ELHG EAST LONDON HISTORY GROUP

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EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY. BULLETIN No.14 SEPTEMBER, 1970.

EDITORIAL

Since our last Bulletin in March (the June issue was suspended in favour of the Exhibition pamphlet), the Exhibition was held in Tower Hamlets and Hackney attracting some 4000 people and 3/400 schoolchildren in parties in the former area, and about 500 during the week at Hackney. It is a pity that attendances at many evening events were small as most of the excellent lectures involved considerable study and research and are unlikely to be heard in East London again. The Exhibition was quite successful. It made an obvious impact on many East London residents, it stimulated interest in the schools and in school-children, it made the activities of the Society more widely known and it enabled us all to extend our knowledge of local history. Many thanks to the few who worked hard to collect, erect, invigilate, lecture, dismantle, re-erect, re-dismantle and return the contributions which came from some fifty or more sources.

Also since the last Bulletin, progress has been made in the St. Katherine's Dock Development Scheme. I am pleased to report that representations have succeeded and that the pedestrian right of way along the riverside between Wapping and the Tower is being preserved. The Dockmaster's house is to be retained. The London Docks Scheme has been presented to the public at three Exhibitions in various parts of East London and it is now being studied by the Committee. If any member who visited one of the Exhibitions wishes to make any point on the new proposals, the Secretary would be glad to hear from them.

Another familiar sight has disappeared from the East London waterfront. The last gas collier (owing to conversion to natural gas) has left the Thames. She is the "Croydon" which has just made the final delivery of coal from the North East to Wandsworth Gasworks. These colliers were specially designed to go under London's bridges and often anchored off East London. It will be remembered that Captain Cook gained his early experience on a Thames collier.

Members who enjoyed Harvey Sheldon's talk on his recent excavations near Roman Road, Bow, will be pleased to know that he plans to return to the site in the near future. Younger members might like to assist in the new "dig". His confirmation that the Roman Road was a three-lane road was most interesting.

One of our members, Mr. Alexander Pollock, of 24 Sherwood Road, Seaford, Sussex, has a particular interest in East London's railways. He is making a more detailed study of the subject and would like to know if any other member(s) are willing to co-operate in this study. Interested members should contact him direct.

A full programme of talks etc. has been planned for the 1970-71 season. There are a number of new subjects on East London which will be presented by highly competent people. When the details are published, note them in your diary and come along. Don't let the rain or T.V. deter you - yours will be the greater gain.

A.H.F.

"KING OF THE STREETS"

The Costers were indeed King of the Streets and masters of their environment. They lived in a closely-knit community, governed by its own unwritten rules of conduct, and employed a distinctive form of speech. A Coster had faith only in himself and his kind.

Mayhew, asking a Coster lad if he had any religion, received the reply, "No Guv, ain't never been inside a Church, but if I did get religion I'd be a Catholic, they looks after their own". This the Costers would understand, for their outlook on life was practical, down to earth. To sell good stuff at a reasonable profit from boyhood to old age. Few ever became wealthy, but few ever starved; a Coster was too cute for that. While he could hire or borrow a "barrer' and a 'Bit o stock' he was in business.

Marriage was unimportant to the Coster fraternity. A lad and his Dinah lived together, usually in one room, brought up a family, were respected by every other Coster, and enjoyed marital bliss without the benefit of Clergy. Very often they had living with them a small boy, an orphan, employed to push the barrow in the streets. He received no wages, only his keep, a warm corner in which to sleep, the odd penny and a dip in Bill's 'baccy box'.

Coster girls were fastidious in their cleanliness for no 'Bill' would tolerate a 'dirty Sal', a derisionary term for a sluttish untidy woman. Although there might be the occasional 'argifying' between Bill and Bess, sometimes ending in a 'shiner' for one or the other, a Coster rarely neglected his common-law wife. On 'Sweet Saturday Night' at the Music Hall or Penny Hop, he expected his wife to be a credit to him. Sitting in the Gods she had to look her smartest in best bonnet, cotton dress and bright shawl, not to mention the silk 'kingsman' around the neck. A Coster girl never wore silk dresses. Costers loved the theatre. The bright costumes; the rip-roaring melodramas; the songs the freedom from restraint, all echoed their love of life and gaiety.

Every Coster lad loved a good fight, and a fellow who had actually knocked down a 'Copper' and kicked his helmet along the road because he had been officiously moved on, was a real hero. Another fellow of respect was the 'Chickaleary Cove'. A very smart fellow indeed; perfect in dress; astute in business; of dashing deportment and a proved lady-killer.

In range of speech the Coster excelled. Nobody called a spade 'a spade'. Slang, Back Slang, Rhyming Slang, was the everyday form of speech. He was master of Cockney wit and repartee. If he 'tumbled to your barrikins' it meant he understood you. 'Doing Dab' was doing badly. Out of funds you had to drink 'Fisherman's Daughter' (water) instead of Porter. People did not die but "kicked the bucket", or if the deceased was a personal friend he would have 'turned up life'. This would result in a 'turnup Friendly Lead' in the deceased's favourite pub to raise the funeral expenses and a 'bit for the widder'. You spoke with your 'Potato Trap' and saw with your 'Daylights'. 'Doing the tightener' was going to dinner, and common house sparrows were 'spadgers'. A full, rich, expressive language for a virile uninhibited people who loved life, laughter and independence.

Slowly the Costermonger moved with the times. The 'barrer and moke' gave place to the horse and cart, then the motor van. The decorative

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clothing became more subdued. Street trading slowly vanished and the Coster became a Market man. But the 'lingo' survived and the same expressive epithets can still be heard from time to time from descendents of old time Cockney Costermongers.

Time passes. Gone the Pearly Kings and Queens with their velvet jackets, pearl buttons and ostrich feathers. Gone the 'Gods of the Music Hall' with their Oranges, Eel Pies, Bottles of Porter, Pigs Trotters, raucas cheers and long sibilant hissing. They cried for the Hero and Heroine parted, and cheered for a villain well punished. But more than anything, they loved a good song well sung. They joined in the chorus and 'raised many a Music Hall roof'.

It has all gone now, and 'Knees up, Mother Brown' will never sound the same again.

(Final Article by S.A.Andrews on The Costers)

WOOL WAREHOUSE MEMORIES : LONDON DOCKS.

(A letter published in "The Port" sent by a docker).

"Your last issue showed a picture of the massed men lining the heavy steel chain stretched across the dock road, inside the London Dock. The men who lined the chain of the wool department in my days were complete nonners, without either a P.L.A. privilege ticket of A, B or C.

With the London wool sales well geared with its daily sales at Coleman street in the City, much labour was required for the many operations then involved. Even as dawn broke across the eastern skies, there were men beginning to collect across the road, facing the closed dock gates. Most of these men without any fixed abode must have been sleeping in the rough (inside a covered street van). It was the days when the first recognition of dockers (brass tallies and buffcards) were not yet in use.

Shuttleworth's coffee shop had its mountainous heights of beef dripping slices, its mugs of black brew. For men preparing to face many hours of exhausting labour, it was criminal that even a dripping slice and a hot mug of char were missing.

With labour massing outside of the dock, the clock hands pointing to 7 a.m. the PLA police took no chances. With a concerted effort the gates swung back quickly. As though it was a gold strike the men raced down the dock road to be placed in position facing the chain. As the minutes passed with more and more labour pressing, the chain commenced biting hard on the stomachs of those in front.

With the arrival of the wool warehouse foreman, the privilege men of A, B and C tickets were all engaged. Then the fun started. Gingerly, the foreman approached each in turn as near to the chain as he dared, for it would have been fatal had he got within grasp of the stretching hands. With groans and grunts from those old men penned in, of the late young arrivals that with an hop-skip and a mighty leap to sprawl across the heads of the bunched men, all reached for that brass ticket. With the last tally gone, the abuse rolled out from some of the disappointed seekers. Often, as the unemployed were shepherded to the dock gates by the police, a few like battle casualties lay stretched across that steel chain.

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For in those days it was amazing the type of men that were engaged in the wool warehouses. A cleverly set of painted boards, of the brokers names, of the different signs required were mostly the products of men that had got lost in the world around them. Of doctors, artists, of the law, names that had once carried distinction in their different fields, were now lost in that denizon of the dock jungle. The docks in those days were a free for all."

Frank (Gus) Davis.

DO YOU WANT TO BUY A WOLF OR A LION ?

When I was a young schoolboy in Camberwell, the Public Library there had a marvellous collection of the vocal scores of Edwardian musical comedies, presented to them one presumes, since, in those days, public funds were not usually spent on anything so frivolous. I was much captivated by the catchy tunes and clever lyrics, and though all these comedies were produced before I was born, I can to this day recall every note and every word of hundreds of vocal numbers from "A Country Girl", "The Toreador", "Our Miss Gibbs", etc.

Occasionally, however, memory fails, hence this request. In one of these Edwardian comedies there is a number sung by a character described in the Dramatis Personnae as "A Dealer in Wild Animals". He starts off:- "If you should come my way, along the Ratcliff Highway..." and invites you to inspect his stock in trade. The lyric is chock full of puns, some rather obvious, such as supplying cheetahs to card sharpers, guinea pigs for shady Company promoters, worms (on special terms) for early birds, and so on. The best pun (which concludes every chorus) is that he calls his macaws "Pink 'Uns" because their tails are red and some are blue... a reference to the well-known "Sporting" paper of those days.

I cannot recall, however, which musical comedy this comes from nor does it really matter (though I should be personally interested to know). What, for the purpose of East London history is relevant, is, did this song have at the date of its inception, some oblique reference to an actual animal importer's establishment in or off Ratcliff Highway? If, in a modern musical comedy, you made reference to a boutique in the King's Road, Chelsea, the audience would know what you were making a dig at. Consequently, it seems quite possible that there was a well-known animal importer's in or off the Ratcliff Highway in Edwardian times, supplying zoos and circuses.

Has anyone information about this ?

William A. Bagley.

MR. ALBERT JASPER

We regret to report the death on the 31st August of Mr. Albert Jasper, of Walthamstow. He had a chequered life rising from the slums of East London to the ownership of his own Company and the authorship of his book "A Hoxton Childhood". He suffered considerably from ill-health which crippled his writing hand. Despite this, he managed to complete his second book "The Year After" He writes as a typical East Londoner - not even allowing his publishers to correct his grammar! His books on the poverty in East London in the early part of this century, of violence and "moonlight flits", of drunkenness and despair, are well worth reading.

THE ROYAL FOUNDATION OF ST. KATHERINE.

The Royal Foundation of St. Katherine was founded during the anarchy in 1148 by King Stephen's Queen Matilda, with three priest brothers, three sisters, and a Master, and an unspecified number of bedesmen and bedeswomen. From the first it was a Religious House and the professed received their habits from the Augustinian Prior of Aldgate, but within a few years it became an independent community directly under the patronage of the Queen. The Foundation was in the medieval sense a 'Hospital' (a place of hospitality) and in the sixteenth century had over a thousand within its precincts, caring for the sick, the insane, the poor, derelicts, strangers, children, etc. For five hundred years it was virtually all the East London there was, being the first of the Tower Hamlets (honoured by the new Borough's name), having its own fair, and it was ruled as a civil liberty by the Master (often a Chancellor or a Diocesan Bishop), who was also a J.P., on the site of what is now East Smithfield (Smoothfield) and the Saint Katherine's Dock.

The Foundation survived the dissolution of the monasteries by the patronage of Queen Catherine of Aragon, whose Chaplain, the Portuguese Bishop of Llandaff, was the Master at that time. When Queen Catherine Parr survived King Henry VIII she appointed her second husband, The Lord High Admiral Seymour, as the first lay Master. Early in the nineteenth century, however, when for the only time in history a King instead of a Queen was Patron, George IV allowed the Master, General Taylor, to sell the buildings and land over the heads of the Chapter, to the City and Dock Company, and the Foundation was moved to Regent's Park where the Chapel and the Master's House still stand, the former being now the Danish Church.

Queen Victoria sometimes appointed ladies-in-waiting as sisters, and virtually used the buildings as grace and favour apartments, but in 1913 Queen Alexandra, whilst allowing the buildings to be used for secular purposes, directed the income of the Foundation back to the East End of London for a Hospital in Poplar, and the Chapel was given to the Danes as their place of worship in London. In 1947, in consultation with Father St. John Groser (a veteran East End priest) Queen Mary succeeded in re-transferring the whole Foundation back to the East End of London to the bombed site of St. James's, Ratcliff, with the adjacent vicarage. The latter, an early eighteenth century house formerly a master shipwright manor's house, was restored and new wings were built around the garden to provide hospitality for retreatants and guests and accommodation for conferences.

So, after a century and a quarter, the Foundation returned to serve East London, just a mile or so down the river from its original site. The chief social work undertaken was old people's work, which grew enormously and was eventually handed over fully to the Borough. In 1968, at the invitation of the Patron, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, the Foundation was entrusted to the care of the Community of the Resurrection and the Deaconess Community of Saint Andrew. So the wheel has turned full circle and the Foundation is once again a religious house of brothers and sisters with a common Chapter, presided over by the Master, who is a Member of the Community of the Resurrection. The regular round of monastic worship is offered in the Chapel and from this flows a large variety of activities, both local and general - teaching in schools, running old people's clubs and children's pre-school groups, child care work, chaplaincy work in the University, assisting the local clergy, etc.

(The Master, C.R., The Royal Foundation of St.Katherine).

WHITECHAPEL HAY MARKET AND OBELISK.

(Continued from Bulletin No. 13 - Mar.1970).

Certain ancient customs, some of which took on the form of a ritual, were preserved by both vendor and buyer. The merchant would first inform the farmer of the date and time of his arrival at the nearest railway station. Here the farmer would meet him and drive him to his farm in a trap or ponycart - later on, perhaps in a car. Sometimes there would be refreshment at the farm before they set out to inspect the haystacks.

After walking round the stack, the buyer would assemble his "iron". This was a metal rod which was made in sections about 2 ft. long and packed in a leather case. When the parts had been screwed together the rod was 6 or 7 ft long. One end was cut in the form of a barb. The merchant would thrust the rod right into the heart of the stack, giving it a sharp twist and then withdraw it. A little wisp of hay from the middle of the stack would be extracted; this he would twist between his finger and thumb to feel the texture and then pass it under his nose to make sure that it smelled sweet and dry. It was unlikely that he would make any comment or show by the expression of his face whether the hay pleased him or not. The two men would walk back to the farm discussing other topics, anything in fact except the hay in question. Tea might be served by the farmer's wife, or a glass of ale consumed before the drive back to the station. There would be more talk on the platform while awaiting the train but still no mention of the possible deal. When the train arrived and the trader had entered the carriage, he would open the window in order to carry on his conversation with the farmer. As the train began to move, he would lean out of the window and strike a blow on the farmer's upturned hand. The bargain had been struck and no written contract was needed to legalise the deal. The farmer would cut up his stack and probably send the bales of hay to London by rail. The trucks of hay would be shunted into the big sidings at Broad Street Station, just outside Liverpool Street. The Whitechapel merchants would send their wagons to collect the hay and take it to the market.

Much business was done on market day. During the year 1907-8, 22,500 loads of hay were sold in Whitechapel. By the Regulation Act of 1844, a load of hay was made up of 36 trusses, each truss weighing 56 lbs. except new hay which must weigh 60 lbs. until September 4, to allow for the extra moisture it contained. In 1909 the amount sold in the market was 19,333 loads and by 1910 it had dropped to 17,761 loads, an average of 114 loads each market day.

The market was not always entirely free for those who used it. In 1853 the Whitechapel Improvement Act was passed, and a body of trustees was appointed. Their business was to levy a toll of 6d per load of hay or straw and an additional registration fee of 1d per load. Later on these duties were taken over by the Whitechapel Council. The market rights belonged to the Lord of the Manor, and he received a third of the sixpenny toll. In 1910 the dues paid to the Lord of the Manor amounted to £133, and in this year three firms of Whitechapel hay merchants banded together to purchase the Market Rights. They felt they needed to strengthen their position in view of the growing hostility towards the Market which caused such an obstruction to the ever-increasing traffic.

During the two hundred odd years of the Whitechapel hay Market, it came in for a good deal of criticism. In 1771 it was reported in "The Public Advertiser" that "a complaint has been made to the Lord Mayor relating to jobbing

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and evil practices among the farmers, etc. in the haymarket". After the turn of the century there was much concern about the obstruction caused to traffic by the market. In May 1914 a select Committee of the House of Commons recommended the abolition of the hay market, but with the coming of war the matter was shelved. In 1923 new protests were voiced and a Thames police magistrate called the hay market "a public nuisance". The hay merchants stood by their rights.

It was clear that nothing but an Act of Parliament could abolish the long-standing market. But times were changing and the final blow was soon to fall. In August 1927 Parliament decreed that the ancient hay market, which was by now held on only two days a week, should be extinguished in six months time. A sum of £17,000 was paid by the L.C.C. as compensation to the three firms who now held the market rights.

With the market gone, the traffic was now able to flow more freely, but no longer did the sweet smell of hay mingle with the petrol fumes.

Celia Davies.

A NOTE ON BALMES HOUSE.

The mansion BALMES HOUSE is often describedas the Manor House of Hoxton though the estate was never a true manor.

The origin of the name is not certainly known but it is possible that it commemorates the Bamme family, prominent London citizens of the late fourteenth century. There seems to be no accurate evidence to support the theory that the house was built by two Spanish merchants, though this was the view held by Ellis, the eighteenth-century historian of Shoreditch.

Balmes was in the hands of the Philpot family from the fourteenth century until 1634, when it was rebuilt by Sir George Whitmore, Lord Mayor of London and a supporter of Charles I. During the eighteenth century the estate was in the possession of the De Beauvoir family; both Whitmore and De Beauvoir occur in local place-names. There was a long dispute between the parishes of Hackney and Shoreditch as to the exact boundary line near Balmes House. Hackney seems finally to have accepted that the House lay on its side of the boundary. A 1662 burial register entry reads :

> "A young man was found drounded in a pond neär the Bames. Not knowing from whence he came, was buried the 21st of March."

Subsequently the house became Warburton's Private Madhouse, where Charles Lamb used to take his sister Mary during her fits of insanity. It has been suggested that the word "barmy" derives from this period of the mansion's history, but again there is no supporting evidence.

The house was demolished in 1850. The site, just north of Whitmore Bridge over the Regent's Canal, has recently been redeveloped, but it seems that no relics of the mansion have come to light, at least on this occasion.

Brenda Hough.

(It is hoped that an article on Warburton's Private Mad House will appear in a subsequent issue). ./-

THE HACKNEY FREE AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS.

The Hackney Free and Parochial Foundation which has close links with the parish church of St. John-at-Hackney, celebrated its 450th anniversary this year. Over four centuries have passed since the Rector and Churchwardens of the parish of Hackney undertook the responsibility for the education of 12 poor boys. They were taught by a schoolmaster in the Old Church House which stood on the site now occupied by the Midland Bank in Mare Street.

In the early 18th century, the parish opened a Charity School, the minute books of which are still preserved. This School was moved to the site in Chatham Place in 1811 which it occupied until 1895. The Foundation now maintains, with the help of the Inner London Education Authority, three schools, the Secondary School in Paragon Road with over 700 pupils, a Junior School in Isabella Road and an Infant School in Tresham Avenue.

An interesting history of the Foundation has been written by the Headmaster, Mr. John Baldry, and published by Colin Smythe at 7/6d. It has frequent references to the Parish Beadle, the workhouse, and the grim House of Correction with its dreaded treadmill. It also gives interesting accounts of the long school hours, the distinctive clothing, and severe discipline of those early school days.

A.H.F.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On October 21st the Society will hold its Annual General Meeting at Queen Mary College, at 7 p.m. At this Meeting we take stock of the past year and put forward ideas for the coming year. It is also at this Meeting that the Society's officers are elected for the ensuing year.

The Society needs more members to assist in its work. The Committee meets for a few hours one evening a month. This is a quite rewarding activity and we hope to have more volunteers for it this year. There are those who are afraid of becoming "involved" but the Society will not ask for more in time and effort than you are able to give. We want more people to give a little of their spare time to maintain and uphold the best traditions of this historic part of London. Also, if you have any nominations for the position of Chairman, Secretary, Programme Secretary, Treasurer, or Committee member, please let Miss Sansom (18, Hawkdene, Chingford, E.4) have them by the 15th October.

WINDMILLS

Windmills played a great part in the early East London scene. Do you want to know more about them? You are invited by the Barking Historical Society to a talk on Windmills by Mr. W.E.Tonkin at the Town Hall, Forest Road, Walthamstow, on the 19th November at 7.30 p.m., or at Abbey Hall, Axe Street, Barking, at 8 p.m. on Monday, 7th December 1970.