



THE EAST LONDON HISTORY GROUP

BULLETIN

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HACKNEY - NEWHAM - TOWER HAMLETS.

EDITORIAL

It is pleasing to record the opening of the new £8m Blackwall Tunnel on the 2nd August 1967. It is 230 yards down river from the original Blackwall Tunnel now 70 years old. The new construction sadly necessitated the demolition of the Tunnel's original entrance of polished granite bearing the arms of the counties it links, and the familiar East India Dock clock tower.

This year is also witnessing the opening of the new Bow Bridge flyover. Perhaps some one will spare a thought at the opening ceremony for Queen Matilda. This bridge is in the vicinity of Abbey Lane, Stratford, where the ruins of the former Hunts Mill have now disappeared under the bulldozer (with the toll-gate post mentioned in the last Bulletin) in the new road construction. Hunts Mill is believed to have been the oldest industrial building in Stratford.

It seems a pity that after several centuries as public highways two of our roads are losing their status. Pennyfields, formerly part of High Street Poplar leading to Limehouse Causeway, is now permanently closed to vehicular traffic although still open to pedestrians, and East Ferry Road (known locally as "Farm Road") is apparently disappearing in the new Millwall Docks extension. This latter road is the pilgrim route used in the Middle Ages, at the southern end of which was the Chapel of St. Mary of Graces. The route has already been breached in the construction of the West India Docks, but the section now to disappear retained much of its mediaeval flavour.

City archaeologists are taking the opportunity provided by the road widening of Aldgate High Street (next to St. Botolph's Church) to explore the foundations of the Roman gateway. At the time of writing, the mediaeval foundations have been uncovered and we await further findings with interest in view of the part played by this gate in the history of East London.

Sir Francis Chichester's famous yacht "Gipsy Moth IV" drew large crowds when on view in June and July in Shadwell Basin. It is fitting that it should be displayed here where a number of famous Polar expeditions were fitted out.

Congratulations on the Centenary of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children, Hackney. We have gone a long way since the establishment of the Leper Hospital in the vicinity in the 14th Century.

A.H.F.

THE THIRST OF EAST LONDON.

The East End of London is well known for its pubs. The "Prospect of Whitby", the "Grapes", the "Waterman's Arms" and the "Gun" are names famous in drinking circles all over London. Less well known are the numerous quiet locals which exist on most corners in Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar. It would be rash to claim that there are more pubs per acre in East London than elsewhere in London, though there may be. But they are certainly very numerous.

Drinking houses have a long tradition in East London, an area which was once dominated by a marine population. How important was the tavern in the past? Were pubs even more numerous in the seventeenth century, when sailors thronged the streets and alleyways of the riverside hamlets, than they are today?

We can give an exact answer for a small piece of East London, the King Edward Memorial Park. This today is one of the few green patches by the riverside of Stepney. It lies east of the London Docks. Since 1922 when it was laid out it has provided a haven of rest and recreation for the inhabitants of Wapping, Shadwell and Ratcliff. It is a small triangular park bounded on the north by the Highway for about 220 yards, on the west by Glamis Road for about 150 yards and on the south by the River for about 300 yards. This area has not always been green. In the seventeenth century it was densely built upon. It was owned by the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. It was a slightly larger area then, extending west to St. Paul's Church in Shadwell. It measured about 350 yards on the north, 200 yards on the west, and 400 yards on the south by the River. When the office of Dean was abolished in 1649 the land was put up for sale and a survey of all the buildings was made. This shows that in this small triangle of land there were some 43 taverns!

They were most densely concentrated along Ratcliff Highway and along the road which ran alongside the River, a continuation of Wapping Wall. So crowded were they that some were situated next to one another and vied for trade. Each tavern had a name. The "Boatswaine", the "Anchor", the "Seaven Starres", the "Three Mariners" and "Globe" and others reflected the occupation of their customers, the sailors. The presence of Scots was suggested by the "Scotch Arms" and the "Sainte Andrew". Most of the names were ordinary and would not look out of place on a pub sign today. The "Kingshead", the "Queeneshead", the "Bell" and the "Feathers" are all, for example, very common now as then.

The taverns varied greatly in character. Some were nothing more than converted private houses, the downstairs room serving as the bar. Others were elaborate affairs. The "Bear" tavern near the River had several drinking rooms on the ground floor and several more drinking rooms in a yard at the back. There was another yard and two sheds used as cellars, and a third patch of ground fronting the River which might have served as a beer garden on summer days. Some taverns were built alongside the River, the "Dolphin" and the "Noah's Ark" for example, and they had their own wharves attached which were no doubt used by mariners and watermen as convenient access points to the taverns.

The impression which remains after studying the Survey is the sheer number of taverns. Could anyone discover so small an area with so many pubs today? Visit the King Edward Memorial Gardens and wonder at the thirst of the seventeenth century East Londoner whose appetite for liquor supported 43 taverns there.

Michael J. Power.

BLENDING THE OLD AND THE NEW

The face and shape of East London is changing rapidly. Most of us, as responsible citizens, have a civic duty to support the various borough councils and the G.L.C. with their various schemes to eradicate the numerous slums which abound in East London and to replace them with modern houses and flats, planned in pleasant surroundings, so that East Londoners can be proud of the area in which they live and not ashamed, or indifferent, as most have been in the past.

But we must not give this support uncritically. Many mistakes have been made (some early post-war housing schemes already look like potential slums) and no doubt many more will be made before East Londoners are adequately rehoused. Members of the East London History Group have a double responsibility in this connection. We should not only approve of these development schemes, but with our knowledge of local history try to preserve the little we have left of 17th and 18th century buildings in Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets, some of them fine examples of the best period of British domestic architecture.

We must try, if possible, to have these buildings and houses incorporated into the new plans, so that they can be useful as well as ornamental, and we must ensure that they are not torn down indiscriminately without a strong protest from us. Just over a year ago, some beautiful houses in Folgate St., of the Queen Anne period, were knocked down and turned into a car park for Spitalfields Market. Now Elder Street is threatened - part of it has already been demolished. You will probably have noted the remarks of our Chairman in the "DAILY TELEGRAPH" on the 7th August. Practically the whole of Wellclose Square has been razed. Thomas Day's house (the author of Sandford & Merton) and the small terrace of early 18th Century houses, which includes an old Court House with a fine carved staircase, is badly damaged. This could still have a useful life if put into good order - it is structurally sound. Swedenborg Square has practically disappeared.

A very handsome 18th Century door surround at No. 34 Alie St., decorated with flying cherubs and floral designs, one of the best in Stepney, was sliced off and replastered flat to make way for a betting shop. To help it on its way to destruction it later received a petrol bomb from some enterprising competitor. A fine early 18th Century shopfront in Artillery Lane (quoted by the "DAILY TELEGRAPH" only a short while ago as one of the best shop fronts of that period extant in London) is threatened. There is even a rumour that the Whitechapel Bell Foundry was due for the planners axe. One could quote many examples, both real and rumoured. It would be untrue to say that nothing is being done to save any historic or beautiful building locally. The early 18th Century Drapers Almshouses in Priscilla Road, Bow, are to be re-erected elsewhere. Repairs and remodelling are taking place at No. 66 Leman St. - a late 17th Century house - let us hope they make a good job of it. Efforts are being made by the G.L.C. to save the Old Mahogany Bar (Wilton's Music Hall) with a view to blending it into their plans for Wellclose Square.

But, generally speaking, the picture is one of destruction and very little or artistic or historic merit is being saved. I believe that, in view of its pre-eminent local knowledge, the East London History Group should protest more strongly than it has done in the past.

David Grannick.

GREENCOAT SCHOOL.

Founded in 1710, the Greencoat School (the Hamlet of Ratcliff School earlier known as the Radcliffe Charity School) in Whitehorse Street, Stepney, was among the first schools founded for the education of the poor. This arose from a resolution adopted by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge which stated in 1699 :

"The visible decay of religion in this Kingdom with the monstrous increase of deism, prophaneness, and vice, has excited the zeal of several persons of the best character to consult together how to put a stop to so fatal an inundation. The cause thereof, they believe, in great measure, to arise from the barbarous ignorance observable among the common people, especially those of the poorer sort..... and from want of due care in the education of the youth, who if early instructed in the principles of true religion could not possibly degenerate into such vile and unchristian practices as they now generally do."

The original intention of the founders was to educate fifty poor boys but in 1723 a girls' section was added. The school originally met in a converted house, but a school-house was erected in 1720 on a plot of freehold land. This was pulled down in 1853 and the present buildings erected. The stone statues of the boy and girl now to be seen on each side of the entrance were carved by a Mr. Dean in 1759.

One day a year was set aside as "Walking Day" (Beating the bounds) when the children walked in procession around the boundaries of the Hamlet. It became the custom for the procession to refresh itself at various intervals and in 1802 the Master complained that several of the children and their parents "got intoxicated at the Green Dragon and otherwise misbehaved themselves", and he expressed the wish that the practice of going into any tavern during the perambulation might be discontinued as it was injurious to their morals "besides damaging their new clothes". The wish was accordingly granted.

In the year 1833, Mr. Brown attended a Meeting of the Managers, and solicited the favour of his son, Willie, being permitted to be absent from School every Tuesday and Friday to assist him in shaving the sick patients in the London Hospital on these days. The request was granted.

On Wednesday, January 30th, 1850, the School was given a day's holiday. The entry in the Attendance Register reads "Holy-day being the day of Martyrdom of the Blessed King Charles the First; to implore the mercy of God, that neither the guilt of that sacred and innocent blood nor those other sins, by which God was provoked to deliver up both us and our king into the hands of cruel, unreasonable men, may at any time hereafter be visited upon us or our posterity."

INCENTIVIS TO THE STUDY OF LOCAL HISTORY.

"The main framework of the Survey (Stow's) was based on a perambulation of the several Wards of the City. . . every Church was visited, and all noteworthy monuments carefully described . . . He did not scorn to question the oldest inhabitant on the history of a forgotten or nameless grave, or to cross-examine the host and his ostler for the story of Gerard the Giant." and went to great pains to measure the length of the pole and its thickness, to examine the ladder and its size in relation to the pole and the roof; and to look up the "Chronicles" quoted by "Mine Host" for further verification!

(Study the whole incident in Stow's Survey 1908, C.L.Kingsford Edn.P.348)

"If men loved Pimlico, as mothers love children, arbitrarily, because it is theirs, Pimlico in a year or two might be fairer than Florence. Some will say that this is mere fantasy. I answer that this is the actual history of mankind. This, as a fact, is how cities grow great. Go back to the darkest roots of civilisation and you will find men knotted round some sacred stone, or encircling some sacred well.

People first paid honour to a spot, and afterwards gained glory for it. Men did not love Rome because she was great. She was great because they had loved her".

(G.K.Chesterton, "Orthodoxy").

"To take the map of a given date and walk through the streets it depicts, and to note the remains of the picturesque and the historic, is a delight which only those who have tried to accomplish it can understand. It makes one love strange routes and strange places". "Not only the side-streets but the backs of houses should receive attention."

(G.L.Gomme - "The Story of London Maps". Geog.Journal,1908 May/June).

"I am painfully aware of my defects as a technical historian, nor can it be expected that this reconstruction of local history, which has been to me the hobby of a very busy life, can have the same appeal to others that it has to myself. I am, however, not without hope that some few of the many thousands of dwellers in the vast wilderness of poor streets, which in its time has looked on so many stirring scenes of action and adventure, may find in this attempt to make the past live, something that will awaken in them a sense that they are citizens of no mean city, and so give new breadth and depth and colour to their lives".

(H.Llewellyn Smith).

"The regard that the majority of men and women have for a particular locality is largely due to their personal association with it: by birth, by living there, or by having been drawn thither in the course of their daily employment. Among children there is shown a remarkable curiosity concerning the history of their own neighbourhood. With their own eyes and ears they learn for themselves a good deal of the current events, and with a little play of the imagination, retain their impressions which are subject to distortion.

In after years they recall and relate them. They are the carriers of tradition, the unravelment of which lays open the core of history."

(Sidney Maddocks)

Incentives (Cont.)-

"Living and working in Stepney for well over half a century, my interest has been aroused in its local history, its people, and its many problems arising from their living and working together in a much-congested, multi-racial, riverside area which borders on the City of London. Its past distinguished history provides a source of inspiration, stimulation, and interest to the rising generation, a potent force with which we might break down the apathy in civic pride and social responsibility which, at times, appears to overtake the area. To this enlightened end of stimulating social significance and civic purpose, our studies (as teachers) in the local history of the Borough, and its neighbouring area, might be usefully and profitably turned."

(C.Truman).

(Collected by C. Truman).

NOTES

There will be a Meeting of the Forest Group, on Friday, 27th October, 1967, at 8 p.m. at Lincoln Hall, High Road, Loughton. A lecture will be given on "Tudor Essex" by William Addison Esq. J.P., F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S. All members of the E.L.H.G. are cordially invited.

The Second Local History Conference of the London & Middlesex Archaeological Society (incorporating the Middlesex Local History Council) will be held in the Livery Hall at Guildhall, on Saturday, October 21st 1967. Mr. D.W.Massey of the University of Cambridge Department of Land Economy will read a paper on "The Suburban County - an approach to the recent history of Middlesex". E.L.H.G. members are invited and it is hoped to display a few photographs from the Group.

The University of London Department of Extra-Mural Studies are holding Lectures on London History, also Lectures for the Diploma in Local History at a number of London centres from end September onwards. They also have lectures on Palaeography and the Use of Local Records. Those interested should contact their local Librarian or the Deputy Director (Extension), University of London, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, 7 Ridgmount Street, London W.C.1 (Telephone 636 8000. Extension 103).

If these lectures do not appeal to you and you do not wish to become a TV addict this winter, drop a line to the Secretary of the Group, Miss Sansom, at the East Ham Central Library, East Ham Town Hall, E.6. State whether you have any particular interest. We shall be pleased to suggest a line of research, activity or study which will enable you to acquire greater knowledge of, and enjoyment of, local history.

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Our congratulations to the Hackney Society on their Garden Party at the Geffrye Museum on Saturday, 19th August. The weather was unkind but the members take heart from the significance their water supplies played in London's history. In the 16th Century, Hackney supplied 'sweet' water to the City of London (Stow) and in the 17th Century the richness of Hackney pastures produced such superior butter that they were able to charge nearly double the market price for it!

THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL IN HACKNEY.(Continued from Bulletin No. 3.- June 1967).

Coming to more recent times, we are able to resolve the earlier uncertainty as to what had been happening to Mrs. Audley's Free School for twelve poor boys of the Parish. In 1820, John Field had bequeathed £1000 annuities "to the Trustees of the Free School in the Parish". He died in 1828 and his son died in 1836, leaving a widow as executrix of her father-in-law's will which, presumably, had not yet been admitted to probate for technical reasons. In due course, the Committee of the Parochial Charity School applied for the amount of the bequest but she could not legally transfer it as there was theoretical doubt that the Parochial School was the intended recipient. Counsel's opinion, in view of the fact that the terms of Margaret Audley's bequest of 1616 had been adhered to throughout the intervening period (i.e. that the Schoolmaster of the Parochial School had received £20 p.a. from the Vicar and Churchwardens for teaching twelve poor boys) was that a judgement in Chancery should be sought as to the appropriation of the Field legacy of £1000. This all took time, as will be appreciated by any instigator of the due processes of law, and the suit was heard at length in 1842, six years after the death of Field's son and fourteen years after the death of the testator.

It was decreed that the Free School and the Parochial Charity School should be carried on together under the title of "The Hackney Free and Parochial Charity Schools" and that some distinction should be made between the clothing of the twelve boys, who should continue to be nominated by the Rector and Churchwardens, and the clothing of the other boys. The Master was to be elected annually. This judgement inaugurated the School which is known today as the Hackney Free and Parochial School. The building in Paradise Fields (now Chatham Place) dates from 1811 and is in industrial use. The Primary School building is in Isabella Road and the new Secondary School stands in Paragon Road.

The student of the history of the Hackney Parochial Schools will find many a pitfall, not least in that there were in existence also the Hackney Grammar School (1829) in Hackney Churchyard and the Hackney Church of England School (1830) to name the two which cause most confusion because of their nomenclature. The former was proprietary and undenominational and in the early years admitted fifty pupils, the Headmaster receiving a salary of £250 p.a. The Hackney Church of England School stood in Back Lane (now Clarence Road) and it was in union with King's College, its patron being the Bishop of London. It was a substantial building with staff apartments in the upper storey and "the school room warmed by the hot water apparatus upon a new and improved principle". In 1831, the year following its foundation, the maximum admission of one hundred and fifty pupils was reached, this producing an income of £856. In addition, one hundred and fifty shares were issued each with a paid up value of fifteen pounds, a total of £2250. Thus it is not surprising to learn that the Headmaster enjoyed the princely salary of £400 p.a., the Second Master £250, the Third Master £120, the French Master £150 and the Writing and Arithmetic Master £120. These two schools are nevertheless outside the scope of the present paper although intrinsically interesting.

(Cont.)-

(THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL IN HACKNEY. Cont)

As Hackney grew, the original ecclesiastical Parish of St. John was sub-divided and therefrom grew the ecclesiastical parishes of South & West Hackney each with its own School. The West Hackney National School started in 1827 with seventy boys and fifty girls, reaching a total of 302 pupils by 1858, and the Parochial School of South Hackney was founded in 1838 with between fifty and sixty boys and thirty girls. Before these, and standing slightly apart was Ram's Episcopal Chapel School at Homerton (1801) and this School was founded "to admit thirty-five sons of parishioners unable to pay for schooling".

Thus we see something of the broad pattern of parochial education in early Hackney, sometimes uncertain and at other times proceeding more surely with increasing financial support as the population increases and more "substantial householders" make their home in the shadow of Hackney's mediaeval tower.

S. C. Tongue.

 DID YOU KNOW THAT :

House prefabrication was carried on as early as 1505. Local bricks, made in Whitechapel and Limehouse, were used to build walls on which complete timber frames, made at Maldon, Essex, were set ?

A coal merchant ran all the way from Billingsgate to Wapping in 1591 leaving the five bushels of coals he had tried to sell as eight, without waiting for any money, when an irate housewife turned upon him and threatened to take him "before my Lord Maior" ?

Manor Way, which connects East Ham with the River, is probably on the line of a Roman road constructed to facilitate the building of embankments. When the Outfall Sewer was being constructed in 1863, a number of Roman coffins were found close to the road. These were deposited at the British Museum ?

Silvertown is named after a firm of Cornhill Outfitters, S.W. Silver & Co. who bought land on the River-front between North Woolwich and Barking Road and removed their waterproofing business from the other side of the River to this new site ?

In 1866 most of the people living at Bow Creek were employed in a local factory making glass which was sent all over England; the windows for the Crystal Palace were made here. In 1875 America came to the fore in glass-making and dozens of Bow Creek inhabitants emigrated to New Albany to continue with their trade. An unusual thing about this area was the large number of people named Lammin, Scanlan or Jeffries. The local schoolmaster stated that in the 1930's at least 100 children out of 160 admitted to the school were named Lammin, and that when a death occurred in one of the families nearly half the school were away for the funeral ?

A.H.F.