



EAST LONDON HISTORY GROUP

Bulletin No.12.

December 1969



EDITORIAL

My apologies for using an East London History Group Cover as, since the October A.G.M. we are now a Society. It will take time to have new covers printed.

The demolition experts in Newham have, since our last Bulletin, put the finishing touches to the Bessborough Road School building. Not an historical building and lacking in amenities, but worthy of a passing tribute to Jack Cornwell V.C. who died in action in 1916 and after whom the school was renamed. It was the first school in the country to have screen education.

History Societies do not normally concern themselves with vintage cars, but it was a pleasure to see an East London entrant, Mr. Keith Butti of Custom House, in the London/Brighton Car Rally with his 1903.-De Dion Bouton. On the subject of cars, Godfreys of Forest Gate has had to close down after sixty years in its present premises but more than a century in East London. Its earlier activities concerned carts and bicycles, going over to cars in 1908.

The Society congratulates the Tower Hamlets Library Staff on their Theatre Exhibition. It was a great pleasure to see so many of the Society's members at the Annual Lecture by John Kennedy Melling held concurrently with the Exhibition.

Regarding the two magazine extracts on Daniel Defoe in our last Bulletin, Mr. S.C.Tongue kindly points out that Robinson Crusoe was almost certainly written whilst Defoe was living in Church Street, Stoke Newington (an L.C.C.plaque commemorates the site of his former residence at the corner of what is now Defoe Road). Defoe's tombstone can be seen at Stoke Newington Library.

The new developments in the Highway, Wapping, bring to mind Phil Cohen, a Jew, who was landlord of "The Artichoke" from 1916 until 1953. He was the only landlord in the East End to have a large photograph of the Pope on his saloon bar wall. He always slept outside, winter and summer, on a special balcony.

Congratulations to Mr. George Caunt, one of our members, on his recently published book "Essex in Parliament". Originally serialised in the Essex Journal between 1966 and 1969, the author deals with Essex Members between 1290 and 1966. The book is obtainable from the Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, at the price of 25/-.

We also congratulate the Hackney Photographic Society who celebrated their 80th Anniversary last month at a reception attended by the Deputy Mayor. Prints were shown going as far back as 1889, and there was a picture of the founder (W.Fenton Jones) reading the proclamation of Edward VII from the steps of the old Hackney Town Hall in 1901.

The Committee send their Seasonal Greetings to you all.

A.H.F.

HOW A GREAT WORK BEGAN
THE ORIGIN OF "EAST LONDON ANTIQUITIES"

It was in the summer of 1899 that the idea of rescuing and preserving for present and future generations the records of East London's great and interesting past was first proposed. The suggestion came from Mr. Charles P. Hale.

In a letter to the Editor of the "East London Advertiser" in June 1899, he suggested that a column should be set apart weekly in the pages of that Journal for the publication of local notes and queries. Amongst those who approved the idea was the distinguished novelist and historian, Sir Walter Besant, who bore out Mr. Hale's contention that there was plenty of scope for antiquarian research.

With the promise of financial aid from a local businessman the project was launched, and the long series of articles which had been appearing as a regular feature in a local newspaper (and may now be enjoyed in a single volume accessible at the Central Library, Mile End) began.

Sir Walter Besant's introduction to that volume should be noted: "To bring before East Londoners the treasures of the past, a past which for many reasons the people are mostly ignorant, to endow them with local pride, to give them a new respect for the place of their residence and to bring the streets and spots hitherto passed over without respect as monotonous or unworthy of observation, a new interest and a new life." (Here I would hasten to add that Sir Walter himself has contributed handsomely to this closer knowledge and understanding of our end of London, (a) in several novels e.g. "All sorts and conditions of Men", "The Children of Gibeon" and "St. Katherine's by the Tower", (b) in a fascinating history of East London in the 19th century, and (c) in his pioneer effort to establish the "People's Palace" and all that that remarkable venture entailed, as a local centre of education and enjoyment).

Some thirty years following this event, in 1930, the Stepney Borough Council, through its Libraries Committee, was persuaded to institute a series of eight lectures on the history of Stepney. These were given by Mr. Guy Parsloe, Librarian of the Institute of Historical Research. These eight lectures were followed up in this same session, by lectures from the principal officers of each department of the Borough Council and the County Council; a comprehensive, co-ordinated presentation of local development which was very widely appreciated - not only in the Borough - and marked a distinct advance in local government initiative and enterprise.

In view of this past successful initiative on the part of local newspaper and local Authority, is it not appropriate to ask for a renewal of such combined enterprise at the present time?

The 'shake-up' in local government consequent on the

(Cont.)-

re-organisation of 1965, the dispersal and influx of population following on housing and business development, the emphasis on political participation to cope with the social problems arising from these unavoidable changes; these events demand far closer knowledge and understanding of our past local history on the part of each one of us.

This situation calls for an immediate, united effort from the local Press, the Local Authority, the local organisations (industrial, social and educational), the members of the East London History Society, and the promise of financial aid from a local business man!

C. S. Truman.

Notice:

 COMMERCIAL RAILWAY
 BLACKWALL

The provisional Committee of the above undertaking, in announcing to their Subscribers that the Bill has been read a second time and that they intend to proceed with it in Committee on Monday next, feel themselves called upon to notice some of the allegations which have been made against it. For some time they have foreborne any public notice of the groundless attacks to which they have been exposed believing that the only proper tribunal (a Parliamentary Committee) would soon enable them to satisfy their Subscribers that their undertaking was not only unobjectionable in principle or details, but on the contrary that it must be highly useful and valuable in its results, and that the objections to which some other objects are liable have been unfairly made to apply to the Commercial Railway. They find however that their silence is construed into an inability to meet the charges and therefore the following very concise statement of facts is submitted in reply.

Their Railway commences at a depot on the east side of the Minories, just without the City of London, a little southward of John Street; a short branch comes into the City to Crutchedfriars to connect the warehouses of the West and East India Dock Companies with the main line. From the Minories the line passes through a very low and wretched property at the back of Rosemary Lane, Cable Street and Back Lane; it crosses the Regents Canal at the Lock near the Commercial Road, passes on the south side of Limehouse Church and through the fields belonging to the West India Dock Company to Blackwall with a branch to the East India Docks. It is on arches the whole way and nearly level not interfering with any sewers, waterpipes or gas pipes, and by the provisions of the Bill, any street under forty feet wide is to be spanned in one arch not less than eighteen feet high. The number of houses actually required to be taken is seven hundred and fifty-eight and if this number is thought large it is easily explained by the character of the property through which the Railway passes, as an instance of which it is to be proved that in one alley of two hundred and ninety feet long there are fortyeight tenements.

It must however be particularly noticed that this destruction of houses will be much more than compensated by the new houses which will be constructed; for the arches of the Railway will be so built that each arch will contain two tenements, each sixteen feet wide by twentyfour feet deep and as the number of arches which may be so occupied is upwards of seven hundred, the houses taken down will be replaced by nearly double the number. In the Bill provisions are introduced securing to the parishes on the line the payment of all rates now payable and at its completion there is a compulsory clause enabling the parish officers to examine the accounts of the Company in order to determine a just and fair prospective rating. So far therefore as the parishes are concerned they must be great gainers, because they can not only rate the Railway as a Railway but the houses under it. With reference to the class of persons dispossessed of their houses it will be seen by the foregoing statement that they may also be again received but with those advantages that the houses built for them will contain increased comforts and accommodations. The public grounds upon which this measure is proposed are the providing a ready and economical communication between the City and the two great Commercial depots of the West India Docks and East India Docks but principally on the remedy which it offers for preventing the dreadful consequences which arise from the crowded state of the Pool, and the difficulty, danger and loss of navigating the river above Blackwall in steam boats. In conclusion, the Committee have the pleasure to state that in consequence of reports which have been circulated that His Majesty's Government intended to oppose a railway to Blackwall, the Committee obtained an interview with Mr. Powlett Thomson on the 9th instant when the statement received the most positive contradiction, and the Committee received the assurance that this Railway Bill would be determined entirely on the question of its merits.

STOKES, HOLLINGSWORTH & TYERMAN

March 17th 1836.

Solicitors for the Bill.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS (1844-1889).

On Saturday, 18th October 1969, a special Commemoration Service at St. John's Church, Stratford, marked the 125th Anniversary of the birth of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Priest and Poet. It was organised by the newly-formed Hopkins Society, the sermon being given by the Rt. Rev. Trevor Huddleston C.R., Bishop of Stepney, and after the Service opportunity was afforded to inspect the G.M. Hopkins entry in the Parish Baptismal Register.

It has been reasonably established that the Poet was born at what became No. 87, The Grove, Stratford. Born with a literary background, little is known of his early life. He became a Jesuit and entered the priesthood. His poetry was undoubtedly influenced by the conditions of poverty in the Stratford area, particularly amongst the Irish labourers.

In 1875 five Franciscan nuns, exiled from Germany, sailed in "The Deutschland" which sank near the Goodwin Sands

and all five were drowned. Four of their bodies were recovered and Fr. Francis, Guardian of the Franciscan Friary in The Grove, Stratford, arranged for them to be brought to the Stratford Church for the Mass and Funeral and for burial in St. Patrick's Cemetery at Leytonstone. Cardinal Manning presided and preached at the Mass, and a great crowd lined the road to the cemetery.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was moved by the story of the nuns and the association of the ceremonies with his birth-place to write his now famous poem. In 1966 the Stratford Franciscans arranged a "Festival of a Stratford Poem" to hold in remembrance the poem and the circumstances of its composition.

In conjunction with the Anniversary commemoration, the Newham Library Service arranged an interesting Exhibition illustrating Stratford in the nineteenth century. Acknowledgement is made to the Staff of Newham Libraries for the above material - they will be pleased to provide information on the Hopkins Society to anyone interested.

A.H.F.

H.M.S. "ALBION"

"Never in the history of the Thames Iron Works, since its first foundation, have all who are interested in its fortunes had to deplore so terrible a catastrophe as that which overshadowed the launch of H.M.S. "Albion". Seldom has the tragic irony of contrast been more impressively insistent. At one moment the good ship moved majestically down the ways, amidst the cheers of an excited multitude; at the next light-hearted sightseers were plunged in their watery grave. At one moment every voice was raised in congratulation and in compliment; at the next all rejoicing was hushed by the awful presence of the Angel Death.

The next twenty-four hours have been branded into my consciousness as with a hot iron. All the petty details of the extemporized morgue - all the pathetic agony of identification - all the stunned silence of desolation - all the busy helpfulness of the Sisters - all the strong sympathy of the district will remain with me to my dying day, and mingled with these sombre memories glitter the gaily-floating flags, the groups of flowers, the bright decorations, a bizarre-discordance with the sadness of the silent yard.

The causes of this terrible disaster were duly investigated at two successive inquests, and the authorities of the Thames Iron Works were absolved from blame, but although it may be perfectly true that the police did their best, under instructions, to keep the gangway clear, and although it may be also true that the rush at the moment of launching overcame all resistance, and prepared the way for the subsequent disaster, none the less those heedless sightseers were our own people, mothers and children of our own workmen, who knew the yard far better than the police who warned them - who had again and again been present to witness previous launches - who had in all probability seen friends thrown off their feet by the back-wave of the launch, and had only laughed at the ducking they sustained - and with the full knowledge which

is only possible after the event, I am still strongly of opinion that blame attaches as little to the victims of the disaster as to the managers of our ship-building yard. Even now it seems almost impossible to believe that thirty-five people should have been drowned in a little space of water, not one hundred yards long, not ten feet deep, within call of fifty boats, and almost within hand-reach of hundreds of friends and helpers.

The very perfection of the launch was the cause of the disaster; the speed of the vessel's descent impelled a proportionately powerful wave against the timbers of the gangway, while the crush of sightseers made the narrow space the more dangerous. There can be no doubt that in the panic of the moment the poor souls trampled each other to death; for my own part I heard nothing of the accident until half-an-hour after it happened, but I shall not forget the heroism which so happily lightened this awful disaster; and I am but repeating the commonplaces of current comment when I say, that granted the accident, nothing more could have been done to mitigate its suffering and shock.

Within ten minutes of the accident the rescued were being professionally treated in our Central Electric Station. Doctors and nurses were fortunately on the spot, and no tribute of praise, too warm or too hearty, can be paid to all who so willingly vied with one another in rendering assistance all through that sad evening and night. Sister Katherine's Nurses, the Ambulance Corps, the Police, the Works' Watchmen, the Foremen, the Time-keepers, all did their duty, not grudgingly or of necessity, but with all their heart and soul, and for this full and free service, I tender them on behalf of our Company my most sincere and hearty thanks."

(This is an extract from the "Thames Iron Works Gazette" dated 30th September, 1898. The author, Mr. A.F.Hills, was the Manager of the Works and a man with progressive views on employer-workmen relations in advance of his time. The disaster took place on the 21st June 1898 at the launching at Canning Town. Most of the victims were buried in East London Cemetery and a marble memorial erected on the site. Acknowledgements for this account are due to Mr. F. Sainsbury and Mr. W. Anderson).

The Greater London Council (Information Centre, County Hall, London S.E.1.) have published "A Survey of the Parish Registers of the Diocese of London, Inner London Area" by Joan Coburn B.A. (Assistant Archivist, Greater London Record Office), Price 12/6d plus postage (9d first class, 6d second class mail). The covering dates of all registers of baptisms, marriages and burials and their present location (i.e. at the Church or at G.L.Record Office) are briefly recorded together with information about indexes and printed transcripts, where applicable. The East London parishes included are Bethnal Green, Hackney, Poplar, Shoreditch and Stepney.

The following addresses are given at the request of members:-

E.L.H.S. Secretary: Miss A.C.J.Sansom, B.A., F.L.A.
18 Hawkdene, Chingford, E.4.
Editor :- Mr.A.H.French, M.B.E., F.I.C.S.
36 Parkland Rd., Woodford Green, Essex.
Membership Secretary:- Mrs.E.Thomas, 7 East Road, West Ham, E.15.

Lectures to which all Members of the E.L.H.S. are invited :

Thursday, 15th January 1970 :

"The Origins of London" by C. Poulsen, at Wanstead Community Centre, Wanstead House, The Green, Wanstead, E.11. at 8 p.m. (Wanstead Local History Society).

Tuesday, 30th January, 1970 :

"Stage Coaches" by J.Elsdon Tuffs, A.R.Hist.S.(following A.G.M) at Hornchurch Library, North Street, Hornchurch, Essex. (Hornchurch & District Historical Society). 8 pm.

Monday, February 2nd 1970 :

"Passenger Transport in East London" illustrated, by Mr. L.A.Thomson (joint-author of "The Tramways of East London", at 7.45 p.m. at the Abbey Hall (Old Civil Defence Club), Axe St., off Ripple Road, Barking. (Barking Historical Society).

Wednesday, February 11th 1970 :

"The Preservation of Historic Buildings" (with slides) by Kenneth C. Reed, A.R.I.B.A., at the Mornington Hall, North Chingford, at 8 p.m. (Chingford Historical Society).

Monday, February 16th 1970 :

"Bethnal Green Museum" (with slides) by Miss E.Aslin, at the United Free Church, Woodford Green, at 8.15 p.m. (Woodford & District Historical Society).

Wednesday, 11th March 1970 :

"The beauty of old Churches" (with slides) by Lawrence E. Jones (Historic Churches Preservation Trust), at Mornington Hall, North Chingford, at 8 p.m. (Chingford Historical Society).

Friday, 13th March 1970 :

"Excavations in the Tower of London", by B.K.Davison B.A. at the Bishopsgate Institute, at 6.30 p.m. (London & Middlesex Archaeological Society).

Tuesday, April 14th 1970 :

"Industrial Archaeology - the Lower Lea Valley Survey" by D. Smith, at Gladway Hall, Farm Hill Road, Waltham Abbey, at 8 p.m. (Waltham Abbey Historical Society).

and, of course, the East London History Society's meetings as shown in your Programme!

THE GREAT TEA RACE

It would be regrettable if we, as East Londoners, allowed the year to close without reference to the famous "Cutty Sark", last of the Clippers, as this is the centenary year of her launching. She now lies in a permanent drydock at Greenwich, a site she saw for only fleeting moments in her race in and out of London. She was, of course, much more familiar to the London and India Docks, and there are still those who feel she should spend her "retirement" in an East London site.

Part of the vessel is actually more than 100 years old

as she was given the bow of the "Punjaub" (later re-named "The Tweed") launched in Bombay in November 1854. She was built by Scott & Linton, Dumbarton, to Lloyd's highest class and of the best materials. In fact, the builders went bankrupt and the ship had to be completed by Denny Bros. She was launched on November 23rd 1869, the ceremony being performed by the wife of her first Captain, Captain George Moodie. He describes her as being a fine ship, with an enormous spread of canvas, and on his best day's run in her she travelled 363 miles giving an average of over 15 knots. She never gained the Blue Riband of the Sea as a tea clipper; the only occasion when she was clearly in the lead she lost her rudder and was put out of the race. She later won her laurels as a wool clipper. The "Cutty Sark" made altogether eight voyages in the tea trade, (from Shanghai and Woosung) between 1870 and 1877. Her longest voyage in this trade took 122 days and the shortest 107 days.

When tea drinking caught on in Britain, the faster ships of the Americans were the first to cash in on the trade. British ships were slower being governed in their design by archaic tonnage laws, but after they were repealed Britain leapt to the forefront. Conditions were as hard as any ever imposed on sailors, but the crew of the first ship home received a handsome bonus in addition to their pay. There was a great deal of betting east of London Bridge on who would win the race each season, the most exciting being in 1866 when, of the 16 ships participating, five (the "Ariel", "Taeping", the "Serica", the "Fiery Cross" and the "Taetsing") arrived in London within a few hours of each other and success depended upon the quality of the tugs for the haul up to London and the depth of water at the various docks. Meridian states in "The Port" - "the opening of the Suez Canal made tea racing as unfashionable as coracle paddling and just as unprofitable".

A.H.F.

"BURIAL OF A MUTINEER"

The body of Parker, the mutineer, which was taken out of the new naval burying ground at Sheerness was brought to the "Hoop & Horse Shoe" public house, Queen Street, Little Tower Hill, on Saturday evening. So large a concourse of persons assembled before the house next day that a party of constables were stationed there in order to keep the mob from breaking into the house, and the corpse in the afternoon was removed to the workhouse in Nightingale Lane by order of the parish. Afterwards, Mrs. Parker was taken before the sitting magistrates in Lambert Street and examined touching the object of her taking up the body. Her answer was: "For the purpose of a more decent interment". It was buried this morning early in the vault of Whitechapel Church."

"Annual Register" July 4th 1797.

(Parker was the leader of the Naval mutiny at the Nore).