

Attlee Foundation Lecture  
October 2023  
'Attlee & the East End: Then & Now'  
Or 'Attlee, The East End - & Me'

I always think that it's unacceptable, an admission of failure, for an academic, a *writer*, to admit they are lost for words - especially at the start of a lecture! But in thinking about tonight, what it means for me to give the *Attlee* Lecture, here, at Queen Mary, University of London, where Attlee took the count in 1945 that was to make him the first majority Labour Prime Minister, a university I had the privilege of studying at and working for, from undergraduate to lecturer and Associate Director of Corporate Affairs, for a total of 18 years, how *personal* it is to me, I'll forgive myself for being a just a little overawed.

What a pleasure it is to be giving the Attlee Lecture. The first one I went to was Lord Robin Butler's on 'Cabinet Government' back in 1999. And it was my absolute honour to sit on the Board of the Attlee Foundation in the 2000s. So imagine my pride when its current Chair Alun Evans asked me to give this one - I've been looking forward to it since. Alun suggested a wide ranging remit to get the annual lecture underway after a few years. So tonight I'm going to talk about Clement Attlee, his life and times; where he stands among modern prime ministers; his East End, and what it is today; all woven together through a personal eye - perhaps a more appropriate title would be 'Attlee, The East End, Peter Hennessy - and Me'.

It is now over 30 years since I first walked through the doors of Queen Mary. I loved it from the first moment. I had been working just up the road in the City after I left education at 18 for two years as a Financial Control clerk - the banks were hoovering up Essex boys and girls to work in their middle and back offices, but rarely front ones - *those* highly paid positions were largely reserved for extended networks of the privileged. For that - and wider reasons involving the soul - I soon decided that banking was not for me.

I well remember coming to the Queen Mary's open day in 1993. A confident floppy-haired individual sidled up to me and chided me for wearing a whistle - a natty brown drapey double breasted number - compared to his nonchalant 'I'm trying so hard to look like I'm not trying' attire, to which I looked him in the eye and shot back a line of my Dad's - 'If you want to *be* the part, you've got to *look* the part.' My oh-so-brief interlocutor backed away. Can't imagine why. For I believed in the *idea* of a university, and I did not have time for anyone belittling the experience. I'm still the same today.

I am the first in the family to stay on for 'A' Levels, let alone anything else. I do not remember the idea of going to university being a part of my upbringing until 'A' Level teachers started to mention it, something I thought might happen one day but far into the future. It was my Dad who started to whisper the idea of it actually being an immediate option to me in my unhappy first stint in banking. And I chose Queen Mary for its reputation, its welcoming nature, its proximity to our home at the end of the District Line in Upminster, and for its East End location.

My family were intimately connected to the East End Docklands. On my Mum's side, dockers and stevedores - got to get that right as I was once pulled up by Aunt Sheila for an interview I'd given to *The Independent*. On my Dad's side, Grandad was a Port of London Authority tug captain. Harold Macmillan once said "There are three bodies no sensible man directly challenges: the Roman Catholic Church, the Brigade of Guards and the National Union of Mineworkers" - the Dockers were every bit as rough and tough, if even *more* militant in their trade unionism and leftist politics. Though I was born in Plaistow (if the traffic stopped and the wind was in the right direction, perhaps, just perhaps, one could hear the Bow Bells), I was bred in Havering - on the one hand delivered into the wider Labour 'movement' yet brought up in true blue Essex at the height of the Thatcher revolution. The contrast of strike cupboards, banking, hiding *The Guardian* inside the *Financial Times* when commuting from Upminster, then reversing that when I got off the tube at Mile End - maybe one can see where the kernel for my part in *Heroes or Villains?* came from.

My great stroke of professional fortune came in my final undergraduate year when I was accepted on Queen Mary Professor Peter, now the Lord, Hennessy's legendary 'Cabinet, Premiership and the Conduct of British Central Government since 1945' class. At one point a few years back, of the five immediate official advisers to the Prime Minister, two had completed this module, and a third had studied under Peter at doctoral level. I thought Peter's approach and material by far the best I had ever experienced - and he took me under his wing - 'well, he clearly did a good job!' as the Princess Royal briskly told me in her inimitable way earlier this year.

I revelled in Peter's teaching. His analysis, his anecdotes, his name dropping which is even more shameless than my own. But most of all his passion. And none more so than for Clement Attlee. I had of course heard of the Labour leader, mostly in the context of Winston Churchill's stunning and oh so complicated landslide defeat in 1945 - what a way for the British people to repay the greatest war leader this country had ever known. Outside of this, Attlee's name was never really spoken about. Not indoors - a very lively political debating forum, I can tell you - not at school, not even really for the first two years of a History and Politics degree *in the East End*. Peter's teaching was therefore a revelation. I'm not saying that I imbued it all immediately - there is to me a highly sceptical and sometimes contrarian side, not *quite* as developed as my great friend John Rentoul - but when I mistakenly briefly returned to banking after my first degree, I was asked at an interview for Goldman Sachs who my favourite PM was. When I answered 'Attlee' - it was clearly not the answer they were looking for, and I did not get the job.

Peter's advocacy of Attlee - or 'The Major' as he often called him - was awesome. I once somewhat naughtily said to Peter that his monumental history of the British Civil Service, *Whitehall*, a book I swear by, was more of a *romance* than it was a *history* - I do sometimes wince when I look back over what I put this good man through who changed my life - to which he replied 'Maybe I did stumble across a lost tribe'. I think in some senses, one might say that he he did something similar regarding Attlee. In book after book, he mined the Attlee archive and contrasted his findings with what he saw as the collapse in leadership and standards of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s - analysis which seems quaint in light of the Boris Johnson and Liz Truss Premierhips.

For the first time I learnt about this giant, Clement Attlee: a man born into the supremely comfortable upper middle class over in West London; a background, according to Professor Sir Vernon Bogdanor, more affluent than Churchill's; all set to follow his father into the higher legal establishment; but who, after visiting his old fee-paying school Haileybury's outreach 'settlement' with its motto 'sursum corda - lift up your hearts', in Ben Jonson Road, a stone's throw from where we are this evening in Stepney, reputed to be at the time the roughest and least law-abiding borough in London; gave up all his comfort to devote years living and working here. He was shocked, deeply impressed and radicalised by the plight but also the pride, energy and friendliness of the East Enders - perhaps the first time the extreme introvert came into contact with working class affability. He became in effect a social worker, moved into Limehouse, and threw off the learning and the lens of his privileged upbringing; felt that it was his duty - noblesse oblige - to sign up for the First World War, though over age, and was badly ill and injured at Gallipoli, in Mesopotamia and on the Western Front. That awful yet supremely powerful phrase 'had a good war' was to attach an unquestioned patriotism to the future Labour Prime Minister.

Attlee loved his East End. He was MP for Limehouse for 28 years, and 5 for Walthamstow West. Time and again his experiences provided a rooted focus to policy debates on the 1920s and 1930s blight of working class mass unemployment as he joined Labour, became a councillor, Mayor of Limehouse, MP for the area, Cabinet Minister, leader, then wartime Deputy Prime Minister, and eventually Prime Minister from 1945 to 1951.

And the East End loved him. Re-reading Kenneth Harris's 1980s authorised biography of Attlee, one marvels at not only Attlee's courage overcoming immense shyness and fundamental humility but how often his determination to help his area and his people crops up. I love the story of him overcoming his fear of public speaking which would lead him to proselytise outside dock gates to exhausted and impoverished workers, sometimes collecting for striking workers elsewhere, from those who barely had more. And also the story that Harris and Professor John Bew tell of when in 1920 he was part of a deputation to Downing Street to discuss mass unemployment 'accompanied on the walk along the Embankment by well-drilled columns of unemployed men,

mostly former soldiers, from each borough ... The mayors left Number 10 just in time to see what appeared to be the early stages of a riot. Attlee jogged round to George Street and found his men had moved from their resting place and were marching, in perfect order, towards the fight. As he recalled the story, he stepped in front and raised his hand. 'Stepney, Halt!' he shouted, then ordered an about-turn. From there, he led them back to Stepney, 'thus saving some broken heads'. Just think of the authority of the man among those who respected him.

He never evolved into a gifted orator, something that Peter Hennessy joyously contrasted against what he often felt were modern identikit politicians mindlessly parroting whatever 'the line' was. Peter loved this particular exchange between Attlee and a journalist in 1951:

'Tell us something on how you view the election prospects?'

'Oh we shall go in with a good fight. Very good. Very good chance of winning if we go in competently. We always do'

'On what will Labour take its stand?'

'Well, that's what we'll be announcing shortly'

'What are your immediate plans Mr Attlee?'

'My immediate plans are to go down to a committee to decide on just that thing as soon as I can get away from here'

'Is there anything else you'd like to say about the coming election?'

'No.'

The key to understanding Attlee the man was his unblinking determination to right the wrongs of historic extreme inequality and to deliver a level of social justice never seen before. This was his unrelenting drive, beginning before the Great War, then redoubled after his own sacrifice and that of all classes in the First and Second World Wars. And boy did he deliver.

He was a first-rate chair of meetings, especially Cabinet. He once took Churchill to task with the cutting line 'a monologue is not a decision'. His quiet, yet iron-fisted chairmanship of his Cabinets of often near-irreconcilable giants - Ernest Bevin, Hugh Dalton, Herbert Morrison, Sir Stafford Cripps, Hugh Gaitskell, Harold Wilson and many others - was to lead to one of the great historic reshapings of Britain. The long-dreamed for National Health Service and a comprehensive welfare system, along with the nationalisation of a third of the British economy, the first huge moves to end the Empire with Indian independence, were all fulfilled. Indeed, I've heard it said that the 1945 Labour manifesto, *Let Us Face The Future*, written by Michael Young - another man of privilege who became besotted by the East End - was in effect a history of the Attlee Governments, so much were the promises enacted. Just think about that as another London lawyer-cum-Labour leader contemplates how to turn dreams into reality.

Add to this the usual warp and woof of governing - only more so: dealing with the new atomic bomb world and deciding that Britain would become a nuclear weapons nation; the sadness that there would be no peace dividend with the onset of the Cold War; the near unbearable strain that all of this placed upon a devastated economy; not to mention Korea, Palestine ...

Counter-intuitively, two somewhat unlikely up-to-a-point supporters of Attlee were Margaret Thatcher and Norman Tebbit. Granted, both hated the three-decades long social and economic consensus that they systematically unpicked in the 1980s. But, as Tebbit told Hennessy in the Radio 4 programme 'Reflections' in 2013, 'I think we both felt the same way about some of the things which that early Labour Government ... did, which were absolutely right, and which it would've been much more difficult for a Conservative Government to do at that time ... such as Membership of NATO. It was not Churchill that created NATO, it was Attlee [and] Ernie Bevin, in particular, one of the truly great men of British politics, in my judgement. And the British nuclear deterrent; again, how difficult would that have been if it had been a Conservative Government, trying to take that through against the Labour Party? And the Labour Party would've been against it.' When one considers all this in the round, you can easily understand Hennessy's hero-worship; and why he was so proud when he adopted the title 'Attlee Professor of Contemporary History'.

But, as I mentioned earlier, Hennessy's post-1980s championing was initially swimming against the tide. And here I want to muse upon the idea of memory, historiography and reputation, and perhaps offer some thoughts as to why and where the Attlee legacy waned, but latterly waxed.

The ebb and sometimes flow of a prime minister's reputation is a complicated inexact science, and Attlee's stratospheric comeback was not a given. In poll after poll of academics, Attlee is now regularly thought of as often first among the pantheon of premiers since the War. How did this happen? Hennessy's advocacy was very significant. His work came at a time when the old world of governing with many of its consensual ways reflecting the experience of mass-unemployment and wartime sacrifice had been turned upside down by the Thatcher revolution. John Bew underpinned and extended the Attlee reputation in 2016 with his award-winning, big-selling and highly-readable *Citizen Clem* which caught a modern zeitgeist of a country ill-at-ease with itself and increasingly lacking the community spirit Attlee so personified.

But. I now tread carefully in such an audience, mindful that not just my own family members are in attendance, but also those of the Attlee family. I went to see Professor Hennessy a few days ago. I wanted to check a memory of an anecdote he had told me. "I'm pretty sure it was the last time I saw Roy Jenkins," Peter told me. "Around the time of the Iraq invasion. [Roy died in January 2003.] He was crossing Russell Square and I was coming out of Senate House. "What's your next book?" I asked him. "I may return to Attlee," said Roy. "You may recall that I wrote a small biography of him. You and I are responsible for raising him just a little too high on the plinth." I've always thought that was a fascinating exchange. First, because Jenkins's 1948 biography of Attlee was based upon him having known him since a child, as his Dad, the miners' MP Arthur Jenkins, had been Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Labour leader. Second, because I'm an admirer of Roy, thinking his biography of *Churchill* one of my favourite history books ever, and having had the fortune of interviewing him for my Masters dissertation on his time as Chancellor. And third, because I think he's probably right. One can overdo, and hero-worship does not help us get to the truth.

For those of you on Twitter/X who follow John Rentoul, and, really, who doesn't?, we all look forward to his forthcoming lecture 'The Myth of the Sainted Attlee'. It's been promised for about a decade now, and I for one can't wait.

Another of those rare voices who never went along with the Attlee worship was the late Professor George Jones of the LSE who, along with Peter, was one of the giants I've had the honour of learning from. Jones had stood for Labour in 1964, and written a biography of Herbert Morrison, whom he thought should have been prime minister in the forties instead. He once went, not exactly head-to-head with Hennessy, but as a competitive adviser to an undergraduate debate here at Queen Mary, jousting over the relative values of the postwar prime ministers. Before I repeat his advice to his team, remember this was a debating contest, trying to paint the worst possible picture in order to score points:

'Attlee is overrated. He had no vision and did not inspire - a mouse; an empty taxi drew up at 10 Downing Street and Mr Attlee got out; a modest man with much to be modest about. He had no strong views on politics except perhaps about India. He was a disaster in foreign affairs. His giving up and withdrawing from Palestine and India bequeathed to the world the terrible problems of Israel and the Palestinians, and of Kashmir bedevilling relations between India and Pakistan, and leaving us a benighted Bangladesh. Domestically he left the UK burdened with a legacy that took a generation to be repaired by Thatcher - an economy that hated enterprise and innovation, dominated by protectionist employers, farmers and trade unions, who sucked the energy out of workers and consumers; a welfare state that encouraged dependency of its citizens on handouts; and a health service based on Stalinist principles. He operated and perpetuated a system of cabinet government that meant policies were produced only after complex time-wasting processes that squeezed all involved into the lowest common denominator. He wasted his majority, and kept the British people in poverty, and failed to release their dynamism. A petty-minded limited PM, concerned to win honours for himself, and incapable of leadership.' Wow.

In 2011, after the statue of Attlee was relocated from outside Limehouse Library to its magnificent setting here before the university library, I was asked by the then Deputy Principal, Professor Philip Ogden, to put on a bit of a show for its unveiling. I thought Lord Mandelson would be perfect: a great speaker, always box office, no longer in power so easier to get - and pertinently, grandson of Morrison. Peter lived up to my hopes - you can see the video on our website. He began saying what 'a delicious irony' it was him being asked to unveil the statue. After the lecture,

Professor Jones quite pointedly asked me, 'Who's idea was this?' I said I asked Professor Hennessy to write to Mandelson suggesting he might like to 'bury to hatchet' after all these years.' George smiled. 'He absolutely should have buried the hatchet - *in* the statue of Clement Attlee!' True story. Deep waters.

I share this because if you knew George, you will likely be chuckling at these lines, often delivered in a bluff, pseudo-aggressive manner, which hid a heart of gold. But also because a bit of balance will help us get closer to the reality. Which is that Clement Attlee was undoubtedly one of the greatest prime ministers of our country. The 'case for the prosecution' I've just read is simply the flip side of a long life well lived. His record in achieving so much, that those with little had needed for so long, finally, is quite enough to cement his place at the very top of the pantheon. He was decisiveness personified in pursuit of results. But to decide is to choose, and to choose is to disappoint, and he did that for many in the decades after his fall.

All prime ministers since the Second World War have left office suffering unpopularity. Attlee was no exception, being booted out of No. 10 after losing narrowly to Churchill in the 1951 general election, then beaten more comprehensively by Sir Anthony Eden in 1955. Attlee's reputation fell, there being little immediate thanks in politics for a very hard job well done. But what I would like to chew on for a moment is why some reputations resurge but others stay in the doldrums. Who here thinks that Liz Truss will be remembered even a little more fondly than she is right now? Eden certainly is not after his shameful activities over the Suez Crisis. On the other hand postwar premiers such as James Callaghan and John Major *have* seen a resurgence. As have, in my opinion, those of the two giants of the past forty years, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. Following her death, I think Thatcher's performance is only going to rise in stature, especially after Charles Moore's masterly authorised biographies, and even in spite of Truss's bizarre cosplay ... Moreover, for those of us in Liverpool last week, though Blair was not to be seen, his influence was everywhere - the years since the Brexit referendum have powerfully underlined that there was more to New Labour than Iraq.

More problematically, I do wonder how Boris Johnson's legacy will fare over the coming years and decades - while his ignominious time in Downing Street is rightly regarded by most as one of our nation's great humiliations, there are those that still revere him; and though largely based upon promises that simply could not be kept, and proven 'lies', his building an electoral coalition that few could comprehend and subsequently winning a sizeable majority of 80 in 2019 will be studied for a long time. (By-the-by, I do not judge 80 seats a 'landslide' - I reserve that term for a three-figures shift.)

The last PM I will discuss here is Sir Winston Churchill: voted the greatest Briton of all time in a BBC poll in 2002, I wonder if he would be so if run again. For the modern world's move towards the removal of context and the simplistic and sometimes moronic judging of yesterday's figures by today's values does mean that I do not think me Nostradamus to predict a rough ride for Churchill's reputation in the coming years. Don't get wrong, we all know that Churchill's legacy is as complex as can be: from the Dardanelles to D-Day, from the Boer War to Indian independence, his long life and vehement opinions require close attention, sensitivity and tolerance to context. As the thoughtful Tory peer and Times communist Danny Finkelstein wrote in 2019, 'Churchill was a racist but still a great man: Even though the wartime prime minister was a lifelong white supremacist his strengths far outweigh his weaknesses' - this is not easy to comprehend for the 2D world of social media.

Attlee's return to grace proves, I think, that in an age where we question whether decency and indeed *actual* delivery matters, Attlee's ascendancy is all the more important. He, I hope, sets our sights higher just as we emerge from has been several years of plumbing the depths.

And what of Attlee's beloved East End now? It's obviously changed hugely from his time. When he first encountered it pre-Great War, it would have been an area dominated by the London docks, with the engine of the City of London financing and insuring just beyond its confines, the very centre of the biggest empire the world has ever seen. Little villages of interconnected slums housing some of the poorest people in the country who were the precarious human labour backbone of the biggest port in the world, employing some 100,000 people - and countless more in ancillary activity including criminal. (It has been estimated that up to a third of some ships'

holds went missing.) All downwind from the pollution of London's manufacturing industries. The sociology of how people helped each other survive - the folklore of not locking your front door and the power of the matriarchy - are all contained in another huge selling book of its day, 1957's *Family and Kinship in East London* by the aforementioned Michael Young.

Then came the devastation of the Blitz focused upon the docklands - my own grandmother was 'bombed out', as she would say, not once, not twice, but three times. How Attlee must have been pained by his people's suffering - and determined to beat Fascism come what may. He was convinced we had to bomb Germany more than they were doing to us, and unflinching in his support for the atomic destruction of Japan.

The postwar world changed so much, lots for the better. Consensus politics saw successive government responsible for total employment - at least until Thatcher's time. Slum clearance and the new towns gave people decent housing - but often at the cost of the community spirit. The closure of the docks from the late 1960s to the early 1980s meant unskilled and semi-skilled labour was no longer soaked up. As Lord Heseltine, one of the visionaries of the post-docks East End, said in a Mile End Group lecture in 2008, 'In a word the area had become uncompetitive ... those who could get up and go, got up and went' - my own family included.

Coming to Queen Mary in 1993, one lunchtime I took some sandwiches and got the 277 bus out to the then bankrupt Canary Wharf, on the site of the closed West India Docks. There was only the first tower, 1 Canada Square, the place was deserted, and a security guard walked across mud to ask me why I was there. The received wisdom was that this was a white elephant which would stand as lonely testimony to a grandiose and doomed attempt to transform the East End. Just a decade later and Canary Wharf had become the second largest financial centre in Europe, second only to the City of London, bigger than Frankfurt or Paris. Granted the vast majority of unemployed dockers were not to become the financial services workers, some worked as builders, cleaners and security guards - but their kids did. Globalisation created the docklands, in some ways it killed them, and then it recreated the area - the awesome sweep of big history. Will Canary Wharf continue to thrive what with HSBC the first bank to announce its move back to the City? The next wave of change may well be underway.

During the nineties and noughties, changed accelerated. Most of the many pubs around Queen Mary closed, historic centres of community lost. Harris's authorised biography lists the ones that Attlee had to frequent, them being headquarters of particular trade unions - the last of these to go was The Hayfield at Stepney, once a favourite of mine. (To note, I'm reliably informed by Dr Brown that, while pubs continue to close up and down the country, since 2000 the number of pubs in Hackney actually increased by more than a third.) I also well remember the police signs outside Mile End station warning of the dangers of mugging, alerts that were subtly moved by one senior Queen Mary Professor during college open days lest they put off parents of prospective students. I always thought that the frisson of fear getting out the tube for some Westminster and Whitehall types unused to the area gave an added edge to early Mile End Group seminars. It certainly does seem very different coming back here this evening, so much more civilised.

Another dramatic change is the ethnic makeup of the East End. It was interesting to read in John Bew's book just how contested the area was in Attlee's time by the indigenous population and the relative newcomers the Irish and Eastern European Jews. I found it fascinating how political rallies could be literally bruising encounters, with Yiddish often spoken. The East End has, of course, been a landing ground for wave after wave of immigration. Before the Irish and the Jewish Eastern Europeans had been the Huguenots, evidence of whom is to be found hundreds of years later across Spitalfields. And after him, the postwar incomings saw West Indian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African and East European again. Whist every one of these led to tensions of one kind or another, I would say the East End of today is more mixed than ever before - and calmer, too. Linked here is the dramatic upturn in the quality of the area's state schools, sending ever higher numbers to excellent universities such as this.

Something that has always intrigued me is, just where *is* the East End? The Thames is obviously its Southern border, though the areas immediately across the River in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe are brethren. And I think most would say that where Aldgate meets the Square Mile is its most Western point, though this is itself not hard and fast as the City begins to encroach. To

the North, I very much enjoyed the late philosopher Professor Bryan Magee's memoir *Clouds of Glory* published in 2004 which documented his oh so colourful growing up among the costermongers of Hoxton Market in N1 - but he thought it was the East End. Nowadays, not least among militant members of my own team, there seems to be emerging a specific North-East London identity, even though they live in Walthamstow, E17, Attlee's later stomping ground. It's a complicated world.

But perhaps the most important aspect here is the East End's gradual move Eastwards. I've had extremists tell me that Plaistow is not the East End. I should have directed them to the EastEnders end credits. I myself was corrected when Dame Vera Lynn passed away in 2020 and obituaries said she had been born in East Ham, Essex, which I railed against but was corrected by Dr Jack Brown among others who pointed out that this only changed in 1965 with the Greater London system we know today. The East End postcode finishes at East Ham, before Barking. Nowadays, for many in the media and I think for me personally, I think that the East End probably finishes at the M25. But this is very definitely not the view of many, and I look forward to the views of my good friend Darren Rodwell, Leader of Barking and Dagenham, as respondent. This is a massive evolution encompassing hundreds of thousands of people with real challenges for future governance.

And perhaps the biggest difference from Attlee's years is the perception of what the East End is. The generation before mine knew what the East End was. It was poverty, slums, crime, chirpy Cockney characters, wide boys, women wearing a lot of gold, rhyming slang, sharp practices down street markets, intense community spirit, supreme stoicism through the Second World War - working class underdogs who stood up to Hitler and who could never be beaten. Though not to the same extent as Attlee's time, there are still parts of today's East End, in such places as Stratford, East Ham, Dagenham and Harold Hill, that need a lot of love, attention and funding. But the transformation of the West of the East has been nothing short of revolutionary. The concept of 'East London' is now, for the first time ever, seen as edgy, cool, desirable. I remember Lord Macpherson, then head of the Treasury, coming out to the East and remarking, 'so this is where all the young people are'. The Olympics was clearly a game-changer. Not only was it a flawless spectacle, the truly massive regeneration of the area - still going on - has created a new East London focal point. Not to mention my beloved West Ham getting what has been called 'the deal of the century' when moving into the Olympic Stadium. The transformation of Spitalfields and Shoreditch is simply breathtaking. For me this was encapsulated when in 2014, the legendary East Ender David Bailey shared a photograph of Christ Church Spitalfields towering above derelict streets in the 1960s. He said 'This is the most dramatic change. Any moment Chanel's going to open a shop here. I don't mind change. It's what life is.' In 2018, Chanel did indeed open.

Talking with Peter Hennessy the other day, he took great fun in telling me that I was in some ways the complete opposite of Attlee - 'Twice the size, loud, and like being around people!' Perhaps Peter's always given as good as he got from me. The more I've learnt about Clement Attlee, the more I've come to respect his record and cherish his character. His care and attention to the people of the East End in particular needs to be remembered and celebrated. As does the mission of the Foundation named after him. As ever the last word goes to Peter: "Given the quality of prime ministers in recent memory, perhaps we need to raise Attlee's reputation even higher."

Thank you.