it was a Friday night and Charlie Wilson, who was then the editor, explained that all of Murdoch's titles were being moved to this new plant in Wapping, it was going to happen at the weekend. People were very angry because they did not like having a revolver held against their temples, but nevertheless they were also very frightened because, by definition, most of these people were extremely good journalists, most of them were blokes with wives and children and mortgages. I got a letter at home, delivered to me by hand, telling me I was fired. The dispute lasted a year and I was basically going to union headquarters most days. We had a weekly meeting of those who hadn't gone to Wapping. There were 10 from the Times (refuseniks), I think the Times had the highest number who refused to go [to Wapping] from the start. Because I was writing for the Times and giving a voice to people who don't normally get a voice on the daily broadsheets, I was regarded with some suspicion and (other jobs didn't happen) because, as far as I was concerned, that was blacklisting and that has to do with the fact that everybody is accepting that I am a good journalist, what they didn't like was the fact that I was an active trade unionist.

Pat Healy's interview is part of the west London collection of oral histories. The other pieces on this page appear in 'News International Wapping 25 Years On The Workers' Story', published with the exhibition in 2011, produced with the support of UNITE/GPM sector, the National Union of Journalists, the Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom and the Marx Memorial Library.

**John Bailey** striker sacked by News International, from 'News International Wapping 25 Years On. The Workers' Story' (2011): As with many strikers, Wapping was a time of mixed emotions for me—a time to remember who had got me into the privileged position I enjoyed, the responsibility I had to pass on those conditions and the support my union had given me from my earliest days in print. I recall that not everyone saw things my way, not even members of my own union who failed to see the consequences of their inaction, and then there was pernicious political influence exerted on our efforts to stop Murdoch's attack on workers' rights. All this was an incentive to accept the consequences of fighting for a cause I believed in. I didn't lose the fight with Murdoch, my beliefs in what we fought for were strengthened in spite of the chaos that ensued. Like many who stood beside and in front of me on numerous occasions when the odds were against us, I resolved to fight for the principles that led me from Fleet Street to Wapping.

**Marie Alvarado** striker sacked by News International: Gloved hands, socked feet, shaken and stirred against a stinging wind; blue eyes, cheeks, noises, blue language shared and roared on another raw day outside the Wapping plant. Those insiders are outsiders, bussed and bribed in to input words on a page, ideas into minds, sans serif fonts ni Corazon; a shell, a sham, coated and cased in a scab of shame. Outside pounding horses and riot police/army lunge towards us, black batons raised. Stop them! Those men, women and children who shiver, stand or march, drink tea and gather under banners, faces open to the world to say: 'Those are our jobs'. Weeks pass, months, a year. But still they gather beneath walls of barbed words, wired up to lorry-loads of 'get-them-out-at-any-cost'. Newspaper cover price now reduced to fear, injuries, heart attacks, grief, dole and deaths. Inside the fortress they try to sleep in peace for 25 years. But Times change: outside the horse of progress gallops on, throws off his rider dressed in blue—we don't need You, either; join the queue. Young hearts and minds share ideas and knowledge in a web that spins around the world and march the streets to an ancient beat against cuts in jobs.



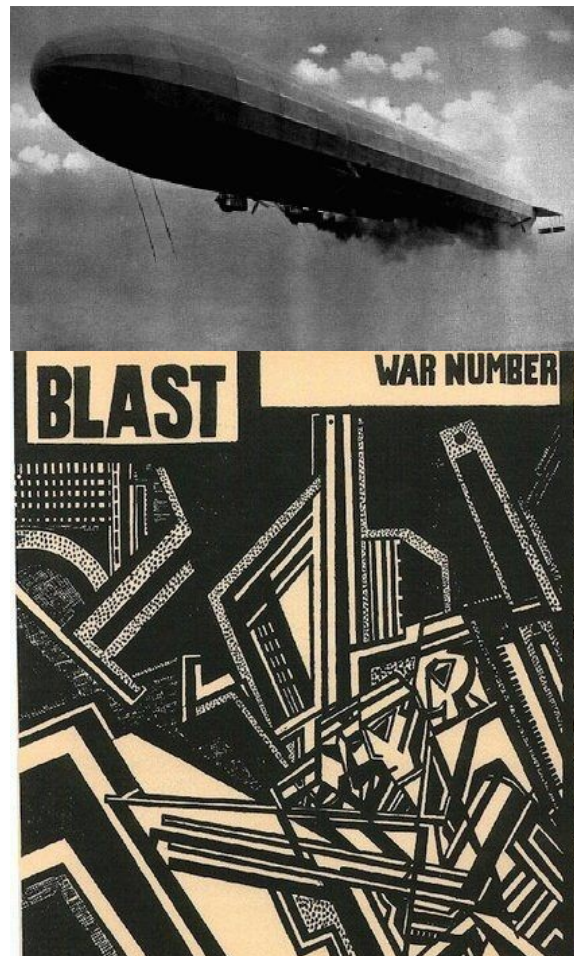
## Notting Hill at War

A hundred years ago, at the outbreak of World War 1 the Electric Cinema on Portobello Road became the target of anti-German demonstrations, because the London and Provincial Electric Theatres Limited company was German owned. The Kensington News and West London Times reported the overly patriotic poster producer Frank Vennell saying in court: 'He knew that the employees at this theatre were English, but his view was that by working there they were acting as collectors of funds for the alien enemy.'

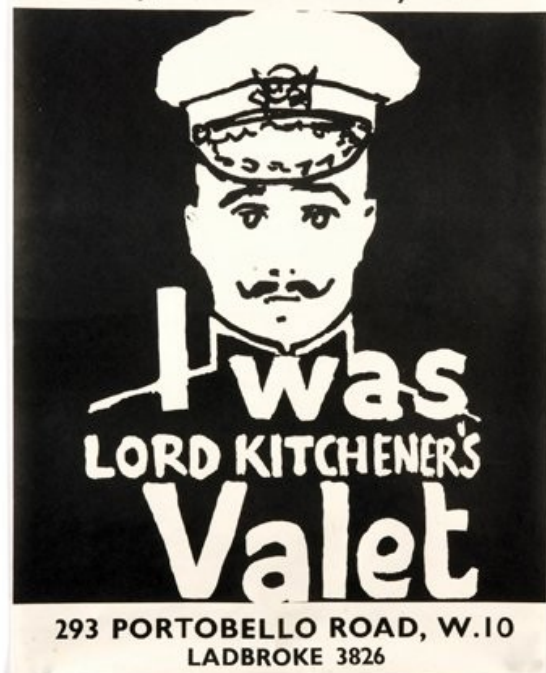
After the Vorticist art revolution prelude to the First World War, Wyndham Lewis returned from the front to continue 'Blasting and Bombardiering', against the art and literary establishment, from Notting Hill Gate. Then he ended up on the other side in the run up to the next war, or at least appeared to, before writing his post-war 'Rotting Hill' book. In Notting Dale, from one street 150 men enlisted from 50 houses. The most renowned local war hero was the boxer Charlie 'Kipper' Allum from Lancaster Road, who was killed in action in 1918.

On the home front, the Dennis brothers coachbuilders on Silchester Road constructed horse-drawn ambulances, and the Talbot car factory on Barlby Road worked on proto-tanks. Lloyd George, Lord Kitchener and Winston Churchill came to North Kensington to see a demonstration of an armoured track-laying vehicle at the Talbot works. War veteran street traders and performers duly became a feature of Portobello and Notting Dale life. Roy Wilson, the owner of the recently closed Stone Brothers hardware shop on Bramley Road, recalls that the iconic local store was founded by the World War 1 veteran old Mr Stone on Latimer Road (on the site of the Edward Woods estate). Patriotic locals from a hundred years ago would be outraged to find a century on that the only familiar place on Portobello Road is the Electric Cinema. **Tom Vague** from Notting Hill at War exhibition at the Tabernacle Powis Square June 23-29 2014

Britain at Work London Group secretary Dave Welsh/ chairman John O'Mahony/treasurer Jan Pollock/ outreach/IT Rima Joebear/newsletter editor Tom Vague Britain at Work is a national programme collecting oral histories of the working lives of people in Britain 1945-1995. If you would like to be interviewed, or contribute to the newsletter, or be on our mailing list see contact details below. All interviews will be placed on the TUC Library Collections website [www.unionhistory.info/](http://www.unionhistory.info/) britainatwork The Britain at Work postcard is available from [tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk) 0207 133 3726. The London group will be publishing the Britain at Work book 'All in a Day's Work' in summer 2014.



LONDON'S FIRST SECOND HAND BOUTIQUE  
Kinky, Period & Military Gear



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