**The Barking Stink**

Examples of various data sources, to be incorporated and to inform our smell mapping / smell layering and collections of reminiscences based on scent

**From Facebook local history groups and enquiries by Nikki on these facebook groups, such as ‘Barking and Dagenham Then & Now’:**

Graham Smith:

“It was very smelly in Barking, I can remember great big open air water reservoirs with steam coming from them. My nan worked at The Rubber so she'd come home smelling of talc powder as she lived just 4 doors away from me in Howard Rd.”

Susan Collings Ciavola recalls of ‘pounce’ – a white powder that women who worked at Warnes rubber factory are reported to have come home smelling of:

"**What does pounce smell like? I really can’t describe it. It had a smell of it’s own. Wasn’t a terrible smell but not perfume. LOL. There was another Barking smell I remember. Right around London Road going down to Barking Road. When I brought my American kids to Barking, when they got out of the car, first thing they said was “what’s that smell’. I knew right away, but my relative said there’s no smell. It was sort of a chemically Cakey smell. This is going back to 50, 60, 70 and 80,s. Anyone know what I am talking about?"**

**Oral history interviews:**Mike Kelly, who grew up in Barking around 1950s to 1970s, recalls in 2019:

'A cocktail of sewage, rubber industry, fumes from the gas works, the power factory'.

Ronald Freeman, Lawes Chemical Company,Interviewed by Judith Etherton in 2006:

"The Barking Fertiliser Factory was the first fertiliser factories in the world" . 'They used to use cow dung, wanting to improve the fertility of the land. " The Factory used to produce the phosphate and then as they improved, I don't know when they started, they imported potassium and then used nitrogen as well. They must have mixed them. A powdered sort of fertliser."

**From online local history forum message boards:**

User ‘abridgeboy’ says online:

“We moved to Hertford Road in 1971, I was 3 years old. I remember playing in our overgrown garden which backed on to the Burges road playing fields soon after we moved in. There used to be a horrendous smell from the paint/chemical factory which was situated near the bridge over the Roding, near where Tesco's is now. The smell was terrible and I can still smell it now, all these years later. “

Source: <https://www.francisfrith.com/barking/barking-so-very-different-now_717492106>

Susan Mitchell:

“Loved steam smell of steam trains at barking station, miss the old smell and watching trains disappear in cloud of steam”

https://www.francisfrith.com/barking/steam\_memory-311251

**From memoirs:**

Fred J Brand*, Barking in 1866 And all what?* Written in 1937:

“Market gardeners round Barking found it profitable to grow a small silvery onion, much in demand by this firm, and brought their products to a large drying shed where the vegetable was duly prepared by skinning for bottling and packing. There still remains at East Ham a thoroughfare known as "Onion Skinners' Lane". This preparatory process became quite an industry at Barking, many women being employed in skinning onions. The word onion had several variants; at one time the vegetable had rather a plebian reputation. Bread and cheese and onions was considered outside 'respectable' society; the smell of the pungent bulb was a sign of poverty. **There was no doubt about it, for should their title escape you, there was no mistaking the odour. They were, so to speak, impregnated by the odour, not perhaps of sanctity but of Onions, which might have been rather more healthy, according to some records of the way holy men lived and had their being.”**

“The smell of the indispensable and delicious vegetable gave way to that of tarry twine and hessian, which to some had its advantages. During the palmy days of the Jute Factory a large influx of working girls came from Scotland; they were more accustomed to the work of the factory. Sufficient Barking girls were not forthcoming. Barking streets were crowded with ‘bonny lassies’, with unfamiliar brogue and costume. However, it has been stated that ‘a Scotsman is never at home but when he is abroad’. Thus the Jute Factory quite altered the ‘atmosphere’ of the town for a time.”

“A familiar sound was that of the Caulking Irons and the heavy mauls at work on the oak ribs of the new vessel, **the smell of the tar and hot pitch, fresh fish, and the indescribable river smell.** Fisher Street was still peopled with fisher-folk and you jostled along the footpath against fisher boys in blue jerseys or brownish yellow blouses or rubbed against sea boots or oilskins, hanks of yarn or barrels of pork, all of which you would find in the doorways of shops” (Fred J Brand)

Florence Rowe, *Edwardian Childhood*,

“Sometimes Grandma would ask me to take Uncle Sam’s lunch up to him. He was a malt roasted, and the smell of the roasting malt was delicious. The roasting was done on the top floor and Uncle Sam would often take me to the loading door overlooking the river to see the view”

Ernest Baker, *Reminiscences of Barking*

‘A regular weekly attender in the Broadway was a man [...] selling what he boasted to be a miraculous toothpowder. He would invite us boys up [...] give us a swig of water out of a bottle, then hand to us a toothbrush, sprinkle it with powder, a quick brushing of the teeth, then a mouth was out of the same bottle… a few minutes of selling the powder and it all started again - same brush, same bottle, same water’

Vic Howard, *Growing Up in Barking*:

"Nobody could say that our estate was built in a choice position. There was the Northern Outfall Sewage works just the other side of the river which ran just a few hundred yards behind our house. Beckton Gas works was well within smelling distance. There was a pickle factory at the top of the street whose workers were ofted refused entry onto buses because they smelled too much of vinegar. Warne's Rubber factory which seemed to regularly burn to the ground, provided another element to the air. River Road ran from our estate down to the Creekmouth where England's largest power station was located, with 17 chimneys belching smoke all day long"

**Health and Medical Reports:**

**Notes transcribed from handwritten book called ‘Barking Local Board of Health Minutes 1854’:**

**“**Numerous complaints have been made to the Board on the subject of the inhabitants of the lower part of the Town and as the unloading of the Barges and carrying away of the manure by carts through the Town are continued from 2 o’clock in the morning until 6 o’clock in the evening the houses in the locality during the greater part of the day are rendered almost uninhabitable*.”*

Barking August 28 1856

At a Meeting of the Barking & Ripple Nuisances’ Removal Committee held at the Town Hall this evening:

**“The Clerk read copy of a letter he had addressed to Meser Allison:**

**August 1 1856**

**I am directed by the Barking & Ripple Committee  to call your attention to the nuisance occasioned by the Manure in which you have hitherto been in the habit of conveying Dung from the Town Quay. The carts made use of are totally unfit for the purpose and the dung being exceedingly light and dry a large quantity is blown off the carts or drops therefrom, at times almost covering the road through the Town. The shopkeepers and residents in the Neighbourhood complain very much of being unable to open their windows and doors this hot weather by reason of Dung blowing into their houses.**

**Besides the annoyance to the inhabitants the Road Surveyor has been compelled to hire men on a great many occasions after your freight has been carted away to sweep the Dung off the Roads and which expense falls not on the entire Parish but on the Ratepayers of the Town Quay.”**

Report of the Medical Officer of Health 1925:

  "useful steps have been taken during the past five years to control the nuisance from excessive smoke pollution, particularly along the northern bank of the river Thames".

A typical complaint to County Health Department "an abominable stench created by a dump of decomposed fish, chickens'remains, rotten vegetables"  from London markets,30 tons a day dumped 50 yrds from house. Attracts flies mosquitoes and other pests. Quotes guidance from Ministry of Health in 1922 for abating & preventing nuisance from rubbish tips.