



### Contact Email for January 2018

Over the Christmas period I have been re-reading Terry Pratchett's "Dodger's Guide to London". It gives a description of London during the 19th century. My thoughts turned to my Parents who were born in 1892 and my grandparents who would have been born in the middle of the 19th century. Pratchett gives a good description of the plight of the poor in the late 19th century but I began to wonder what was happening during the life of my Grandparents. I don't know the exact dates of birth for them, but assuming they were 20 when my parents were born, they must have been born in 1872 or earlier. In that year the Adulteration of Food, Drink and Drugs Act made the adulteration of consumables a serious offence. The Licensing Act was passed that limited the hours during which alcoholic drinks could be sold. Brewers and publicans were defended by the Conservative Party which opposed the Liberal government's legislation. In Australia a telegraph line was opened that connected Adelaide with Darwin and was then extended to connect with lines through Asia to Europe. All this was taking place 40 odd years after Comte invented the word Sociology.

So looking back at what was going on in the mid 19th century I discovered some things that I thought were very modern, were not. For instance, the commercial firm 'Source Perrier' started to bottle the sparkling water emerging from a spring near Nimes, in the south of France in 1863. Cans and can openers were introduced in 1865. 1869 the Suez Canal was opened. In 1870 Charles Dickens, who provided at least some of the background for Pratchett's book, died, and Henry Mayhew, who provided much of the rest, died in 1887. Both were social researchers but did not identify themselves as Sociologists. My parents were born in the year the electric light bulb was invented. However, I can remember being asked by a man in the mid 1950's, who had gas lighting in his house, if I thought it was safe to have the electric light installed.

Having got this far, I suddenly realised that the London Pratchett was talking about was the square mile city, and where my parents were born was in the villages that surrounded the City. My Father in Chelsea, and my mother in Battersea, both around 5km from the City of London. Both my parents could read and write, but I know my mother only went to school when her mother had a spare penny to pay for the day's schooling.

A quote from Lewis Coser (Masters of Sociological Thought, p9 with quotes from Comte's Positive Philosophy), reminds us of the influence of social history and its importance for where we are going.

*The social sciences, the most complex and the most dependent for their emergence on the development of all the others, are the "highest" in the hierarchy. "Social science offers the attributes of a completion of the positive method. All others are preparatory to it. Here alone can the general sense of natural law be decisively developed, by eliminating forever arbitrary wills and chimerical entities, in the most difficult case of all." Social science enjoys all the resources of the anterior sciences" but, in addition, it uses the historical method which "investigates, not by comparison, but by gradual filiation." "The chief phenomenon in sociology. . . that is, the gradual and continuous influence of generations upon each other, would be disguised or unnoticed, for want of the necessary key > historical analysis. A moving illustration of this was given in the "Who do you think you are" SBS programme, 30/1/18*

February Webinar date: Not yet decided.

*Alan Scott*, Continuing  
Education Officer: