

THE METROPOLITAN DRINKING FOUNTAIN AND CATTLE TROUGH ASSOCIATION

THE HISTORICAL SCENE

The Drinking Fountain Association was a product of the age and it is therefore of interest to consider the historical scene at the time of its formation. As the Great Exhibition of 1851 held in Hyde Park can be considered to mark the height of achievement of Victorian England, so the year 1859 can be regarded as a turning point in its political orientation and intellectual life. Queen Victoria, who had been on the throne for over twenty years, was still supported by Prince Albert but this was to change within two years upon his death in 1861. A general election in March 1859, following the defeat of Disraeli in the House of Commons on a reform bill which would have restricted the franchise, resulted in the Liberals coming to power under Palmerston and Russell. The new Chancellor of the Exchequer was Gladstone, now firmly committed to Liberalism, who with Disraeli was to play a major role in the social reforms of the next twenty years.

There was a resurgence of activity by organised working men. The builders were on strike demanding a nine-hour day, a strike which subsequently led to the formation of the politically influential London Trades Council. The railway mania of twenty years earlier, when the main inter-city lines were created, was followed by the spread of local lines into the suburbs. This gave people more mobility and subsequently had a marked effect upon their social habits and living patterns.

Books published in the year also indicate the impending change for whilst Dicken's "*Tale of Two Cities*" and the Poet Laureate, Tennyson's "*Idylls of the King*" were consistent with earlier Victorian literary tradition, there can be no doubt that Darwin's "*The Origin of The Species*", Eliot's "*Adam Bede*" and Fitzgerald's "*Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*", amongst others were harbingers of change. The American Civil War was imminent, Italy was fighting Austria and there was a war scare in England which felt sufficiently threatened by Louis Napoleon's France to form a volunteer militia. Changes were taking place at sea with sail being challenged by steam, and wood by iron, although the Great Tea Race of sixteen clipper ships was still seventeen years away. Photography, invented earlier in the century, was for the first time recording accurately events of the time and Mrs Beeton had published the first edition of her famous book "*Household Management*".

This, then, was England of 1859 and undoubtedly the winds of change were in the air. However, the day-to-day life of the ordinary person travelling and working in the metropolis was still hard. The streets of London were packed with horse-drawn vehicles – traffic jams were a problem even then – and working days were long. Beer was cheap, tea and coffee expensive, palatable water unobtainable, affording little encouragement to those in need of a drink to remain sober.

THE BEGINNING OF THE DRINKING FOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION.

The history of the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association starts in the year 1959 when the Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association, as it was then called, was founded by Samuel Gurney MP, a nephew of Elizabeth Fry.



THE STRAND LONDON 1890



THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851

The supply of drinking water generally available to the poorer classes in London was in those days lamentably deficient both in quantity and quality, coming as it did mainly from pumps and surface wells. A report made in 1866 showed how contaminated this water was, and not only was the impurity of the water held to be largely responsible for the outbreaks of cholera in 1848-49 and again in 1853-54 but the heavy consumption of beer and spirits was in great measure also attributed to this cause. It was therefore high time that something was done to provide a readily available supply of pure drinking water in the cause of temperance, as well as of hygiene and it was to meet this need that the Association came into being.

The Association gained considerable support at its inception: the Earl of Carlisle was the first President and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Marquess of Westminster, the Earl of Shaftesbury, and the Earl of Albemarle were amongst the Associations' early Vice-Presidents.

It was inaugurated at a meeting held at Willis's Rooms in King Street on the 10th April 1859, and the first meeting of the Executive Committee was held ten days later, and thereafter met weekly. At the first meeting a letter was read from General Grey conveying the expression of deep interest which the Prince Consort took in the objects of the Association. These had been stated in a resolution adopted at the inaugural meeting:

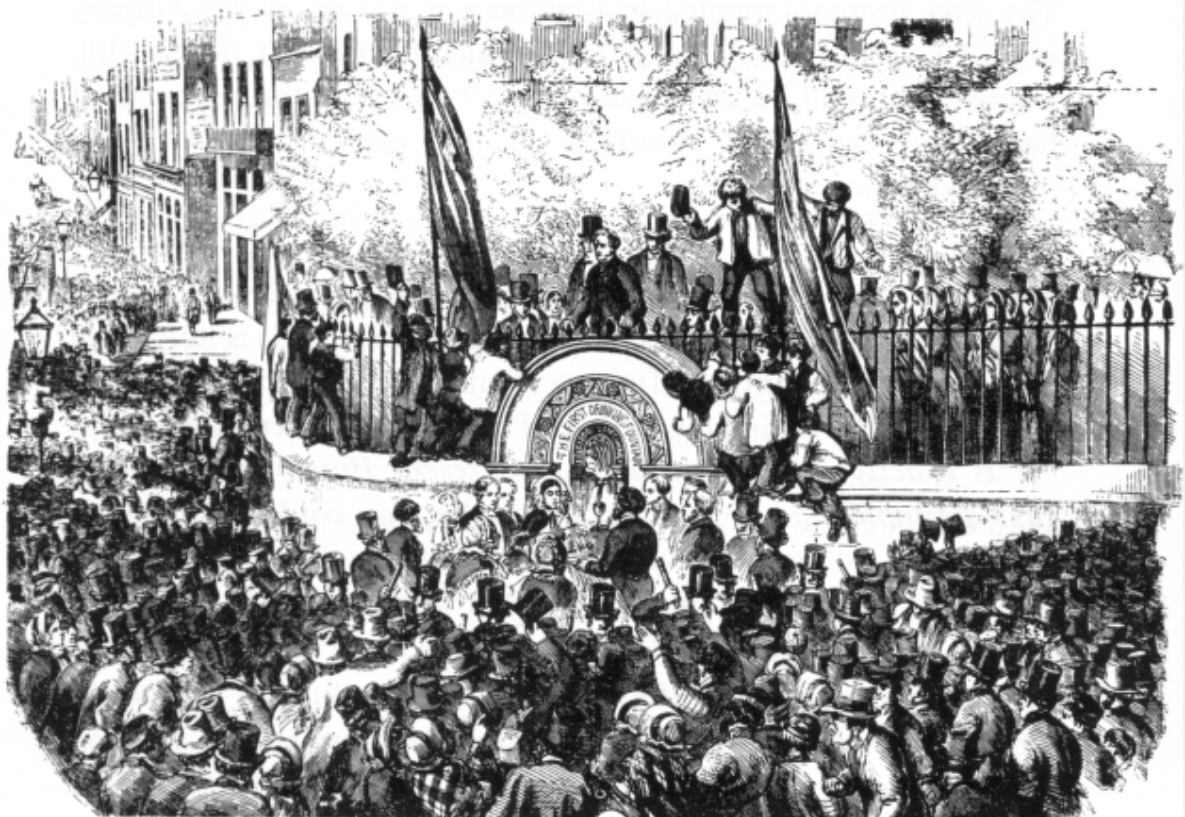
*“That, where the erection of free drinking fountains, yielding pure cold water, would confer a boon on all classes, and especially the poor, an Association be formed for erecting and promoting the erection of such fountains in the Metropolis, to be styled **“The Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association”**, and that contributions be received for the purposes of the Association. That no fountain be erected or promoted by the Association which shall not be so constructed as to ensure by filters, or other suitable means, the perfect purity and coldness of the water; and that it is desirable the water-rates should be paid by local bodies, the Association only erecting or contributing to the erection, and maintaining the mechanical appliances, of the fountains.”*

A public meeting was held on 30th May 1859 at St Martin's Town Hall, Long Acre, presided over by the founder, at which Mr Wakefield, a member of the Executive Committee, announced that £900 had already been raised. But from the start the Association aimed high and, at the same meeting, it was declared that London needed four hundred fountains and £20,000 a year for their maintenance.

The first fountain erected in London was paid for by Mr Gurney in 1859 against the wall of St Sepulchre's Church, Snow Hill, where it can still be seen; and, within two years, the Association had some eighty-five fountains in full working order in the metropolitan area.

The first few years of the Association's existence were indeed years of remarkable progress in many directions. This is illustrated by an extract from a Times leading article, of 6th June 1865. Reviewing the work of Parliament, the writer remarks: *“It is exactly six years since the present House of Commons first assembled ... If the England of that day could be suddenly represented to us we should hardly recognise it ... We had no ironclads [ships clad in iron], no volunteer force, no rifled cannon;*

money was at 2 ½ percent, and there were no finance companies, no new banks, no monster hotels and no underground railways. The first public drinking fountain in London had but just been opened.”



THE FIRST DRINKING FOUNTAIN



“Cart horses enjoy a cooler at a water trough near Tower Bridge”

WATER FOR ANIMALS

From very early in the Association's existence, members realised that the plight of animals was equal to that of humans and by 1865 the majority of fountains then being erected had drinking troughs for dogs attached to them. The notice to members in 1867 announcing the change in the Association's official title to include cattle troughs was accompanied by an appeal signed by Earl Grosvenor which included the following passage:

"The intense suffering which is experienced by all kinds of animals from thirst in the streets of London has long been a source of anxiety and grief to all humane and benevolent persons, and the need of public free supplies of water, both for man and beast, has now been greatly increased by the fact of most of the pumps having been closed, either in consequence of the impurity of the water during the late attack of cholera, or through the drainage of the surface wells by the low level sewers.

The fact that the addition of troughs for animals to the existing fountains was urgently needed received abundant proof, the Association being almost embarrassed within a year or two by the number of applications for help in this matter. To quote from the Report for 1872:

"The sufferings which were endured by parched and wearied animals in our streets before this Society undertook the erection of cattle troughs in addition to drinking fountains must have been past all imagination."

The only place at which water could then be procured was at the troughs erected outside public houses; and as publicans could scarcely be expected voluntarily to undertake the erection of these troughs and to pay the water-rate without a quid pro quo, it was fully understood by carmen and others watering their horses at them that they were expected at the same time to patronise the house; and to remove all misunderstanding on this point a gentle reminder was occasionally given in the shape of some such lines as the following, which have been copied from one of these troughs:

*"All that water their horses here
Must pay a penny or have some beer."*

Surprisingly, the Association did not receive much support from temperance societies initially but was assisted considerably by the large brewers!

EARLY YEARS: PROGRESS, EXPANSION AND STAGNATION

The influence of the Society was also seen in indirect ways. For instance, there can be no doubt that the Order issued by the Privy Council in 1869:

"That watering-stations be provided by Railway Companies so that cattle in transit shall have an opportunity of refreshing themselves with a draught of water at intervals of time not exceeding twelve hours", owed its origin in some measure to the example set by the Association.

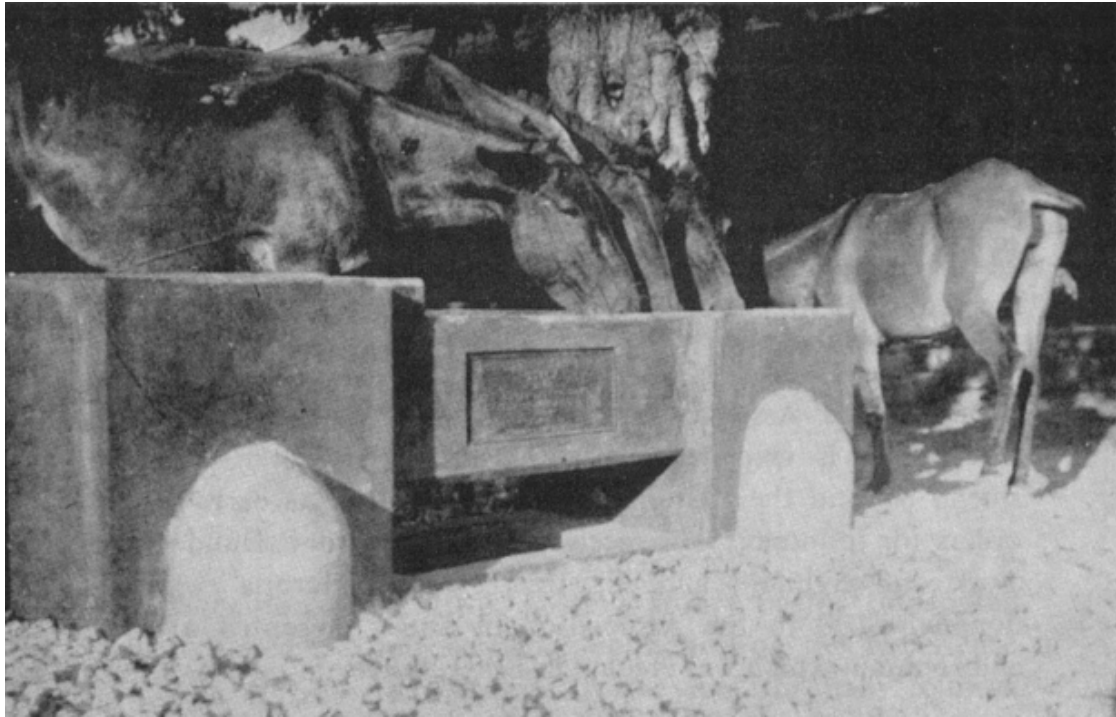
There were some initial difficulties particularly because of obstruction by a minority of the vestries and public bodies in the metropolis. Why they opposed the Association

is unclear; it may be related to the Victorian 'self help' ethic, illustrated by a remark made by a facetious vestry member who enquired:

“why the philanthropists did not supply a bundle of hay as well as a draught of water for the horses.”



TROUGH AND FOUNTAIN PRESENTED BY QUEEN VICTORIA 1877



DRINKING TROUGH ERECTED AT ST. ANN, JAMAICA, 1938



DRINKING TROUGH ERECTED AT JERUSALEM 1939

Officially, the main reason for objecting to the provision, particularly of troughs, related to the fear of obstruction of the traffic.

However, although it took some time to gain the confidence of the less progressive vestries and other public bodies, a steady advance was made and 140 fountains and 153 troughs had been erected by 1870.

Although the Association has the word “Metropolitan” in its title, there is evidence that from the beginning its activities spread beyond the London metropolitan area. As early as 1862 orders for fountains were received from Ilfracombe, Dundee, New York and Sydney; and, in 1877, Queen Victoria, who had donated £100 to the Association in 1869, presented a trough and fountain which was erected in Esher, Surrey.

The Association’s policy has been, and still is, to erect fountains and troughs and assist in the provision of drinking water wherever needed, and its work overseas has ranged far and wide, including such places as Africa, Australia, France, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jerusalem, Korea, Rumania and Syria. After such a successful start it is maybe not surprising that public interest tended to wane. No doubt many thought, quite wrongly, that the need for public drinking water had been met.

Whilst the first decade of the Association’s existence was hectic, thereafter it became less so and until the turn of the century steady progress was made in meeting the continuing demand for both troughs and fountains. The cause was supported by donations, subscriptions and legacies but these gradually reduced and the Association’s finances were often in difficulty. The erection of new troughs and fountains, the cost of running a considerable works department, and the payment of water rates placed a continuous burden upon the funds available and the Association’s existence was reliant upon the personal generosity of friends and members. However, even this was insufficient and, by 1898, liabilities were over £7,000 and the Association was being sustained by a loan from its bankers.

WINDS OF CHANGE AND THE NEW CENTURY

The Association’s Executive, possibly aware of the impending changes in society and certainly conscious of the experience lost in the previous two decades by the death of many founder members, including Samuel Gurney, decided to form a special Committee to review the workings of the Association.

The conservative nature of the management of the Association during the 1880s and earlier part of the 1890s was a reflection of the national attitude of the time. During that period there was only limited apparent change in social patterns and the political scene was quiet. It was as though society was recovering from the upheaval of the previous twenty years and bracing itself for things to come.

The wind of change was blowing from 1898 onwards but it was given additional impetus by the death of Queen Victoria in 1901: from this date onwards the monarch’s role became more social and far less political.

Edward VII could not have been a greater contrast to his mother; he reflected the new mood of gaiety and opulence — one that found expression in the vogue of the music hall and of the country weekend, of Cowes, Henley and Ascot, and of holidays by the sea, already a regular feature of the life of the well-to-do, but now also spreading rapidly among the less prosperous.

Soon the motor car was to become a thing of transport rather than novelty — in the six years from 1904 the number of cars on the road increased from eight thousand to fifty five thousand and the military and commercial development of the aeroplane was beginning.

A major social change was starting — in 1902 local and county authorities were made responsible for the education of all children and within the decade the suffragette movement was to become active.

The Boer War (1899-1903) and the First World War (1914-1918) seemed to accelerate technical innovation and social change so that by 1920 it was a vastly different England to that which buried Queen Victoria.

Therefore the decision by the Executive, in 1898, to have the workings of the Association reviewed proved to be farsighted and timely.

The Committee, mindful of the original intention of the founders that the Association should provide and erect the fountains and troughs but that the local authorities should undertake the maintenance and pay the water charges, produced recommendations proposing that economies should be achieved by reducing the Association's liability for maintenance charges and water rates. The Executive decided to act upon the Committee's recommendations. They also decided that the Association should seek more actively, additional income.

As a result the cumbersome and expensive works department was abolished and the work of maintenance was passed to private contract. The local authorities were approached and very soon the majority of them agreed to pay for the maintenance and water provision for fountains and troughs in their areas.

H.R.H. The Princess of Wales became Patroness, subscription income was maintained and donations considerably increased. A map was produced locating troughs for the use of drivers of horse-drawn vehicles in the London area. These changes were made to prepare the Association for the new century and they proved effective in rejuvenating the organisation for it went from strength to strength and in 1903 easily broke all its past records by expending, from its own funds, no less a sum than £1,650 on new structures.

It was also during this period able to transfer £7,160 to the Charity Commissioners and thereafter the Society received a dividend income. This new income was needed because the demand for new troughs and fountains was considerable, and the fact that they were extensively used is indicated by a press extract of 12 July 1912:

“Despite all warnings as to the futility of seeking relief from excessive heat in frequent in-takings of moisture, the rushes on the part of man and beast to the

Drinking Fountains developed into something approaching a stampede as the sun warmed to his work; and, of this feature of the day's doings, a striking object-lesson was afforded in the Strand

METROPOLITAN
DRINKING FOUNTAIN & CATTLE TROUGH
ASSOCIATION MAP

NUMBER OF	TROUGHES	FOR	ANIMALS	DATE ISSUED	502
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NUMBER OF
FOUNTAINS
FOR HUMAN
BEINGS
June 1862
497

The Society is supported entirely by Voluntary Contributions
President, His Grace THE DUKE OF WESTMINSTER, KG
Chairman of Committee & Treasurer, JOSEPH F. Y. ESQ
General Manager & Secretary, JOHN LEE ESQ FRGS

Office: VICTORIA HOUSE, 111 VICTORIA STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.

table from 1912

At the base of Gladstone's Statue the free drinks, provided by the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association, were drawn upon by the horses to such an extent that the flow of water in the Trough was at times too slow to meet requirements of the endless procession of drinkers. They came in parties of half-a-dozen, and occasionally the drivers had to exercise considerable skill to avoid collision and to allow their charges to drink as long and as deeply as they desired."

Another indication of the need for drinking fountains and the extent to which these were used was given in the request, by the Corporation of the City, for an immediate replacement for a fountain in St. Bartholomew's Close which had been wrecked by a Zeppelin raid on 13th October 1915.

In an effort to meet the growing demand, during 1912 the Association erected no fewer than 37 fountains, 29 cattle troughs and 100 dog troughs, and the considerable use made of fountains and troughs is illustrated by the table opposite.

BETWEEN THE WARS: FEWER TROUGHS AND MORE FOUNTAINS

By the 1920s the motor vehicle was beginning to replace the horse, but an extract from the Association's annual report of 1931 shows that the change was gradual: *"With the extensive use of motor cars and mechanical traction, one is apt to overlook that horses are still being used to a very large extent for haulage. While thus working for the use of Man on the roads of the Metropolis, Country towns and highways, they must be provided with the means of obtaining water. In former days water could be obtained from ponds and streams, but these have long since disappeared or become unapproachable, and now the only free source of water for animals is by means of the Cattle Troughs".*

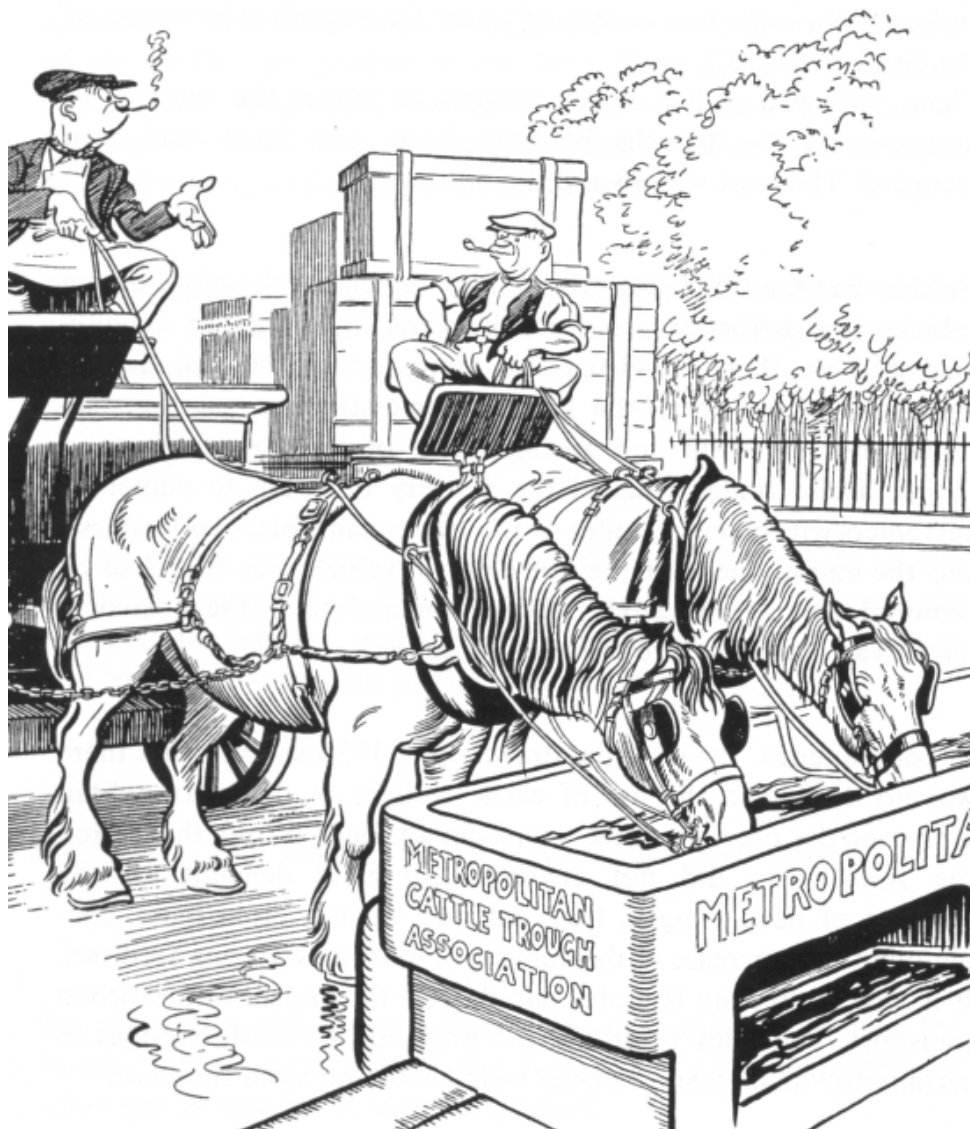
There followed a list of 64 troughs at which the number of horses using the troughs between 9a.m. and 5p.m. had been recorded. The least was 35 and the most 1025.

Neither was the trend towards the replacement of the horse-drawn vehicle straightforward; indeed, in some areas its use actually increased so that, paradoxically, alongside the general decline in the use of the horse, the 1930s saw a distinct revival in certain trades, notably milk and greengrocery, of the use of horses in towns. These trades entailed the delivery of goods to numerous customers within several miles of the tradesman's place of business, and the employment of the horse-drawn vehicle was found to be economically advantageous when compared with the cost of a motor van, even at two miles to the gallon!

In consequence, the statistics drawn up in 1935 showed that there was no decline in the use of cattle troughs in the metropolitan area over the previous three years and although during this period the Association did not envisage any great demand for the erection of new troughs, they did not, on the other hand, contemplate any decrease in the number of existing watering facilities. It is also interesting to note that, despite the impact of motorised transport, enquiries regarding the provision of cattle troughs in certain provincial market places were becoming more frequent.

Despite the continued usefulness of cattle troughs throughout the country, obviously, the Association was aware of the long-term decline in the importance of this aspect of

its work. This trend was offset, however, by an increase in the demand for drinking fountains, chiefly in parks and recreation grounds in the metropolis and suburbs. There were proposals to provide many recreation grounds and the London County Council had, in addition, extensive plans for the erection of new housing estates with associated open spaces. The Association anticipated that the need for drinking water in these areas would be considerable and this would place increasing demands upon their own financial resources.



“THIS WEATHER I CAN’T GET BESSIE TO DO MORE THAN 2 MILES TO
THE GALLON”



UNORTHODOX USE OF HORSE TROUGH
HAMPSTEAD, SUMMER 1951

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE AUSTERITY OF THE BRAVE NEW WORLD

The wartime period curtailed the general development of the Association's long-term work. During the war its activities were severely restricted due to control of labour and materials making it impossible to produce new troughs and fountains on a scale comparable with the peace-time operation. The Association's main efforts were therefore devoted to conserving its resources and keeping in repair existing structures, many of which were damaged by enemy action.

The amount of repair work was actually four times greater than in the pre-war period but this was not only because of bombing. The removal of railings from parks and recreation grounds and the decrease in the number of park keepers meant that there was a corresponding increase in the amount of vandalism and abuse of the troughs and fountains. A system of conversion to an upward jet had been carried out on a number of fountains, to improve hygiene. This had not proved very successful from a maintenance point of view and rendered the fountains more vulnerable to such vandalism. There was considerable concern in the Association that there would be a large amount of further repair work to be done when the war was over.

Actually, when the war ended the results of war damage were found to be less than originally anticipated and the finances of the Association, then healthy, were not severely depleted. There was still a considerable number of horses using the troughs and further troughs were in demand, but by this time the need could be met by moving disused troughs to new positions. Seasonal alternative uses were found by enterprising individuals as illustrated opposite!

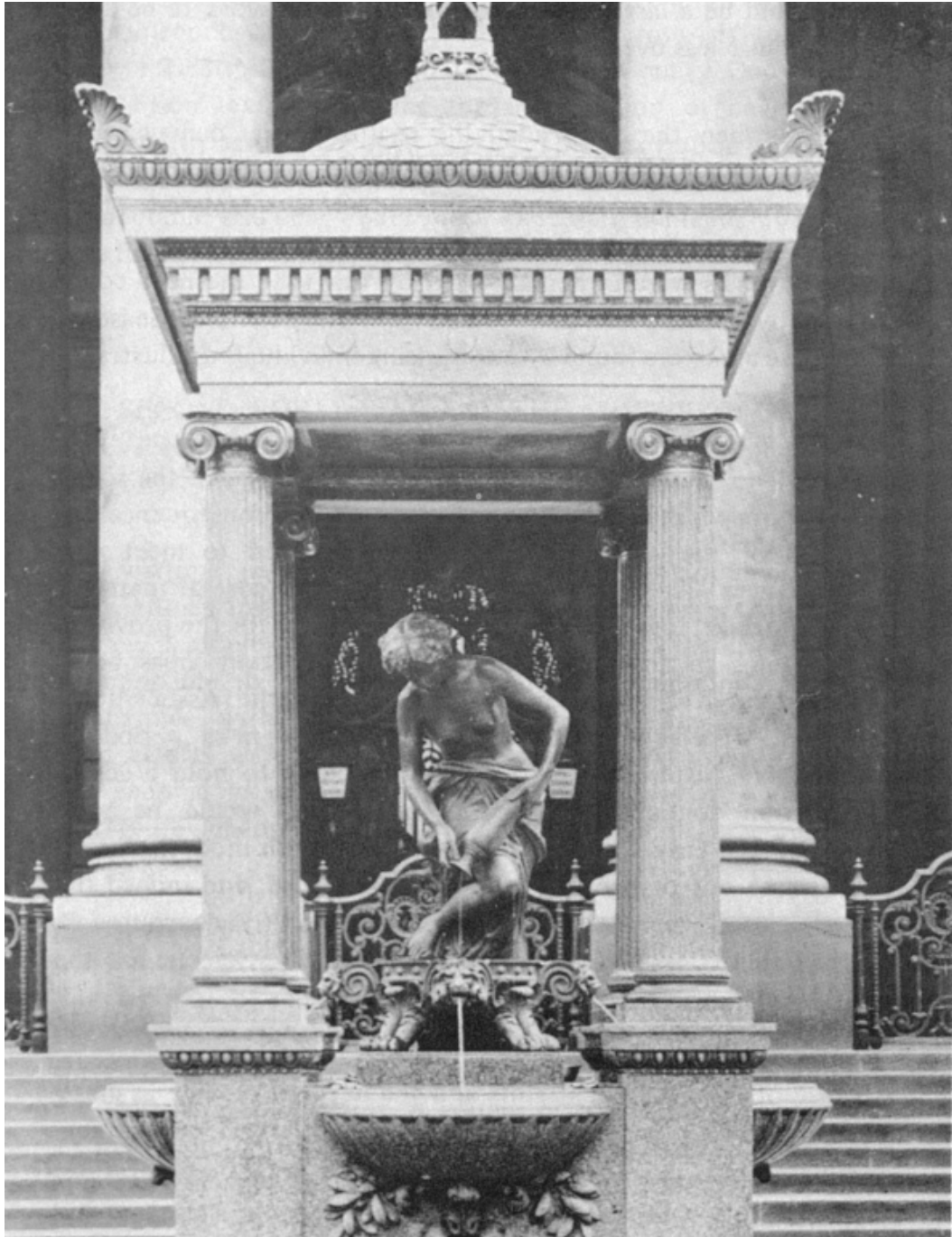
The 1939-45 war marked another dramatic change in the social and economic pattern of life in Europe and in consequence the activities of the Association had to be adjusted to meet new circumstances. The cost of labour and the high cost of material, due to shortage, together with increasing requests for the provision of fountains in the playing fields and recreation areas being created, placed a considerable demand upon the Association's resources. Faced with this increased demand in a period of considerable austerity, the Association decided to hold a design competition for a new fountain, one which would be both economic and easy to produce and yet would suit modern taste criteria not out of keeping with the past record, and indeed the present aim, of the Association which has always endeavoured to provide fountains and troughs suitable in all respects for the locations in which they are placed.

Because of financial constraints and the need to provide as many watering facilities as possible, utilitarian factors have usually predominated but, in some cases, visual and aesthetic considerations have been more important, particularly where the structure has also commemorated an event. However, the majority of the elaborate structures which the Association has erected have been the result of direct donations specifically for a particular fountain or trough and in these cases the Association's normal funds have not been depleted. There have been exceptions to this, one of which was the fountain erected in 1911 by the Association to mark its jubilee, and which stands near the Royal Exchange; another was the fountain to mark its eightieth year, which is placed in Kensington Gardens.

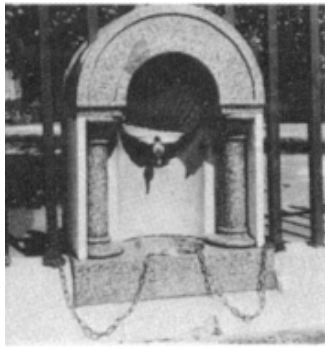
The search for the most suitable materials in terms of both cost and durability has been a continuing one.

In the beginning, iron was used for most of the troughs and fountains but in the course of time it was found that, while cast iron was too brittle, wrought iron was too expensive. Stone structures and wooden troughs lined with zinc were tried but these also proved unsatisfactory and, by 1870, granite fountains and troughs were introduced.

These have stood the test of time and many are still in use today but, by the 1930s, their cost had become very great and a new utility fountain was introduced, made at first of granolithic and later of terrazo. This new fountain had an upward jet, called a “bubble” jet, which was in due course also incorporated into the old granite fountains, replacing the cup attached by a chain which was part of the original design.



FOUNTAIN ERECTED NEAR THE ROYAL EXCHANGE TO MARK THE ASSOCIATIONS
JUBILEE 1911



1859



1865



1877



1878



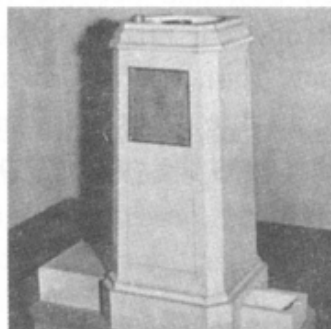
1878



1887



1908



1929



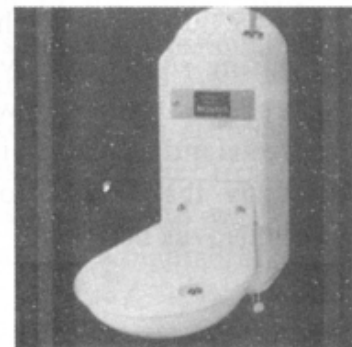
1939



1950



1956



Current

It was against this background of a search for a fountain that was both economic and durable that a competition took place in 1945 but although there were 192 entries none proved satisfactory. During subsequent years designs were commissioned and several types of fountains with parabolic jets were produced. Gradually, free-standing fountains have been less in demand, however, and today the Association provides almost entirely wall fountains of the Novus design.

Over the last thirty years, most notably in the building boom of the '60s and '70s, regrettably a considerable number of fountains and troughs in particular have been destroyed. Due to changing attitudes to conservation and the recent "acceptability" of Victorian design, the older fountains and troughs are now more respected by local authorities. Also, the limitation of their own finances has restricted major redevelopment work, which was the cause of many of our fountains and troughs being lost, and has brought about a resurgence of requests for help in providing new fountains. 1948 marked a record year when the Association erected sixty-three fountains of the "1930s terrazzo" design and three cattle troughs; and, by 1950, drinking fountains had been erected in all the main London railway terminals.

FROM AFFLUENT '60s TO AUSTERE '80s

The Association has for many years been actively involved in relocating troughs into positions where they would continue to be used for the original purpose. Market towns, common lands and zoos have a need for troughs, and conservation and restoration of historic places and the provision of more recreational facilities ensure the continuation of such need. Of course, a number of the originally sited granite troughs are still in use today particularly in parks or locations adjacent to equestrian establishments. Recently, the Association has moved two troughs: one has gone to the British Rail stables near the Old Kent Road which, although now privately owned, are being restored and used; the other trough has been moved from a site near Blackfriars Bridge and will be placed in the Royal Household Cavalry Barracks at Knightsbridge.

Although the demand for troughs is now less than in the past, we still regularly receive requests for assistance in the provision of drinking water for animals.



THE CITY OF LONDON
CORPORATION HAND BACK THE
“BLACKFRIARS” TROUGH



RESTORED FOUNTAIN IN THE MUSEUM OF LONDON

The demand for drinking fountains goes on unabated and at present we are only restricted by the limitation of our funds. The major need in the U.K. is for the provision of drinking water in recreational and playing field areas, many of which are being established and maintained by voluntary contributions. The number of requests from overseas is growing and the amount of money needed for these projects is always increasing. The drought which has affected all of Africa during the early 1980s has brought into sharp focus the considerable need for water in that continent. The Association continues to give help whenever it can and in such cases our main intention has been to provide assistance to enable the indigenous people to help themselves. We have done this by providing finance and equipment for such things as well drilling, pipe laying and training.

Considerable changes have taken place since 1859 and the Association, together with its artifacts, is now part of the history of the metropolis. Mindful of this, many of the documents and records have been placed in the Museum of London for safekeeping and continued public interest. One of the early drinking fountains has been restored and moved to the museum where it forms the namepiece in the garden of the newly opened Fountain Restaurant.

The Association is still fulfilling an active and expanding role. It is again an appropriate time to review generally the workings of the organisation and in the recent past the executive has carried out such a review. As a consequence, a number of adjustments have been made to ensure that the Association is capable of meeting today's demands and able to respond to the constantly changing role that will have to fulfil in the future.

