

Gouaches/sketches by Estella Canziani on loan to the Museum of London from the Folklore Society



“Birds of a feather”: costers in gala dress in the Old Kent Road with a donkey and cart
1935

(Large) Gouache

Acc. 37.70/1

Loc. 33E

This depicts members of the Duckworth and Matthews families. Jim Duckworth, “the pearly King of the Old Kent road” with his wife and their young son sit in the central cart. Their young daughter, who, Canziani says, “loved the donkey,” stands at its head. Behind her is the Duckworth’s son-in law. On the left are their married daughter and her child standing behind the basket of flowers.

Bert Matthews with his banner proclaiming him “Pearly King of Hampstead” stands behind the donkey cart group. His wife, Becky sits in the second cart and on the extreme right is a figure, most likely one of her daughters both of whom appear in a 1950s photograph of the family. Canziani mentions that one of the Matthews’ daughters was about to get married when she painted them in the mid-1930s and a “son-in-law” is also mentioned. However, the Matthews did not seem to have a cart of their own and the cart and driver may be the mysterious and colourful “Jack the Murderer” whom Canziani spent six months locating.



“Hampstead Pearlies, donkey cart and girl”

(13” x17”)

Acc. 37.70/2

Loc. 59C

(unfinished drawing)

The figures in the “Hampstead Pearlies, donkey cart and girl” may in fact be Mr James Duckworth “the pearly King of the Old Kent Road” with his wife and their young son and daughter. The costume worn by the man corresponds to her description that the “coat, collar, pockets, lapels, cuffs were each bordered with a triangular design in black velvet edged with pearl buttons and this design was also continued down the middle of each trouser leg.” In addition the donkey is without a covering, because, according to Canziani, Mr Duckworth was proud of the harness and refused to cover it up.



“Bert Matthews, Pearly King” (study for 37.70/1)

Gouache on brown paper

(A4)

Acc. 37.70/3

Loc. 97B

Bert Matthews carrying his banner. Canziani noted that many of the pearlies identified themselves with banners that were carried or attached to the carts



“Pearly Queen and Boy”

(A4)

Acc. 37.70/4

Loc. 97B

This depicts Bert Matthews wife, Becky Matthews, and “Little Johnny”--either their son or grandson--who posed for Canziani in the yard of their house.



“Hampstead Pearlys, flower sellers and man”

(A4)

Acc. 37.70/5

Loc. 97B

This may also be the Duckworth family, namely the daughter and son-in-law, who kept a flower stall near the King’s Arms, Peckham. The flower arrangement corresponds to the details recorded by Canziani – green foliage first, bunches of flowers laid flat with “their stalks to the middle” and a few empty cans to give the impression that selling had been brisk. Canziani bought the daffodils and tulips used in this sketch, paid the sitters ten shillings each and offered them sweets.



**“Costers Harvest Festival in the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Old Kent Road”
1936**

(Large) Gouache

Acc. 37.70/6

Loc. 33E

The vicar standing at the right is probably Mr A. Barker who originally invited the costermongers to be part of the church service and put Canziani in touch with them. We know from Canziani’s record that Jim Duckworth read one of the lessons at the service she attended, but the other figures are harder to identify. The miniature cart, horses and farmer are clearly depicted. Canziani also noted that a group of coster children headed the procession, but none of them are clearly identified.



“Pearlies Harvest Festival” (composition study for 37.70/6)

(A4)

Acc. 37.70/7

Loc. 97B

The characters and the decorations for her finished study of the Harvest festival all appear in this preliminary sketch



Harvest Festival display (composition study for 37.70/6)

Here again the objects correspond to Canziani's description of the church offering. "A long rod high above the altar steps with supports at the side of these steps was decorated in hops and foliage, asparagus berries were twisted round and from it hung grapes ... Miniature sheaves of corn hung from where the supports joined the long pole and at their base stood large bundles of corn.... A large basket of fruit and a gorgeous orange pumpkin. On the stone parapet each side of the altar steps the beautiful plaited russet-coloured breads were arranged alternately with palm leaves and fruit."