

John Seed

Also by John Seed:

Spaces In (Pig Press, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1977)

History Labour Night. Fire & Sleet & Candlelight (Pig Press, Durham 1984)

Transit Depots (Ship of Fools, London 1993)

Interior in the Open Air (Reality Street, London 1993)

Divided into One (Poetical Histories, Cambridge 2003)

New & Collected Poems (Shearsman, Exeter 2005)

Pictures from Mayhew: London 1850 (Shearsman, Exeter, 2005)

—— John Seed ——

That Barrikin

Pictures from Mayhew II

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*N.B. Images have been removed from this sampler,
in order to reduce the size of the PDF.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Every word in the pages that follow is drawn from Henry Mayhew's writings on London published in the *Morning Chronicle* from 1849 to 1850, then in 63 editions of his own weekly paper, *London Labour and the London Poor* between December 1850 and February 1852 and then in the four volume work of the same title. The visual images are taken from the latter.

JS

Hot spiced gingerbread! hot
spiced gingerbread!

buy my
spiced gingerbread!

sm-o-o-o-o-king hot!

hot spiced gingerbread

If one'll warm you
wha-at'll a
pound do?

Wha-a-a-at'll a
pound do?

I

1

Ah! you should come here of a summer's morning
& then you'd see 'em
sitting tying up
young & old
upwards of a hundred
poor things

thick as crows in a ploughed field

It couldn't be much
if they all of them decamped
though it aint their fault poor things

when they keeps away from here
it's either the workhouse
or the churchyard as
stops them

2

Ah! Mrs. Dolland
can you keep yourself warm?

it bites the fingers like biling water it do

II

1

I sold three times as
many potatoes as I do
now four years back I
don't know why 'cept it
be the rot set people
again them & their tastes
gone another way I sell
a few more greens than
I did but

not many

2

Such a day as this sir
when the fog's like a cloud come down
people looks very shy at my taties very

they've been more suspicious
ever since the taty rot

I thought I should never have rekivered it never

not the rot

3

Some customers is very pleasant with me
& says I'm a blessing

one always says he'll give me a ton of taties
when his ship comes home 'cause
he can always have a hot murphy to his cold saveloy
when tin's
short

4

They don't live long
diseased as they are they

eat salt by basons-full
& drink a great quantity of water after

frequently known those who could
not have been hungry
eat cabbage-leaves
& other refuse from the ash-heap

5

It's about three years since
heard a bitter old Englishwoman say
to hell with your taty-pot
they're only meat for pigs

sure then said a young Irishman
a nice cute fellow
sure then ma'am
I should be after offering
you a taste

I heard that myself sir

6

some of these
poor fellows would
declare to God
that they hadn't
the value of
a halfpenny even
if you heard
the silver chink
in their pockets

7

I can't say they were well off sir
but they liked bread & herrings
or bread & tea
better than potatoes
without bread
at home

III

1

Then there's grass
that's often good money I
buy all mine at Covent-garden
sold in bundles
six to ten dozen squibs you
have to take home
untie
cut off the scraggy ends
trim & scrape
& make them level

in the court where I live
children help me I
give them a few ha'pence
though they're eager enough
to do it for nothing
but the fun

2

Well now sir about grass
there's not a
coster in London I'm sure
ever tasted it &
how it's eaten puzzles us

I was once at the Surrey
& there was some
macaroni eaten on the stage & I thought
grass was eaten in the same way perhaps
swallowed like one o'clock

3

I have the grass it's always called
cried in the streets

Spar-row gra-ass

tied up in bundles of a dozen
twelve to a dozen or one over

& for these I never
expect less than *6d.*

for a three or four dozen lot in a
neat sieve I ask *2s. 6d.*

& never take less than *1s. 3d.*

I once walked thirty-five miles with grass
& have oft enough
been thirty miles

I made *7s.* or *8s.* a day by it
& next day
or two perhaps

nothing or maybe
one customer

IV

1

My rounds are
always in the suburbs

I sell neither in the streets nor
squares in town

I like it best where there are detached villas

& best of all where there are kept mistresses
they are the best of all customers
to men like me

we talk our customers over &
generally know who's who

one way we know the kept ladies is
they never sell cast-off clothes as
some ladies do for
new potatoes or early peas

2

Bless you sir if I
see a smart dressed servant girl
looking shyly out of the street-door
or through the area railings

& I can get a respectful word in
& say my good young lady
do buy of a poor fellow we
haven't said a word to your servants
we hasn't seen any on 'em

then she's had sir for
one penny at least &
twice out of thrice
that good young lady
chloroforms her

3

Cowcubbers were an aristocratic sale
four or five years ago they were
looked upon
first in with a beautiful bloom on them
the finest possible relish but
the cholera came in 1849
& everybody
specially the women
thought it was in cowcubbers

I've known cases
foreign & English
sent from the Borough Market for manure

4

I've mostly kept a stall
myself but I've known gals
as walk about with apples
as told me the weight
of the baskets is sich
the neck cricks & when
the loads took off its
just as if you'd a
stiff neck & the head
feels light as a feather

V

I've known young couples buy fowls to
have breakfast eggs from them one young
lady told me to bring her six
couples I knew would lay I told
her she'd better have five hens to
a cock & she didn't seem pleased
I'm sure I don't know why I
hope I'm always civil I told her
there would be murder if there was
a cock to every hen I supplied
her & made 6s. by the job

VI

Vy sir can you
tell me ow many
peoples in London

I don't know
nothing vatever
about millions but

there's a cat to
every ten people aye &
more than that so

sir you can
reckon there's not near
half so many

dogs as cats
I must know
for they all knows

me & I sarves about
200 cats &
70 dogs

VII

1

My best customers are working people that's
fond of birds its the
ready penny with them &
no grumbling

I've lost money by trusting noblemen

of course I blame their servants

you'd be surprised sir
to hear how often rich folks houses
when they've taken their turf or
what they want they'll
take credit & say
O I've got no change or
I can't be bothered with hapence or
you must call again

they can't know how
poor men has to
fight for a bit of bread.

2

The weather most dreaded
when hoar frost lies long &
heavy on the ground the turf
cut with the rime upon it
soon turns black

foggy dark weather the days clips it
uncommon short & people won't
buy by candlelight
no more will the shops

birds has gone to sleep then &
them that's fondest on them says
we can get fresher turf
tomorrow

the gatherers can't work by moonlight clover
leaves shuts up like the lid of
a box & you can't tell them

3

I don't
complain so
it's nothing to nobody
what I makes

from Beaver Town to
Stamford Hill &
on to Tottenham & Edmonton
turning off Walthamstow way
is as good a round as any I
goes all ways

I dont know what sort of peoples my
best customers

two of em I've been told is
banker's clerks so
in course
they is rich