

THE JECH GALLERY

Sydney's school photos

These three photographs of school children from the east end of London were taken at 25 year intervals: 1900, 1925, and 1950. They were used in his teaching at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine by the late Dr Sydney Chave, who gave them to me after his retirement. This powerful juxtaposition, demonstrating as it does ragged trousered slum dwellers in the 1900 photograph, some with no shoes, many with signs of stunting of growth or chronic respiratory infections, the group which in England was probably typical of the situation in which over 30% of working class recruits to the Boer War were unfit for military service, and led to a government inquiry resulting in the establishment of the School Health Service and a number of other welfare measures (top). By 1925, significant improvements in growth, development and health are in evidence (this before the antibiotic era and at the time of economic recession) (middle); and, in 1950, by now co-educational classes and with the coming of the Welfare State to England in the aftermath of the second world war, a generation whose mothers had enjoyed equity of rations during their pregnancies, and ensured what may turn out to have been the production of one of the most optimally nourished generations before the era of burgers, fat, and fast food (bottom). The 1975 photograph was not available because by then the slum housing from which these children came had been demolished as part of a large scale rehousing programme. Would the 2000 photograph show the early signs of population obesity and the epidemic of diabetes to come?

J R Ashton
Joint Editor

johnrashton@blueyonder.co.uk

