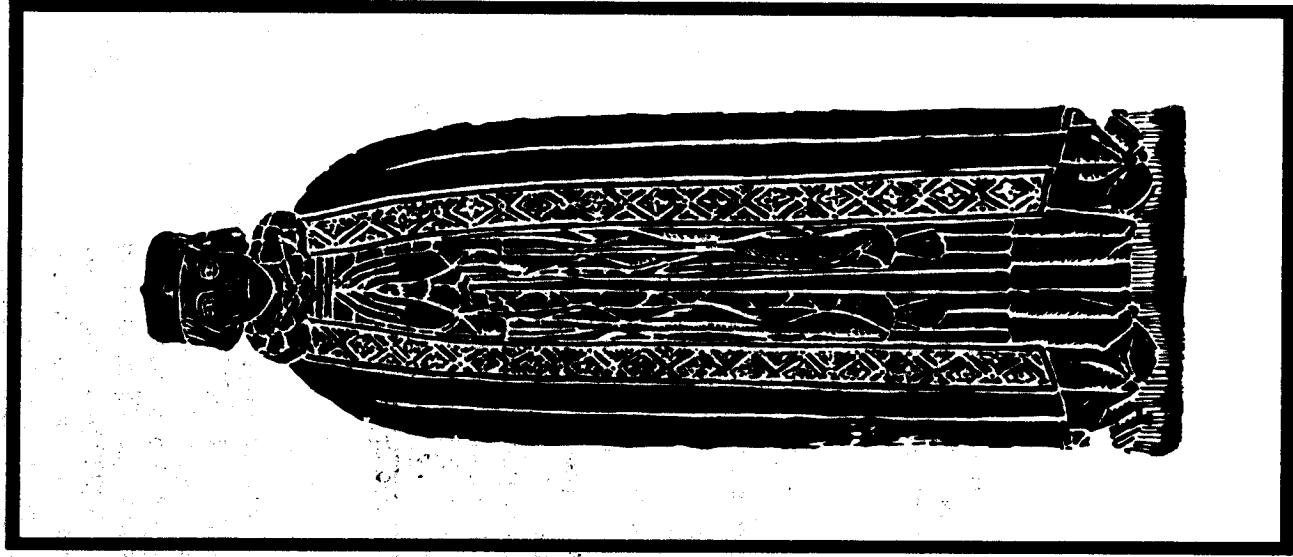
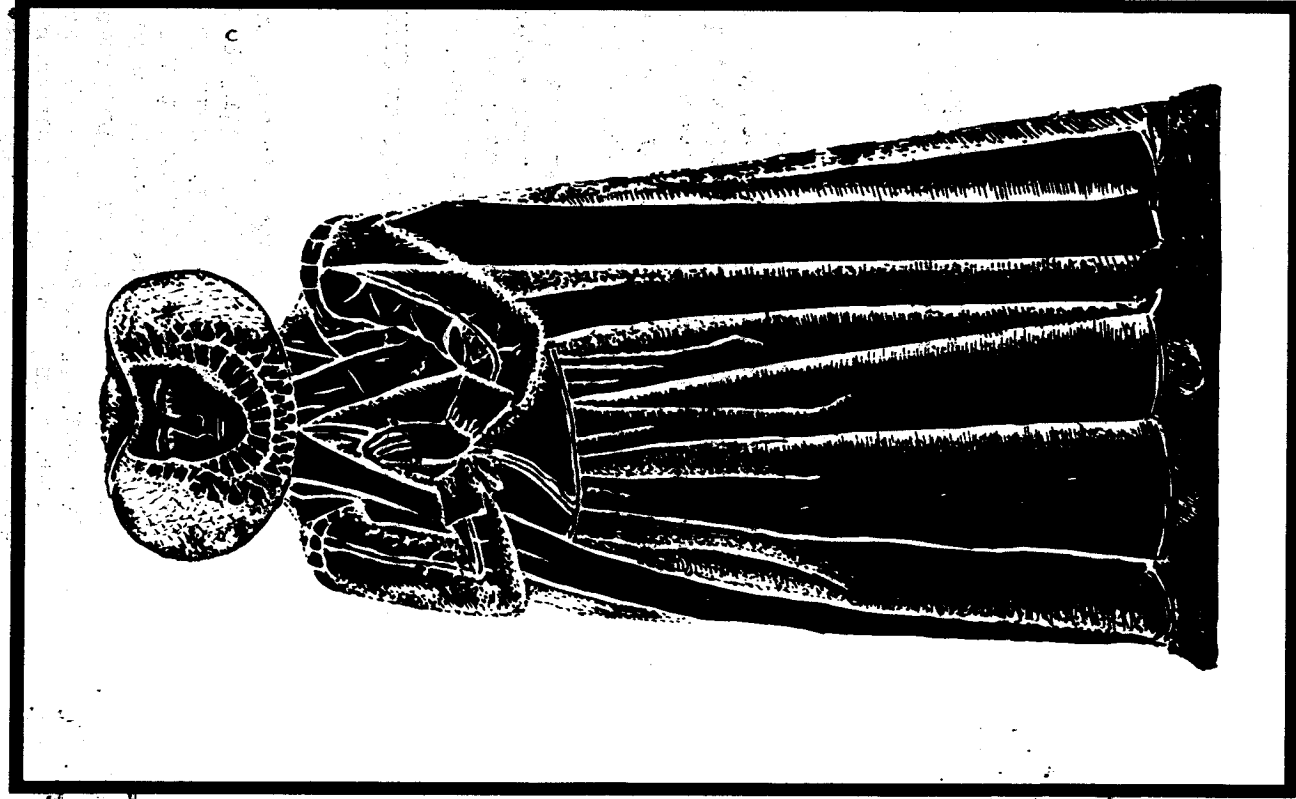


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EAST LONDON HISTORY GROUP

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EDITORIAL.

Since the last Bulletin, we regret to record the death of Miss Muriel Lester, at the age of 84. With her sister, Doris, she founded the Kingsley Hall, Social Centre, at Bow. She kindly co-operated in enabling the Group to make a recording of her experiences, only three weeks before her death. She will be sadly missed by her many friends particularly in East London.

The storms of the last few months recalled an article in the "Annual Register" on January 25th 1800.-

"The storm last night blew down the remains of King John's Castle at Old Ford, near Bow. This ancient pile was built in 1203, and was the residence of King John. Here, historians say, he plotted the death of Prince Arthur; here he entertained the Brabancon chiefs, and here he usually slept, after having signed Magna Carta. This place was first mutilated during the civil wars of Charles I; about 40 years ago the chapel fell, and ten years afterwards two wings tumbled down. It is now all levelled. The ground belongs to the Bluecoat School. Some curious coins have been discovered in the ruins."

This paragraph sounds as if signing Magna Carta was a common pursuit of the King! It was, of course, sealed not signed.

Mr. Kelsall of the G.L.C. Historic Buildings Section is seeking information on some houses north of old Bethnal Green, 17-21 Old Ford Road. It is believed that these buildings have considerable historic interest, though they are apparently not part of the Cass Estate. If any member has knowledge of these buildings it would be appreciated if it could be passed to Mr. Kelsall at WAT 5000, Ext. 7367, or to the Chairman of the Group.

Those of us who have been concerned with the possible demolition of Wilton's Music Hall, will be glad to know the Hall was recently used for the shooting of a film on Isadora Duncan featuring Vanessa Redgrave. The film should be out towards the end of the year and it should give a good idea of what Wilton's was like in its hey-day. Several ideas are still under consideration for the future use of the Hall.

Fill in the blank on your printed programme! Mr. Howgego's talk on "London maps and their makers" will be on July 6th at 2 p.m. This will be a rare opportunity you shouldn't miss.

Mr. Gordon L. Barnes' thesis on Stepney Churches, based on his talks to the Group and subsequent visits, has been published by the Ecclesiological Society. Copies can be had from the Faith Press Ltd., 7 Tufton St. London S.W.1. at 15/- each (and its good value!).

A.H.F.

HOW TO FIND OUT

It is only when one is stopped in mid-explanation for elucidation of a particular point - perhaps an abbreviation, institution, or a matter of fact - which one had taken for granted, that one realises how mistaken an attitude this may be. Therefore, the notes which follow are a mixture of many things which the 'professional' takes for granted and wrongly assumes his friends also to be familiar with, although for their part they are good enough never to assume him to be a master of electronic circuits, economics, hydroponics and the like, nor do they talk their jargon to him without explanation.

In the beginning

Generally speaking, the records which are preserved in collections large and small, up and down the country, may be divided into two groups - national and local. By 'national' is meant the records of Central Government since earliest times and these are housed, broadly speaking, at the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane.

There is nothing terrifying about this organisation. As a citizen, you have every right of access to these records of the administration of our country and, indeed, if you are working on your "family tree" it is almost certain that you will come sooner rather than later to the Long Search Room where the Census records are produced upon request. I will not detail the enormous scope of the Public Records for every Reference Library possesses a copy of Giuseppi's "Guide to the contents of the Public Record Office" (2 vols. H.M. Stationery Office, 1963) and the introduction is explicit. To secure a Reader's Ticket (temporary) takes about five minutes and the Permanent Ticket which follows, if required, is valid for three years.

Having thus summarily disposed of the public records from Domesday to date, we move to those which are usually of more immediate concern to the enquirer into some aspects of local history. "In the beginning" is the heading under discussion and for our present purposes the Church, as the mother of the Parish, is the begetter of many of our earliest records. It is unusual for Vestry Minutes to date from earlier than, say, late sixteenth century when the parish became responsible for the relief of the poor and the maintenance of such highways as existed, and in many parishes these records survive only from a much later date. In Hackney, for example, Vestry Minutes date from 1613 (an earlier volume from 1581 is incomplete); in Stoke Newington from 1681 and in Shoreditch from 1727.

In the early period such minutes are often pedestrian, i.e. they record relatively trivial details of nominations to vacancies in the Almshouse, pew rents and their holders, etc. but they become more informative as increasing duties are laid upon the parish by Parliament and, of course, as the community increases and presents further administrative problems. This is particularly true of the period from 1689-1834 and this is an era when central government left the local parish Vestry very much to its own devices so long as the taxes were forthcoming. The parishes of East London were particularly militant about

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such harsh enactments as, for example, the Corn Laws, and there was much coming and going between parishes as the Churchwardens organised joint petitions to Westminster on this and a score of other repressive measures, not least the almost innumerable and crushing taxes which were imposed in prosecution of the wars against the old enemy, Napoleon. Here also are details of the state of the church fabric, the election of the Churchwardens and, possibly, the Vestrymen.

Equal in importance with Vestry Minutes as a primary source for local studies, are the Parish Registers. These date from the statute of 1538, but since the earliest registers were written on paper and the act of 1598 ordered local incumbents to copy registers on to parchment "at least from the first of her present Majesty" (1558), it follows that the more zealous re-wrote their registers on parchment for the preceding sixty years but the less diligent copied them only from the mandatory date of 1558. Through the country as a whole, the paper registers survive in only about two per cent of parishes.

Obviously, a parish with a full set of registers from 1538 is indeed fortunate and if they have been indexed by a public spirited benefactor, usually a local antiquary, then the community and more particularly the archivist is indeed blessed, for fifty per cent of local history enquiries received from England and the English-speaking countries involve some search of the parish registers. In Hackney, these date from 1555 (with some earlier entries back to 1540); in Shoreditch, of which more anon, from 1558 and in Stoke Newington from 1559.

Whereas, in general, Vestry Minutes and sometimes transcripts also, manuscript or printed, are to be found in the care of the local library or archives repository, the registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials have in many cases been deposited for safe keeping with the appropriate County Record Office and this is a typical instance of the unsatisfactory scatter of local records which makes life difficult for the searcher. Shoreditch registers are at Guildhall Library (but are on microfilm in the Hackney Archives Department); Hackney registers are at County Hall (the Greater London Record Office) and a transcript is at Guildhall Library, whilst the registers of St. Mary, Stoke Newington, remain at the Church. Both latter parishes have indexes to their registers but St. Leonard, Shoreditch, remain to be done and this is a formidable but fascinating task which is now on hand and may take only between three to five years. Volunteers will be very welcome.

To be continued.

S. C. Tongue.

THE BLIND BEGGAR

The greatest treasure of St. Matthews' Church, Bethnal Green, is the Beadle's Mace, dated 1690. Inscribed on it are the names of the "constabls" and other parish officials. On its silver top it bears an embossed picture of the Blind Beggar and his dog. The story says that the blind beggar was Henry, son of Simon de Montfort who hid, disguised, in

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Bethnal Green after the Battle of Evesham. His beautiful daughter, Bessee, lost all her suitors but one, when they found her father was a blind beggar. To the faithful one, a knight, Henry revealed his true identity and gave £3,000 as dowry. A ballad about this dates back to Tudor times and was preserved in Percy's "Reliques". A play was written about it by Chettle in 1600, in 1743 Robert Dodsley wrote a musical play on the theme, and Sheridan Knowles used it again in a play in 1828. The Churchwardens staves also depict the Blind Beggar.

(From St. Matthew's Parish Magazine).

JUDGE JEFFREYS.

The Wapping area around Hermitage stairs, was a riverside swamp until it was drained by the Dutchman, Vanderhelf, during the reign of Henry VIII. Subsequently, St. Paul's Church was built in the 17th Century and rebuilt in the 19th. Part of the drained land was claimed by a Lady McIvie, her claim being disputed by a Mr. Neale who had been responsible for the building of the earlier church.

Her claim supported by cooked evidence and much corruption, was tried before Judge Jeffreys who awarded in her favour. The Dean & Chapter of St. Paul's Cathedral lodged an appeal and produced further evidence to show that the earlier hearing had been subject to false evidence. Judge Jeffreys said "We all thought her claim was a just one - but when the cause came to be heard again we found witnesses to prove her title were guilty of notorious perjury." Those who gave false evidence at the former trial were duly punished but the noble lady appears to have been exonerated.

On another occasion, Jeffreys showed a sense of humour. When two brothers were brought before him for stealing lead from the roof of Stepney Church, he said "I find you are not churchmen in the right way", and went on to mention their good fortune in having been arrested before they had stolen lead of sufficient value to make the offence a hanging one. "But you are mightily beholden to the constable; if he had but given you half an hour longer, you had been in a fair way to be hanged. Your zeal for religion is so great as to carry you to the top of the church. If this be your way of going to church, it is fit you should be taken notice of".

The end of Jeffreys in December 1688 was rather pitiful. Disguised as a sailor and deserted by the King, he spent the night in a vessel moored below London Bridge waiting to flee the country. He ventured ashore for refreshment at the "Red Cow" (not the "Town of Ramsgate", 62 Wapping High St) where he was recognised by a scrivener whom he once wantonly insulted in court, and would have been torn to bits by the mob but for the arrival of the "trained bands" who carried him before the Lord Mayor. He was thence taken to the Tower accompanied by an armed guard who were hardly able to protect him from the angry crowd. He was never brought to trial. He remained in the Tower, ill and miserable, dying on April 18th 1689, at the age of 45.

PLAGUE IN STEPNEY.

The history of plague is a subject which deserves further study. Charles Creighton provided the most comprehensive study of the disease in his History of Epidemics in Britain published in 1891. More recently W. G. Bell has examined the great plague of 1665 in The Great Plague in London in 1665, and F. F. Wilson has described the incidence of the disease in Tudor and Stuart London in The Plague in Shakespeare's London. But a study of the attacks of plague in individual parishes would add to our knowledge of how the disease spread, and how it affected society.

In the 16th and 17th century men could only guess at the cause of plague. It was attributed to a corruption in the air. Thomas Lodge in his Treatise of the Plague in 1603 came nearer the mark when he wrote, "when as rats, mouses, and other creatures.....forsake their holes and habitations, it is a token of corruption in the same." But it was never realised that the flea which infested the rat carried the plague virus. Thinking the contagion was spread by the air, measures against plague tried to isolate plague victims. When a man fell victim to plague, he, and his whole family, were shut up in their house in an attempt to halt the spread of infection to anyone else. Very often the whole household would succumb to the disease.

The parish of Stepney was notorious for its plague attacks. Stepney plague deaths were greater than in any other parish in London or the suburbs in the 17th century. In the three great plagues of the century, in 1603, 1625 and 1665, a very high percentage of Stepney deaths recorded in the parish register were due to plague :-

	<u>Total deaths.</u>	<u>Plague deaths.</u>	<u>% of total deaths.</u>
1603	2257	1933	85.6%
1625	4229	3012	71.2%
1665	7761	6051	77.9%

These percentages of plague deaths were unusually high compared with the average London percentage of plague deaths calculated from the figures given in the Bills of Mortality.

Signs of the chaos which so many deaths caused appears in the vestry minutes of Stepney. In 1625 the parish clerk, John Robinson, was licensed by the bishop to bury the dead. The minister could not cope with the number of bodies. In the same year, a new burial ground was purchased because the old ground had been filled, and in 1665 subsidiary burial grounds were opened in Shadwell and Poplar.

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Further more plague seems to have broken out sometimes first in Stepney and spread to the rest of London. The first case in the plague of 1603 occurred in Stepney in January, according to the parish registers. The great outbreak commenced in March and spread quickly to the rest of London. The plague of 1625 probably originated in Bishopsgate, spread quickly to Whitechapel and Stepney, and then to other parishes in London. The great plague of 1665, however, began in West London, in the parish of St. Giles in the Fields.

We have few details of the agony this disease must have caused. It can best be glimpsed by reading Daniel Defoe's "Journal of the Plague Year". But statistics tell a terrible tale without the embellishments of the imaginative writer. In 1603, the worst plague year of the 17th century, perhaps one fifth of the population of Stepney died.

M.J.P.

"To the Editor :

The Tobacco Industry in East London.

As the result of some work on R. & J. Hill Ltd. who manufactured tobacco in Shoreditch from 1775 until the recent war put them out of business, I was surprised at the extent of this Industry in East London.

Carreras were one of the larger firms around 1904 and there is much to be told also concerning Bernhard Baron's Cigarette Machine Company from circa 1897, apart from his philanthropy in other fields. Ardath also were in Worship Street around this date and there were others in Tower Hamlets.

If members would care to put pen to paper about this, I, for one, will be both interested and grateful.

S.C.T.

DID YOU KNOW THAT ..

1. John Wesley's mother lived in Spital Square ?
2. At a Buckingham Palace Garden Party in 1918, King George V was very surprised to learn from the Rev. W.H.Lax ("Lax of Poplar" the well-known preacher) that he actually slept in Poplar ?
3. The King Edward VII Memorial Park occupies the site of the former Shadwell Fish Market ?
4. A century ago, Whitechapel Market (a little past St. Mary Matfelon) was more outstanding than Petticoat Lane which was already a market of considerable size ?
5. According to local tradition, the source of the expression "balmy" (or "barmy") is Balmers House, a Hackney Asylum which was "a large Jacobean manor house of compact design with pilastered walls and a high hipped roof" (Millicent Rose) This asylum is believed to be the place to which Charles Lamb brought his sister Mary during the attacks of her illness. It was demolished about 1840 in the laying out of De Beauvoir Town.

NOTES ON FOREST GATE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL.

The school was built in 1854 by the Whitechapel Poor Law Union. In 1869 the Unions of Whitechapel, Poplar and Hackney combined to form the "Forest Gate School District" and took over the School.

The School was very much concerned with the "Goliath" fire disaster, an account of which will appear in the next Bulletin. Another fire disaster occurred in 1890, this time in the School itself. It was on New Year's Eve, 1889-90. A fire broke out in the sewing-room, which was on the ground floor, where an iron chimney went through a partition. It was discovered by the wardrobe mistress just after midnight, and she called the Fire Brigade. By the time they arrived about 25 minutes later, the building was well alight. There were dormitories on the first and second floors above the sewing-room, and 84 boys were asleep in them. The Fire Brigade found it difficult to get in, and the boys to get out, because they were locked in the dormitories at night. The attendant, who normally had the keys, was off duty. Eventually 58 boys were rescued but 26 died.

Widespread criticisms were raised at the inquest, and in the local press, about the sleeping arrangements, and many similar institutions changed theirs after this disaster. The following year there was an outbreak of food poisoning at the School, and this led to fresh criticisms about poor food, bad conditions, and prison-like discipline.

Hackney Union had withdrawn from the School District Board in 1877, and Whitechapel withdrew in 1897, leaving the School to be carried on by Poplar alone.

In 1906 the School at Forest Gate was closed, and the boys were transferred to the Poplar Training School at Hutton, Essex. After the buildings had stood empty for a while, they were used as a branch workhouse for Poplar from 1908 to 1911.

In December 1911 they were bought by West Ham Board of Guardians, and renamed "Forest Gate Sick Home". They were used for semi-sick and bed-ridden people from the workhouse, and mental and maternity cases.

In 1930 they were taken over by West Ham County Borough and renamed "Forest Gate Hospital". They were used mainly for maternity and mental cases. The hospital is now a maternity hospital solely. In spite of many additions, and bombing during the war, many of the old "poor law" buildings remain.

8.
BULLETIN BOOK-LIST.

ELLEN BUXTON'S JOURNAL, 1850-1854, Arranged by her grand-daughter, Ellen R. C. Creighton. The first volume is in local libraries and continues the narrative of the Buxton family who so impinge on East London History.

LOCAL HISTORY & THE TEACHER. - Robert Douch. A "must" for the teacher and student of local history.

THE FIGHTING PANKHURSTS : A study in tenacity. David Mitchell.

TOWER HAMLETS Council of Social Service. People without roots; A study undertaken in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 1966-7, and an appraisal of services provided by voluntary and statutory agencies. Ed. F. W. Skinner. From 532, Commercial Road, E.1. 6/-.

LONDON'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE: Aubrey Wilson. An informative and intelligent approach to a layman's guide to industrial archaeology. The East London coverage ranges from Whitechapel to Walthamstow. Published Jan 68.

WOMEN AT WESTMINSTER, an account of women in the British Parliament 1918-66. Pamela Brookes. Nov. 67.

SOCIALISTS, LIBERALS AND LABOUR : 1885-1914. Paul Thompson. An excellent study of the political municipal scene at a critical period. Many little-known facts emerge as a result of the author's painstaking research.

THE MEDIAEVAL MASON, Douglas & Jones, Knoop. An economic history of English stone building in the later Middle Ages and early modern times. Covers period 1280 - 1600.

POLITICIANS AND THE SLUMP : Robert Skidelsky. The Labour Government of 1929-31. The Public Records Act 1958 reduced the "closed" period from 50 to 30 years although this remains discretionary.

BEATRICE WEBB : Muggersidge, Kitty, and Ruth Adam.
A life of one to whom we owe so great a debt.

AGRICULTURE & ECONOMIC GROWTH IN ENGLAND, 1650-1815. This is a further volume in the series entitled "Debates in economic history" and was first published in New York.

A HISTORY OF POLICE in England & Wales. Critchley T.A.

HOW TO READ LOCAL ARCHIVES : F.G. Emmison. 1550-1700.
Published by the Historical Association 1967 (3/6d)

COUNTY RECORDS : F.G. Emmison. (Quarter sessions, petty sessions, Clerk of the Peace and Lieutenancy) with revised appendices. Historical Association 5/- (1967).

SAILORTOWN : Stan Huggill. A study of dockland invaluable to every student of East London History.

S.C.T.