Depositor trends in the Limehouse Savings Bank

London between 1830 and 1876

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Introduction

The Limehouse Savings Bank (previously the Limehouse Provident Institution for Savings) was founded in 1816, one of the many savings banks that were formed in the early decades of the 19th Century in Britain. According to Horne there were 27 savings banks in the London metropolitan area by the end of 1819. Many of these pre-1819 banks identified by Horne map directly on to London’s densely populated inner-city areas such as St Martins Place, Covent Garden, Moorfields and Southwark. In the six square miles encompassing the newly established London docks and its industrial hinterland directly to the east of the city and known generically as the East End there were three savings banks – Whitechapel, Limehouse and Poplar. In 1976 a set of nine account ledgers of the Limehouse Savings Bank covering the period 1816-1876 were found in the crypt of a local church, close to the site of the bank’s 19th century premises.

The extended continuous run of accounts is relatively rare in respect of 19th century savings bank records and it is fortuitous that Limehouse’s system of accounting kept the depositor name and other details together with their account information. As a result the Limehouse data not only allows an opportunity to study a London savings bank, but also to look closely at another neglected aspect of savings bank research – patterns of account usage. The Limehouse accounts are just one of range of financial institution accounts that are part of a pilot research project on working class women’s use of and relationship with financial institutions in 19th Century England. My co-researcher, Josephine Maltby, and I have identified archive

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1 Horne, *A History of Savings Banks*, 1947

2 The account records now form part of the Tower Hamlets local history archive collection – I/SB/8 STE/596, TH/8564/1-8.

3 The history of British savings banks, as seen from the perspective of individual banks, has been the view from outside of the capital. For example, Ó Grada’s exhaustive work on the savings banks in Ireland, Ross and Payne in relation to the penny and savings banks in Glasgow, and Larson, Ward and Wilson who researched the penny bank in Leeds. The savings banks of London are a neglected field of study.
sources from a small number of savings banks that represent a cross-section of 19th Century English industrial and rural communities and regions to compare. We were particularly interested in the Limehouse records for two reasons. The first reason was that London’s savings banks have been under-represented in the historical savings research; additionally we hoped that we would be able to compare the data on women’s patterns of use of savings accounts in the capital with data from smaller industrial towns of the north of England.

Patterns of use data is especially useful for researchers interested in gender and savings because it allows us to interrogate the established narratives around women’s financial agency and especially those narratives that hold that women’s savings behaviour was primarily to do with preparation for marriage, as recipients of lump sum bequests to draw down from widowed or, if married, as operating ‘puppet’ accounts on the instructions of her husband. The first analysis of the data was with the view of establishing what patterns of use could be established across the whole of the depositor sample; further analysis which is now taking place and will be published in additional papers focus on women’s account usage specifically.

Pattern of use data is under-used in British savings bank research. In his comprehensive account of working class saving and spending in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century Johnson laments this state of affairs. He points out the disadvantage in the standard research strategy of recording account balances against depositor occupational classifications, which is that average account size gives no hint of whether deposits in individual accounts rose and fell in line with external economic trends, the length they were held or the uses they were put to⁴. In the US context the research of Wadwhani in respect of the Philadelphia Savings Fund takes just

⁴ Johnson, Saving and Spending, 1985, p. 98
this approach - looking in particular at how savings accounts were used for target saving by successive immigrant groups\textsuperscript{5} but it has not been widely adopted in British research\textsuperscript{6}.

This paper therefore is the first in a planned series of papers using 19\textsuperscript{th} century patterns of use data from a number of English savings banks. It establishes a different, more immediate and accessible, financial history that focuses on the social, rather than occupational, categories of savers, the movement between different categories of account holders and the patterns of use in accounts in two sample years. I argue that account usage can be read as a signal of what sort of retail banking products working families needed and valued in 19\textsuperscript{th} century London. The people of Limehouse might have been offered a one-size-fits-all financial product that came with considerable ideological expectations but they used that product in different ways.

The historiography of British savings banks.

George Rose, the principle parliamentary sponsor of the 1817 Savings Bank Act, managed to win the support needed to establish the banks by suggesting that individual saving would alleviate pressure on the poor rate\textsuperscript{7}. However, savings banks were just one of a number of institutional experiments in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries that shared the aim of improving the condition of the poor by encouraging saving in collective and individual forms and with the aim of reducing the burden of supporting the poor from the public purse\textsuperscript{8}. Friendly societies, which offered limited protection against sickness and consequential loss of income, were well-established and widespread by the start of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century but were felt inadequate to

\textsuperscript{5} Wadwhani, Citizen Savers, 2004; Banking from the bottom up, 2002.
\textsuperscript{6} The one UK study that focuses on data at the level of the account is Lloyd-Jones and Lewis, Small Savers in the late Victorian period, 1991
\textsuperscript{7} See for example the House of Commons parliamentary debate February 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1817. (HC Deb 5 Feb 1817 Vol 35 cc222-6). Available online at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1817/feb/05/saving-banks-bill#S1V0035P0_18170205_HOC_13
\textsuperscript{8} Maltby, ‘The wife’s administration of the earnings?’, 2011
protect the individual against the other great risk of pauperism i.e. old age. If ‘habits of forethought and frugality’\textsuperscript{9} could be encouraged amongst the working population, then each worker could rely on a lump sum to draw down from when they were no longer able to work. Commercial banks had high minimum deposit thresholds that excluded the majority of ordinary citizens from opening savings accounts\textsuperscript{10} and annuities were not a popular form of private insurance for working people, who throughout this period were more likely to turn either to their occupational friendly societies, or to medical and burial insurance\textsuperscript{11}. Philanthropic banking enterprises would, it was hoped by their parliamentary sponsors, fill the gap in commercial bank provision.

Commercial banks did eventually enter the market in the early to mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century and developed retail banking products that catered for the millions of ordinary workers. However, the link between the behaviour of the earliest users of a financial product designed for the masses – savings banks, and later the Post Office Savings Bank (POSB) – and subsequent product and service developments has not been made in the UK historical research on savings banks to date. Instead, the historiography of UK savings banks is dominated by questions that echo the moral panics of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century rather than contemporary concerns e.g. questions regarding the extent to which the savings banks met their stated philanthropic aims of inculcating the habit and understanding of the importance of thrift in the poorer classes. Since

\textsuperscript{9} Scratchley, \textit{A Practical Treatise on Savings Banks}, 1861, p. xvi

\textsuperscript{10} This was not, of course, the experience of Scotland where some commercial banks sought the custom of savers with smaller amounts and seemed more willing to take on the costs associated with operating smaller accounts. They were, however, still out of the reach of the vast majority of ordinary workers that could not fulfil the requirement to be regular savers. The Scottish banks were a powerful lobbying group all throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and acted to exempt Scotland from a great deal of the early legislative reach of the savings banks, considering the government’s rate of interest to represent unfair competition and not a legitimate use of public funds.

\textsuperscript{11} Johnson, \textit{Saving and Spending}, 1985
Fishlow’s critical paper on this topic British savings bank research has focused on the ‘who are the savers?’ issue, almost to the exclusion of all other questions and to the detriment of the contribution it could make to the wider European story of the savings bank movement\(^\text{12}\).

**The Limehouse economic and social context**

The creation of the East India Docks helped define the fortunes of Limehouse, and its character, in the latter 18\(^{\text{th}}\) and early 19\(^{\text{th}}\) Centuries. Although Limehouse had long been associated with shipbuilding, with the ship chandler business and rope making forming the main economic activities of the area, it was the building of the docks that opened up the East End. The construction of the Limehouse Basin in 1820 further established the area as a transport hub. The Basin enabled the transfer of cargo from larger ships to canal boats to use Regent’s Canal, which in turn linked the Thames to Birmingham in the Midlands and the Trent River system that enabled canal transportation to the north of England. Another transport network, this time for passengers not cargo, was completed in 1841 when the London and Blackwall Railway was built.

Over the course of the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century the East End shed its heavy industry and, in part because of the cost of land in the capital, developed instead an economic model of ‘district as workshop’\(^\text{13}\). For example, the London garment industry was located in and around Whitechapel and became increasingly sub-contracted throughout the 1840s and 1850s, which is reflected in the number of single women in the Limehouse ledgers being identified with a specific aspect of the garment trade\(^\text{14}\). Bethnal Green, immediately to the north of Limehouse, was home to a

\(^{12}\) Fishlow, *The Trustee Savings Banks 1817-1861*, 1961

\(^{13}\) White, *London in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) Century*, 2008

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
number of cabinetmaking businesses and this too is reflected in the frequency with which furniture makers appear as depositors as well as related brass trades. Shoemakers were also an occupation that clustered in Bethnal Green. The shipbuilding trade, which a great many of the Limehouse depositors were connected to, was relatively strong until the early 1860s. The shift to iron ships disadvantaged shipbuilding on the Thames because London was so far from sources of both iron and the coal needed to drive the machinery and from the 1860s onwards trade was lost to competitors on Tyneside and in Glasgow.\textsuperscript{15}

Limehouse, in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was therefore a series of complex, thriving specialist districts that embraced trades of all varieties from heavy engineering to fine fashion work. In this respect it was no different from other Thameside areas and reflected the industrial development of the capital. The problem, however, in studying Limehouse and its wider neighbourhood is that the East End is now synonymous with ‘London poverty’. Even though the conflation of the East End and social degradation is a misrepresentation of Booth’s sociological investigations of the late 1880\textsuperscript{s} some of the best historical works on London paint a uniform picture of destitution and poverty when the reality, and its economic history, is much more nuanced.\textsuperscript{16}

[Compare] … the descriptions of the small blocks of streets for which Booth provided individual data on poverty... In the Tower Hamlets division of the East End (i.e. excluding Bethnal Green and Shoreditch), blocks ranged from having 60.2 per cent of residents ‘in poverty’- this being in part of the Isle of Dogs- to 10.2 per cent (in an area

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Brodie, The Politics of the Poor, 2004
around Bow Road). Blocks ranged relatively evenly between these extremes, and the overall average for the division was 38.0 per cent 'in poverty', a figure only 7 per cent higher than the average for the whole of London.\(^{17}\)

Whilst there is no doubt that the East End was – and remains – a challenging urban environment it has never been mono-cultural or a one-dimensional economic context of unrelenting social deprivation. Its challenges came in human and non-human forms e.g. its housing stock, sanitation levels and proximity to the river that saw the area hit by a cholera epidemic in 1832 and which fostered high numbers of tuberculosis cases throughout the period. Its reputation for perilous poverty is also rooted in the crisis of the 1860s, when the decline in shipbuilding and a run of severe winters almost brought some of the poorer Poor Law Unions in the East End to the point of collapse. The relatively small number of ratepayers in the district could not sustain the taxation demand for poor relief\(^{18}\). Whilst a sizable number of the people who lived and worked in Limehouse lived in economically precarious financial circumstances many were able to count on a little more stability through a predictable, if not always wholly adequate, income.

An inadequate level of income was a fate that the vast majority of London workers shared throughout the 19th century. The cost of doing business in London was high and the increased overheads that were the result of premium paid for fuel, transport and premises created the incessant downward pressure on wage levels\(^{19}\). The seemingly inexhaustible supply of skilled labour also kept wages low despite increasing unionization and worker disputes and


\(^{18}\) Tanner, The Casual Poor And The City Of London Poor Law Union, 1837-1869, 1999

\(^{19}\) White, London in the 19th Century, 2008
unrest. White comments that wage levels in the 19th century were such that they allowed very little capacity to save\textsuperscript{20}. However, the account ledgers of the Limehouse Savings Bank are testament to the banking services sought by the resident rope makers, brass workers, mast makers, lightermen\textsuperscript{21}, porters, mariners, instrument makers, master mariners, general labourers, tradesmen, shopkeepers, clerks, furniture makers, servants and dressmakers that are all represented in the records. So too are some of more notable residents of Limehouse – the vicars, the gentlemen of the elegant villas where many of the servants work, the government officials in the customs services and the occasional individual who records their principal address as a village in Kent or Surrey. The charities that deposit their funds in the bank are also indicative of the place and its people – the clothing clubs, friendly societies, benevolent funds and the Royal Order of the Jolly Cocks (that even the bank’s clerk cannot resist adding exclamation marks next to as he starts a new account for them). These people were, as Rose suggests and historians such as Brodie and White would want us to appreciate, the ‘common run of people’ who had the normal range of financial issues, needs and wants in life and found themselves in need of a bank.

\textsuperscript{20} White, \textit{London in the 19th Century}, 2008

\textsuperscript{21} The distinction in occupational descriptors that would have been understood by local residents at the time is between lightermen, who carried cargo, and watermen, who carried passengers.
General depositor trends 1830-1878

One of the challenges of studying early savings bank records is the lack of standardization of their accounts presentation. Although savings banks could opt to be covered by the Savings Bank Act of 1817 (and later amendments) each bank remained a separate legal entity and not bound by centralized bureaucracy or standard operating procedures. It is not exaggerating to suggest that the formats in which the individual depositor accounts are presented are the result of the individual trustees’ best approximation of what a bank ledger should look like. As in the case of Limehouse the format of ledgers can change over time, which can result in depositor data from one decade not being comparable to depositor data from another. The information that savings banks were required to collect was not set out in legislation until 1828, which means that although some broad depositor information is available from 1816 it is only in 1828 that the data becomes detailed enough to be useful. For the sake of simplicity I have chosen 1830 as the date from which to present depositor trends in Limehouse; average account holding percentages for each decade have been calculated from the 1830s to the 1870s (although the 1870 records are partial and run out in 1876).

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22 Limehouse, in contrast to other savings banks of the period, never allowed the opening account using only a number or ticket. The practice of not requiring named depositors created, critics of the system believed, the means by which the middle classes could open multiple accounts. The 1828 Act moved to define the basic information that should be held for each depositor but, sadly for those researching savings banks, did not stipulate how this information should be held. Limehouse recorded the information in the ledger books and had named accounts. Other banks recorded personal information in a registration book and assigned an account number for the account book. If the registration book is not preserved along with the account book there is no way of making the connection between the individual depositor and their account.

23 Cap XCII 9 GEO IV – An act to consolidate and amend the Laws relating to Savings Banks 28th July 1828. Clause XXXII stated that “no sum shall be paid or subscribed into any Savings Bank by any person or persons by ticket or number or otherwise without disclosing his or her name together with his or her profession business occupation calling and residence to the Trustees or Managers of such Savings Bank and the Trustees or Managers of every Savings Bank are hereby required to cause be name of such depositor together with his or her profession business occupation calling and residence to be entered in the books of the Institution”
Table 1: Percentage of new accounts taken out by depositors in different categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>1830s</th>
<th>1840s</th>
<th>1850s</th>
<th>1860s</th>
<th>1870s (partial)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of total new accounts in each decade</td>
<td>2440</td>
<td>3156</td>
<td>3885</td>
<td>2633</td>
<td>1480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Male accounts (total)</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Female accounts (total)</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* widows</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* married women</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* single women</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Minors</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Minors</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charities</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-standard</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adult men represent the largest overall group of depositors in the Limehouse Savings Bank from its opening until the end of the 1850s. This would be expected given that it is not possible to disaggregate their data on the basis of marital status as it is for adult women.

At the end of the 1850s there is a marked rise in the number of married women account holders and adult women become the largest overall group of depositors. The presence of married women accounts in 19th century account ledgers of British savings banks is often overlooked given the almost exclusive interest in occupation categories (the only means by which adult male accounts can be compared) and overall account size and trends, rather than

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24 The Limehouse recording conventions allow for the analysis of adult women accounts by marital status but do not do the same for adult males. As a result the adult female accounts have to be aggregated in order to perform a direct comparison but are shown below in summary and disaggregated forms.

25 Maltby, ‘The wife’s administration of the earnings?’, 2011 is an exception.
depositor behaviour within categories. Where the emphasis in the research is on thrift then women are considered as a category, but again the focus is on women’s occupational status with the general agreement that female servants were well placed to accumulate savings and that this was an explanation for the large numbers of savings accounts held by women. Even where the account holdings of married women are specifically considered, as in Pollock’s study of the Bridgeton Cross branch of the Glasgow Savings Bank, the majority of the discussion is not given over to the data but considering whose money the women are depositing. Although Pollock ultimately dismisses the argument that women are acting on their husbands’ behalf, or are using money that their husbands have given to them as opposed to banking their own wages, it is disappointing to note how persistent the tendency is in historical banking studies to dismiss the idea that women were active economic agents in their own right prior to the passing of the Married Women’s Property Acts later in the century.

Savings bank regulations permitted married women to hold accounts in their own right. The wording that was transferred through all subsequent acts – and also to the regulations of the Post Office Savings Bank prior to the passing of the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 – stated that

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26 E.g. Payne (1967) focuses on occupational categories to the exclusion of all mention of gender. Johnson (1985) undertakes no separate analysis on gender in his broad survey of saving and spending, nor does his more detailed analysis of the Post Office Savings Bank look to the use made of accounts by married women. O Grada (2003; 2008; 2009) is more balanced in his treatment of women’s accounts in the Irish context, but again subsumes discussion of them in terms of account balance and the degree to which domestic service was an occupational category.

27 Pollock, Aspects of Thrift in East End Glasgow, 2007, p. 133. Even more disappointing is the fact that Pollock is responding to an anticipated, rather than actual, challenge to his statement that women were opening bank accounts in their own name in order to seek an element of personal economic security.

28 Some advertising for the Post Office Savings Bank stressed the fact that married women would now be given the right to open their own accounts, but this was to ignore the facility to do by the ‘old’ savings banks.
…whereas deposits in savings banks may have been made and may be made by married women … it shall be lawful for the trustees in any savings bank to pay any sum of money in respect of any such deposit to any such woman unless the husband of such woman or his representatives shall give to such trustees notice of such marriage and shall require payment to be made to him or them.\(^\text{29}\)

Such written requests to the Limehouse trustees were rare. There are only two recorded instances in the period 1830-1876 of a note being added to a married woman’s account stating that the husband is to be allowed to draw ‘by order’\(^\text{30}\). It was a much more frequent occurrence for notes to be added converting an adult male account into what is effectively a joint married account by the addition of the wife’s right to draw. Whilst it may be the case that men were adding wives to their accounts at the time of their marriage in order to transform their accounts into joint married accounts, it is no means certain that all the cases were of this type. The practice of adding family members or unrelated persons to the account for periods of time and later withdrawing them, or of adding a named individual and later withdrawing the name of the original account holder is a constant feature within the ledgers throughout the period studied.

\(^{29}\) Clause 26 of 9 Geo IV c. 92, it is incorporated into the Post Office Savings Bank Act through Clause 14.

\(^{30}\) Ledger C, Limehouse Savings Bank, I/LSB/8 1831 Pages 479-480 and Ledger G, Limehouse Savings Bank, I/LSB/8, TH/8564/7 1856 Pages 1221-1222
Table 2: Percentage of accounts to which spouses were added by decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>1830s</th>
<th>1840s</th>
<th>1850s</th>
<th>1860s</th>
<th>1870s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wives added</td>
<td>1.14%</td>
<td>3.91%</td>
<td>1.74%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands added</td>
<td>1.38%</td>
<td>2.67%</td>
<td>2.39%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Married women also added their spouses to their accounts in similar percentages to those of men adding their wives, suggesting that the practice was more likely to be the result of decisions about convenience in relation to the operation of the account rather than indicative of a desire of husbands to control their wives’ accounts more closely. It is, of course, possible that some of the women that converted their accounts to joint married accounts did so before it reached the point where their husbands were added ‘by order’ but, even so, the evidence would suggest that the banking arrangements within households were largely consensual, as opposed to conflictual in nature.

Indeed, the ledger book marginalia suggests that the Limehouse Savings Bank trustees and clerks took the protection of married women’s accounts seriously, both in terms of enforcing the requirement for a husband to give written and advance notice of intent to withdraw the money in their spouse’s account and also in terms of the right to privacy. For example, in 1861 Mrs Emma Jane reported to the bank that her husband had taken her passbook without her permission and intended to withdraw the full 10s balance at the next available opportunity. The clerk released the funds to the woman immediately and retained the passbook on the closed account when the husband later arrived at the bank31. In 1845 an individual wrote to the bank

31 Ledger E, Limehouse Savings Bank, I/LSB/4 1861 Pages 521-522
asking them to release information about a woman’s account and the bank refused, citing the fact that ‘the rules forbid the giving of information about depositors and their accounts’.

The bank also showed a degree of local decision making in respect of the disposal of adult male account balances where they believed that there was a genuine reason to release funds to women, irrespective of the fact that they had no legal claim on the funds. In 1839 they allow a woman to be added to an account, without the express written request of the spouse, on the grounds that he is at sea and she has found herself without funds. Limehouse also pay the balance of an adult male account to his wife in 1850 on receipt of the information that she has been deserted, obviously considering that the deserted wife has a moral rather than legal claim to the funds.

The general account trends suggest that within categories of depositors, as defined by age, gender and – within the adult woman category – marital status, the distribution of accounts remained relatively steady throughout the period. The one increasing trend in the period is amongst married women, who were permitted to hold accounts in their own right and whose increasing numbers reflects the changing economic mix of East End industries, their growing economic activity and, I suggest, the confidence which they had in the savings bank to maintain their account independence as well as to offer some flexibility where there was domestic breakdown and/or disruption. The extent to which local banks could reach out to their communities and respond with an appropriate level of service was recognized in the 19th century.

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32 Ledger E, Limehouse Savings Bank, I/LSB/4 1845 Pages 1655-1656
33 Ledger C, Limehouse Savings Bank, I/LSB/8 TH/8654/2 1839 Pages 1110-1111
34 Ledger F, Limehouse Savings Bank, I/LSB/8 TH/8654/5 1850 Pages 169-170
century as an important determinant of their success and longevity; the commentators at the time thought conceived of service in very narrow terms and related it to opening times whereas the marginalia related to married women in the Limehouse accounts suggests ways in which local knowledge helped the bank’s integration in the community.

**Non-standard accounts 1830-1878**

When the data was collected for this research every account that could not be attributed to an individual account holder or charitable organization was noted as a ‘non-standard’ account and the nature of the account was recorded in more detail. Into this category were placed all the accounts opened and held between two or more people and accounts held in trust for other people. The joint account category was broken down into three further sub-categories: joint married accounts, joint family accounts held by adults and joint non-family accounts. An account was considered to be non-family if there was no clear connection in terms of shared family name, there were different addresses and the clerk failed to record the family connection, as was common when setting up family joint accounts e.g. Jane Doe, a widow and Josephine Smith, her niece. A note of whether the trust account was held on behalf of a minor or an adult was also made. Therefore where an adult family member held an account in trust for a minor in the same family it is recorded in the trust account category and not the joint family account category.

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35 See for example the reference to this by Galdstone, House of Commons parliamentary debate February 8th, 1861. (HC Deb 08 Feb 1861 Vol 161 cc262-7) introducing the Post Office Savings Bank Act. Available online at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1861/feb/08/resolution#S3V0161P0_18610208_HOC_77

36 This is a label within the data set rather than a category used by the savings bank or in the official reporting.
The existence of family joint accounts was an expected feature of the account data. Census data throughout the 19th century records households that were not only multi-generational but often included ‘spare’ relations as a result of the “vagaries of fertility and mortality” e.g. unmarried daughters, nieces and nephews, maiden aunts etc. However, joint family accounts never made up a substantial number of new accounts in the time period covered by the Limehouse ledgers. Joint accounts held between family members averaged just 0.4% of new accounts opened each year across the period, and even in the busiest years for opening family joint accounts only four were set up. The regulations covering the release of funds following death of an account holder allowed for the release/transfer of funds under 50l to the family on production of death certificate; as most accounts were well under this threshold there was no real benefit in opening joint accounts because of fears of savings being suspended in probate after death. As such the joint family accounts were probably either set up to help less confident or able members of the family to manage money, or to facilitate the flow of resources to a dependent family member.

37 Morris, Men, Women and Property in England, 2005. Morris refers to extended family networks in this period and the complex kinship relationships as ‘cousinage’ although his remarks are in relation to the networks revealed in the wills of the middle classes.

38 1849 and 1860

39 Given the small number of family joint accounts and the relative lack of fluctuation in respect of the numbers opened over the period this category of non-standard account has been removed from the graph data presented in this section.
Non-family joint accounts, adult trusts and married joint accounts

The more noticeable moving trends of the non-standard accounts in the period were in relation to non-family joint accounts, adult trusts and married joint accounts. The non-family joint accounts were not an expected feature in the data and, as a category of account increased in frequency after the mid-point of the century. The most common form of the joint non-family account was an account taken out by two or more adult men, frequently in the same or allied trades. So for example, in 1834 two shipwrights, in 1840 two labourers and 1841 by two watermen, open an account together although later in the century it becomes more common to see account holders with different trades. The ledgers also show instances where adult males and females, with no relationship noted in the ledger, share a joint account. In some cases we might surmise a relationship of trust – as in the cases where the male account holders are mariners and
away for long periods of time and leave their passbook in London with a sweetheart or landlady for safe keeping and/or money in the event of their death. There are examples of unmarried couples holding joint accounts presumably as a result of just these sorts of trust relationships. However, the relationship did not always run smoothly. Ledger marginalia from 1856 notes that a young single woman, who opened a savings account with a sailmaker two years previously, had come to the bank to turn in the passbook because she has not heard from him for some time and “wants no part” of the 30/ deposited in the account.

Where three or more individuals held the joint account a note was added to the ledger stating how many of the account holders had to sign their agreement for a withdrawal. In most cases this note would indicate that ‘any two out of three’ had to be present and able to sign the withdrawal notice. The deposit and withdrawal pattern of the non-family joint accounts are suggestive either of an individual who wishes to place their money beyond temptation and enlists a couple of trusted friends/workmates to act as co-signatories to the account to stop the main account holder from withdrawing the money on a whim, or a group of friends pooling their money and placing it beyond reach for an agreed period of time to earn interest on their collective savings. For example, in 1851 we have Charles Johnson et al from Mile End depositing 10l, leaving the money untouched in the account for over 12 months and then withdrawing the 10l 3s 10d (deposit plus interest payment). According to the 1851 census record Charles Johnson was 65, married and living with his wife, adult son and 17-year-old grandson. In 1861, Samuel Louttit et al, all who give their address as the Customs House on East India Road, deposit 20l and withdraw it over a year later after the interest of 10s 8d has

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40 E.g. Ledger J I/LSB/8 1855 TH/8564/8 Pages 1125-1126
41 Ledger G, Limehouse Savings Bank, I/LSB/8, TH/8564/7 1854 Pages 975-976
42 Ledger F, Limehouse Savings Bank, I/LSB/8 1851 TH/8564/5 Pages 283-284
been added. Samuel Louttit’s residence was noted on the 1861 census return as 23 Stepney Green, where he lived with his wife, four children and a servant as was befitting the status of the 49-year-old Comptroller of HM Customs House.

The data from Limehouse suggests that the non-standard account form (joint account and/or trust account) was being used in various ways to manage risk in relation to work and non-married relationships and also to build a form of do-it-yourself term deposit for larger lump sums. This latter type of account, where several signatures are needed to release the money, appears to be a work-around the removal of the adult trust fund. The data on non-standard accounts mirrors the changing regulatory position in relation to trusts throughout the 19th century. The 1844 Savings Bank legislation amended the regulations so that individuals could not hold an account in trust for another without the person for whom it was held in trust enjoying the benefit of the account, and a regulation was introduced whereby the trustee and the individual for whom the account was held both had to sign on withdrawal. The adult trust account was thought to be the mechanism by which that straw man of the savings bank parliamentary opponents – the middle class investor – got around the regulations re maximum individual deposits and created multiple accounts to benefit from higher interest rates paid out to savings bank depositors.

After 1844 there is a steady fall in the number of accounts held in trust for adults. The accounts do not completely disappear and even in the 1870s we see such an account being opened, but overall these accounts are used only to manage the finances of adults who are prevented from looking after their own affairs by physical, mental health or learning disabilities. A drop is also seen in the number of accounts opened in trust for minors, although the reduction is never as large as that affecting adult trusts, lags a couple of years behind and the accounts are still relatively common until 1850. The trusts established in the sample years of 1851 and 1861
are accounts of considerable longevity. Of the trust accounts opened in 1851 80% are active after 5 years and 57% are still active after 10; in 1861 90% of the accounts are still active after 5 years and 67% still active after 10. Only 18% of the total accounts opened in 1851 were still operational ten years later and this had dropped to 11% of all accounts in 1861.

Married joint accounts, which up until 1860 constituted an average 4-5% of new accounts opened annually, do not feature in the Limehouse ledgers after that date. Given there is no legislative or regulatory change to prohibit joint married accounts in 1860 it is reasonable to attribute the lack of new accounts after that date to the creation of the Post Office Savings Bank in 1861. The longer opening hours of the POSB and the ability to deposit and withdraw money from any post office seems to suggest that the reason that joint married accounts were created in savings banks, and migrated so quickly to the POSB, was that they were sensitive to ease of deposit and withdrawal and issues around access and location.

If there are middle class depositors that are using the savings banks to their own advantage, and helping to fuel the impression that the banks were not useful to working families, they are likely to be found within the non-standard account categories. It should therefore be possible to establish which account choices were ‘strategic’ in this sense by looking at the movement of accounts after the trust option was removed by the 1844 Act. Table 1 suggests that monies that were formerly placed in adult trusts as a form of term investment may have transferred to some of the higher multiple non-family joint accounts and, possibly, to the other account category that grew in this period – married women.

It would be precipitate to attribute the whole of the growth in married women accounts to households moving excess resources from adult trust accounts to married women accounts instead. 24.7% are not an unrealistic proportion of accounts to be held by this category of saver given the level of married women’s involvement in employment in this period. Indeed, Field
and Erickson suggest that savings bank data is probably the best indication we have of the rates of economic participation by married women in the pre-census era. In related work on the geography of adult female employment in England using the 1851 census Shaw-Taylor estimates that the rates of regular employment of adult women in the London registration districts that cover the East End to be 20-30%. As it is not clear to what extent irregular employment was recorded in the census the 20-30% figure will understate female participation rates. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the growth in married women accounts broadly reflect growing economic participation rates. Overall, taking into consideration the movement of funds out of adult and minor trusts after 1844, and the growth in non-family joint accounts that operate as term deposits, Limehouse appears to have had a level of ‘strategic’ middle class account use of circa 5%.

In this section I have suggested that if we look at the trends in accounts, rather than focusing on the social class of depositors, it is possible to discern what was important to savings bank customers. The crafting of a form of ‘protected’ term deposit account by an individual by requiring additional signatures was an example of savers trying to create a product they valued out of the standard offering. Savers also showed that they were able to use regulatory loopholes, where they existed, in order to exploit opportunities for additional savings accounts but not in numbers that suggested a widespread strategic use of the savings bank by middle class investors. Where account categories were sensitive to particular features – such as the preference for what was a proto branch structure through the creation of the Post Office Savings Bank network – then we also see shifts in deposits. Having dealt with the general trends across all accounts in

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Field and Erickson, Prospects and preliminary work on female occupational structure in England from 1500 to the national census, undated.
the years 1830-1876 I now turn to two sample years to look at account behaviours in more detail.

Sample account years 1851 and 1861

It is difficult to account for the lack of savings bank studies that examine pattern of use data. As long as there is an identifiable account holder and a reasonable continuous run of account ledgers then there are no insurmountable methodological barriers to the collection and analysis of this data beyond the usual hardships i.e. voluminous amounts of non-machine readable data and lack of time, money and assistance to do so. The methodological choices were therefore ones of how to select the criteria for the categorization of the data.

The coding system for account use is based on the number of total transactions on the account throughout its life. Indeed, this was the basis of the method used in two surveys undertaken on account usage by the Post Office Savings Bank in 1930, where accounts were grouped on the basis of having \( \leq \) five transactions, \( \leq \) eleven transactions \( \geq \) thirty transactions\(^{44}\). However, using total transactions as the criterion for classification results in a one-dimensional picture. Another option is to include the number of years the account is held (which the POSB surveys did not), which then is used to provide an indication of average account usage per annum. But again, the calculation of a ‘transaction per year’ score does not indicate how the accounts were used. In order to isolate different types of accounts it is necessary to compare deposit and withdrawal transactions and to remove interest additions by the institution from the total count.

\(^{44}\) Johnson, Saving and Spending, 1985, p. 98
Five types of account usage were identified.

The first account usage type is characterized by an equal numbers of deposit and withdrawals but only ever consisted of two transactions in total i.e. there was an opening deposit and a subsequent withdrawal of the same amount prior to the qualifying period for interest accrual. This account usage is labeled an ‘in and out’ account.

The second type of account usage also consisted of two transactions; an opening deposit and a withdrawal but in this category of account the money was left for at least two years. This type of account usage is referred to as the ‘lump sum’ deposit.

The next sort of account is one where there is a lot of activity but where there is no discernible pattern of deposits and withdrawals; as it was suggestive of an account being used to plan for and to respond to normal households contingencies in a short time period and it has been labelled as the ‘contingency account’.

The fourth category of account corresponds to a target saving behaviour where there is a regular pattern of deposits and then one lump sum withdrawal, presumably when the individual’s saving objective has been met. This account usage has been designated as an ‘accumulating account’.

The last category of account is where there is a single lump sum deposit and the customer withdraws from that initial deposit in smaller withdrawal amounts over time until the original money is depleted and the account is closed. This is referred to as ‘draw down’ account behaviour.
Table 3: Types of account use in sample years 1851 and 1861

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“In and Out”</th>
<th>Lump Sum</th>
<th>Contingency</th>
<th>Accumulating</th>
<th>Draw down</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>1851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>63.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>10.52</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>16.90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>69.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Woman</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>10.52</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Minor</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Minor</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>64.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.66</td>
<td>53.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint accounts</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>23.07</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>69.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.49</td>
<td>10.37</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>62.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In and out accounts

Sarah Williams has noted the difficulty of examining the beliefs and interpreting the actions of historical actors when the material on which we rely is largely that left to us by middle-class observers defined by their own institutional presuppositions.45 The context of Williams’ comments was in respect of religious belief, but they are also apposite to the motivation to save. Looking at the 1851 and 1861 comparative figures for married joint accounts (+18.73%) and married women (+13.87) it is tempting, if following the thrift narrative, to attribute the worsening performance of savers in those categories to the accounts being abandoned through apathy.46 Certainly as viewed from the Smilean perspective, accounts of short duration would almost inevitably have been considered ‘failed’ - the result of an individual’s inability to practice common sense, and a lack of willpower to resist selfish enjoyments.47 This is to view savings success from the perspective of the middle-class policy-

45 Williams, The Problem of Belief, 1996, cited in Brodie, Politics of the Poor, 2004
46 Johnson, Saving and Spending, 1985, p. 98
47 Smiles, Thrift, 2011
makers and advocates of working class thrift as opposed to the savers themselves. Johnson acknowledges this problem in discussing the 31.6% of the accounts sampled in the 1930 POSB survey that were used for five transactions or less. It is possible that some accounts were abandoned through apathy or lack of moral fibre; it is equally possible that the savings objective had been achieved, regardless of the short time period the account was held.

Savings banks did not allow for an account to be held with a zero balance. When the balance was withdrawn the account was closed, regardless of the savers inclination to save again using the same facilities. The Limehouse ledgers record multiple account closures and re-openings on accounts that have as many as half a dozen breaks in their operation. Where possible the clerk would start the account record under the original account entry but it is not clear whether this practice was widespread or consistent. Therefore the number of ‘in and out’ accounts cannot be considered proof positive of failed savings behaviour but could, as evidenced from other ledger entries of savers that returned to re-open accounts, suggest that some customers might have benefited from a distinction being made between a zero balance and account closure.

*Lump sum accounts*

As discussed in the section on non-standard accounts there is an identifiable number of accounts where the clear intention of the depositor is set aside a sum of money and to place it ‘beyond reach’ for a period of time. In common with the ‘in and out’ account it is unwise to judge the success of those accounts on the length of time that money is set aside, or on the basis of how much money is set aside. In the time period between the two sample years we note that ‘lump

48 Johnson, Saving and Spending, 1985
sum’ deposits that appear to be used to be put out of use in order to accumulate interest become a deliberate savings strategy of married joint account holders and trusts.\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{Contingency accounts}

The ‘contingency account’ is the largest type of account usage in both sample years and for all individual adult savers (i.e. adult males, widows, wives and single women). This suggests that savings banks accounts were interactive financial products that helped individuals budget and allocate scarce resources within short-term financial cycles. This is a very different use of the savings account than envisaged by advocates of thrift for smoothing out life-cycle risks by the incremental accumulation of funds over years, or even decades. The pattern of deposits and withdrawals is, however, exactly what you would expect in terms of low wage financial management strategies that were common to most working people in 19\textsuperscript{th} century London as described by White. Low wages resulted in a lack of ready cash, erratic savings and few possessions or ‘portable property’. The fact that most householders rented their accommodation meant that credit could not be raised against housing, and so was pledged against material objects or against future earnings. A lack of secured credit meant that the creditor loaned, or gave goods on credit, on the basis of trust.\textsuperscript{50}

For the poor and the working class short-term credit was usually obtainable at the corner shop and from the landlord. Indeed, landlords, wittingly or otherwise, were the main bankers to the poor. Rent arrears were built up in hard times to be worked off in good.

\textsuperscript{49} The numbers of male minors in the sample year is too small to suggest that this strategy can be ascribed to this category of saver.

\textsuperscript{50} White, \textit{London in the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century}, 2008
Many grocers ‘ran a book’, totting up purchases made on credit during the week to be redeemed on payday\textsuperscript{51}.

This was the reality of the majority of Limehouse savers throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Many of the deposits and withdrawals would have followed the cycle of the rent book or was cash put aside for the door-to-door tallyman, who provided clothing and other drapery for small weekly instalments at high interest\textsuperscript{52}. Shortfalls in the cash needed were most likely made up using the local pawnbroker who loaned cash against the few portable possessions owned by individuals – clothing and jewellery. White notes that as the 19\textsuperscript{th} century progressed the number of pawnbrokers in London increased, and the need for short-term credit that was the inevitable outcome of the ability to manage only short-term saving, remained high ‘despite the growth of building societies, of savings or loans clubs based on trade unions and church missions and cooperative societies, or the more risky local versions that mushroomed in pubs and working men’s clubs’\textsuperscript{53}.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid. ‘On your uppers’, para. 3
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Accumulation accounts

Arguably this is the only type of account usage that the founders of the savings banks would have recognized, and approved of. Accumulation accounts represented approximately a quarter of the total account types in both the sample years. There were clearly some categories of savers who were more likely to run ‘standard’ savings accounts in 1861 i.e. children of both sexes and single women, of whom a growing proportion were recorded in the accounts of this period as being in domestic service. The drop in the number of joint married accounts that were using accounts to accumulate savings (withdrawing them when a particular target for purchase was reached) in 1861 can be attributed to the drop in the overall number of married joint accounts held by the savings bank that was commented on in a previous section. Savings accounts were valued and maintained but the overall trend was not for long term accumulation to cover life-cycle risks but for target savings behaviour.

Draw down accounts

Accounts of this type were established with a lump sum deposit, presumably obtained through a gift, inheritance or bequest and then gradually drawn upon and depleted over time. It is not surprising to see widows as the category most likely to use their savings accounts in this way, suggesting a dependence on a lump sum inheritance or gift on which to supplement and manage their budget. Again it is notable that the use of trusts in the latter sample year has declined as a mechanism and that the money appears to have moved instead into joint accounts, although the small number of accounts exaggerates the apparent shift.
Conclusion

The research approach used in this study of the Limehouse Savings Bank suggests a promising alternative direction for historical savings bank research, one that reconnects savings bank history with the wider history of retail banking and allows for a much richer interplay between social history and financial history. By looking at the patterns of use by the Limehouse account holders it was possible to see the ways in which working families and individuals interacted with a standard product and standard service offering, sometimes adding layers of complexity in order to create a different banking product, or using the accounts to budget within a short term cycle rather than saving for a significant purchase or event.

From the service side the bank demonstrated that it was able to operate with some degree of flexibility and in ways that were responsive to the social context in which they operated. There is clear evidence of the importance of local knowledge and trust relationships, for example in supporting women who had a moral claim on money held in their husbands’ names, and in providing access to money when in need and the official account holder could not provide consent. There was also evidence of reciprocal trust e.g. when Emma Jane felt able to approach the bank to plead the case that her account balance, regulations notwithstanding, should be considered beyond use by her husband if she did not consent for it to be so.

But overall the account usage approach to historical savings bank data shows how ordinary working people were using standard products in often predictable, but sometimes very inventive, ways. These accounts were not – in the lives of these people – a mechanism for moralizing thrift, they were useful, and could be manufactured into financial products that some valued for transience and some for longevity, some for their flexibility and some for their rigidity.
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