



From 1964, The Rael Brook company's head office and one of its factories was in Forest Road at the corner of Markhouse Road opposite Blackhorse Road station. It employed a large number of predominantly women machinists making shirts from a fabric called Toplin.

## Harry Rael Brook

The company was founded by Harry Rael Brook who, formerly had been Harry Seebrook. He had been working in partnership in Mrs Israel and her son Harry of a company named I Israel & Sons and changed his name in 1955.

He built up a company which was the biggest manufacturer of branded shirts in the country. The success of the company was based on the use of the material Toplin that he advertised as a non iron fabric and was promoted by a clever TV advertisement.

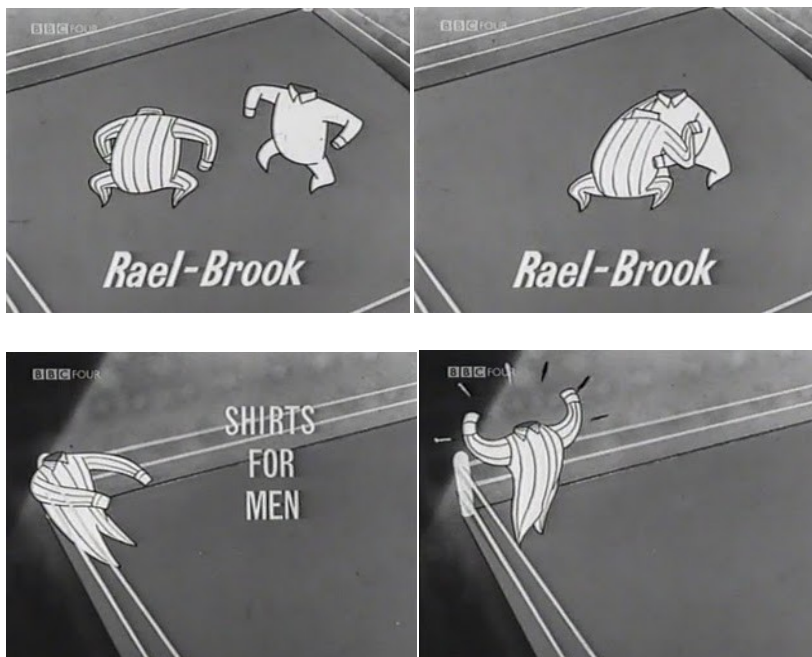
## The Technical Stuff: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poplin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poplin)

*Poplin traditionally consisted of a silk warp with a weft of worsted yarn. As the weft is in the form of a stout cord the fabric has a ridged structure, like rep, which gave depth and softness to the lustre of the silky surface. It is now made with wool, cotton, silk, rayon, or any mixture of these, though originally made from silk. The ribs run across the fabric from selvage to selvage. Poplins are used for dress purposes, and for rich upholstery work. They are formed by using coarse filling yarns in a plain weave. **Shirts made from this material are easy to iron and do not wrinkle easily.***

## The Dancing Shirts

Those of us of a certain age will never forget the dancing shirts and the annoying jingle that went:

*Rael Brook, Toplin, the shirt you don't iron*  
*Rael Brook, Toplin, the shirt you don't iron*  
*Rael Brook, Toplin, the shirt you don't iron*  
*Rael Brook, Toplin, the shirts for men*



If you really want to annoy yourself go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGilA8hM80>

The company was taken over in 1965 by the *Calico Printers Association* for £2.7 million and he joined the Board, In 1967 he left to go into business on his own.

## Management Buy Out

I don't know why the company closed the Walthamstow factory. It was probably because they built bigger and better premises that enabled them to manufacture shirts etc more cheaply. In 1988 there was a management buy-out of the Rael Brook and Southern Comfort brands and the group portfolio expanded with the acquisition of the Rochester Shirt Company with its David Latimer brand and Folkespeare, an up market tie and accessory brand.

The following site has a good picture that shows the demolition of the Walthamstow building:  
[www.flickrriver.com/photos/isarsteve/4618378789/](http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/isarsteve/4618378789/)

**Bill Bayliss**

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