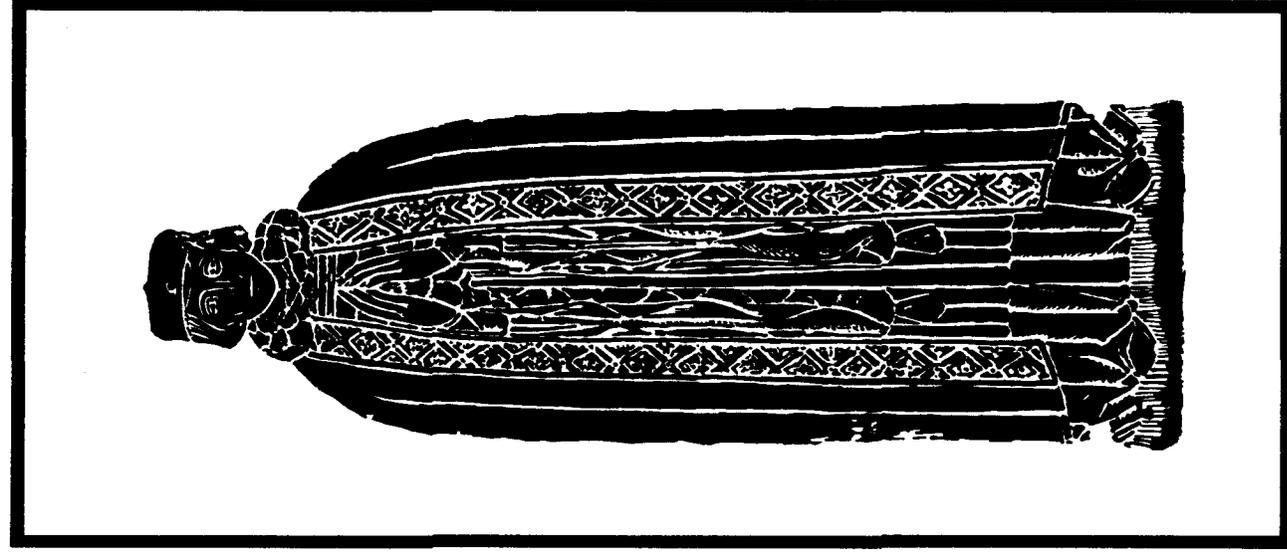
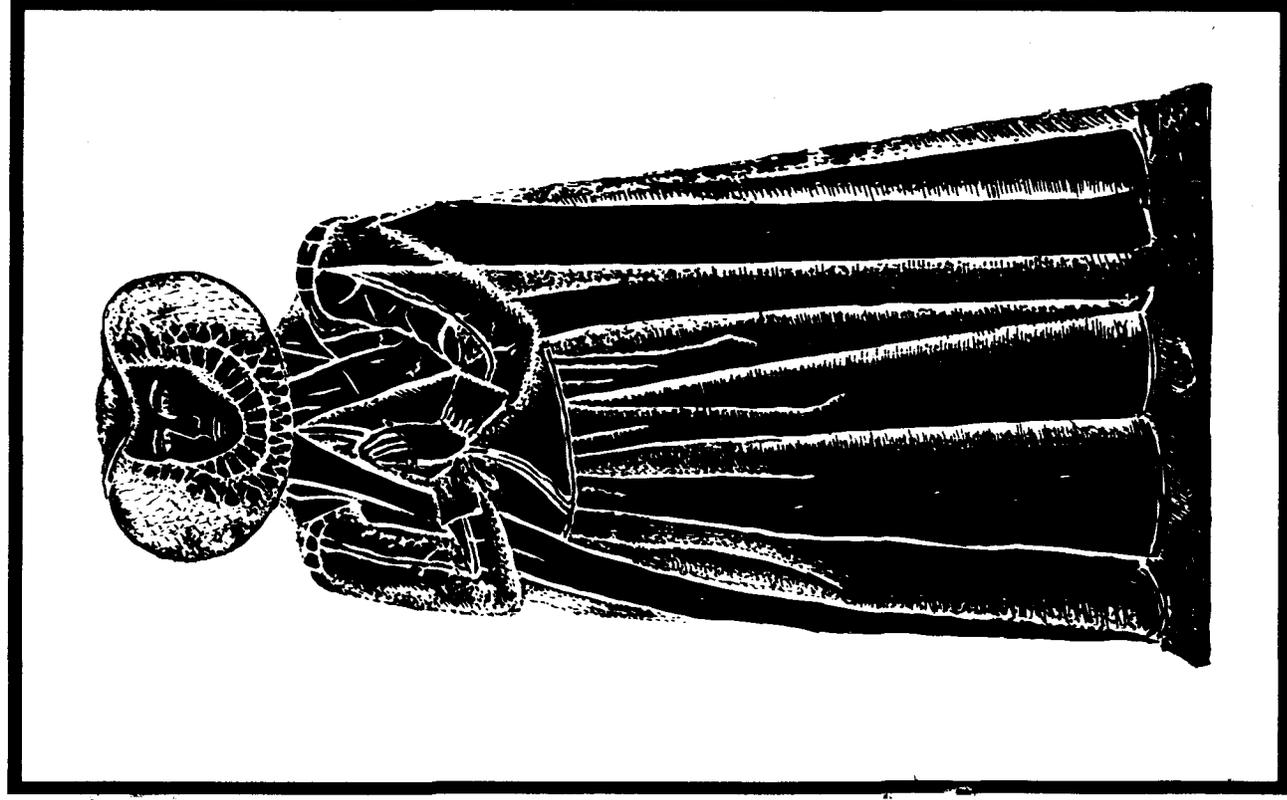


EHC

EAST LONDON HISTORY GROUP

Bulletin No.13. March 1970



EDITORIAL

The face of East London continues to change. Orient Wharf, Wapping, one of the oldest on the Riverside, is closing this month. It has handled only tea for 60 years and has been hit by the rising costs of de-casualisation and declining trade. Also in this changing scene, John Mowlem & Co. have begun their work on the Northern Approach to Blackwall Tunnel from Old Ford Road. The work, involving the building of roads, under-passes, bridges, subways and associated works, is expected to be completed in 30 months. It covers an area steeped in history. The proposed redevelopment of the St. Katherine Docks area shows at least one redeeming feature - the old foundation of St. Katherine will return to the site it was given by Queen Matilda in 1148.

The famous paddle steamer "Princess Elizabeth" has been bought by a former Thames waterman and lighterman who intends to tow the vessel round to London and use her as a floating restaurant. So East London may yet again see what was a familiar sight on the River a century ago. Another attempt to re-capture the past is the opening of "The Londoner" (the old Eastern Hotel, Burdett Road) on the 31st January. You can now have there with your beer a dish of boiled beef and carrots, sausage and mashed, cockles, whelks, jellied eels, bubble and squeak etc!

Looking through the Roll of Honour of the Parish of St. Luke, Millwall, for the 1914/18 War, it is interesting to note that of 685 men who served, 115 gave their lives. Of the men who served there were only six who reached officer status, rather less than 1% (one reached the rank of Major), and 468 did not rise above the rank of Private. One wonders what the numbers would have been for a parish say in Kensington. The 685 included 92 who served in the Royal Navy. Only 4 women in the Parish served in the Forces.

As I write, the Chinese are celebrating their New Year. Before the last War, the Chinese community in East London hired transport to take them (including children) to the East London Cemetery where food and drink would be placed on the graves of their deceased relatives. They would then return to a Chinese feast to which all and sundry could come.

The recent controversy over allotment-holders in Newham is a reminder that the East London gardening community is fast depleting. One wonders what Dr. John Fothergill, Quaker doctor and botanist, would have thought of these developments. In 1762, he purchased what was originally the Smyth estate, and made it into a botanical garden which was then considered second only to Kew. Part of the estate is now West Ham Park and some of the exotic trees and plants can still be seen there.

It is understood that the Tower Hamlets Planning Department is preparing for two Exhibitions of redevelopment schemes. One is expected to be on the Isle of Dogs some time in March and the other will probably be held later in Roman Road, E.3. The Society's Exhibition is under way and all members are asked to support the programme of films and lectures of which they will receive full information in due course. Help is needed in erecting and dismantling, and stewarding. If you can spare a few hours in June/July, please drop a line to Mr. French at 36 Parkland Road, Woodford Green, Essex. Many thanks.

A.H.F.

ROMAN SETTLEMENT AT OLD FORD ?

Old Ford is a district of East London situated on the west bank of the River Lea. It lies within the land parish of St. Mary Stratford-atte-Bow. It derives its name from a shallow river crossing that existed in past days. The exact whereabouts of the site of this crossing place is uncertain, but has recently been discovered to within fifty yards on the modern river. It is clear that the site was discovered in 1906, but the description of the find is a little confusing, and therefore the conclusions reached here are based on further research and local dialogue.

The documented evidence relating to the district is very sketchy, and whilst Old Ford is mentioned in many standard reference books, very little space is given to descriptions of the character of the neighbourhood. In 1550 STOW in his 'Survey of London' mentions that it came into the gift of Sir Thomas WENTWORTH, Lord Chamberlain of the King's Household. He also refers to the building of Bow Bridge in the reign of Henry 1 after Queen Matilda was nearly drowned crossing the River Lea. The district is also indicated on the earliest plans of the site of the City of London. It is certain, therefore, that Old Ford can lay claim to an earlier occupation than the rest of Tower Hamlets.

One can only assume that in very early times, when the Old Ford provided the only practical crossing place close to an established track eastwards out of London, people were often forced to camp or seek shelter on the higher ground in the district, owing to the state of the tides or the inability to cross the marshes beyond. One can easily imagine that this river provided an enormous and hazardous barrier to the traveller, who may have had to wait several days before attempting the crossing. The river was, at that time, total up to one mile above the Ford. Even today, the Spring tides sweep up the river from the Thames and inundate the towpaths and lowlying ground in the locality. In this way, even before the Roman Invasion of A.D.43, Old Ford was probably well established as some kind of settlement.

At some time during the Roman occupation, most likely at an early date, there may have been some military activity in the area, the higher ground providing a defensive position above the Ford and marshes.

Recent find, including a section of Roman Highway at Lefevre Road, about four hundred yards west of the site of the Ford, provides ample evidence that the Romans occupied the district, and there was probably at least one habitation or farm. Until the excavations are completed and the evidence thoroughly examined, the exact extent of this occupation will remain uncertain.

The Ford across the river was sited at the end of a short access road 'un-named', which is situated on the bend of Old Ford Road about 30 yards north of Iceland Road. This roadway terminates at the edge of the river between Iceland Wharf and Bundock's Wharf. It was here that, in 1906, the River Lea Conservancy Board dredged up some pieces of Herring-Bone patterned masonry from the river bed; these were examined at the time by experts and thought to be of Roman origin. The value of these finds could not have been fully appreciated as their whereabouts are unknown today, and the record of the site leaves a great deal to be desired. 'This was from below Old Ford Locks and just above the passage of the Northern Outfall Sewer opposite the Chemical Works owned by Messrs. FORBES, ABBOTT & LEONARD'. (Victoria History of London, Vol.1, pp 31-32). This description is confusing, as the words 'Just above the passage of the Northern Outfall Sewer' were taken to mean upstream of it. The Chemical Works do not exist today, but extensive enquiry shows that Messrs. FORBES, ABBOTT & LEONARD occupied the site known as Iceland Wharf. 'Kelly's Post Office London Directory 1870'. (Courtesy of Guildhall Library). This has been confirmed by local elderly residents, one of whom recalls a fire at the Wharf during the First World War, after which Messrs. FORBES, ABBOTT & LEONARD moved to Tunnel Avenue, Greenwich. The same person had a close childhood association with the BUNDOCK family, who had a timber wharf adjacent to what was then traditionally the site of Old Ford and common knowledge.

The most persistent clue however is the access roadway already mentioned. It is shown on GASCOIGNE's Survey of 1703/4 and again on John ROCQUES' Survey of 1740, although slightly mis-aligned on the latter map. This seemingly useless piece of highway still exists today and is shown on modern maps. It now serves as a car park to neighbouring business concerns. A line from this piece of roadway across the Roman Highway at Lefevre Road gives a reasonable alignment to Aldgate, the probable Roman Route.

Having dealt with the character of Old Ford and the River Lea, it is worth considering the character of the roads leading to it. In Roman times it is quite clear that at least one road of importance provided access to it out of the City of London. The Lefevre Road site has produced two pieces of roadway, one probably earlier than the other. However, the alignment of these is difficult to establish, as neither of the surfaces uncovered is intact or devoid of later building intrusion. Whether these two roads, which appear to run parallel at this point, would merge or be on the same alignment is almost impossible to prove. It could be that the older of the two followed a line from Old Street and the Aldgate Road replaced it at a later date. Here again, until the dating material has been studied and further excavation made, this cannot be confirmed.

The alternative route of Old Ford Road is not easy to dismiss. This road has sufficient continuity towards the City (Old Street Roman foundations), to be useful. The north/south line of this road suggests a natural riverside track, and for that reason

alone its great age is without question. It well may be that this stretch of roadway formed the original link between the Roman Highway and the Bow Bridge built about 1086. The Mile End - Stratford Turnpike Road was constructed some time later. The Roman Route probably crossed Stratford Marsh on a causeway, no trace of which exists today. The Route is again picked up at Romford Road in front of the 'Passmore Edwards Library', whence its line is known to Colchester (Camulodunam). The present road named Roman Road arrived at its title by chance. The line of this highway is straight enough towards the City to merit attention, but it does not seem to stand up well to close scrutiny.

The stretch of roadway between Lefevre Road and St. Stephen's Road almost exactly coincides with the suggested Roman Aldgate alignment, and quite by chance sits on the Roman foundations for part of its length. In 1703 no trace of this highway was apparent. A field boundary existed in the vicinity, and this may have been an established right of way. This footpath extended westwards to the point where Globe Road now meets Roman Road, Bethnal Green, and was known as "The Driftway", a mere track which converged with Bethnal Green Road. This 'Driftway' was extended eastwards by 1840 almost to the point where St. Stephen's Road now crosses Roman Road. This was later widened and re-named Green Street extending east to Lefevre Road. By 1840, when it was further improved, it was re-named Roman Road probably because of the numerous Roman finds that came to light during the building of the railways nearby from 1850 onwards.

Jan.1970.

Bernard J. Barell.

THE COSTERS - No. 2.

'KINGSMEN - KICKSIES & SLAP UP TOGS

The Victorian Costermongers had a style of dress entirely their own. The only other group in the Aldgate area having a distinctive dress were the Jews. They however, favoured the deepest black. Not so the Coster, for life and gaiety were echoed in the fancy cut and adornment of their "slap up togs".

A Coster prided himself upon his cleanliness and demanded it especially in his womenfolk. He had no time for a 'Dirty Sal'. He purchased his clothes at a tailor's shop who advertised his specialist wares with the term "Slap up togs and out and out Kicksies Builder". This man knew what the Costers demanded both for work and Sunday best.

For everyday working wear, and starting from the head, was the small cloth cap or a worsted tie-up skull cap, close fitting. The cap was always worn a little to one side, and the few small ringlets of hair showing on the temple was a must. The shirt was white or with faint blue stripes, and a coloured shirt was never worn. The waistcoat was very long and buttoned to the throat. It was made of broad ribbed corduroy with fustian

back and sides. The colour was usually sandy. The buttons were of plain brass or sported raised foxes or stags heads upon them. There were black bone buttons with a flower pattern on the front or those made of mother-o-pearl of 'dark rat-skin hue'. Pockets were large with huge flaps like those of a shooting jacket. It was considered the height of extravagance to wear a blue cloth jacket for work as the slime and scales of fish stuck to it too easily.

The trousers were dark coloured cable-cord which fitted lightly at the knee swelling gradually until they reached the boots, which they almost covered.

The Coster lad's pride and joy however, was his boots and Kingsman. The boots were good and strong; always well shod, and it was a disgrace to wear a secondhand pair. The upper leather was ornamented with a tastefully designed heart or thistle; a design that was also repeated in brass nails below the instep of the boots.

The Kingsman was the neckerchief, and here the Coster really went to town. It was a large brightly patterned square. The lads wore it wrapped loosely around the neck. Patterns varied from yellow flowers on a green ground to brightly coloured patterns of red and blue. No self-respecting Coster lad would be seen wearing a dirty or ragged Kingsman, and he would vie with his mates in obtaining the latest patterns.

Those who could afford it, would have a Sunday Best suit of brown Petersham with velvet facings of the same colour. Cloth trousers with a stripe down the sides, and a rough beaver hat.

Coster girls never wore silk dresses, but always a printed cotton gown. Petticoats were worn short to the ankles; just high enough to show the much admired boots. Around the shoulders they also wore a silk Kingsman with the ends sometimes tucked into the neck or into the apron string. Bonnets were of black velveteen or straw adorned with a few ribbons or flowers. Under the bonnet was always worn a tight fitting net cap that came close to the cheek.

For Sundays, there was a gown of a bright showy pattern and a bright shawl. As a Coster lad told Mayhew, "Coster like to see their gals and wives look ladylike when they take them out".

Costermongering, a word derived from costard - monger, meaning apple merchant, was more than a form of trade; it was a way of life. In every way the Coster was an individualist; in his form of trading, his transport, his dress, and, as I will show in my next article, his social and domestic life. Even his language was rich and personal.

When the Coster lad hitched up his wide belted trousers; pushed his 'barrer' into the yard, and declared that he was now going to "do the tightener", he merely meant that he was going to dinner.

ALIGNMENTS & GRADIENTS.

One of the pleasures of studying one's own locality is gained by tracing where buildings, roads, etc. existed, where famous incidents or events occurred, where notable people lived, etc. To be aware of the actual site stimulates interest and excites the imagination. There is, however, a grave danger (of which few people are aware) of losing all trace of the pattern which has existed in many areas for centuries.

It is to be found to a considerable extent in the City where rebuilding has taken place at straight angles and on "race-track" lines. Many ancient lanes have disappeared and gradients levelled. Who would imagine today that at one time Tower Hill could clearly be seen from Ratcliff Highway, rising in the distance? The levelling of the hill itself and the raising of the surrounding area has left something which is hardly a hill.

Marjorie Honeybourne (Vice-President of the Historical Association) writes of the City:-

"Rebuilding as such is not the issue but the fact that it ignores the long-established street pattern and building lines. Instead it apes some pseudo-garden city on a virgin site, with wind-swept Italian piazzas, raised pedestrian ways and underground shops approached by wearisome steps. Most of London's open spaces should be noise-and-dust free within the building complexes - as in the Temple precinct and the Oxford colleges - with approaches along the familiar rights-of-way. Small vacant sites along the main streets could well be utilized for shops with living quarters let at cheap rents, to help revitalize the City with more residents with a real stake in their environment.

The resurgent City must retain its unique personality and its historic continuity if it is truly to satisfy and serve present and future Londoners proud of their noble heritage."

Some of us would not go the whole way with Miss Honeybourne in this matter, but each time a local tour is conducted it becomes increasingly difficult to pin-point events or sites. The sad thing is that once a street or site is lost, the memory rapidly fades and the event or building tends to become lost in obscurity. Such a fate, I fear, awaits the site of St. Leonard's, Bromley. We then get to the stage of saying "somewhere around here lived....." as is the position at Stepney Green. How difficult it is today to try to show someone where the Abbey Church of Stratford Langthorne was!

Rebuilding schemes would be quite impracticable if all winding lanes and narrow streets were to be preserved, but undoubtedly more could probably be done by local authorities in some areas to preserve their ancient character and leave something for the pleasure of future generations.

A.H.F.

A HAY MARKET IN WHITECHAPEL.

There must be many people who still remember the hay market in Whitechapel High Street, for it was not until 1928 that it was finally closed. This busy market, crammed with carts and lorries filled with sweet-smelling hay, with its big shire horses and fresh-faced countrymen, blocked the middle of one of the main highways into London, while the ever-increasing traffic was reduced to a snail's pace. It seems strange to us today that this country market should have operated so near to the heart of the City, but in the early part of this century nearly all the traffic on the London streets was horse-drawn. There was the constant rumble of wheels and the clip-clop from the hoofs of a great variety of horses. There were the powerful dray horses and those stalwarts who pulled the London buses, and there were the weary cab-horses. Then there was a great array of cobs and ponies pulling the tradesmen's delivery vans and coster carts, and pride of place was held by the smartly groomed, privately owned carriage horses. Scattered about London were well-stocked livery stables and riding schools, and the Army quartered in London had large numbers of horses. It will be realised that vast quantities of fodder had to be brought from the country every week and that hay was then a commodity somewhat akin to petrol today, but far more bulky.

There had been three big hay markets in London, namely Whitechapel, Smithfield, and the Cumberland Market in the vicinity of Regent's Park. This last-named market had been transferred from the location of the West End street we now know as the Haymarket in 1836, the last year of the reign of George IV.

It was, however, the Whitechapel market that was of paramount importance, and in 1927 Sir Walter Besant stated that it was the largest in the whole country. It was strategically placed just without the precincts of the City, in the middle of the main road connecting Essex and Hertfordshire with London. This market had originally been sited at Ratcliffe, one of the Tower Hamlets within the Manor of Stepney. It dated back to the year 1664 when Charles II granted a patent for a weekly market to be held at Ratcliffe Cross and an annual fair on Michaelmas Day on Mile End Green. The hay market was transferred from Ratcliffe to Whitechapel in 1708 and was established by Charter to be held three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. It is possible that there was a market in Whitechapel before the move from Ratcliffe. In the early part of this century when an action was brought against the hay-traders for causing an obstruction, Mr. Horace Avory KC said "The origin of the market could not be traced".

On market days in Whitechapel High Street, as soon as it was light, big hay wagons would start arriving, many of them bearing the names of the farms and villages from which they came. The market was open from 7 a.m. till 3 p.m. from Lady Day until Michaelmas, and from 7 a.m. until 2 p.m. during the winter months. A warning bell was rung one hour before the market was due to close.

Most of the hay and straw which found its way to Whitechapel came from Essex and Hertfordshire and the Isle of Sheppey. In the early days most of it came by road, although Thames barges played a

big part in shipping hay up this river from Canvey Island and Sheppey. Later, much of it came by rail and motor lorry, although horses still played their part until the closing of the market. Until the end of the first decade of this century and possibly later, people who lived in country towns in Essex, such as Epping, Ware, and Hoddesdon, would wake in the night to hear the rumble of wagon wheels and the sound of plodding horses as the big hay carts went by on their way to Whitechapel.

Many farmers who did not have the facilities for marketing their own crops sold them to the hay-merchants, some of whom were located in the vicinity of Whitechapel with premises consisting of big yards. One of these firms, which went by the name of Gardner and Gardner dated back to 1784 and survived until the closing of the market. It was situated in Whitechapel High Street in premises known as Spreadeagle Yard. Over the large entrance gates was a double-headed eagle carved in stone. Beside the gateway, and flush with the road, was a cottage where the horse-keeper lived with his family. Down one side of the yard was the office block. The other sides were filled with big cart-sheds with stables over them, the horses going up a ramp to their quarters.

The merchants would go into the country to purchase hay. Some they would buy in the big country markets, such as Chelmsford, but they also dealt directly with the farmers, buying the hay in the stack.

Celia Davies.

(To be continued).

PROGRAMME NOTES.

1. Final details of the Newham Meeting are as follows:-
 Tuesday, 17th March 1970. - F.Sainsbury Esq., A.L.A., B.E.M.
 "West Ham, 1820-1870; a social and industrial revolution".
 East Ham Library, High Street South, E.6. 7.30 p.m.
2. London & Middlesex Archaeological Society, forthcoming Meetings.
 - (i) Seventh Annual Conference of London Archaeologists.
 Livery Hall, Guildhall. Saturday 14th March 1970.
 2.30 p.m. Admission by ticket - further information
 from R.A.Canham Esq., London Museum, Kensington Palace,
 London W.8. (s.a.e.).
 - (ii) City Tour led by Peter Marsden.
 Saturday, 25th April, 2.30 p.m. Limited party,
 Tickets from Hon. Director of Meetings (F.J.Froom Esq.
 7, Henry's Avenue, Woodford Green, Essex).
3. The Secretary of the Society is endeavouring to arrange a canal trip in April. Members should give this the utmost support as East London's canal banks are rapidly changing. Please reply to the Secretary as soon as details are circulated. Bring your camera and enjoy East London from the water!