

The Society's "Journal" No.3 is now in the hands of the printers and should be available in the autumn. It is full of East London history and is a bargain at 60p. The Project to use Poplar Chapel (St. Matthias) as a cultural centre received overwhelming support at a public meeting held on the 28th May, and we now await further developments. The annual subscription (£1) is due on the 1st October and should be paid to Miss Lenham, 39 Harbinger Road, London E.14. in order to receive your programme for 1980/81 which contains something for everyone, the sportsman, the 'Dickensian', the musician (including some concertina playing), the hospital visitor, the historian and even the job-crawler! Incidentally, members are reminded that there is a box at the Bancroft Road Library in which the Society places a lot of odds and ends relative to East London History. Ask to see it next time you go to the Library.

## ENTERTAINMENT (2)

Further to my Article in the last Summer Newsletter, I turn to the new type of family entertainment which appeared in the early 1920's providing a change from the weekly visit to the local music hall or theatre, or the 'silent' films. Something new was coming over the air from a studio in Savoy Hill off the Strand. I lived in Poplar and there was great activity in back yards where the washing-line pole was put to use by hanging a length of wire to an insulator, extending it to the length of the yard and fixing to the house. A lead was attached connecting to the receiving set and an earth wire placed into the ground outside the window. The set was composed of coils of wire with a small cylinder into which was inserted a 'cat's whisker' which had to be manipulated to find a 'sensitive' spot on the crystal situated in an adjacent container. Without a proper "contact" of these items, no results could be obtained. Usually, two earphones were attached to a band which went over the head but they were adjustable so that two persons could listen at the same time.

So came the music, plays, talks, and all the items connected with this new type of entertainment. There were regular announcers such as John Snagge, Raymond Glendenning, Alvar Liddell, Frank Phillips and others. As time progressed, all these names became household words. The B.B.C. (renamed from 2LO) who had first put this innovation into everyday use, broadcast every item of interest throughout the British Isles and the four corners of the earth. It became part of everyday life and enlarged their influence on the general public, relayed from their more modern headquarters at Portland Place. I think one of the most popular forms of entertainment was the Dance band, a large amount of time being allocated to live broadcasts from hotels and clubs. All the different bands had many fans and naturally each group thought their choice the best. The favourite night was Saturday night from 10.30 to 12.00. The first I heard in my house in Poplar were the Savoy Orpheans, Savoy Orpheans & the Selina Four, Debroy Somers, Howard Jacobs and Billy Mayerl. Later, there were the Savoy Hotel Orpheans conducted by Carroll Gibbons from the Savoy Hotel in London. Then came Ambrose and his Orchestra from the Mayfair Hotel, broadcast live from the ballroom every Saturday night, commencing with the signature tune "When day is done". His many fans thought his Orchestra and singers were the "Daddy" of the lot. Incidentally, I understand that Bert Ambrose started his career playing the violin at a cinema in Mile End Road, almost opposite Bancroft Road). Then there were Max Goldberg, Tommy McQuater, Teddy Foster, Ted Heath, Lew Davis, George Chisholm, Maxie Bacon (drummer & singer), Syd Phillips, Joe Polo, Joe Jeanette, Billy Anstell, Bert Barnes, fronted by vocalists Leslie Carlisle, Sam Browne, Ann Shelton, Vera Lynn (who commenced her career at Poplar Baths at a dance show by Howard Baker) and, of course, Evelyn Dall (The Blonde Bombshell). They made many records and appeared at the London Palladium and other halls. They also appeared at Buckingham Palace playing to the Royal Family. I can remember two of their records "When day is done" with a change of tempo midway, and "Woodchoppers Ball" Absolute! Instrumental! Perfection!

What a wealth of entertainment these following bands provided on the stages and dance halls to "wireless" broadcasting each providing different kinds of music, Lew Stone, Joe Loss, Jack Jackson, Jack Payne, ./-

Henry Hall, BBC Dance Orchestra, Charlie Kunz, Harry Roy, Sid Ray, Mantovani, Edmundo Ross, Howard Baker, Jack Hylton, Billy Ternent, Billy Cotton, Ray Noble, Fred Elizaldi, Sidney Lipton, Roy Fox, Nat Gonella and many others. Singers were Al Bowlly, Kitty Masters, Alma Cogan, Alan Breeze, Michael Halliday and many others. Those years from 1933 to 1939 were full of cheerful music and even the War period did not deter the bands from providing first-class syncopated music. Of course, all this happened before the advent of television which does not seem to give the same time to large orchestras at the BBC "Wireless era" did. So passed an era, and many of the names I have mentioned have passed from the scene. In any case, to gather a band of musicians together in one orchestra regularly, would be well-nigh impossible in these days of inflation.

John Blake.

### THAMES IRON WORKS.

In 1939 the Admiralty took over two drydocks belonging to the defunct Thames Iron Works. These were situated on the eastern side of the mouth of the River Lea and were called the Eastern Dock and the Western Dock. They were in a deplorable condition and alterations and repairs had to be effected before they could be used. The intention of the Admiralty was to use these docks as a small repair depot for coastal vessels and small supply ships (including wooden ships) up to approximately 500 tons. Ships would be floated in on high tide and floating caissons moved into position at the entrance of the docks and secured. The ships could either be shored up or rested on blocks and the water pumped out.

In February 1948, the Lea experienced a series of exceptionally high tides. Two vessels were in drydock at this time, the "Loch Killarney" an Admiralty frigate, and the "William H. Daniels", a Canadian Lake boat, and about 250 men were employed on them by the Admiralty. One day, at about 12.30 p.m. warnings were given by the Chargehand Fitter (an employee of Harland & Wolff Ltd) and by a Mr. John Hoskins (a cripple caretaker) that the tidal water was coming over the head of the caisson and that it was buckling under the strain. Fortunately, most of the workmen were at lunch and the rest were able to get out of the docks quickly.

About ten minutes after the warning, the caisson collapsed under the weight of water and hundreds of tons of water swept into the Western Dock carrying the wrecked caisson and other debris. The "Wm. H. Daniels" was carried up into the air about 40-50 ft. crashing into the head of the dock. She then swept back tearing the blocks adrift and they shot into the air like corks. The surge of water swept across the Yard wrecking small buildings, tool-sheds, toilets, etc. and then filled the Eastern Dock causing the "Loch Killarney" to burst the shores which were holding her upright. She rose into the air about 20-30 ft. and crashed down on her port side. The waters receded leaving about 3/4 feet of mud over the Yard and a trail of wreckage and destruction.

Police, the fire service, and ambulances were called but a roll call confirmed that no-one was missing, and only minor injuries had been sustained. Volunteer workmen from Harland & Wolff Ltd. with the Admiralty workmen cleaned up the Yard and commenced salvage. The "Loch Killarney" was righted by means of air compressors and wire hawsers after temporary repairs could only continue at low tide and her frames were buckled. Eventually, she was floated and towed to the Union Drydocks at the Isle of Dogs for permanent repairs which took over a year. Thus the end of work done at the Thames Iron Works. The Canadian Government were sympathetic and undertook all repair costs to the "Wm. H. Daniels". (This article, which had to be reduced, was written by Mr. Walter Francis of Manor Park, who had to run for his life and hang on to a wall, the water coming up to his chest. It was dictated to the late Mr. David Cranick in hospital).

**NOTE: COACH TRIP.** - There will be a coach trip to Cambridge on Saturday 27th September. After lunch at Cambridge, we will visit Wimpole Hall, an 18th Century house in a lovely park. Tea can be obtained at Wimpole House. Cost will be £4.50 including entrance to Wimpole Hall (£3.50 to Nat. Trust Members). Coach leaves Mile End Station 9.30 a.m. Please advise Miss Sandom.