

EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY

SUMMER NEWSLETTER - 1986

1. FOR YOUR DIARY :

- August 5th LIFE AND WORK IN LONDON'S DOCKS. A lecture by Bob Carr at Harrow Museum & Heritage Centre, Headstone Manor, Harrow, 2.15 - 4pm. Admission 50p. Details from Jill Pedlar, 863 5426 (day) (GLIAS)
- August 9th A WALK TO LOOK AT TRANSPORT SITES IN THE LIMEHOUSE AREA. Meet Stepney East Rly Stn. 10am. Returning from Mile End. Led by Jim Smith 04427 3846 (GLIAS)
- August 9/10th FIRE-FIGHTING, VICTORIAN ERA ONWARDS. At Kew Bridge Engines, Tel 568 4757. Weekend exhibition. (GLIAS)
- August 31st MERSTHAM & GODSTONE IRON RLY. Visit to examine Merstham terminus. Bring torch and wear old clothes and hat. Led by Paul Sowan. Meet outside Merstham Stn. (GLIAS)
- September 27th E.L.H.S. COACH TRIP. Details within.
- October 2nd Mr Alan Ruston on UNITARIAN NONCONFORMITY IN HACKNEY, including history of both the Gravel Pit & Newington Green congregations. (Friends of Hackney Archives 241 2886)
- October 25/26th THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE LONDON REGION TO 1500. A 2-day conference at Museum of London by London and Middx Archaeological Society. Tickets £10 for week-end 788 0015
- November 12th Talk on FAMOUS EAST LONDON SAILORS by A H French, MBE. Bancroft Road Library. Ragged Schools Museum Hist. Soc.
- December 2nd David Mander on GLIMPSES OF ANCIENT HACKNEY AND STOKE NEWINGTON by Benjamin Clarke FRCS. 241 2886 (Friends of Hackney Archives Dept)

2. BETHNAL GREEN - WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE VESTRY, 1857-1872 - C J Lloyd.

Over a hundred years ago the local authority in Bethnal Green, the Vestry of St Matthew's was faced with considerable problems. I intend to describe some of the work its Members engaged in to improve public facilities and the district's environment.

Overcrowding created many demands upon the Vestry's resources. The census taken in 1871 measured a population increase of 15,099, to a total of 120,200 from 1861 to 1871 (approximately the same increase as for the period 1851 to 1861). The density of the population was 158 persons per acre in 1871, or an average of 7.5 persons per house, having risen from 6.3 (1841), 6.7 (1851) and 7 (1861). The greatest population density was in the Town district but this area was actually the only one of the four in Bethnal Green in the last ten years to be depopulated, largely due to the demolition of houses for the new railway. During the decade new tenement buildings were erected by Baroness Burdett Coutts, Mr Peabody, and Sir Sydney Waterlow, which greatly improved the health of the inhabitants.

The Vestry was empowered to control the sanitation, public health and nuisances. It set about paving, road levelling and regularising the channels, gullies and sewers

In 1862 the Members decided to alter the annual contract for dust collection to a system of employing drivers, horses and carts by the day and hired men to attend the carts, with wages of 10s a week and 3d for each load filled and removed. A Foreman or Superintendent of the Scavengers was appointed at £1-5s a week. All the streets had to be visited weekly by the dust carts. In 1863 the watering of the whole of the parish was commenced. Previously only Bethnal Green Road and Church Street had been watered.

The Medical Officer of Health's greatest burdens came with the Cholera epidemic of 1866 and the Smallpox epidemic of 1870. He reported to the Vestry in 1867 that in the last 12 months, deaths from Cholera rose from 10 (in 1865) to 612 (in 1866) and deaths from Smallpox from 39 to 155.

One of the possible causes of the rapid spread of the disease, he told the Vestry, was that street cabs were transporting sufferers to the Smallpox hospitals. Another cause was that water lay stagnant in containers (the intermittent supply of water necessitated water collection). He identified Shoreditch and Bethnal Green as the areas of East London with the lowest death rate from Cholera, probably because the former, at least, was being supplied with water from the New River Company. It was believed that in June or July, just before the outbreak, impure water from some adjoining ponds entered Old Ford reservoir. An investigation revealed also that the reservoir had not been cleansed since it had opened in 1855.

The Vestry's action when the crisis broke began with lengthy daily meetings from 26th July to 8th September 1866 (and less frequent meetings until 6th October). Medical visitors were appointed, surgeries were ordered to stay open for gratuitous supplies of medicine. Disinfectants, food and stimulants were sought. Fifteen assistants were appointed for house-to-house visitation on a salary of £4-4s per week; six dispensary stations were formed and manned by second and third year medical students. The clergy, Sisters of Mercy, the Committee of the Nichol's Row Schools and the Bedford Institute distributed the nourishments, stimulants and new bedding.

Each house and alley was washed down two or three times a week. 2,696 houses were cleansed and purified, 779 cesspools were filled and 57 houses declared unfit. Burial was speedily undertaken by Mr Martin of 78 High Street, Hoxton and the Great Northern Cemetery Company. The Medical Officer of Health was able to monitor accurately the pace of the epidemic daily, from the instant return of forms completed by the Registrars upon the death of each victim.

The Vestry tried desperately to find hospital space, at first at the London Hospital, and then a house on the Green, and finally, the Commercial Street hospital (opened on 20th August).

The greatest mortality occurred in Hare Street and St John Street (at the back of Hare Street) where 31 people died within one fortnight. It nearly caused a panic.

The efforts of the Vestry to improve sanitation showed up in the following years statistics. Cholera deaths fell from 612 to 7 in 1867 and the number of deaths from all causes fell by 1047.

House inspections were carried out throughout the period of study. The complaints of nuisance totalled 924 in 1857; 15 required legal proceedings to compel abatement. Until 1864 the Sanitary Committee only consisted of five Members. It was decided now to make the Committee a committee of the whole Vestry so that the responsibilities of the committee were shared by every Member, and the Members of each would have the opportunity of devoting special attention to the ward they represented. In that year 695 nuisances were inspected; 330 notices for sanitary improvements were served; 4,800 visitations to check on work in progress were made; 45 cases went before the Police Magistrate in Worship Street for neglecting to comply. This work rapidly increased. In 1871, 8,871 houses were inspected and 3,391 notices served and 16,851 visits were made.

The Medical Officer of Health also monitored the work and statistical returns produced by the Queen Adelaide Dispensary, the Workhouse, The London Chest Hospital, and Bethnal House Lunatic Asylum and incorporated these institutions' reports in his annual reports to the Vestry.

Parliamentary legislation, Privy Council Orders in Council and the activities of central government and boards such as the Metropolitan Board of Works all contributed to the expansion of local government activity. Any parliamentary bill that had a possible detrimental effect on the local population was petitioned against. The Vestry claimed for example that the effects of the Amendment of the Metropolis Turnpike Roads (North of the Thames) Bill would be too costly as the two miles of Turnpike roads (Hackney and Cambridge Roads), which would be transferred to the Vestry, would need £2,000 a year for repairing, watering and cleaning. The bill became law in 1863 and the tollgates were cleaned on 1st July 1864.

Other petitions were more successful. The promoters of the Metropolitan Tramways Bill agreed to pay the Vestry for paving work and to maintain and cleanse the road within the tramlines and to the extent of 18 inches beyond. The Bill became law in 1869 and the tramway from Whitechapel and Stratford began to be constructed in 1870.

The repairing, kerbing, paving and lighting of roads were of considerable importance to the Vestry at this time. As the new estates were finished the householders were required to pay the Vestry individually for the cost of the paving and kerbing outside their property. The Vestry recognised that some roads needed extra measures for roads suffering from increased traffic: Bishop's Road, Grove Road and part of Old Ford Road, from Canal Bridge to Grove Road for example. These were repaired in 1864 with granite instead of as before with ballast. In 1870 an experiment was made with the Patent Steam Roller, when part of Bethnal Green Road and Church Row were recoated with granite. It was considered that the savings made on materials by consolidating through rolling would be equivalent to the expense of the equipment. A smooth, firm road was created instead of, as before, a bed of loose sharp stones.

Twig Folly bridge was at last rebuilt but only after lengthy negotiations with the Canal Company. Between the 21st and 26th May 1866, the Company agreed to empty the part of the canal to enable bridge excavations to be made.

Numerous clashes occurred between the Vestry and the gas companies over excessive charges. In 1865 the Vestry persuaded the Commercial Gas Company to reduce its charges to 4s for 1000 cubic feet of gas to private customers but both this company and the Imperial Gas Company refused to make any reduction for charges for power supplied for local authority street lighting. Eventually, legislation came in 1869 with the Imperial Gas Act compelling that Company to raise the standard of lighting by gas by "two candles" and

reduce the maximum price to 3s9d per 1000 cubic feet. Local Authorities were to be charged a uniform rate. By 1872 there were 733 (629 in 1859) lamps in Bethnal Green lighted by the Imperial Gas Company and 64 (58 in 1859) by the Commercial Gas Company.

The period 1857 to 1872 also saw the renaming of streets and renumbering of houses, so that for example, the 34 different names to houses in Hackney Road were abolished in 1861. This greatly assisted the public as well as the postal system.

The fixing of name-plates to the streets throughout the parish began in 1870.

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3. REPORT ON ORAL HISTORY AND LABOUR HISTORY CONFERENCE MAY 2-4, AT
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF LABOUR HISTORY by Ann McGrath

a) Centerprise History Workshop - Strike Songs Group: Memories of Rego and Polikoff workers collected by a Centerprise workers and ex-clothing trade employees, including Martha Lang (Memoirs 'The Austrian Cockney').

The session comprised a history of the disputes as well as an account of the breakaway United Clothing Workers. - Strike song recordings were played (with full audience participation) and the difference was pointed out between the depersonalized language of the left, as shown in songs like 'The Union Banner' and the songs written by women which challenged the way strikes were reported and also the stereotypes of clothing workers.

General discussion stressed the problem of oral history's accessibility and the importance of not leaving it to academic historians to make connections between individual life-stories and a wider economic/social/historical context.

b) Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop - a voluntary group set up three years ago, which has a 'health and welfare' bias because most group members work in health and social services, where much of their contact is with elderly people (home-helps often refer their clients to the group).

Their first publication was on childhood health - 'Touch yer collar', and their second deals with the East End butchery trade. The group works closely with the local museum and Workshop recordings give a boost to the Museum. Local people feel able to come in and talk and subsequently their memories become the basis for talks to pensioners groups and children.

c) Bengali History - Caroline Adams has worked in the East End for six years and lived in Bangladesh for a time, where she talked to old men who had left London to return to the Sylheti region. In London she recorded the basis of a history. The pattern of life stories emerged (to be published by THAP in late 1986) and Caroline combined these with the results of researches in the India Office and the National Maritime Museum. She was not funded to interview: her work was completed in 18 months of spare time.

d) Representation of poverty in East End folksong. Jaki Leboff was originally employed by the ILEA as an entertainer in old people's homes. She found a tradition of singing among working-class pensioners and has been collecting songs by herself for six years. Many of these reflect lives of grinding poverts, the resilience necessary to survive, and the particularly painful memories that people have of their mother's lives. Jaki did not

start by researching songs on poverty but it was an inevitable part of working-class life; like pawnshops and tallymen, to help people forget empty bellies and all the restrictions of home and working life.

e) CHINATOWN ANNIE by Bob Little. Annie, now 83, was an Englishwoman who married Chinese Yin Lai (deported for splitting a man's head open and for criminal drugs record/gambling activities). She tried to step into his shoes after his deportation. Her husband's legacy was a shopfront and a gambling den, and she also knew how to operate the opium trade. Unfortunately she became destitute after two years and was forced into prostitution, where she tried to be as independent as possible, refusing a pimp. Bob met her through his work with the elderly.

f) REPONSE TO SPEECHES OF ENOCH POWELL IN LONDON DOCKS - 1968 by Fred Lindop. Events in the docks were the most prominent action/sympathetic response to Powell, who was playing to a very strong current of working-class anger and fear. Fred found that the people he interviewed had great difficulty in talking about events; there was rather a great deal of confusion. The majority of interviewees were convinced that most dockers were on strike, whereas militants like Jack Dash were sure that most men went to work.

Obtaining clear accounts of what happened on the docks in 1972 etc, not just 1968, is very difficult; general impressions are all one received.

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4. HENRY MACHYN ; FROM HIS DIARY - Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London, 1550-1563.

"25th August 1532 : This day Sir Anthony Wyncckfeld, knight, controller of the Kings Horse, buried in Stepney with a great Company of mourners, with priests and clerks singing, and a herald singing his mass. Carried from Bethnal Green over Mile End with his standard and a great banner of arms, and his helmet and his target of the Garter, his sword, crest a bull silver and gold. At the communion, the vicar of Shoreditch, a Scot, did preach. And after a great dinner for all that came. All his insignia was offered - the helmet, the gorgot, the sword, the standard and then his banner of arms. After dinner it was set up over him, and it was a goodly sight to all, all was offered to the priest."

"12th November 1567 : This day was buried at Stepney Master Maynard, merchant and sherif of London, in the sixth year of king Edward VI which kept a great house, and in the time of Christmas he had a Lord of Misrule. The king's Lord of Misrule came to dine with him. At the Crosse of Choep he had a great scaffold made and made a proclamation..... He was buried with two white branches, 12 torches and 4 great tapers. After to Poplar to a great dinner."

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5. HACKNEY ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT.... is acquiring its own photocopier which will be installed in the exhibition lobby. Searchers will be able to photocopy non-fragile material for themselves. Fragile items and all archives will still be copied only by staff, but it will normally be possible to do them the same day. The copier has been specially designed for use with archives. The light used excludes ultra-violet and so does not damage documents. It has a V-shaped cradle to avoid damaging spines of books and to give a better copy. Because of these special features, the cost of copies may have to be reviewed. We hope the extra cost is worth it to users.

6. COACH OUTING - SATURDAY 27th SEPTEMBER 1986 -

The Autumn trip will be to Maidstone, Allington Castle and Boughton Monchelsea Place, Kent.

We shall first go to Maidstone and stop there for some time to allow for lunch and a look around - places of interest include the Museum and Art Gallery (free) which includes a Japanese room and Anglo-Saxon jewellery, and the Tyrwhitt Drake Museum of Carriages in the stables of the Archbishop's Palace. We shall then go on to Allington Castle, which is very close by, a 13th century moated castle which retains its walls, gatehouse and great hall. We shall have a conducted tour.

Boughton Monchelsea Place is a few miles further on - an Elizabethan manor house built in 1567, with Regency alterations, in a deer park with beautiful views over the Weald. Things of interest include displays of costumes and old carriages, manorial records, and the village church is nearby. Tea is being arranged here.

The cost will be £3.75 for the coach, £1 for Allington Castle, and £1.10 for Boughton Monchelsea Place for adults - 75p for children. When booking please send the coach fare only. I will collect the entrances on the coach. The pick-up is at Mile End, opposite the station, at 10am. Return booking form to :-

Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London, E4 7PF (Tel: 524 4506)

COACH TRIP 27th September 1986.

I/we would like seats for the coach trip. Cheque/P.O. for £..... enclosed.

Name/s
Address
..... Phone Nr.

7. EAST LONDON RECORD Nr. 9 This is well in hand and should be available in the autumn.

Members may wish to note that Mr A J Searle has kindly attended to distribution in the past, but on account of his age now wishes to relinquish this task. Mrs D Kendall has kindly agreed to take this on and can be contacted at 20 Puteaux House, Roman Road, London, E2 (Tel: 981 7680 evenings).

In the meantime we express our most grateful thanks to Mr Searle for his devoted and tireless work in connection with the first eight issues. All members of the Society owe him a great deal.

8. THOMAS HOOD - MARINER - Society meeting reports by Mrs D Kendall.

Three archive boxes not collected from the Probate Courts by the widow, held at the P.R.O., led our lecturer Mr Alex Werner of London Museum, to material of great fascination into the life a a Ships Captain in the 17th century.

Papers showed that Captain Thomas Hood worked his apprenticeship up to Ships Master on coal barges between Newcastle and London. A licence also gave him authority to 'Bounty on the high seas' along the coast of France.

He must have been very successful in selling his coal and bounty and he settled in the 1750's in Ocean Street, Mile End. There are receipts for good quality furniture, Chippendale chairs, dining table with six hand-carved legs, repair bill for a new balance to a silver watch, servants wages, food bills, and a carriage licence for £2.

Captain Hood became a Ships Master with shares in three Whaling Ships out of the Duke of Bedford's Greenland Dock in Rotherhithe. Other shareholders were City Merchants, The Duke of Bedford, and local shopkeepers and chandlers, who also supplied the local workforce to strengthen the Whaling Ship's timbers against the ice (all on an hourly rate), sail maintenance, ropes, harpoons, fishhooks, nets, tools, staves for barrels, all needed on voyage. They also supplied bread, meat, wine, etc., needed for the three-month turnabout voyage.

Each year's bills were neatly tied up, with the 40-odd crew members wage-sheets on the outside. The year 1761 in status order showed wages. Bonus for fish-blubber and whatebone was added later as cargo was sold after the voyages. All were signed by crew members, with very individual 'X' marks by some. Family signatures are also there, for a months wages in advance, when the crew were safely at sea off Gravesend.

Other papers showed the disagreements between the Rotherhithe shareholders and the City Merchants over the luxury food, wine and fittings supplied to the boats. The expense accounts of Captain Hood's city lunches were also in dispute. Shipowners in Holland were written to, with great authority, claiming monies for goods salvaged from a boat wrecked in Greenland.

Approximately twenty slides were shown, from the Port of London archives and the Duke of Bedford's Estate. Ocean Street was shown as just six houses and two cottages... surrounded by fields and market-gardens.

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9. FROM MEMBERS :

Doris Sumner and her husband, Stephen, both had fathers who were members of Poplar Borough Council.. indeed, both were Mayor and both involved in the fight for equalisation of rates, Stephen's father leading the march to prison (Alderman Charles Sumner).

Mr I W Itzkowitz, 90 Cazenove Road, London N16 6AB, expresses an interest in horse-bus services and early bus-services before 1914 in East London. Any-one with similar interests should contact him.

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10. FROM VICARAGE TO 'DEWDROP INN' Book review by Carolyn Merion.

'Mary Hughes, A Friend to All in Need', by Hugh Pyper, illus. Sue Henry.
Quaker Home Service, Friends House, Euston Road, NW1. £1

Mary Hughes came from a well-off family in Victorian Mayfair. Her father was Thomas Hughes, the judge who in his spare time wrote 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'. But Mary gave signs early on that she would not be a conventional young lady. A friend said "She is always ready to attack a tiger with a toasting fork.

In the Berkshire village where she became housekeeper to her uncle, the vicar, she not only started a coffee-shop and a cottage hospital but set about arranging boxing lessons for the kids. In 1895 she came to London to join her sister whose husband was vicar of St. Jude's Church, Whitechapel. She lived here in the East End for the rest of her long life, becoming a Quaker, a Stepney councillor - and a Communist.

First she stayed with her relatives in Whitechapel. Then she moved to Poplar, helping to found Kingsley Hall, Bow, and backing Poplar Council in its radical days. From 1926 she lived in a former pub in Vallance Road, Whitechapel, which took the name 'Dewdrop Inn' and became a community centre with a difference.

Everybody was welcome, "Mary filled the Dewdrop with all sorts of waifs and strays", Hugh Pyper tells us. Some of the rooms were used for classes, clubs and an advice centre. But Mary herself slept in a tiny room near the front door on a sort of padded bench. Even this was often given up to some homeless woman for the night and Mary slept on the floor. More than once she ended up in hospital with bronchitis.

Some of the people who admired her were nevertheless appalled by her behaviour. One wrote 'Comrade (Mary) is so big that she can embrace Communists and Plymouth Brethren with equal fervour. My soul responds but my mind condemns'.

When she died in 1941 the Friends Meeting service in her memory drew 'Quaker, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Salvation Army and Jew, reactionary councillor and communist critic' to praise her, and a London County Council blue plaque was put on the Dewdrop Inn. But now not many people can remember her, so Hugh Pyper's fascinating little book is a welcome mark of revived interest in someone whose ideas and methods are fresh and up-to-date.

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11. SOCIETY OFFICERS :

Hon. Treasurer : Mrs J Page, 1 Luctons Avenue, Buckhurst Hill, Essex.
Hon. Chairman : Ms Carolyn Merion, 17 Victoria Park Square, E2
Hon. Membership
Secretary : John Curtis, 9 Avon Road, E17 3RB (520 4808)
East London Record Circulation : Mrs D Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Roman
Road, E2 (981 7680)
Outings Organiser : Miss Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, E4 (524 4506)
Hon. Secretary : Howard Bloch (As Howard has intimated he wishes to
relinquish this post, it is thought advisable not
to give an address and telephone number.)

12. SUBSCRIPTIONS - 1986/87

Subscriptions become due from September and this timely reminder will ensure you are fully paid up. Members are reminded that the sum due is £2 per member for full membership (£1 for O.A.P's and full-time bona fide students). You may use the portion below or send your subscription with a covering note.

Name

Address

.....

..... Telephone

Please find enclosed £ Date

SUBSCRIPTIONS TO :- J CURTIS 9 AVON ROAD LONDON E17 3RB

13. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Thursday 30 October 1986 -

By the time this has been confirmed as the correct date you will have received your printed programme of Society meetings. In the meantime it is thought worthwhile to bring a couple of points to your notice.

Firstly, our present secretary, Howard Bloch, has expressed his intention of not standing again. Anyone who is interested, or knows someone who is interested, will be very welcome to fill this very necessary post.

As far as is known, all other committee members are prepared to carry on but this does not mean other people cannot take their place. The membership secretary, John Curtis, is only too willing to stand down if there is a volunteer to fill the post. New members are always welcome on the committee, bringing with them new ideas and fresh impetus.

The second item you should note that we would like to use the latter part of the meeting to give members a chance of showing their interests. This can take the form of a small talk about their particular facet of local history - a showing of colour-slides or photographs - an exhibition of any items of interest - etc.... If you have an item for inclusion, perhaps you could let us know, especially if it requires any 'setting up' time or equipment.

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14. FROM ESSEX : by Bob Vickers, who now lives at Braintree.

In the town (Braintree) I'm finding lots of evidence of an eventful history. ... The town is full of digs by university bods who photograph and record like mad while forgetting the contemporary scene thats changing all around them. I am surprised to find liks with East London in so many things. The machines used in the weaving industry.. or the pre-railway transport systems, both road and sea were involved with the London docks.

