We present a re-analysis of the material on which Cockney Phonology (Sivertsen 1960) was based. Cockney Phonology was one of the first investigations of urban dialects in England. Typical of the time, the study was small in terms of number of speakers and did not systematically examine language variation. Nevertheless, it has been one of the main sources for reference works on English accents, such as Wells (1982). Later work looking at change in contemporary London speech has used Cockney Phonology as baseline, although the lack of acoustic data has made the investigation of processes such as vowel change more difficult as these studies, e.g. Kerswill et al. (2008), have exclusively used formant tracking. Recently, however, Sivertsen’s original recordings have been recovered and digitised, and been made available to other researchers. Her two main informants, already elderly when the recordings were carried out in the mid-1950s, were born around 1890 and lived in Bethnal Green in London’s East End. Our acoustic analysis of phonological features provides an improved baseline for some of the linguistic processes that can be observed in London English today. Not surprisingly, the analysis of all vowels shows more variation than the system presented in Cockney Phonology. One of her main informants is more towards the ’educated’ London end, whilst the other main informant may not be a native speaker of English and has features of Yiddish in her speech. The data gives new insights into language contact and life in the area, which has been a centre of immigration to London for hundreds of years. The data also shows that processes of language contact have been evident in London speech for much longer than what have previously been thought (Cheshire et al. 2011).

Keywords: Contact, London, Ethnicity.