

# ILFORD

LIMITED

## Early Days and the Plate Factory

In 1879 Alfred Harman set up the Britannia Works Company in the basement of his house in Cranbrook Road producing photographic plates. Here he was assisted in the manufacturing by his wife and their housekeeper.

The business was a success and soon needed more space, so Harman purchased some cottages in Ilford town centre near Roden Street where Sainsbury's stands today.

Water is needed to manufacture photographic plates and a location near the River Roding was therefore essential. Employees working for the company as late as the 1970s remember these cottages and the importance of water.

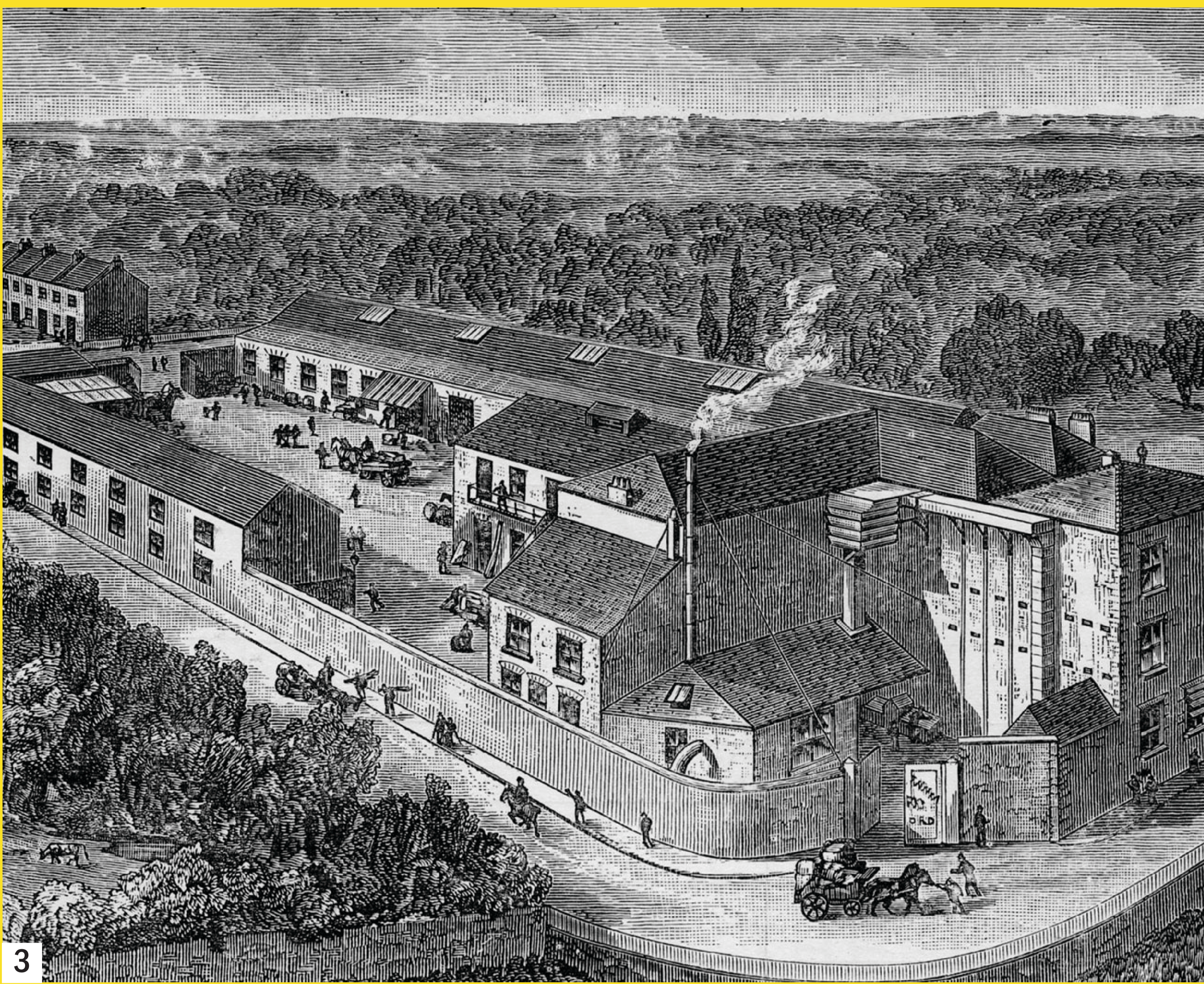
"... The old Ilford site was really dated, little brick cottages scattered amongst the technical buildings and the plate factory. Steam rising from the plate factory because they used water, gallons and gallons of water in the plate factory... probably for washing the glass..." Keith Davidson



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Harman built a specialist plate factory near the cottages in 1883 and in 1900 changed the name of the company to Ilford Limited. The company continued to use the plate factory, catering for scientific markets long after most photographers moved on to using film.

"The thing about a glass plate is that it's dimensionally stable, whereas a piece of plastic isn't. So if you create an image on a glass plate you can make measurements from the image on that plate or from projections of it, and it's dimensionally stable. It doesn't... expand or contract, or it doesn't wobble around." David Alcock

Glass plates are extremely sensitive and must be made in a dark, dust free environment. Ilford was the perfect place for making photographic plates because at the turn of the century it was a rural town with few pollutants. The factory was specially designed to minimise contamination of the plates.

"If you went to the plate factory you - obviously you were taken round by a supervisor if there was any reason you had to go over there - and you were plunged into total darkness most of the time and all you would say as you went: 'Mind me, mind me,' as you feel your way along... you'd see these tiny, tiny little glowing green lights which were little tiny torches with a filter on the front... it's the only thing you could tell where anybody was... Took ages to get your eyes used to it..." Keith Davidson



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## The Faces & Places

Pictures (top to bottom):

1. Unbranded folding plate camera c.1900- 1930. Copyright Creative Commons.
2. A selection of Ilford's photographic plates from c.1900- 1950. Courtesy of Martin Reed.
3. An engraving of The Britannia Works Company's factory at Ilford, 1888. Cottages can clearly be seen among the factory buildings. Courtesy of Martin Reed.
4. Glass aliasing c.1960. Copyright Redbridge Museum and Heritage.
5. Plate labelling c.1960. Copyright Redbridge Museum and Heritage.



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