Soundtrack for a New Jerusalem

The songs that told our story of the path towards the NHS

By Lily Meadow Foster and Toliver Myers
EDITED by Peter Daniel

The 70th Anniversary of the National Health Service
William Beveridge set society the task of slaying the Five Giants—this underpinned the Welfare State.

Royal College of Nursing
On July 5th 1948 Aneurin Bevan’s dream was realised, when the NHS opened its doors for the first time. However, the government realised that the resources they had would struggle to meet demand.

Aneurin Bevan launched the NHS to the press in a blaze of publicity. The Evening Standard declared it, ‘A Free for All’ service. Many saw the NHS as a symbol of the arrival of a New Jerusalem—a fairer more equal Britain.

However, Politicians were soon worried that they would not be able to meet demand. The NHS produced leaflets seeking to curb demand (as shown by the area on the 1948 leaflet shown below highlighted in the red box). It cautions an enthusiastic public that, ‘no fairy wand was waved on July 5th.’
Prime minister Lloyd George’s had promised “Homes for heroes,” but post war reality was a housing crisis you can hear in My Old Man, a song written from 1919 by Fred W. Leigh and Charles Collins, in which Marie Lloyd sang about doing a ‘moonlight flit’ - moving house after dark to avoid paying the rent.
Many music hall songs, and much of the comedy, were a comment on social conditions. They reflected working class life. Marie Lloyd’s hit 'My Old Man Said Follow the Van, and Don’t Dilly-Dally on the Way' was about doing a moonlight flit to avoid paying the rent. For the Seaby family with 12 people living in two rooms there was often...
Music provided escapism and enhanced a community spirit emphasised by popular songs such as "Let's All Go Down the Strand (have a banana!)." Written in 1909 by Clarence Wainwright Murphy and Harry Castling, it celebrated the route to London’s fruit and vegetable market, and home of Covent Garden’s costermongers or barrow boys.
Costers developed a strong sense of ‘otherness’ brought home by Flanagan and Allen’s, ‘All My Life I wanted to be a barrow boy’ which celebrates working class camaraderie. Private Georgie Seaby returned to Covent Garden from the Somme with a silver plate in his skull. Georgie literally turned his ‘back on all of high society’-to those who had promised ‘homes for heroes’ but left men like him crippled by war.

Georgie Seaby received a head wound during the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and needed a metal plate inserted into his skull. Georgie never recovered from his wound and had periods where he was unable to work as he could not afford to have the specialist treatment that he needed.

What did you get out of the Great War?”

Although the government promised to make Britain a “home fit for heroes,” the planned economy was abandoned after World War One and with it attempts to raise the living standards of the poor.
Before the NHS, hospital treatment was reserved for those that could pay for it. Costermongers had a custom of organising a whip-round to help those who had fallen on hard times. This ‘brotherhood’ can be seen in the Pearly Kings and Queen’s, who decorated their clothes in pearls to raise money for charity, i.e. hospitals. In 1916, the year Georgie Seaby was wounded, they were raising money for hospitals for disabled soldiers.

**A Coster Brotherhood: Pearly Kings**

Henry Croft (1861 - 1930)

The Pearly Kings and Queens, who did so much for charity, have a history which stems from the story of a young boy named Henry Croft, who sewed pearly buttons onto his hat and coat in order to become more visible in the marketplace, where he was selling wares to help the poor.

*From just thirteen he swept the streets round London's market stalls*

*Those costermongers took to him, admiring his calls.*

*He wanted not to gain himself, but sought to help those others Who when in need he’d give his love like they were all his brothers.*

Anita Williams

---

"The Original Pearly King"

Henry Croft – First Pearly King

Wellcome Library

IN MEMORY OF
HENRY CROFT
WHO DIED
JANUARY 9TH 1930
AGED 68 YEARS.

Mrs. Hobart's Shetland pony Dazzler, which won a first prize.

The Queen Witnesses a Costers' Race at Richmond Horse Show.

Entries from the Front.

CANCELLED last year on account of the war, the Richmond Royal Horse Show was held yesterday in aid of Queen Mary's Star and Garter Home for paralysed and disabled sailors and soldiers.

The Queen and Queen Alexandra spent nearly three hours at the show, and King Manuel and his Consort were also present.

Many features, of course, had to be dropped, notably the coaching Marathon, but this was replaced by a 'costers' donkey Marathon.'

This provided a good deal of amusement. Driven by pearly kings, escorted by their queens—wonderfully robed and crowned with magnificent feathers—whole families were crowded in some of the donkey carts.

Entries for the ordinary events were naturally fewer, but many had an interest quite their own, having come from officers in the trenches, written in pencil.

Mr. Walter Winans took two prizes.

During the afternoon the Queen visited a number of wounded soldiers who were being entertained at tea in a special marquee.

The sale of nine horses, one donkey and two rabbits for the benefit of the fund realised £357 6s.
Lambeth Walk has become synonymous with the Pearly King and Queen’s-who helped raise money to support the coster community. Released in 1937 for the musical Me and My Girl (lyrics by Douglas Furber and L. Arthur Rose and music by Noel Gay). The tune gave its name to a Cockney dance made popular in 1937 by Lupino Lane. It was all the rage as Joe and Dibs Seaby welcomed their daughter Patsy-Ann’s birth in April 1938.
When Patsy Ann was born in 1938 a cockney song ‘The Lambeth Walk’ was the hit song of the day. It came from the 1937 musical ‘Me and My Girl’ about a flash Cockney barrow boy who inherits an earldom but almost loses his Lambeth gal-his girl-

Costers like Joe were flashy dressers who made the most of life when times were good. Joe knew war was on the horizon, but as a coster his motto was: “Spend it while you’ve got, tomorrow you may die.”
On September 7th 1940, whilst this young family sheltered in terror from the Blitz, veterans shared trench-songs like Bombed Last Night to bolster spirits. Four years later, Hubert Gregg’s Maybe it’s Because I’m A Londoner summoned up London pride to overcome the terror of the V1 Doodlebug and V2 rocket attacks.
First Day of the Blitz: September 7th 1940

Joe, Dibs, Patsy Ann and Dib’s Mum Flo were living at 9, Radnor Walk, Chelsea, when war broke out in 1939. On 7th September 1940, they spent 14 hours in a public shelter, whilst the Germans unleashed their first heavy raid on London. Joe’s soldier cousin, Dick Seaby, wrote to the family immediately he heard of the raids on the wireless (radio).

Chelsea was heavily bombed on September 7th, 1940. Lots Road Power station was a frequent target. K & C LSA
“It was the 3rd January 1945 and I was walking with my mum (Dibs) to school (St Joseph’s, Cadogan Street) when we saw a sudden flame in the sky, followed by a massive explosion. We had thrown ourselves into a doorway to escape the blast of what proved to be a V2 rocket falling on the Royal Hospital. As the dust and debris cleared, Mum started laughing. We’d sheltered from the blast in an undertakers doorway!”

Pat Daniel, nee Seaby June 2017

The North East Wing took a direct hit from a V2 rocket; the wing was completely destroyed and many surrounding buildings were significantly damaged. Five people from the Royal Hospital lost their lives as a result of this attack and 19 others were injured.
By then Private Joe Seaby was in Italy recovering from the horror of Anzio. He was in the same regiment, the Royal Fusiliers, as 2nd Lt Eric Walters, one of many men sacrificed to hold the Anzio beachhead. His son, Pink Floyd’s Roger Walters sang about his death in the haunting ‘When the Tigers Broke Free’ (1982). The anguish of Anzio reflected in this song can be seen in the shell-shocked features of Joe Seaby.

Roger Waters was just five months old when his father, 2nd Lt Eric Waters died when the Royal Fusiliers were attacked by Tiger tanks at Anzio on February 18, 1944.

A British soldier of the 8th Army stands by a disabled German Tiger tank. Pink Floyd’s Roger Waters lost his father at Anzio to one of these tanks.

Imperial War Museum
Operation Avalanche' was the invasion of the Italian mainland near Salerno. Joe’s ship carrying him and other members of the Royal Fusiliers sailed from Tripoli on 8 September. On the way to Salerno they heard Italy had surrendered and thought that the invasion would be an uncontested stroll onto the beach. But in reality, Germans had replaced the Italians in defence; thereby making things more difficult, not less.
At Christmas 1943 Patsy Ann Seaby became seriously ill with scarlet fever. With husband Joe fighting at Anzio, Patsy-Ann’s mother, Dibs Seaby, struggled to pay the medical bills. In desperation she applied for a War Service Emergency grant.
Londoners celebrated VE Day, May 8th 1945 in the same way they had celebrated the end of the First World War, they went out into the street and sang Knees Up Mother Brown. Not recorded until 1938, by Bert Lee, Harris Weston and I. Taylor, "knees up" became cockney shorthand for a party.
Victory in Europe Day, (V-E Day) May 8, 1945 marked the surrender of Nazi Germany. Joe Seaby was still in Italy and didn’t return until 1946.

Victory in Europe May 8th 1945

The stall North End Road

Seaby shop Fulham Road 1945

Patsy Ann and friends Radnor Walk 1945

Patsy Ann’s Victory certificate

8th June, 1946

Today, as we celebrate Victory,
I send this personal message to you and all other boys and girls at school. For you have shared in the hardships and dangers of a total war and you have shared no less in the triumph of the Allied Nations.

I know you will always feel proud to belong to a country which was capable of such supreme effort; proud, too, of parents and elder brothers and sisters who by their courage, endurance and enterprise brought victory. May these qualities be yours as you grow up and join in the common effort to establish among the nations of the world unity and peace.

Georgie P. R.
Two weeks before the NHS opened its doors on July 5th 1948, the SS Empire Windrush arrived at Tilbury Docks Essex. The Windrush generation arriving from the Caribbean would staff the hospitals of the new NHS. Aboard the ship was calypso singer Lord Kitchener, whose optimistic anthem ‘London is the Place for Me’ pointed towards a brighter future for all in England’s green and pleasant land.

Lord Kitchener snag his calypso song to the BBC as he arrived on the Empire windrush in 1948. Udine Canoville came from St Martin to be a nurse in the new NHS.
Patsy-Ann Daniel nee Seaby died from ovarian cancer on February 10th 2018. Fields of Gold was her favourite song and the original lyrics by Sting were adapted by musician Vince Burke for the Towards a New Jerusalem project. Vince’s words above emphasise that what underpins the NHS is the strong sense of community that forged it.

In July 1942 Pte. Joe Seaby is given two weeks embarkation leave before leaving for an unknown destination overseas. He decided to go on a big family holiday to East Peckham Hop Farm, near Tonbridge, Kent. For many years poor London families would take a paid holiday harvesting the hops needed to make beer.