

EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY
SUMMER NEWSLETTER - JULY 1984

1. PROGRAMME

The Programme for 1984/5 has now been printed and is being circulated to all members. Jim Connor's "All Stations to Poplar" on the 20th September will revive memories of the London and Blackwall Railway, whilst the videotape on the Hopfields following the AGM on 25th October will prove great fun! The Annual Lecture at Bancroft Road Library is being given by Lord Asa Briggs on "The Centenary of Toynbee Hall". This should be of great appeal since the formation of this Society was the result of efforts made by Professor Bindoff of Queen Mary College and the Warden of Toynbee Hall. Not having (yet) seen any balloons over Newham, I can only wait and see what Howard Bloch has in store for us on the 12th December.

2. AUTUMN COACH TRIP

There will be a visit on Saturday, October 13th (pickup at Mile End station at 9.30 am) to Canons Ashby in Northamptonshire, a National Trust house only opened this year. It was the home of the poet Dryden, and has been virtually unaltered since the early 19th century. There is a medieval priory church in the grounds. This will be combined with a visit to an attractive village nearby, and possibly other places of interest. The fare is £3.30, and entrance to the house £2 (National Trust members free). A booking form for the outing is sent with this Newsletter.

3. BUSINESS ARCHIVES

The Museum of London has six lunch-time lectures relating to business records of London firms. These will be held on Fridays at the Museum and is organised by the Business Archives Council.

4. REGENTS CANAL WALKS

All members are invited to join two-hour walks from Camden Town Underground Station (where you meet the guide) to Islington (near the Angel Underground station). Meet 2.30 pm on Sundays August 5th, October 7th, December 2nd, also at 6.15 pm on Tuesday July 17th (if you get this newsletter in time). There will be a charge of £1 which will go to the funds of the Inland Waterway Association. (Information from I.W.A., 114 Regents Park Road, NW 1 - 01-586 2510).

5. WALTHAMSTOW ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

This Society invites ELHS members to any of their meetings, which are held at Waltham Forest Town Hall, Forest Road, Walthamstow at 7.45 pm. The next three meetings are:

September 20th - "Coal Duty Posts" by David Wilkinson (Chigwell and Loughton History Society)

October 18th - "Fitzrovia" by Graham Richards (Walthamstow AS)

November 15th - "Pubs of Waltham Forest" by John Howes (Walthamstow AS)

Thanks to Walthamstow A.S. for their kind invitation.

6. BRITAIN'S MARITIME HISTORY, 1500-1900

A University of London Extra-Mural Evening Class surveying Britain's maritime history in the age of sail will begin on the 18th September 1984. The class will meet weekly on Tuesdays, 7.15-9.15 p.m. in the Half-Deck, East Wing, at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, SE10 9NF. If you are interested in joining this class, please telephone 01-858 4422. Tutor:- Roger Morris, BA.Ph.D.

7. SIR JOHN LEMAN

Mrs. Rosemary Weinstein of the Museum of London visited us on the 15th February. Her subject was Sir John Leman, a name familiar to East Enders through the naming of Leman Street, Aldgate. We also learnt that at least two other streets in the area are named after his family connections, Mansell Street and Alie Street.

Sir John, like many other great Londoners, was not born here - he first saw the light of day at Saxmundham in 1544. His connection with the fish trade in that area brought him to London and he became a very active member of the Fishmonger's Company, attending the Fishmongers Court for some 39 years. Curiously, it seems he made his early fortune not from fish but from trading in butter and cheese which he imported from the farms of East Anglia. The background of this trade is difficult to establish, no import duties or excise being charged on them. Consequently, not a large number of records have survived, but those that do indicate the size of Sir John's trading.

He had a very long life, dying in 1632 at the age of 88. During his life he held many public offices, including that of Lord Mayor of London. A picture of his mayoral barge survives in Fishmonger's Hall, and a very grand affair it was. Also surviving, and we saw colour-slides of these, are his gold signet ring, his seal, and a portrait of him in his old age. He died, one of the twentysix richest men in England and a bachelor, leaving many charitable bequests.

Our thanks to Mrs. Weinstein for making this story of an illustrious man with local connections so colourful and interesting. She, on her part, has written to us for being such an interested audience.

J.C.

8. WILLIAM WHIFFIN, 1879-1957

An Exhibition at the GLC's Photograph Library (40 Northampton Road, EC1R 0AB) which ended in mid-April, offered an opportunity of studying more than 60 of Whiffin's East London photographs, most of them enlarged to a degree that made identifying details a very interesting and rewarding task. The Whiffin collection has now been fully integrated into the GLC's Photograph Library, but members of the Society will know that an enormous number of Whiffin's original photographs are held locally in the History Library at Bancroft Road. Also, members will know that one of the few useful things written about this local photographer appeared in our magazine, the "East London Record" for 1980, pages 18-21, from Bernard Nurse, then the Archivist at Tower Hamlets Local History Library.

Colm Kerrigan.

9. LEAFLETS

Two excellent leaflets are now available, published by the Tower Hamlets Environment Trust for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Tourism Working Party.

The first is "A walk through Spitalfields" containing a potted history of Spitalfields, photographs, a map and suggested walk. This walk is also marked out on the map. It starts and ends at the Brushfield Street junction of Bishopsgate and is very well thought out, although it may be rather a long walk for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it covers a fair mileage and may be a bit too much for those who find getting about a bit

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troublesome. Secondly, with the walk being so long, anyone doing it will really have to skim the surface, taking only a superficial look at all that is offered. However, both these objections can easily be overcome by splitting the walk into sections, thereby at least doubling the pleasure by doing parts of it on different days.

The second pamphlet is "East End Music Hall". This contains a potted history of the music hall, photographs, and some details of eight East End music halls, these being The Foresters, Cambridge Heath Road; Sebright Amusement Temple, Coate Street; Wiltons, Grace Alley; The Royal Cambridge, Commercial Street; The Paragon, Mile End Road; The London, Shoreditch; The Rivoli, Whitechapel Road; and Queen's Theatre, Poplar. Both these pamphlets are very well printed on good quality paper and are worth collecting. I got mine from the Tower Hamlets Information Office, Roman Road, and I assume they will be available from public libraries. Incidentally, both would form very sound bases for illustrated talks, all it needs is a willing spirit with a camera..... or how about a couple of members getting together on it?

John Curtis.

10. LOCAL HISTORY FESTIVAL

The Royal Festival Hall was the setting for the 'Exploring Living Memory' Festival in February. Spread over three days, 17th-19th, the Festival drew an attendance of many thousands. The accompanying Exhibition remained in Festival Hall until the 4th March.

Nearly fifty organisations put on shows, occupying from one to four exhibition screens, and some had showcases and/or video presentations. Some of the organisations had tables, manned for the three days, selling their publications and giving information to the public and other participants. A great sense was felt of being involved in something constructive.

During the three days of the Conference, organisations ran workshops or put on small theatrical and musical presentations, all these being followed by some discussion.

Of particular interest to our own members were the following:- 'Rent strike in Hanbury Buildings, Poplar' (photos); 'Whitechapel in the 30's' (photos); 'The Fisher Family" (photos & documents); 'Memories are made of this" (photos of one woman's family); 'The Island History Project' (photos of past lives of women in the area); 'When we were kids' (photos and book extracts); 'Hackney life in Workhouse, Home Street, etc' (photos); 'Pictorial features of East London' (photos); 'Health care before the Welfare State' (photos & book extracts from Waltham Forest); 'Newport Road School, Leyton' (photos, artifacts and documents).

These were just a few of the many interesting and fascinating displays. Let us hope that the experience will be repeated next year, and that if it is, the East London History Society will be among those taking part. If I had to sum it up in one word, I would call it exhilarating.

J.Curtis.

11. LONDON HISTORY WORKSHOP CENTRE

This organisation is worth bringing to the attention of all members. Its aims are:-

- To gather material on the Londoner's life and work in the past,
- To make this material available for consultation,
- To run workshops and courses and to publish in various forms,
- To provide research services and advice.

Its archives contain sound and video-tapes (transcribed, indexed, and catalogued). These may be listened to and/or watched by anyone, whether familiar or not with libraries and archives. Anyone is also encouraged to deposit copies of their material in the archives (copyright restrictions being observed).

A small photographic collection is also available of 19th and 20th century

material. These are for reference only. Other services are:-

Annual summer school and a variety of other workshops and courses.
 Preparation of exhibitions, slide/video shows, etc.
 Publishing pamphlets and audio-visual packs, etc.
 Providing help and advice to individuals and groups.

Full details can be obtained from 42 Queen Square, London, WC1 3AJ.
 Tel:- 831 8871.

J.C.

12. LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA

Our most distant member, Mr.A.W.Tiffin, wrote to Alan Searle in January. As well as thanking Alan for his copy of the "East London Record", Mr.Tiffin included the following, which we hope will interest many of our members:-

"One of the highlights of my 1983 80th birthday trip to England was a visit to my old friend, Dudley Crighton, at Eastbourne. He, like me, is now in his 81st year, and 1983 was also important to him because he and his beloved wife, Rose, celebrated their Golden Wedding at Bow Road Methodist Church, at which I was his Best Man in 1933, as he was mine in Kent in 1928.

My three months in Kent with my family and friends provided me with many happy experiences and hosts of memories were revived. On July 25th and 29th my son took me to scenes of my boyhood and took many photos. I supplied him with many notes and captions and he has made an excellent album of them (I have a similar album). My birthplace, 56 Ropery Street, Bow, still stands but many other buildings were destroyed in World War II. Council flats now occupy the sites of St.Stephens Church, Tredegar Road, where my parents were married, 87 Morville Street where my father had his corner shop, and 32 Mostyn Grove where I lodged when first starting out to work. 147 Malmesbury Road (my last lodgings before moving to Kent in 1924) and all the north side of that road is now a roadside verge.

Of the four churches I knew, Bow Baptist (Sunday School), Old Ford Methodist, Harley Street Congregational and Bow Road Methodist, the first was destroyed and a smaller church occupies its site, the second is now a crockery warehouse, the third is a Sikh Temple, and the fourth is a modern building on the site of the old church I remembered.

Of course we went through Victoria Park, and of course we had to have a photo of the famous Fountain! I was much pleased by a visit to 64 Tredegar Square where I lived from 1906, when my father died, until 1918, when I became an office boy in the City of London. My son and I were invited to tea with Dr. and Mrs. Hardiman and family who now live there. In my day the house was one of the M.E.O.T. scattered Homes under the control of the Poor Law and its Board of Guardians. My father died of TB in the Workhouse Infirmary in Bancroft Road, now called the Mile End Hospital. Of course we went to the Central Library, where my son was interested to see the East London items I presented fifty years ago and since. I bought him a copy of Colm Kerrigan's "A History of Tower Hamlets"."

This concludes our excerpts from a most delightful letter. We hope Mr. Tiffin will not mind our making his letter public, and we wish him many more years of membership.

J.Curtis.

13. THE "ISLE OF DOGS RAILWAY"

The North Greenwich Branch of the Great Eastern Railway which, during its existence from 1871 to 1926 enjoyed the publicity of using even more decrepit rolling stock than that which had hitherto existed on the main line to Millwall Junction, was the changeover point for passengers. The North Greenwich line extended from Millwall Junction to Ferry Street (alongside the Island Gardens). The terminus, known simply as North Greenwich, comprised a simple wooden structure from which a ferry, purchased by the Railway in 1874, ran across the River to what the Great Eastern termed South Greenwich.

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Through tickets were obtainable until 1902 when the ferry was replaced by the L.C.C.'s free subway (ever since affectionately dubbed by the Island residents as "The Pipe") and the railway received £8000 compensation. The trains ran every 15 minutes throughout the day, their busiest time being Saturday afternoons when Millwall F.C. were playing at home. Millwall Football Club was formed in 1885 and used various grounds on the 'Island' until they removed to New Cross in 1910. Passenger services to North Greenwich came to an end with the General Strike in 1926. Surprisingly, the modest wooden station at the terminus in Ferry Street survived, firstly as a storage depot, and subsequently it became the HQ for the Blackwall & Poplar District Rowing Club. Now it is no more. During May 1969, I watched the remaining structure being demolished to make way for a new HQ for the Rowing Club and the provision of improved local amenities.

Are any of our members interested in railways? When one realises the amount of land in East London used for railway purposes over the past 100 years, there appears to be a wealth of local history in relation to communications to be recorded and brought together in useful form.

K.R.

14. TOWER HAMLETS CENTRAL LIBRARY

The Vestry of the Hamlet of Mile End Old Town came into existence in 1856, consequent upon the passing of the Metropolis Local Management Act the previous year. Prior to this date, the affairs of Mile End were administered by the Vestry of St.Dunstan, Stepney, on which its representatives served. A Town Hall and Workhouse existed in Mile End Road, near Stepney Green, but the growing population of the Hamlet and increasing Vestry business caused the Vestry to propose the erection of a new Vestry Hall in 1857, and in 1860 a site in Bancroft Road, adjacent to the new Workhouse, was purchased from the Mile End Old Town Guardians of the Poor. The tender of the local builder Frederick Wood for £3,748 was accepted, and the still visible foundation stone was laid by the Rector of Stepney, Rev.Richard Lee, on the 2nd October 1860. The architect was the Vestry's Surveyor, James Knight, and the first meeting in the new building was held in July 1861.

The question of a public library in Mile End was first raised in 1859, but the Vestry delayed adoption of the Public Libraries Acts until 1896, and even then their negotiations for the transfer of the People's Palace Library proved fruitless. In 1900, the Vestry was succeeded in its functions by the Stepney Borough Council, and between 1901 and 1902 the Vestry Hall was adapted for public library use, with the lending library on the right of the entrance hall, and the reading room occupying the present lending department. The reading room was opened by Canon Barnett in January 1902, followed in April by the other departments. Reference library provision proved quickly inadequate, and in 1905 the Council approached Andrew Carnegie for funds to extend this service: as a result of his gift of £6000 an extension consisting of the lecture hall and, on the first floor, office accommodation for the Borough Librarian and a reference library, the present Local History Library, was built on the site of a disused mortuary and yard at the rear of the building. The designer was M.W.Jameson, the Borough Engineer, and the builders Messrs. Patman and Fotheringham. The new rooms were opened by the Duke of Argyll on the 23rd April 1906.

In 1912, the lending library was transferred to the old reading room on the first floor. In 1935, a further extension took place, with the acquisition of No.38 Bancroft Road and a sewage depot to the south of the library. This created an enlarged and modernised building; the original ground floor lending department was demolished and the main staircase resited, and a new children's library added to the existing building. This was opened in October 1937 by Walter de la Mare. The architect was the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, Bernard Belsher, and the builders Leslie & Co. of Kensington.

During World War II, the children's library was used as an A.R.P. first aid post, the reference library for storing Civil Defence materials,

and the entrance hall as a Civil Defence station. The Stepney Central Library was chosen as the Central Library for the new borough of Tower Hamlets when Stepney, Poplar and Bethnal Green amalgamated in 1965, and the combined Local History Collections of the three boroughs were housed in the former reference library.

C.J.L.

15. CATHERINE GLADSTONE

The wife of the famous Gladstone, was very active in the East End of London. She was quite a formidable character in her own right, toiling endlessly like the GOM. She was particularly active at the London Hospital during the great cholera outbreaks of the 1860's.

She founded a hospice for those who did not die, but were very weak and required nursing and convalescence, at Clapton. Then one at Snaresbrook where the locals finally drove her out. They didn't want East Enders, particularly those who had had cholera, near them. So she got the freehold of a house in Woodford Green. She braved contagion and was a great encouragement to the staff at the London Hospital, some of whom fled fearing contagion. She even took some children back to No.11 Downing Street (The GOM was then Chancellor of the Exchequer), or to Carlton Terrace, for a few nights until they could be allocated to one of her homes.

A.S.

16. FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We have now carried out what we hope is a complete revision of the membership List and our present mailing list should now contain only those members who are up-to-date with their subscriptions. We hope no paid-up member has been missed and if you know of anyone who is not receiving Society literature, please let us know as soon as possible, so that we can rectify the matter.

In the hope that members will correspond and help each other out with their interests and queries, we intend publishing a selection of these in future newsletters. If you find anyone with a common interest or can help anyone with their queries, please reply direct to them. Of course, if the matter is thought sufficiently interesting to the general membership, a copy should be sent to me for possible inclusion in the newsletter.

Mr.A.D.WETJEN (South Holm, Manor Road, Beeding, West Sussex) informs us of an interest in the period 1849 to 1900. His great grandparents were German immigrants to East London at the beginning of this period. His great grandfather commenced his working life in England as a Journeyman Engineer Driller, but after a few years moved over to the licenced trade, running many different pubs within the area of Tower Hamlets, one being the William IV, William Street, Bethnal Green, c.1862. Any information on the history of the area during the latter half of the last century would be of interest, as would information and accounts of German immigrants to East London.

17. MISS JUNE LENHAM

We are indeed sad to record the sudden death of our Treasurer on the 10th September 1983, and are indebted to "The Islander" for the following obituary :

June was born in Hampshire 66 years ago and lived in Harbinger Road for the past 20 years. In the Second World War she was a nursing officer with the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, and served in North Africa, Italy, Belgium, Germany and India. After the war until her retirement four years ago, she did various jobs connected with medicine and health care, involving travel to the Far East, New Zealand and Australia; her last job before retirement was with the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

June Lenham was a rare person, she loved people - and she served them all her life. A member of the Millwall Labour Party, she also played

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an active part in many local organisations; the Mudchute Association, The Association of Island Communities, and its predecessor the Isle of Dogs Action Group, where her comments and slightly sardonic wit were always appreciated, and will be greatly missed. In her home life, June was a keen gardener, pianist, and cat lover - known as "the cat lady" in her neighbourhood, she was always ready to look after cats when their owners were on holiday. Her active mind and zest for learning led her recently to take up evening classes in carpentry and stained glass making and she was for many years Treasurer and Membership Secretary of the East London History Society. A much loved neighbour, a dear friend and colleague to so many people on the Island, her passing will be deeply felt.

18. JOTTINGS

The "East London Observer" (January 26th 1924) quotes from "British Weekly" :-

"The deacons of North Bow Congregational Church, Roman Road, E.3. are sending out cards of invitation to the ordinary (sic) service of their minister, Miss Mary G. Collins, on Thursday, January 24th.... The occasion is described as "unique in the history of Congregationalism.." The reason for this is that Miss Collins, who was the first woman to receive the Exit Certificate of New College, London, commanding her for recognition as duly qualified for the Congregational Ministry, will also be the first holding such a Certificate to be ordained officially to the sole charge of a church. Miss Norah M. Thompson, who received the New College Exit Certificate on the same day as Miss Collins, was sole minister for a few months at Sunningdale, Berks, and then left for China to marry the Rev. C. Busby of Siaochang. The Rev. Constance Coltman BD. who qualified for the ministry at Mansfield College, Oxford, has held joint pastorates with her husband."

D.B.

"Showtime in Walthamstow is a revised edition, first published 1967 and costing £1.60 is available from Walthamstow Antiquarian Society. It is the story of local entertainment during the last 100 years; of music hall, theatre, cinemas and film studios in that borough. Well written by the late Gregory Tonkin, and with photographic illustrations, the 32-page booklet should be of interest to members.

A slip for your Annual Subscription is included here. Although not due until September, these will be gratefully received at any time hence, thus saving some postage. Thank you.

Name.....

Address.....

Date.....

Enclosed £..... (£2 full member, £1 for OAP's and full-time students)
Return to John Curtis, 9 Avon Road, London E17 3RD.

BOOKING FORM FOR COACH TRIP

I would like to book..... seats for the Coach Trip on the 13th October.
I enclose cheque/P.O. for to cover the fare. (Payable to the Society)
(Fare £3.30 adult, £1.65 child)

Send to:- Miss A.Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, Chingford, E4 7 PJ (Tel: 524 4506)

Please complete and cut off each slip as appropriate.