

## EY2010 Journalist Award UNITED KINGDOM

### Winner print/online

**David Cohen**

**Article title: "The dispossessed: Babies buried four to a grave - not Dickens but London today"**

**Published in: Evening Standard, 01/05/2010**



David Cohen is the chief feature writer on the London Evening Standard and author of the paper's 2010 Dispossessed Campaign. He was shortlisted for the Paul Foot Award 2010 for investigative/ campaigning journalist of the year in the UK, and also the 2010 Bevins Prize for his outstanding investigative journalism. In 2007 he was short-listed for feature writer of the year at the British Press Awards. He has published two critically acclaimed books: *Chasing the Red, White, and Blue*, a social travelogue about poverty, social exclusion and race in America that won the Jenny Crwys-Williams Prize for Book of the Year in 2002, and *People Who Have Stolen from Me*, which launched the Picador Africa series in 2004. He was born in Birmingham, grew up in Johannesburg and has lived in London since 1987. He was educated at Oxford (PPE) and later travelled to the US on a Harkness Fellowship.

Special report Tale of two cities

# Babies buried four to a grave...

## THE DISPOSSESSED

**FIFTEEN YEARS AGO THE STANDARD PUBLISHED A SHOCK REPORT ON THE PEOPLE LEFT BEHIND BY LONDON'S ECONOMIC BOOM. THIS WEEK WE REVISIT THIS HIDDEN WORLD OF PRIVATION. WE TALK TO THE FORGOTTEN POOR TO REVEAL THE REALITY BEHIND THE POLITICIANS' PLEDGES. AND WE HIGHLIGHT THE TEACHERS, YOUTH WORKERS AND DOCTORS FIGHTING THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE FRONT LINE. WE BEGIN OUR FIVE-DAY SERIES WITH AN EXPOSÉ ON PAUPERS' GRAVES**



**T**HEY buried the first baby at 9.30am. The mother clutching the small white box handed it to the pastor, who gave it to the grave-digger, who lowered it into the grave. Heads bowed, the mother and father clasped hands while the pastor said a brief prayer. Two minutes later it was over.

The grave-digger stood off to one side, but as the couple departed, he did not close the grave. Not yet. "I'll be back in 10 minutes with the next one," the pastor told him.

They buried the second baby in the same unmarked pit at 10am. This time there were no mourners present. Just the pastor, who again said a few words, and the grave-digger, who climbed into the pit and laid the second coffin alongside the first. Again he did not close it, temporarily covering the top with some green felt and loose planks.

For these are not normal graves. They call them communal or unpurchased graves – what in Victorian times were known as "paupers' graves". They take four children per pit.

"We have common graves for adults as well," the grave-digger explained. "Could be a tramp, somebody who hasn't got no family or money, the state buries them. We go down about 10 foot and then stack them four to six deep. "A coffin goes in, then a layer of bark, then the next coffin. But when it's children, like today, I find it hard to

David Cohen



focus. I lost a granddaughter once – that's all I'm saying."

This is not happening in some third-world state, but right here in London. The exact location: Islington and St Pancras Cemetery, where the penniless people of Islington and Camden end up.

Who knew we still have communal graves in London in 2010? Certainly not the £210,000-a-year chief executive officer of Islington council, John Foster. When I interviewed him at his town hall office, he turned to his press officer and asked: "Have we got communal graves? I don't believe we do."

I cited statistics provided by his own officers – 135 adults and 91 children buried communally in this cemetery in the last three years (more than one a week) – and confirmed that such practices occur across London, including our richest boroughs Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea. He looked shame-faced.

"I'm shocked," he said. "I see no reason why the poor can't be buried individually like everybody else." The reason, as so often, comes down to economics. If a person dies penniless,



a communal grave costs the council just £60 for a baby or £270 for an adult, as opposed to £1,400 and £1,725 respectively for the cheapest private options.

Islington found £1 million to refurbish its art deco Assembly Hall last year, but the small beer it would cost to afford these citizens a decent burial did not make it on to the agenda.

If Mr Foster did not know what was happening under his nose, what hope is there for the rest of London? For there is no doubting that his heart is in the right place. Uniquely among council chief executives, Mr Foster, now 61, grew up in care from the age of six and knows what it is like to live in poverty.

Yet it is apt that we begin this series of articles – highlighting the plight of

### THE FACTS

£191,000

Average bonus of a Barclays Capital investment banker last year

57 years

How long it would take a lone parent on jobseeker's allowance to accumulate the same amount

London's dispossessed – here in Islington because this is where the social-reforming New Labour project began.

This is where Tony Blair lived and it is here, at Granita restaurant in fashionable Upper Street, that he and Gordon Brown famously met in 1994 to plot their rise to power and allegedly thrash out the "Blair-Brown pact". By 1997 Mr Blair was Prime Minister and two years later he made his momentous pledge to "end child poverty within a generation" and to "halve it by 2010" as an interim measure.

"And I will set out our historic aim that ours is the first generation to end child poverty for ever, and it will take a generation," said Mr Blair, addressing a packed Toynbee Hall in the East End

# not Dickens but London today



## THE PROMISES

'If the Labour government has not raised the living standards of the poorest by the end of its time in office it will have failed'

Tony Blair, 1996

'We are determined not to continue down the road of a permanent have-not class, unemployed and disaffected from society'

Labour manifesto, May 1997

'A nation that leaves its vulnerable behind diminishes its own future'

Iain Duncan Smith, Easterhouse estate, 2002

'We must think in terms of an escalator, always moving upwards, lifting people out of poverty. And crucially, an escalator that lifts everyone together'

David Cameron, 2006

'The Liberal Democrats will invest more in education to give every child a fair start and break the link between poverty and low grades'

Steve Webb, Liberal Democrat welfare spokesman, January 2010

**Forlorn:** a baby's white coffin lies at the bottom of the communal grave at Islington and St Pancras Cemetery. It will not remain alone for long

with almost biblical zeal. "Poverty should not be a birthright. Being poor should not be a life sentence. We need to break the cycle of disadvantage so that children born into poverty are not condemned to social exclusion and deprivation. It is a 20-year mission but I believe it can be done."

Such a commitment was unprecedented, but Mr Blair believed we'd all be winners because child poverty correlated with our most intractable problems: high teenage pregnancy rates, poor GCSE results, unemployment and above all, violent crime.

In 2001 Mr Brown called child poverty a "scar on Britain's soul" and in 2006 Conservative policy director Oliver Letwin said his party, too, shared

Labour's ambition. Today that pledge lies in tatters. In London 41 per cent of children, 650,000 in all, live below the poverty line (defined as less than 60 per cent of median income), the same as 10 years ago. In inner London the figure rises to 44 per cent.

Moreover, the type of poverty children experience in London is more acute than the rest of the UK, with one in five living in severe poverty and going without basic essentials.

For such a rich city these are mind-boggling facts. Yet with a general election looming, neither Gordon Brown nor David Cameron talks much about reducing child poverty any more.

Fifteen years ago this newspaper, then under the editorship of Stewart Steven,

## THE FACTS

£3,500

Value of property owned by each of the poorest tenth of London households

£900,000

Value of property owned by each of the richest tenth

set out to document the wretched conditions of the underprivileged in the East End. The groundbreaking series of reports reminded us of the forgotten Londoners who lived in the shadow of our metropolis where deprivation rates were three times the national average. It generated a huge response – from readers and decision-makers alike.

Today, once again, we seek to take stock of where our city is headed. How deep is the problem? Is it solvable? The Joseph Rowntree Foundation believes it would cost the Government £4 billion (0.2 per cent of GDP) to meet its missed 2010 target of taking half the country's 3.4 million children out of poverty.

This is the crude cash cost of a stimulus package. In reality a range of poli-

cies would be deployed to put people into work but it helps to put a number on things.

Is this more than we can afford? Perhaps not if you consider the £17 billion of taxpayers' cash spent by the Treasury to bail out Britain's failing banks. Or the billions in bonuses to individual bankers. We need a vigorous debate and a new vision. In a vibrant, multi-cultural city such as ours, where we pride ourselves on our inclusiveness, the ultimate goal must surely be "One London".

But what our investigations reveal is just how far we have pulled apart to become a tale of two cities. A whole

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## Special report Tale of two cities

Continued from Page 3

swathe of society is shut out from London in a way that makes your head spin. They are the capital's dispossessed.

Take the case of 18-year-old Vincent Madubueke. He lives with his unemployed mother and young sister in a social housing block opposite the former Granita restaurant, now ironically, called Desperados. Vincent, who is studying dance at City and Islington College, has lived here for 10 years but he has never noticed Desperados not, it turns out, much else in this fashionable street favoured by north London's chattering classes.

**U**PPER Street is useless, he says. "There is nothing to do here." He has never been tantalised by the towers of delicious pavlova meringues (£7.50 each) in the window of Ottolenghi, nor has he joined the affluent mothers brandishing their £1,000 Bugaboo prams in the brunch queue outside Carluccio's because, until I point out these places to him, he had never even noticed their existence.

"I've never eaten in a restaurant in my life, except for a couple of times at the 'eat-all-you-like-for-£5' Chinese buffet at Angel Tube," he says.

What about the Almeida Theatre? As a dance student, surely he has been there? "Where is it?" he asks. I point to the blazing Almeida sign almost visible from his doorstep. He shakes his head.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that Vincent, who gained five GCSEs at grades A-C, is stupid. It's rather that despite living in this street, on his budget of £50 a week (just £7 a day) he inhabits a different world.

In Islington, one of the capital's four most deprived boroughs (with Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham), an extraordinary 48 per cent of children live in poverty. Like Vincent and his

**I've applied for 32 jobs but never even had an interview. After a while it hits your confidence'**

**Vincent, 18, from Islington**

10-year-old sister, most come from households where no one works, although the irony is that back in 1997, when Labour came to power, his family were better off than they are today.

Then his Jamaican mother worked as a housing officer and the family lived in Thornhill Road, 300 yards around the corner from the four-storey Georgian house occupied by the Blair family in Richmond Crescent. "Life was good," says Vincent, "our family had money, they were happy times."

But several things happened to plunge the family into poverty. In 1998 his father, a chemical engineer who had split from his mother four years earlier, left the country and stopped supporting his son. And the following year, his mother had a second child. Unable to afford childcare, she gave up her job and went on benefits.

"My mother is a fighter and I thought she'd easily get back into work soon as my sister got older, but she's struggled with her health and finding jobs," says Vincent. "Sometimes, if there's no food in the house and I'm hungry, I turn on her and say, 'Why aren't you working?' And she says, 'You're 18, you get a job!' "I've applied for 32 jobs but never even



### THE DISPOSSESSED

## THE STUDENT WHO LIVES IN TRENDY ISLINGTON BUT CAN'T AFFORD TO APPLY TO COLLEGE

had an interview." He looks down. "After a while it affects your confidence. You think, I'll never get a job."

Typically a family of three like Vincent's receive benefits of £137 to £193 a week, enough for basic food, heating, the odd bit of cheap clothing and phone bills but well below the official poverty line of £239 for a family of their composition. It's the kind of money Islington's middle-class young career professionals would blow in a night.

Islington's chief Mr Foster, whose borough is split down the middle between Liberal Democrats and Labour, says: "The cliché about Islington being polarised between the chattering classes and the poor is all true, but what makes us unique is that the poverty here is diffused. Rich and poor really do live side by side, often on the same street, though with little connection. That's our challenge, to bridge the divide."

But "One Islington" is far from being a reality. "It's still only an aspiration," he says.

"Everyone recognises that the best way to get people out of poverty is to get them into permanent, fruitful employment, but we've learned from the failed New Labour experiment that

### THE FACTS

**1 in 6**

Number of children growing up in workless households in London

**1.3 million**

Rise in number of people in low-income households over the past three years

**1.9 million**

Number of people with no or low qualifications – a quarter of London's population. The capital also has more graduates than any other region

**10x national average**

Proportion of families living in temporary accommodation in London

this is more difficult than we thought because people are less work-ready than we imagined. Also, poor parents cannot afford childcare and they can lose some housing benefits when they go back to work and find they're worse off. We need to address this.

"Our local target is to reduce child poverty by 10 per cent in two years but it'll be tough, especially as we expect significant cuts to local government budgets."

**V**INCENT, meanwhile, is hoping that a degree, ideally in dance perhaps leading to teaching, will be his route out of poverty. "I'd love to apply to Middlesex," he says. He looks defeated. Are his grades not good enough? "It's not that," he says. "It costs £19 to put in a UCAS application form. That's £19 I don't have. I must save up for months but it's frustrating not having £19 to pay for something so essential." Yet compared with others, Vincent is a relative success story.

From the window of her flat, young mother Jaydine looks out over shredded plastic bags dangling from the branches of bare trees and peers

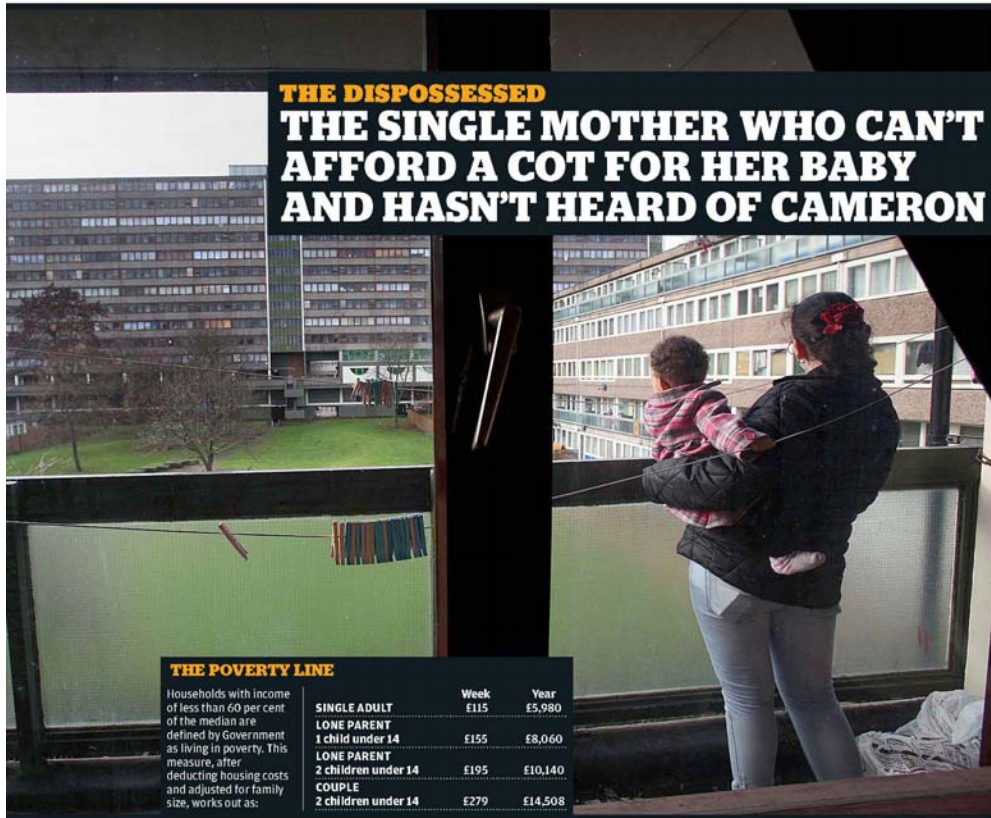
towards the light blinking intermittently from the apex of Canary Wharf. "One day," she says, "I'd love to go to that building just to see what it looks like up close."

Jaydine, 21, lives with her 11-month-old baby Terrees on the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, just four stops from Canary Wharf on the Jubilee line.

Why doesn't she just go? "Most of the day I'm exhausted because Terrees is teething and up at night, or I'm attending social services or jobcentre appointments," she says. But the look in her eyes tells another story. Because for Jaydine, going to a place like Canary Wharf is like crossing the border into a foreign country.

She is dressed in a £4 tracksuit from Primark. She has no bank account, no savings and lives in a squalid flat with nothing except a stained Moses basket and a bed with a plastic mattress.

Some old clothes that no longer fit her baby are stuffed at the bottom of her wardrobe, but nothing is hung up. The living room has no furniture, not even a TV or a chair, and two sheets double as curtains. Her kitchen is utterly bare. "Sorry I can't offer you a drink but some people broke into my



**THE DISPOSSESSED**  
**THE SINGLE MOTHER WHO CAN'T AFFORD A COT FOR HER BABY AND HASN'T HEARD OF CAMERON**

**Lost hopes:** Jaydine, 21, holds baby daughter Terrees as she gazes out on the wall of flats that forms the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark. Far left, student Vincent Madubueke on the balcony of his social housing block near the fashionable parts of Islington

**THE POVERTY LINE**

Households with income of less than 60 per cent of the median are defined by Government as living in poverty. This measure, after deducting housing costs and adjusted for family size, works out as:

	Week £115	Year £5,980
<b>SINGLE ADULT</b>		
<b>LONE PARENT 1 child under 14</b>	£155	£8,060
<b>LONE PARENT 2 children under 14</b>	£195	£10,140
<b>COUPLE 2 children under 14</b>	£279	£14,508

'One day I'd love to go and visit Canary Wharf just to see what it looks like up close'

Jaydine, 21, from Southwark

place and stole my fridge, my cooker and my washing machine," she says.

When? "Three months ago, I've asked the council to improve my locks because this estate is a [crime] hotspot. And to get me a cot for baby now that she's too big for her Moses basket. I've asked four times."

Jaydine's fragile position is not helped by the fact she is dyslexic and barely literate and struggles to fill in complex council forms. She lives off benefits of

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 Join our online What Should Be Done forum at: [standard.co.uk/dispossessed](http://standard.co.uk/dispossessed)

£142 a week, comprising income support, child tax credit and child benefit.

It amounts to £7,384 a year and puts her squarely in poverty – just above the category of "severe poverty" defined by Save the Children as less than 50 per cent of median income.

Her parents, both white and unemployed, split up when she was 13. Three years later, having dropped out of school, she left the family flat in Hackney after falling out with her mother

and went to live in a hostel. At 17 she fell pregnant and had an abortion. At 19 she fell pregnant again – by a man 10 years older whom she met at a job-centre and who is now doing time for burglary – but this time she kept the baby. It was a traumatic birth which almost ended in tragedy (and which would have meant her baby becoming the 28th child to be interred communally by Southwark last year).

She says: "Terrees was born premature with some of her organs outside her body and she had to have an operation to put them back in and save her life. I was told she might not make it, but she bravely pulled through."

"I was told it's common in teen pregnancies. Also she can't breastfeed, so she cries a lot, but she's worth it. She's the best thing in my life."

Jaydine moved into this flat in April last year after living in a dozen chaotic hostels and being moved by various councils. She was never in the same place for more than a few months, but to improve her position she applied for three jobs a week.

"I only ever got one interview, at Toys R Us on the Old Kent Road, but they interviewed 12 of us at once and took

**THE FACTS**

**£45 million**

Most expensive house now on sale in London

**£55,000**

Cheapest property on sale, a studio flat in SE20

**£25,000**

Week's rent in Mayfair penthouse renovated by designer Nicky Haslam

**£53**

Week's rent for two-bed flat in Bromley-by-Bow tower block

someone else." At one point she got so weary and depressed that she decided to go back home, but her mother told her she'd "washed her hands of her" and ordered her to get out.

She says: "At 17 I took my first paracetamol overdose. Later I slit my wrists and tried to strangle myself with my dressing gown belt. I tried to kill myself about six times. But that was before I had my baby." She smiles. "My child has taught me not to give up on life."

Have social services offered her therapy? She shakes her head and begins to cry. "My baby has had six different social workers in a year. There is no consistency."

"I made a big mistake leaving school so early and not getting on better with my mother. But I also feel let down by my dyslexia, the council who put me on this shithole estate full of crack-heads and this Government who don't give a toss about the likes of me."

Does she feel that a David Cameron-led Conservative government will be better for her? She stares blankly. "Who?" Jaydine, it transpires, has no idea who David Cameron is, or that a general election is looming. "I don't

really watch the news," she says. "At friends' houses I watch soaps. When I was young, mum would put on the news and I knew quite well what was going on. I used to watch Tony Blair."

She lights a cigarette and moves onto the balcony to smoke away from her baby. "Yeah, they should bring him back. At least he put up the minimum wage and talked of helping poor people."

Was she old enough to recall, then, the optimism of 1997? She closes her eyes and breaks into a smile. "Aah, 1997. I'd have been seven or eight then. That was when our family went to Spain. One week of sun, sand and beach. How can I forget it? That was the last time I ever went on holiday."

"They say you see the shape of a city from the shadow it casts but for Jaydine and those like her, Canary Wharf seems further away than ever."

Editorial Comment Page 14

**DAY TWO: A MOTHER RAISING 11 CHILDREN AND A SCHOOL THAT ROSE TO SUCCESS**

## Winner AV

**Katie Stallard**

**Report title: "Rural poverty"**

**Published in: Sky News, 01/01/2010**

Katie Stallard is Sky News' West of England Correspondent. Based in the UK, she is responsible for an extensive patch covering the South West of England and Wales.

Since taking up the post in 2008 she has covered a series of high-profile criminal cases, including the conviction of Plymouth nursery paedophile Vanessa George, and an exclusive investigation into the prevalence of female paedophilia.

In 2010 she became the first British journalist to travel to the remote 'Iceberg Alley' region of Greenland to investigate the new British Arctic oil exploration there.

Katie joined Sky in 2003 as a runner, working her way up through Showbiz and World News to become a London reporter in 2006.

Katie has a first class honours degree in English from University College London, where she won a National Student TV Award for her programme about the invasion of Iraq.

Katie is from the North of Scotland.

### **Summary: "Rural poverty"**

The beauty of this place is also its curse.

A beauty that lures people in, and prices people out.

A beauty that can hide real hardship underneath.

Unemployed Fisherman - Paul Carlyon: 'From living in a house to living in a car... and now I'm living in a shared house in a hostel so I've lost everything I ever worked for, basically.'

Paul Carlyon worked these boats for 20 years – when the fishing fleets were cut he lost his job, then his home, and finally his family when his marriage broke down under the strain.

This is the Cornwall you don't see.

Paul Carlyon: 'You're trapped. And ok it's beautiful on the outside, but on the inside there isn't a lot going, other than what you can see, there isn't a lot of industry other than this, and there's people going out of business in this every day of the year. And there isn't the support and the help really that bigger towns and cities and counties got.'

One in five of the rural population are living below the poverty line, but because their numbers are scattered and dispersed across the countryside we're not confronted with the issue.

Government's Rural Advocate – Dr Stuart Burgess: 'Poverty in rural areas is basically hidden poverty – it's not in your face so much as it is in urban areas. The scale of it is around 700,000 households, and if you brought all of those people together it would create a large city, so they are, if you like, the forgotten people in rural areas.'

Plumber – Graham Salter: 'This is currently where I'm living with my partner and my son, we have this one room, one half of the wardrobe for our clothes, and what you see around.'

Graham and his partner moved into this one room in his father's house two years ago - they've put their money into a community self-build scheme and should have been into their new house by now, but it's still bogged down in the planning stages.

Graham: 'It's losing the community – if people have to keep moving away the actual base and the history is getting moved on as well. I grew up here, this is my roots, and I have a 10-month-old son and want him to grow up here too, want him to grow up where his parents, where his grandparents grew up. You know, we shouldn't have to move away, we should be able to grow up in the area we were born in.'

Poverty means different things to different people: losing your home, losing your livelihood, losing your community.

The way of life here has always been hard, and the people are no stranger to the struggle, but it's what's going on beneath the surface that's now the issue – and the hidden hardship beyond the rural idyll.

The national winners were selected by a national jury which consisted of:

- Jan Krauss, EC Representation
- Elspeth Darby, NIB Representation
- Martin Benedyk, UK News Editor for The Associated Press TV department
- June Burroughs, EY2010 Ambassador and Founder Director of the Pierian Centre