

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

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Lives Remembered: Ambrose Barker and Ella Twynan

Albert Meltzer

1995

Ambrose Barker was active in the anarchist and atheist movements for 73 years. He came to London from Northamptonshire in 1878 to work as an assistant teacher at a Layton Board school, joining the Stratford Branch of the National Secular Society. He broke away to form the Stratford Dialectical and Radical Club in 1880, at which Kropotkin spoke. Barker extended his vision from radical atheism to anarchism at an early date. Between 1910 and 1914 he was associated with the Walthamstow Syndicalists, who met in the Walthamstow Workingmen's Club, which still exists. Barker is remembered there both as Club Secretary and an anarchist.

Many of the Walthamstow Syndicalists were in the Horse Transport Union, an anarcho-syndicalist union (not a breakaway from the T & G, but a forerunner) which decayed with the trade itself.

Ambrose Barker helped John Turner and George Cores form the London freedom Group (1930–36) and was involved in the Walthamstow Workingmen's Club 1892–1953 (Secretary until 1950) and wrote a book on its history. His companion Ella Twynan wrote several pamphlets for the NSS and was involved in

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the anarchist and anti-militarist movements. During World War I she was one of the international delegation which went to Sweden to discuss international socialist opposition to the war.

After Barker died she was involved with the NSS to a greater extent but came to the first meeting of the “Cuddon’s” Group, which later became “Black Flag”. It was she who suggested the name “Cuddon’s Cosmopolitan Review” after the paper published in 1861 by Ambrose Cuddon, Junior, who she claimed was the first self declared anarchist in Britain. A direct connection with the Chartist and Luddite movements, he welcomed Bakunin to London (“The Working Man” 1862, successor to CCR)