

Back From Jerusalem:

The Life and Times of  
Emma Hardinge Britten,  
Spiritualist Propagandist

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The Emma Hardinge Britten Archive

Version 2.1  
January 2012

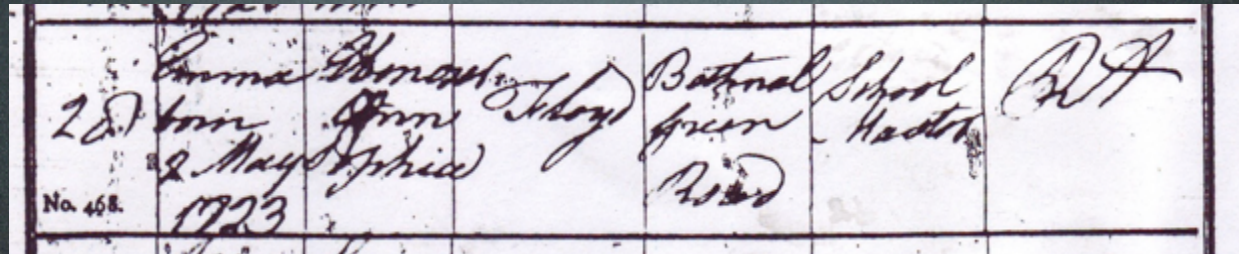


# Module 3

1823-1838  
The Dark Period



# 1823 - Bethnal Green



- Emma's elder sister, Frances Ann, has been born, and has died, young -- as did ~ 30% of children at this time (25% in London, 58% in Manchester)
- Ebenezer has become a schoolmaster, in Bethnal Green, which is becoming (but is not, as yet) among the worst of the slums associated with the "great wen" of London



Bethnal Green c. 1820 - still mostly open fields



A Bethnal Green garret - room for a family of 10, circa 1860



## 1823 - Bethnal Green

“Bethnal Green, Middlesex, once a hamlet of Stepney, from which it was separated in 1743, and formed into a distinct parish....[includes an] old mansion, now called Bethnal-Green House, [which] was built in the reign of Elizabeth, by Mr. Kirby, a citizen of London, and is still called in the writings Kirby Castle. It is now the property of James Stratton, Esq., and has been long appropriated for the reception of insane persons. A considerable increase of building has been made of late years in this neighborhood, and a **neat chapel, with schools for converted Jews**, has been erected.

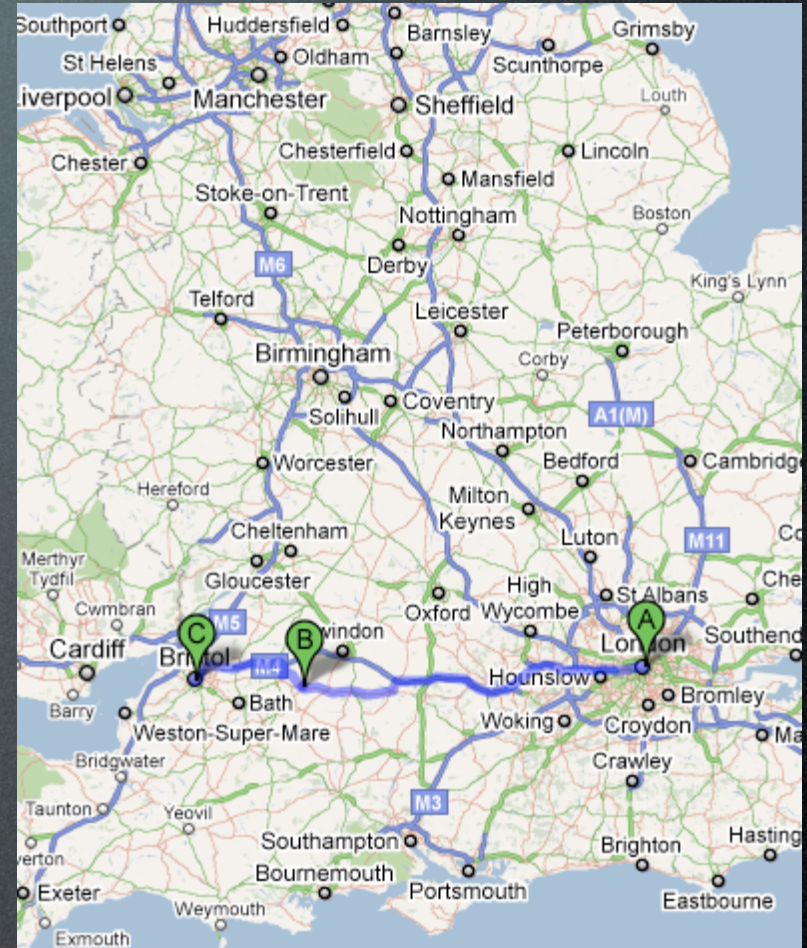
John Bew, The Ambulator, or a Stranger's Guide for a Tour Round London (1820), p. 29.

- The Episcopal Jews' School - a place of worship and education for the children of voluntarily-converted (?) Jewish families. Funded by the London Jews' Society (established 1808).
- Contained 38 boys and 44 girls, in 1832 - they were transported from “all over London” to attend school here
- Associated with “missions to the Jews”



# 1823-1833 - The Children & Their Christenings

- Emma -- 1823 -- London (A)
- Thomas -- 1826 -- Calne (B)
- Margaret -- 1830 -- Bristol (C)
- Ebenezer is variously
  - Schoolmaster, then
  - Boatman (?), then
  - Apothecary (at a time when this occupation required several years' apprenticeship)



What drew  
them westward?



# 1830s - Bristol



*C. Burton, del.*

*R. Carverright-Lithog.*

QUEEN SQUARE.

*On the Night of Oct. 30, 1831.*

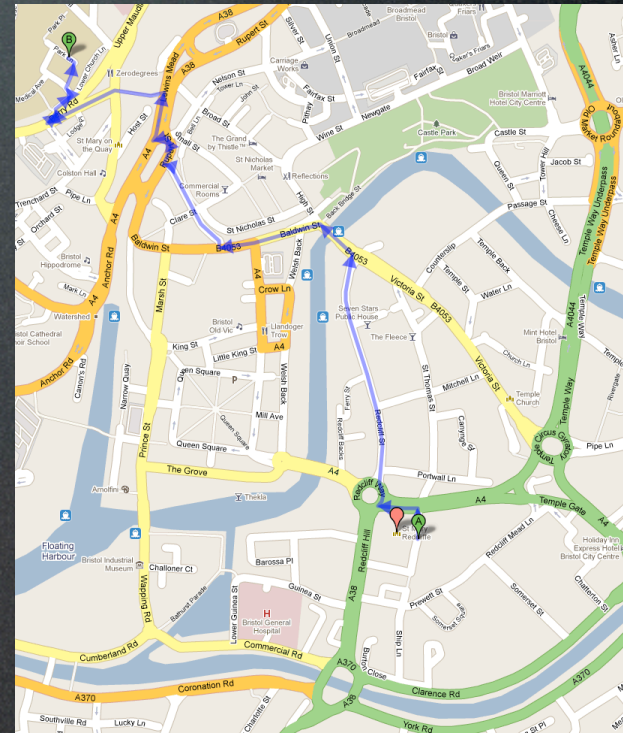


# 1830s - Bristol

- Well-educated and politically active urban working class, making full use of the emerging machinery for organization, propagandizing and -- when necessary -- destruction
- Intensely prosperous in the late 1820s and early 1830s, and intensely unstable
- Traditionally, an area dense in folk-occult practices, particularly astrology
- (Relatively) cosmopolitan -- wide class spectrum, international influences
- Emma and family are probably living in the Redcliffe area, near the world-famous floating harbor... surrounded by members of Ebenezer Floyd's family and their children



John Sell Cotman, St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol (c. 1805)



(A) St. Mary Redcliffe ; (B) St. Michael on the Mount Without



## 1834 - Ebenezer Dies

- May 5, 1834
- Emma is 9
- Thomas is 6
- Margaret is 2

...Bridegroom is 34, of the Clerk's Office.  
**DIED.**  
Lately, in this city, Mr. Ebenezer Floyd, formerly of Minehead, Somerset.  
April 21, at Jersey, after a protracted illness, Phillis, wife of Lieutenant William Mansell, B.N., and only daughter of Joseph Horsford, Esq., of Weymouth, aged 24.  
April 22, Mr. John Hodge, of Crewkerne.  
April 23, at Stoke Rivers Parsonage, aged 71, the Rev. Charles Hiern, upwards of 42 years rector of Stoke Rivers and Henshaw, Devon.  
At 11.30, at his residence, Blandford, Devon, aged 82, the Rev.

- Ebenezer is of sufficient stature to warrant a death notice in the papers of the area (at least 3) -- this is important, but we do not know what it **means**
- Ann Sophia is in her late 30s or early 40s, depending on how we date her birth, of very limited practical skills, and possibly estranged from her family, whose wealth may or may not be deteriorating anyway...
- This is an unmitigated, horrific disaster.
- And then, a cholera epidemic sweeps through Bristol in the summer of 1834...



## 1834 - Ebenezer Dies

I am quite sure I suffered the bitterness of death when my good father, to whom I was passionately attached, passed away from earth. With a breaking heart, I, a little eleven-years-old child, was sent out to earn my bread as a pupil-teacher of music. Hating my life, and longing to join my father -- somewhere, anywhere with him -- I resolved to follow him, and thus I stood one dark night by the river's brink, and was only saved from seeking a winding sheet in the Avon's depths at Bristol, by the sound of my dead father's voice bidding me return to school, and leading me back, as I distinctly felt, by the hand. To me it seemed as if I had died then...

EHB, Autobiography (1900)

- In some respects, this is the truest statement Emma made about herself, and her childhood, throughout her long and contradictory life
- Whether Ebenezer called her back from the brink in 1834, and whether he later became one of her spirit guides (as she would claim) is beyond knowing
- But his death left her, at 13, the only economically competent member of her family



## 1838 - March 16

“The Charity Trustees met yesterday, when several applications from descendants of Alderman Robert Kitchen were read and referred to a committee. Several charitable donations, to poor prisoners in Newgate, were ordered to be distributed by such members of the board as are magistrates of the borough. Notices for the purchase of some land in Congresbury by the Exeter Railway Company were referred to the solicitor. An advertisement [sic] was ordered for tenders for some building at Week St. Lawrence and another for provisions &c., for the schools. The applications for the office of housekeeper to the city school were then taken into consideration, and the election was declared to have fallen on **Mrs. Ann Sophia Floyd.**”

Bristol Mercury, March 17, 1838

- This is the only known occupation ever held by Ann Sophia Bromfield Floyd - a “gift” living as a housekeeper at a charity school for boys
- And it, too, represented a disaster -- for entirely different, and psychic, reasons...
- And it was short-lived: at best, a year or two
  - Emma feels the pressure: to earn.



1838 -- November 28

"A young lady, named Miss Floyd, made a very promising debut; she possesses a voice of more than ordinary sweetness and flexibility, and of great compass, and, judging from the manner in which, under all the disadvantages of a first appearance, she executed some very difficult passages in the music assigned to her, we should say she will prove a valuable acquisition to the musical profession."

Bristol Mercury, November 29, 1838

On stage, Miss Floyd...

In print, E(rnest)  
Reinhold  
(EHB's first pseudonym,  
at age 15)



## SACRED MUSIC.

ASSEMBLY-ROOMS, PRINCE'S STREET, BRISTOL.

For the Benefit of the Survivor of the *BLIND BROTHERS*,  
**N. B. WILLIAMS,**

**W**HO most respectfully begs leave to announce to the Nobility and Gentry of Bristol, Clifton, and their Vicinities, that, in accordance with the wishes of his Friends, his

### ANNUAL CONCERT,

OF SACRED MUSIC,

Will be Gratuitously Performed at the above Rooms, on WEDNESDAY Evening, Nov. 28, from *HANDEL'S GRAND DETTINGEN TE DEUM*, the *Oratorios of Israel in Egypt, Joshua, Judas Maccabeus, Samson, &c.*, with his *Grand CORONATION ANTHEM*. "God save the Queen." Likewise selections from the Works of *Haydn and Mozart*; to which may be added the names of *Boyce, Arne, Guglielmi, Welsh, &c.*

PRINCIPAL VOCAL PERFORMERS:

Mrs. PENLEY (of the Bath & Bristol Philharmonic Concerts,)

Mrs. E. LODER,

(Of the Bath & Bristol Philharmonic & Nobilities' Concerts;)

Miss SULLIVAN;

Miss FLOYD, (her first appearance in public);

Mr. MILLAR, (Principal Tenor Singer at the English Opera House & Bath Concerts); and

Mr. T. MACHIN.

The Band will comprise the Bristol Lyric Society, and will be led by Mr. H. C. COOPER.

Conductor - - - Mr. G. EDWARDS.

In the course of the Evening, Mr. COOPER will play a *CONCERTO on the VIOLIN*;

Mr. W. S. PRATTEN will play with Mr. COOPER a **GRAND CONCERTANTE DUET**

On the Piano-Forte and Violin, by *Herz and Lafont*.

The Chorusses will be sustained by the Bristol Choral Society, and the whole assisted by several respectable Amateurs.

Tickets of Admission—Saloon, 5s.; Gallery, 3s.; which may be had at the several Music Warehouses of Mr. Howell and Messrs. Hodges, Clare-street; Mr. Moutrie, College-green; Mr. Edwards, Upper Arcade; also of Mr. Gardner, 88, Castle-street; Mr. Walters, High-street; and at the Assembly-Rooms.

The Doors to be opened at Six o'Clock, and the Concert to begin precisely at Seven.