

PRE-WAR RECOLLECTIONS OF BOW.

Many times in the past, I have pondered the question "Where did my ancestors originate from before settling in East London, and who were they?" I eventually decided to find out. I obtained a copy of my late father's birth certificate and discovered he was born at No.2 Turners Buildings, Poplar, in 1896. With other information contained on the Certificate, and coming to one or two dead ends, I managed with the help of expert researchers to trace back to the century before last. My great, great, great, great grandfather was born at Portsmouth about 1750. His grandson who was born in 1799 was a Warrant Officer in the Royal Navy, who died in 1843. My great grandfather was born at Portsmouth in 1840 and in 1868 he was living at No.3, Seyssel Terrace, Millwall. He was married at Christ Church, Poplar. In 1869 when my grandfather was born, they were living at No.22 Queen's Terrace, Poplar, and some time later they were living at West Ferry Road, Millwall.

I myself was born at No.53, Blackthorn Street, Bow. One of my earliest memories is of my mother pushing a pram to the Council Yard at Glaucus Street for tarry blocks for the fire. At the corner of Blackthorn Street and Sherwood Street (later renamed Lawes Street) were Adams the Bakers, who, on Sundays would cook your dinner for a small fee. Every Sunday you could see women hurrying there with their prepared dinners covered with a cloth. A daily sight was the milkman with his pony and cart selling milk straight from the churn. Another well known character who was known far and wide was "Annie, the fish girl". She also had a pony and cart and looked a picture of health with her ruddy complexion and leather apron. At the corner of Blackthorn Street and Devons Road was, and still is, All Hallows Church (known locally as 'the red church') built in 1873. It is believed that Devons Road follows an ancient track leading to Stepney Way. About 1931 we moved to Tidey Street, on the corner of which was a Dairy with a cow barn at the back. The Dairy later became the Francis Mary Buss House, which was a Club for young women. The cow barn was used as an air raid shelter during World War II. Opposite the Dairy was a building known as the Tidey Street Cinema, where they showed silent films. A lady by the name of Mrs. James from Blackthorn Street used to sell peanuts outside. Later the cinema was demolished and on the site was built the Queen Mary day nursery which was opened about 1936 by the Duchess of Gloucester. One of my sisters who was four years old at the time had her photo in the Press with the Duchess stooping over the table talking to the children. Tidey Street had its share of tragedy. During a short period several women lost their husbands, and a gentleman living in Whitethorn Street, wrote a letter to a very well-known newspaper about it. They nicknamed it "Widows Street". At the corner of Bow Common Lane and St.Paul's Way (formerly St.Paul's Road) was the Holy Name School and Catholic Church which I attended. The big event of the year was the Catholic Outdoor Procession which took place in May. People would come from far and wide to see it and the streets would be packed. Catholics in the area would have a candle-lit shrine in their front room window, consisting of a crucifix, statues of the Virgin Mary and St.Joseph, and highly polished brass candle-sticks. On the night-time, the Priest would visit each shrine and bless the house.

The Iron Bridge in Bow Common Lane which crosses the Limehouse Cut was always known as "Stink House Bridge" and it replaced an old brick one. Just over the other side and leading off Upper North Street was Guildford Road. Here there was a barber who was reputed to be the first one in the area to use electric hair clippers. When Armistice Day came round God help anyone who did not observe the Two Minutes Silence. I once saw a man very roughly handled when he was pulled from his bike because he ignored it. Between Tidey Street and Sherwood Street was a small cul-de-sac with a dirt road, called Tryphena Place. On the left hand side were some old cottages while on the right was a building known as "The Centre" where there was a team of nurses to treat cut fingers, grazed legs, etc. When I was a boy I spent many happy hours on Brunswick Pier watching the ships sail by. If a child was "chesty" the doctor would tell the parents to let him spend a couple of hours on Brunswick Pier because the air is fresher there.

Upstairs in No.10, Tidey Street, there was an old lady by the name of Mrs. Gerrotte, who was bedridden. She was an accomplished linguist. When she was young her father who was a wine merchant used to travel

between England and Australia. When he went on these trips and due to his father being dead, he used to leave his daughter with some people living near the Docks. These people ill-treated her and used her as a drudge. When her father came home she complained to him about it. He decided to take his daughter abroad, taking her to Constantinople and leaving her at an English Convent School. He then went on to Australia where he died. The convent brought up his daughter and taught her several languages. When war broke out between Russia and Turkey, Mrs. Garrotte had to leave Constantinople and eventually arrived back in England after getting passage on the ship which was towing Cleopatra's Needle. My family lived in the bottom flat of No.10 and I often heard Mrs. Garrotte tell her grandchildren about the very rough sea journey she experienced. One of her granddaughters still lives in Bow. Mrs. Garrotte's maiden-name was Wright.

Every Saturday morning you would see a procession of children pushing prams and pushcarts backwards and forwards to Bow Common Lane Gas Works for sacks of coke. Every time there was a pub "outing" the customers in the coaches would throw handfuls of coppers to the waiting children, and what a mad scramble there would be to get the money. I think myself that this custom must have had its origin in the ancient past. The Romans were known to put a coin under the masts of their ships. A coloured man used to come down Tidey Street who was known as 'Johnnie the Indian Toffee man'. He used to have a metal container strapped to his shoulders and carried a well hand ball. The area around Tidey Street was a very closely-knit community and everybody knew one another and the people were the most sociable you could ever wish to meet. I think that now that most people watch television they have lost the art of conversing with their neighbours. We are told it is progress but how can it be progress when people are drifting away from each other as they are today?

H. Willmott.

FOOTBALL FEATS.

In a year in which their team fought a losing battle against relegation, Millwall supporters may be cheered up by reading some of the best achievements of their Club. Many of these appear in the GUINNESS BOOK OF SOCCER FACTS AND FEATS by Jack Rollin (Guinness Superlatives Ltd, 1978, £1.95), including how they got their nickname 'the Lions', which I was surprised to learn dates from their Isle of Dogs days.

The Club moved to New Cross early in the present century, but it was not until the 1925-26 season that they entered the record books by not conceding a single goal during eleven consecutive Division Three matches, a record that lasted nearly fifty years. Two seasons later they set another record for the Division when they scored 127 goals in 42 League matches, not losing a single League match at home all season.

A less exciting feat of the Club is that they were involved, with Fulham, in the first League match to be played on a Sunday. This was in January 1974, during the 'three-day week'.

But the GUINNESS book does not have everything. There is no mention of Millwall's Cup achievement in 1937, when they became the first Third Division Club to reach the F.A. Cup semi-final (losing to Sunderland, but went on to win the trophy). Nor do we read everything about their more recent feat, when, between August 1964 and January 1967 they played a record number of 59 home matches without defeat. These last two achievements are, however, contained in an updated edition of THE OBSERVER'S BOOK OF SOCCER, by Albert Sewell (Frederick Warne, 1978, £1.25). Recollections of these events, together with the success of their youth team (who won the F.A. Youth Cup this year) will, hopefully, keep Millwall's many East London supporters out of the 'slough of despond' until the senior team's fortunes change.

Colm Kerrigan.

ENTERTAINMENT IN EAST LONDON

To clarify the following article, may I state that I lived for many years in the East End of London, being domiciled at Poplar. The Bulletin for Winter 1978/79 issued by the East London History Society provided most interesting reading and stirred many memories of East End life throughout the ages. One of the subjects concerned the People's Palace in

to End Road, and East End people were able to enjoy the culture it provided for the masses, such as literature, music by large orchestras, bel concerts, and meetings of political and religious denominations of all descriptions; in fact, Art was displayed in all its forms.

One of my memories concerning the entertainment at the 'Palace' occurred in my teenage days, and my mind goes back to changes taking place in the environment of American life with regard to entertainment in the social world. From coast to coast in America, a new craze was sweeping the country and it was emanating from the original 'spiritual' songs and music. The tempo of the music was called "rhythm", "jazz", "syncopation", and all songs and dances were based on it. From the old banjo, it developed to cups and large orchestras, and the art of 'crooning' by male and female singers of the various melodies, and dance halls, clubs, and concert halls were paramount with the help of the writers of the new type of music. It increased and increased in popular desire and then it emerged from America to world-wide proportions. In England, everybody was talking about this new aspect of entertainment. At a guess, I would say the time was in the 1920s era, or before, which is probably more likely. I was born in 1899, and I cannot quote the exact date of arrival here.

The 'talk of the town' was concentrated on this different type of 'melodic' music and this is where I first became interested. On the recordings adverts were appearing with regard to the "jazz era" in this country, and as a result I decided to go to the People's Palace in Mile End Road where it made its first descent upon this country. What I saw on the stage was an outfit called the Southern Syncopated Orchestra. It took the place by storm. The difference, in the musical aspect, of the syncopated music was, instead of the string, brass and percussion of the large classic-orchestras, the new outfits consisted of Trumpet section, Trombones, Tenor, base, drums and saxophones and clarionets, fronted by a singer, either male or female. As time went on, Hotels engaged orchestras for dancing, conducted by dance band leaders, and dance halls sprang up everywhere. Recording industries were in their element, and soon the bands and conductors became household words, especially as the new invention of "wireless" provided all this new entertainment. Talk about how the little acorn grows to the mighty oak! The popularity has prevailed to the present day, but I always think of the time when I saw the first syncopated orchestra to appear in this country, on the stage of the People's Palace. I wonder if any of the audience at the first show in this country, ever imagined that a new musical 'tempo' would assume the gigantic proportions it enjoys to this day.

John Blake.

FOR YOUR DIARY

The Society will begin its Winter Session on the 27th September with a talk on "Limehouse in the Thirties" by Mr.A.H.French. He worked along the Chinese during this period and spent some time in the docks. The Annual General Meeting will be on the 30th October and members will make contributions to the programme after the business meeting is concluded. Course on "East End Radicalism" will be held at Queen Mary College from 9 p.m. starting on the 21st October. Mr.W.J.Fishman is the Course leader and others will contribute. Details from the University of London, Extra-curricular Dept. or from the Bancroft Road Library. The Exhibition on Captain Cook at the Museum of Mankind (Burlington Gardens, W.1) will continue from the 18th November. David Granick will present more of his interesting slides on the 13th December and for our January meeting on the 14th January, Ian Renson will draw on his vast store of memories of Victoria Park, illustrated by some excellent slides. Make a special point of coming to the "Cinema in East London" show at 113 Roman Road, when we shall have in co-operation of Four Corner films.* Following items will be shown in our new Programme. If you have not already paid your subscription for this year kindly forward £1 to Miss Lenham. The "Record" No.2 will be out in a few months and it is hoped it will be a "sell-out" as the previous one. Finally, please do your best to attend the meetings - our attendances have not been good recently and it is difficult to understand why those who have an obvious interest in the history of East London do not take these valuable opportunities of improving their knowledge and pleasure first-hand.

A.H.F.