

**This article is an output from, 'Educating Deptford: the Deptford Ragged School and its Place in the Community'.**

A project run by The Deptford Ragged School Archive and The Bear Church researching the history of the Deptford Ragged School and how it impacted lives.

The project digitised the Deptford Ragged School archive and made it freely available online. It involved partnerships with Creekside Discovery Centre, IRIE! dance theatre, and The Bear Church, who used the stories of the Deptford Ragged School to develop new programmes and run events in the local community.

Educating Deptford: the Deptford Ragged School and its Place in the Community was made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to increase understanding of the history of the Deptford Ragged School, create a digitised archive, work with the local community, and utilise the research to explore how the school provided education, care, built community and enabled social mobility.

**The Community Research Process**

Keeping with the People's History approach of the project, it was important to ensure that the research undertaken was not only *about* the people, and *for* the people, but that, where possible, it was also undertaken *by* the people.

Consequently, the project appointed nine Community Researchers to investigate the Deptford Ragged School Archive. Candidates were selected for their skills and experience in research, having a background in history and a specific interest in London and Deptford history, and for their ability to work efficiently, to deadlines, and within a small team.

Each researcher was given the opportunity to develop an idea, story, or pattern which they had found in the archive materials into a short thematic article.

All these articles, along with a range of other resources, can be downloaded from the Deptford Ragged School Archive website: [www.deptfordraggedschoolarchive.org.uk](http://www.deptfordraggedschoolarchive.org.uk)



**'Milk from One Cow for Infants and Invalids': the distribution and purpose of milk at the Deptford Ragged School and its relationship with local milk production**  
**Adam Markiewicz**

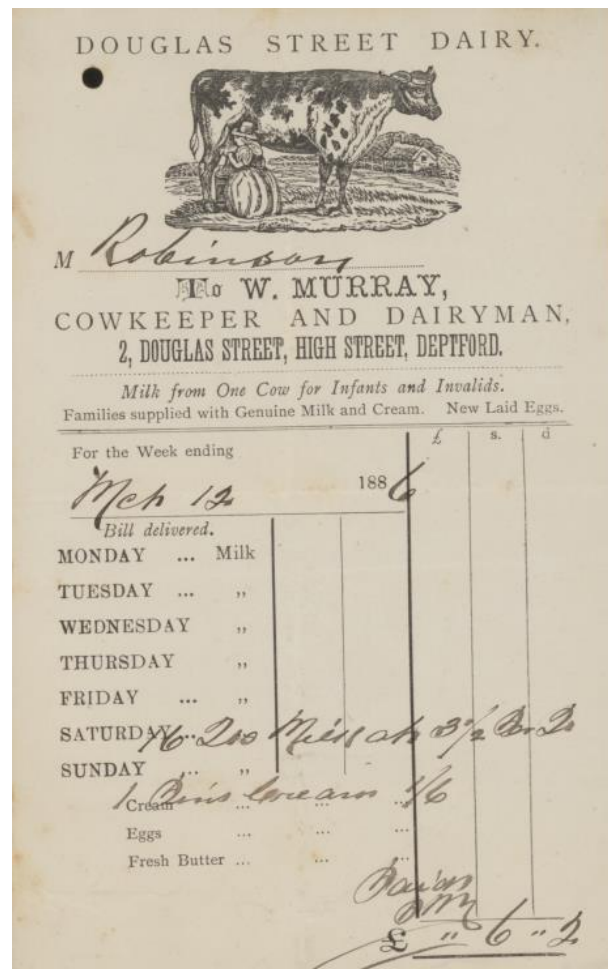


Fig. 1: DRSA\_5\_1\_1, p. 87

One of the most eye-catching loose papers gleaned from research of the Deptford Ragged School Archive was the above receipt from Douglas Street Dairy. Its striking pictorial logo features a milkmaid at work, considerably dwarfed by the imposing frame of a robust cow, set on a background of lush pasture. The proprietor of the dairy is a W. Murray, Cowkeeper and Dairyman, and the business is located at 2 Douglas Street Dairy, Deptford High Street, just one road away from the Deptford Ragged School. It features the expository and somewhat catchy tagline of, 'Milk from One Cow for Infants and Invalids', outlining its available products of genuine milk, cream, and fresh eggs.

Dated 12 March 1886, the receipt accounts for the purchase of milk and cream for six shillings twopence total, by a Mr. Robinson. This seemingly innocuous document can serve as a springboard into understanding how and why milk was distributed within the Deptford Ragged School and the importance of local milk production to this.

### The Distribution of Milk at the Deptford Ragged School

Throughout the Annual Reports, references to milk most commonly appear in the accounts section for the school's Benevolent Fund. The fund provided material support to the children

of the school and their families, funded by donations from benefactors. For several years, it was managed by the same Mr. Robinson who made the purchase from the dairy, so we can deduce the milk purchased was to fulfil the needs of the fund. The functionality of it with consideration to the remits of the other school's services is outlined in the Annual Report of 1911:

REMEDIES.—Our Penny Bank, Slate Club, Boot, Coal and Blanket Clubs, and Sewing Classes render valuable and timely service in helping the poor to help themselves, and when these fail, our Benevolent Fund steps in where possible with gifts of milk, bread, groceries, or coal. Can a better channel be found

Fig. 2: DRSA\_1\_1\_5\_1911, p. 5

Thus, the charitable nature of the fund was secondary to the school's philosophical goal of 'helping the poor to help themselves'. The goal was to educate, not just in 'The Three R's', but crafts such as needlework and life skills like financial thriftiness. Nonetheless, the fund fulfilled an important role where this was not feasible. Milk, and other amenities such as bread, meat, groceries, and coal were commonly distributed in the form of tickets. These were not unlike modern day coupons, each held the value of a certain quantity of product it could be exchanged for. This system served a purpose both practical and otherwise.

Practically, the collection and distribution of highly perishable food goods could be problematic, although this was still done on occasion. More significantly, utilising a ticketing system ensured the beneficiaries would use the fund as intended, as opposed to providing cash that could be used for undesirable means, e.g. alcohol. This was seen as a significant social ill by the school which plagued deprived areas like Deptford.

The usage of a ticketing system was in-line with the Ragged School movement's philosophy, and of wider evangelical Christian paternalism of the time, which felt the poor could not necessarily be trusted to spend money wisely. The following excerpts from the Benevolent Fund accounts are just a snapshot of examples showing that milk and milk tickets were widely and consistently distributed over time. This suggests it was seen as an essential element of people's diets, which could be guaranteed by employing a ticketing system.

|                                              |   |    |                             |
|----------------------------------------------|---|----|-----------------------------|
| „ 107 Quartern Loaves, 4 <sup>3</sup> d..... | 2 | 2  | 3 <sup>3</sup> <sub>4</sub> |
| „ 146 Grocery Tickets, 8d .....              | 4 | 17 | 4                           |
| „ 66 Meat „ 8d.....                          | 2 | 4  | 0                           |
| „ 138 Pints New Milk, 2d.....                | 1 | 3  | 0                           |
| „ 83 Coal Tickets of ½ Cwt.....              | 2 | 8  | 5                           |

Fig. 3: DRSA\_1\_1\_3\_1889-90, p. 36. Annual Report 1889-1890 showing 138 Pints of Milk expended.

|                                   |     |     |     |     |     |   |    |    |  |
|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|----|----|--|
| Relieved 288—                     |     |     |     |     |     |   |    |    |  |
| 54 Milk Tickets ...               | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3 | 1  | 10 |  |
| 17 Meat ..                        | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 11 | 4  |  |
| 78½ lb. Beef for Christmas Dinner | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2 | 15 | 5  |  |
| 43 Loaves Bread (17 Gifts)        | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 8  | 10 |  |
| 101 Coal Tickets (65 Gifts)       | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 1 | 1  | 10 |  |
| 152 Grocery Tickets               | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 5 | 1  | 4  |  |
| Balance in hand                   |     |     |     |     |     |   |    |    |  |

Fig. 4: DRSA\_1\_1\_4\_1897, p. 31. Annual Report 1897 showing 54 Milk Tickets expended

|                               |     |     |     |     |     |   |    |    |  |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|----|----|--|
| 90 Bread Tickets and 34 Gifts | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 1 | 15 | 3½ |  |
| 113 Grocery Tickets           | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3 | 15 | 4  |  |
| 75 Milk Tickets ..            | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4 | 7  | 6  |  |
| 11 Meat Tickets ..            | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 7  | 4  |  |
| 55 Coal Tickets and 72 Gifts  | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 1 | 16 | 8  |  |
| Balance brought down          | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2 | 6  | 9  |  |

Fig. 5: DRSA\_1\_1\_5\_1904, p. 31. Annual Report 1904 showing 75 Milk Tickets expended

|                                          |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |   |  |
|------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|---|--|
| By Oranges—Christmas Day                 | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 0 | 13 | 6 |  |
| „ Wellbeloved—195-lbs. Beef              | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 6 | 10 | 0 |  |
| „ Albany Institute—Dinners for Sick Poor | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1 | 0  | 0 |  |
| „ Marshall—93 Milk Tickets               | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 5 | 8  | 6 |  |
| „ Carr—93 Bread Tickets                  | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 2 | 5  | 2 |  |
| „ Trickett—60 Grocery Tickets            | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 2 | 0  | 0 |  |
| „ Ovenell—42 Coal Tickets                | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1 | 8  | 0 |  |

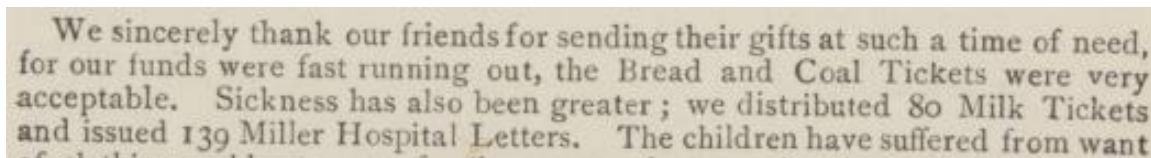
Fig. 6: DRSA\_1\_1\_5\_1910, p. 10. Annual Report 1910 showing 93 Milk Tickets purchased from 'Marshall'

### 'For Infants and Invalids': Milk and Wellbeing

Douglas Street Dairy's unambiguous statement of their product's intended use 'For Infants and Invalids' contrasts with how we might understand milk today. Although free school milk is still available for children under five, and in certain benefits-based primary school subsidies, these schemes which promoted the nutritional value of milk for young children are less popular than they used to be. Fears around iron and fibre deficiency, and weight gain when milk is prioritised, often outweigh the accepted benefits of calcium and its vitamins for growing children. Milk is primarily an ingredient food in present-day Britain, for baking, cooking, and most importantly an additive to tea and coffee, where it has not been eclipsed by plant-based alternatives.

Similarly, John Burnett has outlined that 'little milk was generally drunk in liquid form by town-dwelling adults in the nineteenth century' and was mostly consumed in tea. (Burnett, 1999, p. 36) However, at the time of Mr. Robinson's purchase from W. Murray, his tagline rings true; milk was seen as absolutely essential to the nutritional needs of children and, therefore, could have significant health-giving value to those who are sickly. The archival evidence shows that this was the prevailing attitude at the Deptford Ragged School, but that it must be considered as part of a holistic approach to wellbeing.

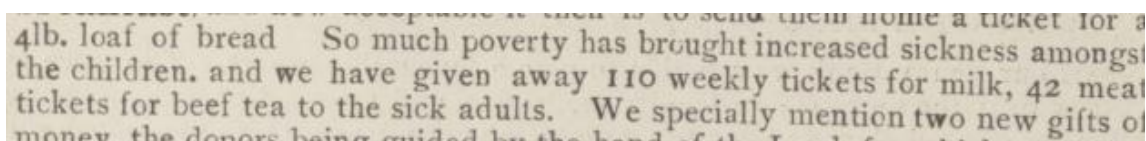
For example, there are several instances where there was an increase in milk ticket distribution to combat bouts of sickness amongst the attendees. In the Annual Report of 1903, 80 milk tickets were issued due to spreading sickness:



We sincerely thank our friends for sending their gifts at such a time of need, for our funds were fast running out, the Bread and Coal Tickets were very acceptable. Sickness has also been greater; we distributed 80 Milk Tickets and issued 139 Miller Hospital Letters. The children have suffered from want of clothing and food.

Fig. 7: DRSA\_1\_1\_4\_1903, p. 13

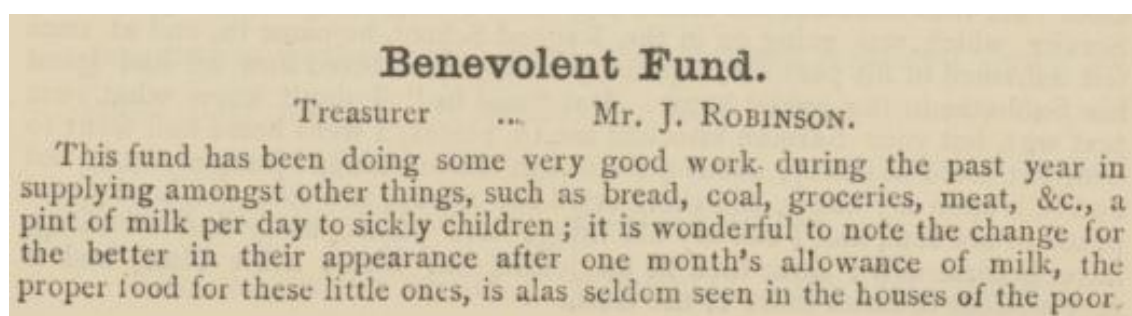
Again, in 1905, 110 Milk Tickets were given to sick children. Interestingly, for sick adults in this instance, it was preferable to provide meat tickets for 'Beef Tea', a nutrient-rich broth made by simmering beef meat in water, which suggests a difference in understanding of the nutrients required for children and adults:



4lb. loaf of bread. So much poverty has brought increased sickness amongst the children, and we have given away 110 weekly tickets for milk, 42 meat tickets for beef tea to the sick adults. We specially mention two new gifts of money, the donors being guided by the hand of the Lord.

Fig. 8: DRSA\_1\_1\_5\_1905, p. 12

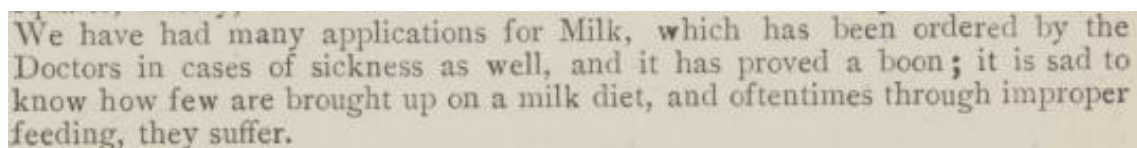
The Annual Report of 1891-1892 records the health-giving effects milk could bring:



**Benevolent Fund.**  
Treasurer ... Mr. J. ROBINSON.  
This fund has been doing some very good work during the past year in supplying amongst other things, such as bread, coal, groceries, meat, &c., a pint of milk per day to sickly children; it is wonderful to note the change for the better in their appearance after one month's allowance of milk, the proper food for these little ones, is alas seldom seen in the houses of the poor.

Fig. 9: DRSA\_1\_1\_4\_1891-92, p. 15

Therefore, even more so than substantial food staples such as bread and meat, it is the ample quantity of a pint a day that is observed to have brought sickly children back to good health, asserted as the '*proper* food for these little ones'. Its medicinal value is intrinsically connected to the fact it provided essential nutrients that the children would not have been able to get from other foodstuffs, further exacerbated due to poverty. Consequently, it was not seen as a medicine as such, but rather in line with contemporary attitudes towards health which saw a nutritious diet correct for one's age as the fundamental factor to good health, as opposed to conventional medicines or supplements more common in today's world. The Annual Report of 1900 further illustrates the primacy of nutrition over conventional medicine, where milk is prescribed on doctor's orders and the 'milk diet' is stressed:

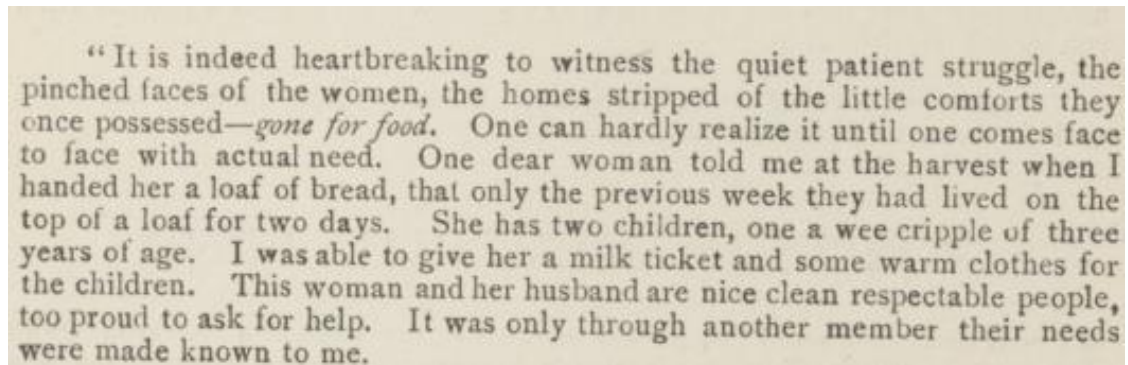


We have had many applications for Milk, which has been ordered by the Doctors in cases of sickness as well, and it has proved a boon; it is sad to know how few are brought up on a milk diet, and oftentimes through improper feeding, they suffer.

Fig. 10: DRSA\_1\_1\_4\_1900, p. 13

With additional context we can deduce this excerpt is referencing further complications in the provision of nutrients for infants. Malnourishment in mothers could inhibit the ability to lactate, so 'improper feeding' is likely referring to infants who were weaned early and then fed alternatives such as 'pap', this being milk, or tea diluted with water and bulked with bread or flour and sugar, which could lead to higher rates of disease and infant mortality. (Valenze, 2011, pp. 155-156).

A particularly poignant example from the 1907 Annual Report accounts for a member of the mothers' meeting experiencing acute hardship:



"It is indeed heartbreaking to witness the quiet patient struggle, the pinched faces of the women, the homes stripped of the little comforts they once possessed—*gone for food*. One can hardly realize it until one comes face to face with actual need. One dear woman told me at the harvest when I handed her a loaf of bread, that only the previous week they had lived on the top of a loaf for two days. She has two children, one a wee cripple of three years of age. I was able to give her a milk ticket and some warm clothes for the children. This woman and her husband are nice clean respectable people, too proud to ask for help. It was only through another member their needs were made known to me.

Fig 11: DRSA\_1\_1\_5\_1907, p. 12

The donation of a simple milk ticket, along with bread and warm clothes, could have had profound meaning for someone in such a desperate situation. Apart from being a vital source of nutrients and comfort for her children, one of whom was a disabled infant, it shows a sense of mutual support amongst the mothers at the Ragged School. They ensured basic amenities along with a real sense of empathetic camaraderie; thus milk provision should be seen as part of a holistic approach to wellbeing.

#### 'Milk from One Cow': Local Milk Production and the Deptford Ragged School

During the first half of the nineteenth century, difficulties in the storage and transport of milk meant local and town dairies were preferable, with 24,000 city and suburban cows in the London area. However, the rinderpest outbreak of 1865-67 ravaged town cowsheds, meaning imported milk became essential. The necessity of technological advancements in milk transportation, coupled with a rapidly expanding railway system and tighter sanitary regulations, signalled the gradual decline of the town cowkeeper. By 1864 there were 1,361 cowkeepers in London, and by 1886 just 301; thus local cows provided only 'a drop in a great ocean of milk'. (Burnett, 1999, pp. 33-34)

W. Murray's Douglas Street Dairy is therefore somewhat of an anomaly in the context of late nineteenth-century London, but one which provided a product and service distinct from larger milk suppliers. Advertising 'Genuine milk and cream', 'from One Cow' was a proud statement against widespread milk adulteration in London at the time. From the 1870's it was common for imported milk to contain numerous preservatives, and in 1880, 27.5 percent of milk in London was found to be diluted. (Burnett, 1999, pp.38-39)

The Deptford Ragged School distributed milk primarily for its health benefits, and by relying on small-scale local suppliers who they could trust, they ensured that their milk was of high

quality and untampered with. The school continued trading with Murray, which expanded to Murray & Marshall by 1908 and then became just Marshall, until at least 1917. (Annual Report, 1908 and 1917) Shopping local was not just for the superior produce, but was also a way of forging community and mutual support. A second receipt from the archive shows dealings with other local cowkeepers and dairymen, J. Martin & Sons of Lewisham High Road, part of Brockley Park Farm Dairy:

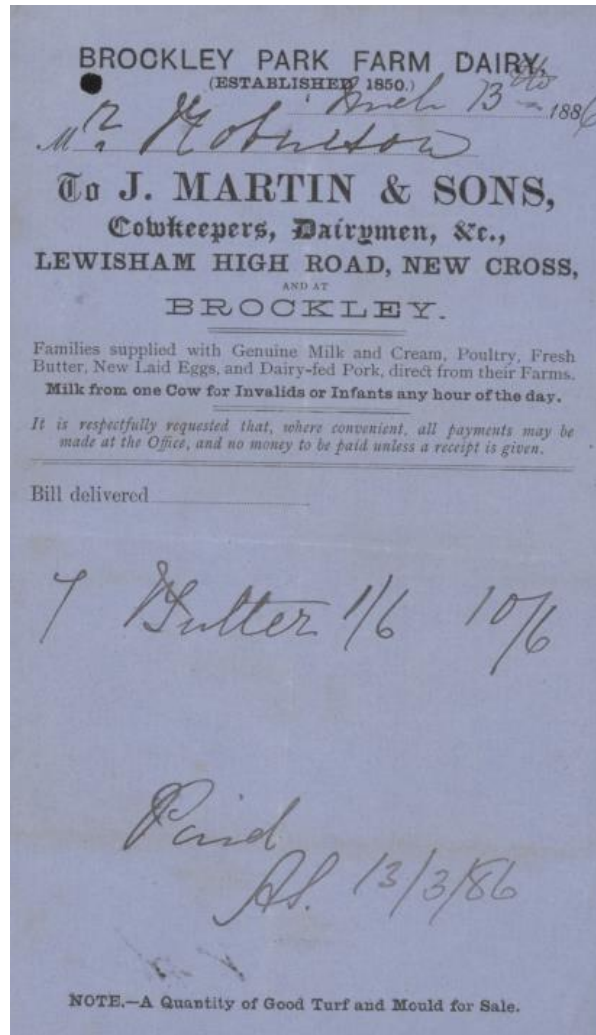
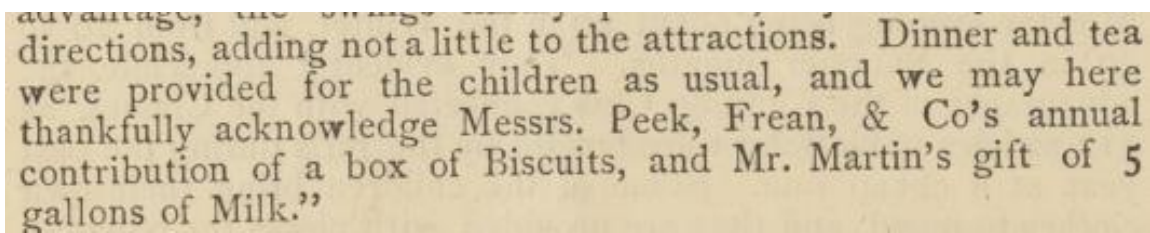


Fig. 12: DRSA\_5\_1\_1, p. 89

Similarly advertising ‘Milk from one Cow for Invalids or Infants any hour of the day’, a purchase was made for butter just one day after the milk and cream was purchased from W. Murray. Further investigation reveals that J. Martin of Brockley Farm Dairy was a long-term benefactor of the school. In 1880, he donated milk for tea during the annual summer treat ‘as on several occasions’, recorded again in 1882:

pleasure, till the time for departure arrived. As on several previous occasions the milk for the tea was presented by Mr. Martin, of Brockley, and a box of biscuits was given by Messrs. Peek, Frean & Co.”

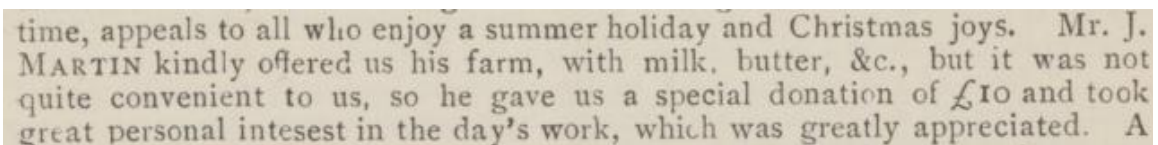
Fig. 13: DRSA\_1\_1\_3\_1880, p. 11



advantage, the arrangements for the children's directions, adding not a little to the attractions. Dinner and tea were provided for the children as usual, and we may here thankfully acknowledge Messrs. Peek, Frean, & Co's annual contribution of a box of Biscuits, and Mr. Martin's gift of 5 gallons of Milk."

Fig 14: DRSA\_1\_1\_3\_1882, p. 10

In 1910, J. Martin generously offered his farmland as a venue for that year's summer treat, and when it was not needed, he donated the considerable sum of £10 in lieu, as well as showing 'great personal interest':



time, appeals to all who enjoy a summer holiday and Christmas joys. Mr. J. MARTIN kindly offered us his farm, with milk, butter, &c., but it was not quite convenient to us, so he gave us a special donation of £10 and took great personal interest in the day's work, which was greatly appreciated. A

Fig. 15: DRSA\_1\_1\_5\_1906, p. 17

Evidently, small-scale local cowkeepers and dairymen provided long-standing trade and considerable charitable support of food, money and even extracurricular activities to institutions which sought to uplift the local impoverished population. Although quantitatively inconsequential according to Burnett's findings, within the locale of Deptford it is fair to say some of the most destitute individuals would have had access to the most nutrient-rich milk available, and very likely will have led to substantial improvements in the wellbeing of the young and the sick as the reports so illustrated.

The relationship the school formed with these dairies, and indeed many other businesses in the area which warrant further research, paints a picture of a community-driven locale in Deptford. Beyond what we have learnt about how and why milk was distributed by the Deptford Ragged School and where it came from, what has been fundamentally demonstrated is that within Deptford there was a dedicated group of organisers, business owners, benefactors, and all manner of neighbourly individuals who cared deeply about the deprivation their community faced and sought to do something meaningful about it.

### References:

John Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures: A Social History of Drinks in Modern Britain* (Routledge, 1999)  
Deborah Valenze, *Milk: A Local and Global History* (Yale University Press, 2011)

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