



The corner of St George's Street, now the Highway, showing wooden houses on the corner of Old Gravel Lane, c. 1910. One hundred years earlier, the Ratcliffe Highway murders created terror and panic amongst the local residents of Wapping and Shadwell. See page 18.

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**Editorial Note:**

**The East London History Society Newsletter** is published twice yearly and is free to members of the Society.

The Newsletter is edited, typeset and produced by Rosemary Taylor with the assistance of an editorial team comprising John Harris, Doreen Kendall, David Behr, Philip Mernick and Doreen Osborn.

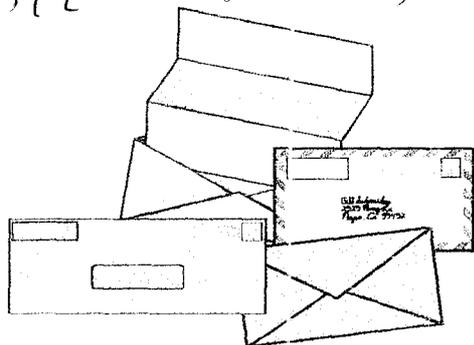
Letters and articles on East End history and reminiscences are always welcome and we make every effort to publish suitable material. Whilst hand-written articles are acceptable, items of interest that are typewritten or even better still, on disk will get priority!!

Enquiries to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green, E2 0RF, Tel: 0208 981 7680, or to Rosemary Taylor, 29 Stern Close, Great Fleete, Barking IG11 0XW.  
Tel: 0208 924 2599 E-mail rftaylor@aol.com

All queries regarding membership should be addressed to John Harris, 13 Three Crowns Road, Colchester CO4 5AD.

The Present committee are: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, John Harris, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborn, Bob Dunn, Howard Penberg and Rosemary Taylor.

0206 845327



**EAST LONDON  
HISTORY SOCIETY  
PROGRAMME  
2001**

**Thursday 29th March**

**Roman Southwark - First entrepot of empire? (Illustrated)**

Speaker: Al Green

**Thursday 5th April**

**The Breweries of East London (Illustrated)**

Ken Smith

**Saturday 12th May**

**Coach Trip to Thaxted and the Gardens of Easton Lodge**

See back page of newsletter for details and booking form.

**Thursday 17th May**

**Open Evening**

**From Docks to Dockland**

Memories and Photos

**Note:**

The lectures are held on Thursday evenings at 7.30 pm in the Latimer Congregational Church Hall, Ernest Street, E1. Ernest Street is between Harford Street and Whitehorse Lane, off Mile End Road (opposite Queen Mary and Westfield College). The nearest Underground Stations are Mile End and Stepney Green.

Bus No. 25.

## Bookshelf

**A Pictorial History of Victoria Park,**  
price £6.95 plus £1.50 postage and packing.

**Enquiries to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux  
House, Bethnal Green, London E2 0RF**

**The East End at Work and  
The Changing East End, Stepney, Bethnal  
Green and Poplar 1860-1960**

Rosemary Taylor and Christopher Lloyd  
Price £9.99 plus £1.50 p+p.

**Enquiries to Rosemary Taylor, 29 Stern  
Close, Barking Essex IG11 0XW.**

**The Isle of Dogs, A Brief History -  
Volume 1: 1066 - 1918**

Eve Hostettler  
£10.00 plus £2 p+p

**Enquiries to Eve Hostettler, Dockland  
Settlement, 197 Est Ferry Road, London  
E14 3BA**

**Rob Boyce, EARM Publications has  
provided further information on 'Stratford:  
A Locoman Remembers':**

I understand that in a recent Newsletter you  
kindly included a review of our recent  
publication, 'Stratford: A locoman  
Remembers.' Unfortunately, I am advised that  
there were no details as to how to obtain  
copies. For information, they can be ordered by  
any of the following means:

- a) through local bookshops
- b) on line through our website at  
<http://www.earm.co.uk>
- c) by post at £5.45 (inc. 50p p+p) from East  
Anglian Railway Museum, Chappel Wakes  
Colne Station, Colchester, Essex CO6 2DS.  
Cheques should be made payable to EARM  
Publications.

## News and Views

### **SPONSOR A STREET FOR THE BOOTH NOTEBOOK PROJECT**

Readers may have seen the first (South East London) volume in Deptford Forum Publishing's "Streets of London" series, which makes accessible a first batch of the 392 notebooks compiled in 1897/8 by the researchers working on updating Charles Booth's famous poverty maps. Until this project got under way the notebooks languished in the LSE archives, and were not particularly easy to use. Handsomely produced, at affordable cost, Deptford's series aims ultimately to transcribe the full series of notebooks, indexed and organised into districts, accompanied by full colour reproductions of the maps and contemporary photographs. In the full transcript of the text each researcher describes a walk round a specified area in the company of an experienced local police officer. Street life, the condition of the people and their homes, crime, drinking and prostitution are all observed first hand or from the local policeman's insight, and make this a source beyond compare for social and topographical history. Jess Steele, the editor, and her colleagues have hit on a first class resource, and the South East London volume (published in 1998) sets a high standard and does the material full justice.

The next volume, covering East London (including Hackney) is being prepared for the press, but money is short. The publishers invite anyone who supports the project to subscribe. £30 will sponsor a street, £100 a neighbourhood, and sponsors will be recorded in the volume. Details from Deptford Forum Publishing, 441 New Cross Road SE14 6TA (020 8692 7115).

**Isobel Watson**

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## Book Reviews

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### THE EAST END AT WAR

Rosemary Taylor and Christopher Lloyd. Price £14.99. Publishers Sutton Publishers for WH Smith. ISBN 0-7509-2623-6. Available at WH Smith, Stratford and other branches.

This book, A4 size of 121 pages clearly printed on white paper with three or four photographs to a page is a memorial to all the civilians who lost their lives during the bombing of East London, and who have no plaques, open spaces or streets named after them.

Drawings and photographs from the archives of Bancroft Road History Library recall regiments of volunteers in Tower Hamlets who served as long ago as 1798 and later became the Territorial Army in 1908 and still serve today in Mile End.

Ships of war for all nations, built by Thames Iron Works and Yarrow and Co show what great engineering skills the men employed on the Isle of Dogs possessed in Victorian times.

Photographs of the First World War show the horror of the bombing raids on civilians, no air raid shelters existed and the bombing by Zeppelins and Gotha aircraft were devastating.

Many photographs of the Second World War have been printed, very rarely do they state the location or where the bombing took place. By 1939 when the government knew war was inevitable, strict censorship was enforced. There was a shortage of photographic film and the majority of the general public did not possess cameras, so many events went unrecorded. Only professional photographers were allowed permits. William Whiffin, whose studio was at 237 East India Dock Road, Poplar was granted such a permit in 1939. No photograph was allowed to show or have written on the back the people's names, location or date of the area being photographed. Bancroft History Archives have through the years identified the locations of many of these photographs which Rosemary and Chris have used together with their own research on buildings, firms destroyed and people killed by enemy action.

Photographs by William Turner of children being evacuated in 1939 will bring back many memories for our members who also will recall their own evacuation.

This book will recall for many of you open bombed areas which you passed everyday on your way to school and work and never knew the sad history of such spaces before they were redeveloped.

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### Doreen Kendall

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### THE ISLE OF DOGS: A Brief History Volume 1 - 1066 to 1918

by Eve Hostettler

Published by Island History Trust. 120 pages paperback. ISBN 0-9508815-4-6  
Special price of £10 (+ £2 p&p) from the publishers: Island History, 197 East Ferry Road, London E14 3BA

It has been some time since the last publication from the Island History Trust, but this is a book well waiting for. Compiled by the Trust's curator Eve Hostettler it is based on archive research and draws extensively on the Trust's collection of reminiscence and ephemera put together by Islanders themselves over the past 20 years. It includes many photographs from the Trust's own collection and from the Museum of London PLA Collection.

The story of the Isle of Dogs from medieval times to the opening of the docks is explored in the context of the expansion of London as an international port and the development of Britain's trading relationship with the rest of the world. Industrial growth on the Isle of Dogs is shown as linked to ship-building in the first six decades of the 19th century, with a new population converging on the area from all over the British Isles. This population growth continued until 1900, by which time the character of the local economy had become much more varied, with engineering and food processing as dominant activities. A settled community was developing with all its associated features of extended families and shared pursuits, only to be shattered by the impact of World War

One, illustrated here through the recollections of one individual Islander who served in the trenches.

This is a fascinating collection of illustrations and photographs, which together with first-hand accounts of events within living memory, makes for compulsive reading.

**Rosemary Taylor**

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### **HACKNEY IN THE NEWS**

by David Mander

Sutton Publishing Ltd. Paperback; 128 pp; ISBN 0-7509-2528-0

Price £10.99 (+ £1.45 for p&p) Available from Hackney Archives Department, 43 De Beauvoir Road London N1 5SQ. Cheques should be made payable to the London Borough of Hackney.

In this latest in his series drawn from sources at Hackney Archives, Hackney's borough archivist exploits the rich seam of material available in local newspapers. This means mainly the Hackney Gazette, but does not exclude some fascinating and quirky material from national and regional papers from before the days of the local press.

The introduction sets the scene and outlines the story of local newspapers, the Gazette in particular, outlining the strong link its early editors forged with local history in the area. In the first chapter, drawn from the 18th and early 19th centuries, we have hatches, matches and despatches of the rich, the miserly and the eccentric, elopements and duels, balloons and bull-baiting.

The rest of the book is arranged thematically, covering housing, health and welfare, local government, schools and transport, crime and punishment, religion, race and politics, local events (including the local experience of wartime) and entertainments, until (nearly but not quite) the present day. It is a fascinating and entertaining mix, guaranteed to elicit both a sense that in some respects "nothing changes", and to raise a few eyebrows and not a few chuckles.

It is difficult to choose highlights from such a rich mixture, but family historians will particularly enjoy the extremely enlightening recollections of a census enumerator from 1871, and there is tragedy as well as comedy, as in the confession of John Homesby for the murder of his unfaithful wife.

The book has been well written, with a well-chosen range of (mostly) photographs, many of them not previously published in book form.

**Isobel Watson**

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### **MAUVE**

Simon Garfield. Price £9.99. ISBN 0-571-20197-0

How one man, William Perkin invented a colour and in the process transformed the world of fashion. Before 1856 all colours were expensive, produced as they were from animals, minerals or plants. Working people usually wore black because of the high cost of production of natural dyes.

Members will recall that in East London Record No. 12 with its mauve colour the exact shade discovered by Perkin, an article by David Leaback tracing his ancestors in the district of Shadwell came across the Perkins family who lived at No. 1 King Davids Fort. It was here in an attic room that William Perkin at the age of eighteen experimenting to prepare quinine artificially discovered 'mauve' the first aniline dye.

The dyers Perkin was recommended to use by Robert Pullar of Perth Scotland, dyemakers to Queen Victoria, was Thomas Keith, a silk skein dyer of Bethnal Green. With the help of Bancroft Road Library it was discovered that this firm was situated at No. 9 Victoria Park Road, later No. 15 Old Ford Road, today the site of a complex of large houses, including St Margarets House.

The book carries on the story of Perkin setting up his factory in Harrow, becoming a millionaire, being knighted and the effect of his other experiments upon our lives.

Sir William Perkin died on 14th July 1907 and was buried in Christ Church Roxeth Hill, Harrow. Also interred his son Frederick in 1928, his second wife

Alexandrine in 1929 and his eldest daughter in 1949. Today no trace of the grave can be found.

At Tower Hamlets Cemetery, No.0871, square 27 is a large red granite obelisk memorial being the family grave of his father George Fowler Perkin, his mother Sara, his brother George Frederick, sister Sarah Ann and two nephews.

Today a plaque on the wall at King David Lane, Shadwell erected by Stepney Historical Trust is the only one recording the achievements of Sir William Perkin.

### **Doreen Kendall**

#### **WW1 Book of Remembrance:**

An appeal is being made by the Barking and Dagenham Council to complete a Book of Remembrance containing names of people who died during World War One. The War memorial in Barking Park, Longbridge Road, was initially unveiled on March 25, 1922, to honour those people of the former Borough of Barking who died during the 1914-18 war. The memorial originally bore 820 surnames and initials of those men who had joined up from Barking, those who had near relatives residing in Barking and also those who died up to the official end of the war, August 1921. However, over the years many of the names have become illegible and could not be re-engraved as the original records were destroyed by enemy action during World War Two. The Council has made every attempt to trace the names, but to date this has not been possible. Meanwhile, a Book of Remembrance in respect of the 1914-18 war has been compiled and drafts of the book can be viewed at the Town Hall, Barking Civic Centre, Dagenham and Barking Central Library. The book will contain many more names than those on the memorial, as some records were not available in 1922. Friends and relatives of the deceased will have the chance to see if their relatives' names are recorded and, if they are not, to request the names be added to the book. The book can be viewed until April 2001 and if you know of any names that are missing, please contact the Member's Secretariat 0208 277 2116, giving any names and service number for inclusion.

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### **Dear Doreen**

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Doreen Kendall, our indefatigable researcher, is always ready and willing to help members in their searches for ancestral resting places. Sometimes, her endeavours surpass all expectations. Below are some of the responses she has received as a result of her efforts:

#### **From Richard Maddams, Much Hadham, Herts:**

I'm writing to say a big THANK YOU for the info you sent me regarding George Alfred Maddams.

Having been to the PRO and made some other enquiries, with little success, I could hardly believe the amount of info that you were able to send me. It's so interesting to me. I now plan to make a visit to the area in the Spring or Summer and I may try to make it on one of the days when the Tower Hamlets cemetery has something going on.

#### **Note:**

*Doreen's research at Bancroft Library revealed several cuttings relating to the death of Councillor George Maddams, as well as a letter written by Mr Maddams, with his signature and address. But it would appear that Mr Maddams was so poor at the time of his death, he was buried in a public grave.*

#### **LONDON GARDEN SQUARE DAY**

##### **From Pamela Paterson, English Heritage:**

Thank you so much for sending a copy of your newsletter. The review of the parks project was nice and the account of Victoria Park most interesting.

We wondered if your society would be so very kind and mention London Garden Squares Day which will be on **10 June 2001** (and every year on 2nd Sunday of June). It is a wonderful day out for everyone. We are at the moment writing to garden squares committees to invite them to open up for the day. If you can think of any squares which have garden committees or Friends Groups that would like to join in on the day, we would be pleased to hear from them.

**From Harry Willmott, Loughton, Essex:**

Very many thanks for the newsletter you sent me. As regards to V C Godley there is a blue plaque to go up on the wall of the house where he lived at the time of his death in Torrington Drive, Debden Estate. We are so pleased as this is the first time one has gone up on the estate, all the others are in Loughton. When I first started this research I said to Jan Fox of the Loughton Town Council, 'I will make sure this man is never forgotten again.'

As regards to East London, I often wonder how many older members remember the Duchess of Gloucester when she opened the Queen Mary Day Nursery, it was about 1935 or 37. It was built on the site of the old Tidey Street silent cinema opposite the Frances Mary Buss House. My young sister Joan who was recovering from a mastoids operation had her photo taken with the Duchess and it was published next morning in the papers.

**From Mrs Iris May, Uppingham, Rutland:**

We are continuing to enjoy the East London Newsletter very much. I wonder if the enclosed would be of use for publication - may even set some memories and discussion going!

Once again schools and the considered best form of education has been in the news. Our children and grandchildren have been through various systems from nursery class, comprehensive and private education, and now it seems training for life with trade or profession is attractive.

Both my husband and I attended Bow Central School (after passing - not winning the 11 plus exam). It was a fine school teaching woodwork, metal work, art domestic sciences, sports, music, shorthand, typing and book-keeping, and languages, alongside general subjects.

Sadly our education was interrupted by World War II and evacuation to Banbury. Each day the class venue was in some church hall, school or library in various town locations. Masters were called up and mistresses left to join either their husbands or the forces. I stayed on for 2 1/2 years, as a 15 year old monitor, taking charge of younger classes.

Just the 'year to three' enjoyed at Bow has stayed with us throughout life, and we know of parents

who wished they could have paid fees for that education rather than private schools.

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**From Patrick Dunn, Wald Str 1, Grafelfing, Germany:**

I well remember Friday, the 1st September, the day we were to be evacuated, or 'evaporated' as someone mistakenly said. I was attending Rushmore Road School E5 at the time. It seemed the whole school had assembled outside tin Chatsworth Road. I stood with a little suitcase, I'd just started to wear long trousers at thirteen, I felt rather manly in fact. God knows how long it took to get us sorted out, but we finally set off for Clapton Station on foot, about a mile or so away. It seemed rather chaotic to me. The teachers that were coming with us, were doing their best to preserve some sort of order. Perhaps some children on the way there changed their minds, and just went home?

I often wondered about that. There were some mothers accompanying us to catch the train or trains to Bishops Stortford. We learned this on the way! On arriving there I remember the all pervading smell of hops or beer being brewed. There was a brewery quite close to the station. That was to be one of the things that I still remember about Bishops Stortford, along with the nice billet that I had. A man and his wife - they had no children. I had my own room, bedroom, I mean. The house at No. 30 Rye Street, had been built about 1929, so it seemed quite modern to me.

The lady worked at a private school as a cook, the other side of town on a hill, I remember. He did odd jobs. Their name was Cowland, a good old country name, I thought. They had a black and white dog named Whisky. They had relations up at Barreldown, about 10 minutes walk. Old Tom, Mr Cowland called him, and his wife. I often used to go up there after school for beautiful apples from the garden. They had no children either, and after Clapton, it was the difference between chalk and cheese. Schooling was almost non-existent, they tried to get us interested in gardening, without much success. I don't recall every sitting in a class with local children though, perhaps it was thought we wouldn't have got on so well. Often we were roaming the countryside, or having conker fights among ourselves. I remember charging down hills,

the others fleeing in supposed panic, but it was only a game.

The midday meal that I had at the private school was like hotel food to me. My goodness, Mrs Cowland was a very good cook, although she reserved it mostly for her work. At home it wasn't anything special.

I asked on arrival her why she had chosen me. 'Oh,' she said, 'I liked the look of you waiting on your own outside, next door there were swarms of children. So I beckoned you to the door to come in with us. You'll like it I'm sure.' I did too.

But often I thought about Clapton, E5, and its cinemas, which I loved going to. They had just the one in town showing films I'd seen weeks before.

So the weeks went by. I'd gone up to London once by train, only a weekend, and went back to Bishops Stortford rather reluctantly. It was not long before I was back in London permanently by December 1939. I'd had enough anyway. I wanted to earn some money. Even 14 shillings at a Cardboard Box Factory wasn't bad at 14 years of age. As well as there being no air raids. They came later. Then I really shared with the others in our Anderson shelter what it's like to be under bombardment and fire. All in all I look back now sixty years later on this little episode with affection, perhaps I was fortunate.

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**From Georgina Holmes, Woodford Green, Essex :**

I have a problem which, so far, I have not been able to solve and I am wondering whether any of our members could help.

I have managed to acquire a copy of my grandmother's wedding certificate which shows that she was married in January 1884 by Edward Green in the Established Church of either St Saviours/St Simons (I am unable to make out the writing) in the Parish of Bethnal Green in the County of Middlesex.

I would dearly like to find this church or at least to know where it stood but all my enquiries have come to nothing. The diocesan office at Chelmsford tell

me that there never has been a church of that name in the area.

If any of our members know of such a church or could point me in the right direction I would be very grateful.

**Doreen's reply:**

*If your grandparents lived near Green Street, today's Roman Road, the church could be St Simon Zelotes in Morpeth Street. Bombed in 1943, the site was cleared in 1951. The church was a large plain red brick building, one of the original 12 churches built in the East End. The vicarage still stands and is converted into flats. A walk down Morpeth Street and a chat to elderly people in the market square will recall the church for you.*

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**From Alan Bartley, 15 Sutherland, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 7RL:**

I am researching the history of the People's Concert Society (P.C.S.) , which was active in London between 1878 and 1935, mainly in working class areas of the Metropolis, and I would be very interested to know whether any of your members may have any information helpful to my enquiries.

I have established, via the Annual Reports of the South Place Ethical Society and the monthly reports of the Bermondsey Settlement, that the People's Concert Society was arranging recitals of classical music in many areas in the East End, including Bermondsey, Canning Town, Greenwich, Holloway, Poplar, Stepney and Whitechapel, (by the time of the 1909 season it had given over 1,200 concerts) and I am seeking further information about the venues, the performers and the audience response.

I also know that the P.C.S. was begun by a group of middle/upper class people who set up series of cheap concerts at local settlements, institutes and church halls, presumably part of the Victorian concept of rational recreation for the lower classes. The name of the P.C.S. secretary during the Edwardian years was Mrs Arthur Smith who, as Ethel L. Robinson, ran a concert agency from an office in Wigmore Street.

To the best of my knowledge a history of the Society has never been published, yet the fact that it

continued for over fifty years suggests that it had a considerable measure of success, and it would be surprising if there were no archive of its activities in existence. Such an archive does not, however, appear to reside in any of the major London libraries.

Is it possible that you or any members of your Society may be able to help me?

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**From Eric Cook, Flat 39 Rectory Court, 114 Church Lane, Marple, Stockport SK6 7AY**

**A Tale of Evacuation:**

In 1939 my mother Dorothy Cook, aged 36 lived with her children Eric, 9, Jack, 7, and Grace, 6, in an upstairs flat at Forest Gate, West Ham. Forest Gate was a pleasant place to live and free of any large factories. My parents had been separated for 3 years, we were poor and our flat sparsely furnished. I attended Whitehall Place school about half a mile away. Our school holidays began routinely at the end of July 1939 but ended dramatically a few weeks later in September with our evacuation to Bredfield some 3 miles from Woodbridge in Suffolk.

In the first week of September 1939 Mum took us to my school playground. We had luggage label tags with our names on them tied to our lapels, our gas masks in cardboard boxes on our shoulders and spare clothing in small suitcases. A whole train load of East End school children was assembled, each batch under the control of its own teachers for dispersal into the outskirts of Essex and Suffolk.

The final stop was at Woodbridge when those remaining on the train were dispersed to various Suffolk villages. My family and a few other evacuees came to Bredfield and waited in the village school playground to be allocated to those kind village families who had volunteered to foster London evacuees. Jack and I were allocated to Mr and Mrs A H Gearing and No. 1 Mill House, Grace to Mr and Mrs Masterson at a bungalow a few doors away. Mill House was a large detached house next to the village pub, it was split into two separate dwellings, and for a while it was very full. Mr and Mrs Gearing had four grown up children, and a border collie called Gyp. When their two sons were called up for service, my sister came to live

with us. Somehow we all managed to squeeze into a very modest sized three bedroom house. There was no piped water into the house, so no bathroom or WC. We shared an outside cold tap, water was filled into two galvanized buckets which stood in the pantry for cooking and washing. A shed in the garden had an Elsan earth closet, used by all at Mill House. Mr Gearing had the routine task of carrying the full bucket to the end of his large garden and burying the contents of the Elsan.

Mr Gearing was the kindest and gentlest of men. He cycled to work at St Audry's hospital and worked hard in his own garden to feed us all. He was ARP Warden for the village. Mr Gearing had served as a soldier in WW1 and saw action in the battle of the Somme in 1916.

September 1939 also meant a new term at a new school. We attended the Bredfield village school together with the village children taught by Mrs Gardner. Bobby Gearing also involved me in his activities, and I soon came to know my way around field paths, how to find and identify birds' nests and eggs, the names of wild flowers, to explore streams and brooks and to climb trees.

After the evacuation from Dunkirk in May 1940, Suffolk became a possible invasion area. All the London children were re-evacuated inland out of harm's way. My family went to Frankton near Rugby, Warwickshire. By contrast there seemed to be no thought of Suffolk children being moved to a safer area.

I returned to London in 1942, my sister in 1943 and my brother from nearby Hemel Hempstead in 1945 at the end of the war. Bobby Gearing took an apprenticeship in 1943 with a Woodbridge boat builder. Ivy, who married, had a daughter Rosie in Woodbridge in 1941. I visited the Gearing family in 1945 for two weeks holiday. During this time the war ended on August 15 with victory over Japan. It was celebrated in Woodbridge with a bonfire on the village green. My family was privileged to know the Gearing family, and share in Bredfield life for a year.

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**"LONNIE'S LONG, LONG, GONE....."  
But Not Forgotten!**

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**PETER (Pie) LAMACQ**

Between the years of 1956 and 1958, what can only be described as a 'musical phenomenon' erupted throughout much of the UK. Skiffle had arrived, and thus provided many of us as the newly labelled 'teen-agers', with an unforeseen opportunity for youth emancipation, and the development of 'artistic expression' Skiffle had sprung from the interval entertainments given by 'guitar singers' during traditional jazz band performances. The main exponent of this 'new' form of music was one, Anthony 'Lonnie' Donegan, who had originally played banjo with Ken Collyer's Jazz Band in the early 1950s, shortly after leaving National Service. In 1956, Donegan eventually joined Chris Barber, when he (Barber) left Ken Collyer to form his own 'Trad' band. It was not long before this form of entertainment, was dubbed 'skiffle' and soon outstripped the popularity of the parent jazz band that it had supported, and such driving epics as "Rock Island Line", "Wabash Canonball", and "My Dixie Darling" were to be heard. It was Donegan's recording of "Rock Island Line" that had the distinction of having to be promoted from an LP to a single, which climbed both the British and American charts, and this was in the 'Elvis-riddled' days of 1956!

Skiffle became a nationwide craze, before the wild days of the Rock 'n' Roll invasion hit our shores. It was a gift to amateur (and some who could be best described perhaps as semi-amateur!) musicians. Almost anyone could have a reasonable shot at it, even if it was only on a kazoo or a washboard. Donegan showed us how to construct a bass from a tea chest with a broom-handle and some string, (ours worked better with a piano string, 'borrowed' from the church hall) to which was added as many three-chord guitarists as could be mustered. This 'wall-of-sound backing' accompanied by old American folk songs sung in as high a nasal whine as possible, formed the basis of our new music. Skiffle groups were everywhere. In church hall socials, talent contests, on BBC Radio's Skiffle Club, on flexible vinyl records and even sometimes on TV. The real 'youth revolution' had begun. Lonnie Donegan went on throughout the decade,

outselling most attempts at imitations of Elvis with such numbers as "Cumberland Gap", "Tom Dooley" and lively out-pourings like "Putting On The Style" and perhaps one of his greatest hits (still occasionally to be heard on radio today) the classic "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavour On The Bedpost Overnight?". Other notable skiffle groups of the time, were Chas. McDevitt and Nancy Whiskey, and Wally Whyton with The Vipers, who also had a good deal of success.

Whilst all this energetic national activity was occurring, deep in the environs of North Ilford, Essex, something else was stirring. A group of lads from the local Boys' Brigade Company at Hainault, having become bored with cigarette card collecting and tired of roller-skate hockey, had formed themselves into a skiffle group, and were doing a great job of 'terrorising' both parents and neighbours with their 'melodic' rehearsals, and new interpretations of the works of their hero Lonnie. Yes! The Black Dice Skiffle Group had been born! Practice and rehearsals took place at various homes of members, with guitars often borrowed from long-suffering and indulgent fathers, who had long since given up any idea of developing their own musical careers. Repertoire, although much discussed amongst the group, would inevitably consist of several loud renditions of "Down By The Riverside" or "We Shall Not Be Moved", which occasionally prompted suggestions from others, who were obviously not lovers of good music, that we should indeed be moved, preferably to the other side of the river! In spite of these early set-backs the group went from strength to strength, and eventually needed to engage the 'management skills' of Mr. John Matthews, a local 'entrepreneur', part-time assistant vocalist, and all-round good chap, who immediately seeing the group's potential, rushed out and had some business cards printed! Image was of course very important, and the group was soon to be seen dressed in the matching designer black and white, diamond patterned shirts, white bootlace ties with dice decorated toggles, complemented by black trousers and shoes, for which it became famous.

At this point in the great saga, some mention should be made of the group members. Although at times The Black Dice Skiffle Group (SOCIALS, DANCES, PARTIES) line-up resembled a massed

guitar orchestra, the main players were usually, Doug (*James Dean*) Galpin (tea chest bass), Colin (*Motorbike*) Manby (guitar), Johnny (*Guitar*) Atkinson (home-made electric & accoustic guitar), Bob (*Taps*) Cunnings (washboard, snare drum, paper bag etc.), and myself, Pete (*Pie*) Lamacq (small guitar). All these were aided, encouraged and sometimes led by the aforementioned Mr John (*Entrepreneur*) Matthews providing enthusiastic lead vocals. There were occasionally 'guest artistes' such as Ray (*Piano*) Thomas, and even Colin's Mum (*Mrs. 'Fingers' Manby*) once played piano with us at rehearsal! Well it was her front room after-all! It may have been a bad dream, but I seem to recall a time when Malcolm Kennedy and Peter Cook, two members of the Boys' Brigade band, joined us on bugles! But as I said, I think it was a BAD dream.

On their first 'World Tour of Hainault' The Black Dice played such mainstream venues as "The Alfred's Head" public house at Manford Way, The Ethel Britten Hall, Fairlop School and even St. Francis Church Hall. Later they hit the 'big-time' with performances at Ilford Baths Hall, and Cranbrook Hall. During the group's brief 'cabaret' period they were engaged to play at a 'Skiffle Jamboree' held at the Wignore Street Restaurant in London, and at The Glenyou Club in the West End. The group being paid around five pounds between them for each of these gigs. In their short but illustrious career, The Black Dice Skiffle Group also entered several talent competitions, notably at the State Cinema Barkingside, where they came forth, and came fourth! Another contest at The Grenada Cinema, East Ham, saw them narrowly beaten into about fifth place by the Italian Tenor from the local pie-shop, several dancing schools and a brass band.

By a strange quirk of fate, it was to be on this very same Granada stage, that some three months later another struggling, and little known, former skiffle band from the North of England, now known as "The Beatles" were to perform. I have often wondered what happened to them, and suspect, that like the Black Dice they probably just eventually faded away!

In the first few years of the new and exciting decade of the 1960s, many of the group members,

now reflecting on their past 'successes', looked towards a more alternative, perhaps more productive and less frantic style of life. Most of them now had full-time jobs, and some were even considering marriage (to women, not each other!). Meanwhile, recordings by Bill Haley, Little Richard, and Elvis Presley, together with hundreds of other home-grown clones of these performers, now dominated the British music scene. It was time to draw the final curtain over the 'riotous' rock and skiffle lifestyle that The Black Dice Skiffle Group had previously enjoyed.

Today, after over forty years, the group members having travelled, lived and worked in many parts of the world, now all live in relative obscurity. No more for them the blazing flashbulbs of the 'paparazzi', the hordes of screaming teen-age girls no longer hang about outside the stage doors waiting for a glimpse of their heroes. (This never did happen in reality, but one can fantasise about what might have been!). The 'melodic' sounds of those three chord tricks and G7ths are nowadays never heard. But sometimes in my quieter moments, when I look at the fading photograph of the group on my bedroom wall, at those keen and eager faces, straining every nerve to put the song over to an excited audience. I see the carefully prepared stage uniforms and gleaming instruments, and I think... where did it all go? What was it all about? And in the night I sometimes imagine I can still hear the twang of a banjo and the distant strains of "We shall not, we shall not be moved" But of course we were!

We are now all in our 60s, and at a recent reunion, we discovered than none of us had pursued a career in music after the demise of The Black Dice, and, thankfully, no-one was interested in reforming the band. But all agreed that it was a great experience at the time, and that it now provides, material for stories to tell our grandchildren, and perhaps an interesting chapter for those of us who are writing family histories.



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## DR BRAGG OF THE OLD FORD MEDICAL MISSION

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by Jean Hewitt

Dr Bragg led the work of the Old Ford Medical Mission from 1920 to 1932. It took place in Park Hall, a building owned by neighbouring St Mark's Church and it was situated in an area in the north-east corner of Old Ford, called the 'Island.' It earned its name by having four clear boundaries and being only accessible by one entrance or exit from Monier Road into Wick Lane.

There were a few shops and one off licence on the Island. The Roman Road street market was less than half a mile away. The adjoining Cadogan Terrace boasted The Morpeth Castle at one end and The Mitford Arms at the other. Both were well patronised, especially on Friday nights.

Five hundred small terraced houses were crammed into the dozen cobbled roads. Some people managed to transform their backyards into colourful gardens while others kept chickens there. Smeed Road school, whose playground adjoined the Mission Hall, provided education for all the Island's children: Infants on the ground floor, Juniors on the first floor and Seniors on the top floor, with boys and girls taught in separate class rooms.

A valued amenity was the fine Municipal Wash house where a hot bath or clothes-washing facilities could be purchased for six pence. Several factories like Yardleys, Sunlight Soap, and the Broadwood piano factory, provided local employment. Then there was the timber yard which bordered onto the Hertford Union Canal.

The Tin Tabernacle, in Smeed Road was the only other place of worship on the Island and they too endeavoured through their clubs and evangelistic meetings to combat the alcoholism and poverty that prevailed. This, and the neighbouring Bow, was the area where George Lansbury, the local politician, championed the cause of socialism and where Sylvia Pankhurst had set up her headquarters in 1912.

The distinctive feature of the Old Ford Medical Mission was that it provided medical as well as social and spiritual care. Thanks to Lloyd George's Health Insurance Act of 1912 working men's fees were covered by a National Insurance scheme, but others were expected to pay. At Park Hall patients were asked for six pence but those who could not afford the fee were never turned away.

One Sunday evening Jack Payne, a recent arrival on the Island, called at the Mission Hall to ask Dr Bragg to visit his sick son, John. Jack was immediately struck by the stocky doctor's commanding, military bearing, yet kindly manner. This was the start of John's association with the Mission which was to change the direction of his life.



**DR BRAGG**

It was, perhaps, surprising to find Tom Bragg in Old Ford. He had travelled many miles to reach there. Born in 1877 in Whitehaven, Cumbria, he had trained in Edinburgh as an engineer. While there he had met Dr and Mrs Liddell, (parents of Eric, of athletic fame) who were on leave from their medical missionary work in China. "Why don't you become a doctor and come and help me?" Tom accepted the challenge. Once qualified, he came to London to take a House job at the Mildmay Hospital. One day he heard a most beautiful voice. He went to investigate and discovered the singer, Miss Grace Wakefield. Love led to marriage in 1904.

Grace was from a genteel background. While on her way to a ball in Eastbourne she noticed a crowd on the seashore. She stopped her carriage and joined the gathering. The preacher was writing in

the sand: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..." This touched her heart and there and then she gave her life to God for Him to use. She was accepted for training as a Mildmay Deaconess and started work at the Mildmay Hospital. After further training Tom and Grace sailed for China. He was put in charge of a well-equipped hospital in Tientzin in North West China within sight of the Great Wall. Students from Peking Medical College were sent there for training. They both learned to speak Mandarin fluently. It was here that the Braggs started their family. Agnes was born in 1907 but a second daughter died of yellow fever. After seven years in China the family returned to England on grounds of Tom's health. An incident in Marseilles on the voyage home contributed to the angina from which he suffered for the rest of his life. While he was giving an illustrated talk, the 'magic lantern' exploded in his face. Back in England they settled in Bristol where Peter was born in 1913.

War saw Tom in the RAMC as a Major on the Western Front. There he caught 'trench fever' which took further toll of his health. After a spell in 'Blighty' he was sent back, this time in charge of the Chinese coolies whose language he could speak.

### **THE CALL TO OLD FORD**

The War had left the Mildmay Hospital short of doctors and Tom Bragg was asked to fill a temporary vacancy. While there he was offered a lucrative practice in Wakefield, Yorkshire. The accommodation and the proposed salary were attractive. However, simultaneously he was invited to take over and build up the work of the Old Ford Medical Mission. The salary offered was £100 per annum. Tom and Grace prayed about their choice and felt it right to accept the challenge of Old Ford. The family set up their home in 373, Victoria Park Road. In the adjoining house lived two ladies who were known to carry out illegal abortions.

### **GRACE AND AGNES**

Under Dr. Bragg's leadership the Mission flourished. He was the driving force and inspiration of the work but he relied on an army of voluntary helpers.

First was his family. Grace provided a loving home for her two children, Peter being too young to be

actively involved. Her main contribution to the work was to offer hospitality from her home.

But she also ran the Band of Hope and took an interest in the girls' work too. Together with Tom she welcomed ex-prisoners to their home.

Agnes was at first tempted to resent the choice her father had made, but before long she became a faithful helper in the young people's clubs. Touched by the sight of young children sitting on the steps outside the Morpeth Castle pub in Cadogan Terrace while their mothers drank inside, Agnes gathered up the children and took them to the nearby Mission Hall. There she taught them songs and Bible choruses. Sometimes her father accompanied them on his violin. Her fellow pupils at her school were so impressed by the stories of deprivation Agnes was witnessing, that they collected enough money to purchase an organ for the work. Soon they had a presentable choir which performed at Carol and other Special Services. The girls' mothers, dressed in their black shawls, came to hear and admire them.

As soon as she left school, Agnes opened a Wednesday evening club for the factory girls. They enthusiastically demanded more, so Agnes started a successful netball team which included Dolly Harvey, Annie Davis, Lill Goodwin and Maude King. They wore white blouses and some of them made tunics for the matches, wearing them over their flimsy chiffon dresses. They played their home matches on the playground of the Smeed Road school which lay behind Park Hall. The whole team became converted to faith in Christ.

### **MEDICAL MISSIONS**

Since the pioneering days of Dr. Burns-Thompson who had founded the first medical mission in Cowgate, Edinburgh, evangelical Christians had been convinced of the need and the value of such missions in poor districts. In London, the Islington Medical Mission was the pioneer, followed by the Bethnal Green Medical Mission which was founded in 1901. Soon to follow was the Mildmay Hospital in Shoreditch of which the Old Ford Medical Mission was an offshoot. As a student Tom Bragg had seen what could be done in Edinburgh and he now applied the same principles and practice in Old Ford.

He held surgeries on three mornings a week. Patients were given a numbered ticket as they arrived and were seen in that order. It was understood that a half-hour evangelistic service would take place in the main hall before the doctor started to see his patients. They accepted that this was part of the "package". A voluntary helper expounded some passage from the Bible or gave a personal testimony about their faith. A rather forbidding lady, Miss Bagley, called out the ticket numbers and those patients went through the connecting door to the surgery which was held in a private house adjoining the Mission hall. There "Little Nurse" attended to ulcerated legs and minor dressings while Miss Poole dispensed medicines. Those who needed to see the doctor were ushered a stage further, into his room.

To supplement his meagre income Dr. Bragg also held a surgery in Cadogan Terrace in a house which had belonged to a former Harley Street consultant. Through drink he had sunk to a degraded life style. Dr. Bragg not only treated and cured him but led him to put his faith in Christ. In gratitude, this man left his house to the mission in his will.

### TRAINING MISSIONARIES

Amongst his other commitments, Tom Bragg was the official doctor for the China Inland Mission whose Headquarters were in Newington Green. Their Home Directors, Mr. Howard Taylor and later, Dr. Stuart Holden, were only too pleased to direct their students to Old Ford to acquire training from one who had first-hand knowledge of medical missionary work in Inland China.

One such was Alfred Bosshardt. He later achieved renown by writing the story of his capture by the Communist Army aiming to overthrow the national government of Chian Kai Chek. The training he received stood him in good stead during the appalling sufferings he endured on the notorious Long March across China in 1935. He recalled that training with affection in his book, "The Guiding Hand".

*"Mondays were set apart for medical training at the Old Ford Medical Mission, a cycle ride across London. Our tutor, Dr. Tom Bragg, had been in China and knew that in the interior we would find few hospitals or nurses, and would be*

*faced with frightening situations. There were days when he had terrible misgivings about us, as we tied ourselves in knots with bandages, and confidently prescribed the wrong remedies. "Admirable", he would say on the rare occasions when he could. Our hours with him were among the most important of our training, going far beyond normal first aid. We assisted in compounding ointments, dispensing medicine and reading prescriptions. After diagnosis he would instruct us in the steps to be taken. In the consulting rooms we caught glimpses of the courage of patients and the strains of the doctor. Dr. Bragg withheld nothing, knowing from his experience what we would face in China. His lectures introduced us to new words and new worlds".*

### STUDENT HELPERS

Medical Students from Barts, the Royal Free Hospital and from the nearby London Hospital, were regular visitors to Old Ford. They received medical training as well as contributing to one of the many clubs. Mr. Priddy, a medical student at the London, ran a boys' club, helped by a pair of twins called Golding. They were strapping rugby players who stood no nonsense from the club's troublemakers, one of whom recalls being tucked under a Golding arm and carried out of the hall after some misdemeanour. Mr. Priddy was so inspired by his experiences in Old Ford that he went off to become a tutor at the South Wales Bible College. Dr. Bragg's connections with the Officers Christian Fellowship attracted Commander Startin of the Royal Navy to take his place, assisted by Lieutenants Hart Dyke and Hugh Stileman, R.N. Cadets from the Royal Academy in Woolwich also came to help in the clubs and to speak at the meetings. So did the Woodford Crusader Bible class whose leaders were on Tom Bragg's Governing Committee.

All these students and helpers passed through the Braggs' home in Victoria Park Road. They needed feeding, encouragement and to be listened to. This is where Grace Bragg's gift of hospitality shone. Sunday nights saw her kitchen piled with crockery and Dolly Harvey, a local helper, would be round there on Monday mornings to help restore order.

## CLUBS AND MEETINGS

The Mission's time-table was filled with Clubs and meetings for boys and girls and Bible Study Groups for adults. Always there was a Bible talk and testimony. Two or three hundred children attended the 6pm Sunday meetings which were run by Dr. McCarthy and Dr. Martin. The main adult meeting was held as late as 8.0 pm so it did not compete with St. Luke's Church services.

The Annual Outing was the highlight of the year for many of the children who had no chance of travelling beyond nearby Victoria Park. Local firms lent transport for the occasion. Epping Forest was a regular venue, but one memorable year the children piled into Broadwood's lorries which took them to Westminster. There they boarded a hired launch which carried them up to Richmond and Hampton Court.

## JOHN PAYNE

Young John Payne was growing up. The clubs and Sunday meetings were an important part of his life. The death of his mother when he was ten drove Jack Payne to drink and an unhappy second marriage. John's resentment at his loss turned him against all that the Mission stood for.

He joined a gang of boys who attended meetings with the express aim of wrecking them. They would push each other off the end of the bench and generally disturb proceedings, demanding to be noticed, and they spent their free time gambling.

Dr. Bragg loved these troublesome youngsters. He saw through their bravado and by faith imagined how they could be. "I want to set you a challenge", he told Leslie Keeble, a China Inland Mission Candidate. "See what you can do with that gang." Leslie's patience was tested in the days ahead but he did not give up. He too, loved the rascals and prayed for them. They hung around the street corners and Leslie joined them. When he eventually sailed for China his brother Fred took over the group.

Occasionally Dr Bragg would plan for a special week of Mission Meetings, when a noted speaker would be invited to present the gospel. One of the more popular visitors was "Happy Jim" Bryant of the Open Air Mission. During the 1929 Mission

Jim told a harrowing story which so affected John that he went to the back room and asked Dr Bragg to explain the way of salvation. He promptly wrote to Mr Keeble in China to tell him that his sweat and tears had not been in vain.

Word spread swiftly. Such was the reputation of this 19 year old troublemaker that people talked about his conversion for weeks. They watched him too, keen to disprove the validity of any change in his behaviour. He no longer wished to continue gambling with his mates and, to his relief they left him alone.

## OPEN AIR WORK

Not content with attracting people into the Mission Hall, Dr Bragg took his message out to the residents of the Island by holding open air meetings in the streets. There was no traffic on a Sunday, so a crowd would gather to listen to a short gospel address or a personal testimony. The congregation gave a fair hearing to their own neighbours who had come to faith in Christ and had the courage to share their story. Many a missionary candidate received valuable training for his future work in this way. John now joined the team of speakers and helped rather than hindered the work of the Mission.

## DOLLY AND JOHN

Dolly Harvey lived a few doors away from Park Hall so she had attended every possible club and meeting from an early age. She, too, had acquired an unkind step-mother so the Mission was a welcome outlet for her. She became a committed Christian and accompanied Agnes Bragg and Rosie Rogers on their visits to house-bound people on Sunday afternoons.

Becoming a Christian was a costly step in that environment. John Payne's stepmother made it impossible for him to stay at home. She also stirred up trouble for him at the Mission. Overhearing part of a conversation, she put the rumour about that John and Dolly had got married secretly because they *had* to. Many a girl returned, pregnant, from her jaunts to Wanstead Flats, but Dolly was not one of them. This chatter became so embarrassing to John that he stayed away from the Mission. When Dr Bragg realised this he called on them and said, "Don't worry about that sort of

gossip. Time will tell if it's true or false." His gentle encouragement enabled the young couple to resume their Mission work. At her conversion Dolly had asked God to give her a missionary husband. Although she had known John Payne as a child she did not associate with him during his rebellious years. Now that he was a Christian too they were drawn together and after a long courtship they married in 1935.

### ST MARK'S CHURCH

Rev. Walters had served ten years at St Mark's but he was a sick man. His wife appealed for help with preaching and playing the organ. Dr. Bragg was glad to help, despite the extra pressure this involved in his busy schedule.

In 1929 Rev. Legge was appointed as the new Vicar. He was impressed by the good work being carried on at Park Hall, and since the premises were owned by St. Mark's he wished to bring it under the aegis of his church. Dr Bragg did not agree with this so he found accommodation in the basement of a Baptist church opposite the Eton College Mission at Hackney Wick, and, to Rev. Legge's regret, he transferred the work there. It now became the Old Ford and Hackney Medical Mission. Surgeries, clubs and meetings continued but the work became more of a struggle, especially as Dr Bragg's health was failing. He was advised to leave the work to others. After twelve years of unstinting service Tom reluctantly agreed.

### ORDINATION

Reports of his ministry at St Mark's had reached the ears of the Bishop who suggested that he should train for ordination in the Church of England. "I've not even been confirmed," Tom protested. But his non-conformist background did not deter the Bishop who directed him to train at the London College of Divinity in Highbury. Tom Bragg was ordained in to the Anglican Church in 1932. He served as Curate to Dr Stuart Holden at St Paul's Portman Square, in London's West End and a far cry from Old Ford. A short spell at Lowestoft and at Drayton, Oxfordshire, preceded his call in 1939 to become Vicar of Christ Church, West Bournemouth.

His son, Peter, was now in the R.A.F. where he had a distinguished career. Agnes had trained as a nurse

at St Thomas' Hospital. She had married Dr Kenneth Buxton in 1935 and after some months of medical work in Ethiopia they were now at a missionary hospital in Ruanda, East Africa. Affectionate letters flowed, but the unbridgeable distance between them was hard to bear through all the years of war. Although active around the parish Tom Bragg was limited by his increasingly severe angina pectoris. Despite this he would turn out for fire-watching duties at the first sound of the alert. By summer of 1942 his heart was in a serious condition and he was forced to retire from Christ Church.

He and Grace moved to a small flat in St Leonards. He dreaded redundancy, so, "You will be glad to know," he wrote to Agnes on August 17<sup>th</sup>, "that I preach at least once every Sunday, and help in other ways, so I do not fear being absolutely useless. In fact, I continually pray that I may be used in a deeper way to lead others to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ."

On August 19<sup>th</sup> Tom Bragg preached his last sermon. "If this were to be my last utterance," he prophesied, "I would urge you to realise the power of prayer." Six days later his suffering was over. Grace sent a telegram to Agnes: "Father at rest." A final tribute summed up Tom Bragg's influence. "As Vicar of Christ Church we had for two and a half years, a good man who was exceptional as a clergyman. Wide experience, knowledge of the world, and physical suffering had refined and mellowed his character, making him the humble, cheery, patient and helpful Dr Bragg whom we knew. Very few of us realised the dangerous nature of his illness, and few knew of the acute suffering he bore. He excelled as a visitor, having a special gift of comforting and cheering the sick. He was always ready to visit anyone who needed his help. Deeply spiritual, a man of earnest prayer, depending on his heavenly Father, and doing his best to follow the Master's example, he laboured on, loving his people, and being loved by them in return. When his medical adviser pronounced retirement inevitable we all felt sad because we were losing a friend."

All those whose lives he had touched in Old Ford would have agreed.

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## WE REMEMBER

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### Howard Bloch

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Howard Bloch, at the age of 45. Howard was known to many ELHS members during his long tenure at the Local History Library, Stratford, Newham. He was closely involved with the community and its history. He was also involved in community plays, talks and walks.

Over the years Howard has published several books and articles most covering the heavily industrialised area of West Ham and the Royal Docks. Although he continued to write the history of the area, he left his job in Newham some years ago, and worked for a short spell at Lewisham Local History Department. His last book "Germans in London" was about German immigration in Canning Town and detailed much about the sugar industry there in the 19th and early 20th century. One of his projects, researching the events surrounding the sinking of the pleasure steamer The Princess Alice, appeared to have had a deep effect on him, and friends say he brooded over the tragedy.

His body was found on October 9th at Limehouse Reach, a month after the 122 anniversary of the disaster and some three miles from the scene of that event. He had been missing for about a month.

Many people knew Howard and worked with him and he had many friends and admirers, and he will be greatly missed.

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### Caroline Benn

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Caroline Benn, wife of Tony Benn, MP, died in November last year, and will be remembered with great affection by many of us in the East London History Society. Members will remember her lively talk on Keir Hardie, shortly after the publication of her definite book on the great socialist leader.

Some years previously she had graciously agreed to unveil the plaque in honour of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Suffragettes on the site of 400 Old Ford Road, a wonderful occasion, with a reception

hosted by the Landlord of the pub The Lord Morpeth.

Caroline came from a wealthy family in Cincinnati, Ohio, and graduated from Vassar, the top Ladies College, and undoubtedly she was destined for high society. Instead, in post-war Britain, she met and fell in love with a socialist, ex-RAF pilot and her life changed forever. Tony and Caroline devoted themselves to radical causes in a political partnership, both fortunate in meeting someone whose idealism matched their own. Together they raised four children, and while Tony pursued his political career Caroline taught at the Open University and Kensington and Hammersmith Further Education College. She was also a writer, her best work being the biography of Keir Hardie, but she also wrote widely about education.

Tony Benn said, 'We have had such a marvellous life together and her radicalism and support and determination have really kept me going.'

## END OF AN ERA

The death in October 2000 of Reggie Kray closed a unique chapter in the history of the East End of London.

The Kray twins, Ronnie and Reggie and their older brother Charlie were reviled and revered in equal measure in the East End, as gangsters who terrorised the petty criminals of the underworld with gang warfare, and who achieved Robin Hood status in the neighbourhood where they were born and lived, Vallance Road in Whitechapel. Their names will be forever associated with the Blind Beggar Pub in Whitechapel Road, and the cold-blooded murder of George Cornell, and the later killing of Jack 'the hat' McVitie. In 1968 Ronnie and Reggie were jailed for life, while justice caught up with Charlie in recent years. All three brothers died whilst still serving out their sentences:

**Ronald Kray -**

Born 24th October 1933, died 17th March 1995

**Charles Kray -**

Born 9th July 1926, died 4th April 2000

**Reginald Kray -**

Born 24th October 1933, died 1st October 2000

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## Murder on the Highway

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### An Exciting Discovery

A short time ago LWT approached the History Society requesting an interview with regard to their forthcoming series of bygone murders and mystery. The event they were focusing on was the Ratcliffe Highway murders of 1811. After several phone calls and pleas, I was finally prevailed upon to meet with Graciela Martin, to give her some background material on life in early 19th century East London. Having told her that I had only read through Critchley and James's book, *The Maul and the Pear Tree*, and knew a few other details of these horrific murders, from various sources, and could not therefore give her much more information, when it came to the 'interview' she proceeded to question me in detail about the murders of the Marr family and their shop assistant, and the Williamson family and their maid, asking me to describe the events as they unfolded, and my views on them!

Standing outside in the graveyard opposite the ruins of St John's Church, just off Wapping High Street in the freezing morning in February was not my idea of a pleasant day out. After being told off by the cameraman for moving around too much, when in fact I was in danger of losing all sensation in my toes, we decided to head for St George's Church on the Highway, where the Marr family had been buried.

The Rev. Gillean Craig had told us that he had rescued the headstone from the churchyard, and had it stored in the boiler room. I was a bit sceptical about this information, as PD James had stated that the headstone had been unreadable for many years, and had subsequently disappeared.

Rev. Craig took us into the basement, where we found the headstone, in four pieces. There were five or six lines of inscription, and although the words 'sister of Celia Marr, aged 34, died in 1817,' could be deciphered, it did not fit in with the inscription as recorded at the time. Everyone was very disappointed at this finding. It was then I noticed that the inscription began with 'Also', and asked him if there was anything on the reverse of the stone. The Rev. Craig, still full of enthusiasm, proceeded to heave the stones over, with the reluctant help of the burly cameraman. This

revealed the sections of stone to be covered in lettering, although muddy, very faded, and worn.

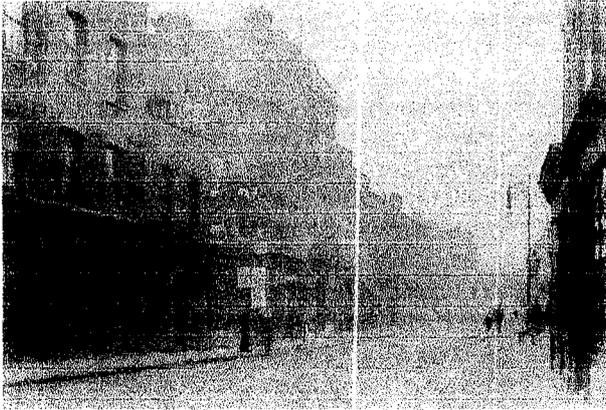
The vicar obligingly raced off to get a bucket of water, brush and sponge, and our efforts finally revealed the inscription we were looking for. Although many of the words were difficult to trace, we were able to read the names of Timothy Marr, aged 24 years, his wife Celia Marr and son Timothy aged 3 months, also their address, and some of the epitaph.

To say that I was delighted at this discovery is a vast understatement! This was truly a find of great significance and an important addition to our research in East End history. And I must here acknowledge that it would not have been possible were it not for two facts. One, Doreen and myself were shown in Tower Hamlets Cemetery this very technique of reading worn and indecipherable lettering on headstones, and having spent many, many rewarding hours in TH Cemetery reading headstones, I was aware that inscriptions are to be found not just on both sides of the stones, but also around the base, and on additional stones.

This is the full text:

Sacred to the memory of Mr Timothy Marr, aged 24 years, also Mrs Celia Marr, his wife, aged 24 years, and their son Timothy Marr, aged 3 months, all of whom were most inhumanely murdered in their dwelling house, No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway, Dec. 8, 1811.

*Stop mortal, stop as you pass by,  
And view the grave wherein doth lie  
A Father, Mother and a Son,  
Whose earthly course was shortly run.  
For lo, all in one fatal hour,  
O'er came were they with ruthless power;  
And murdered in a cruel state -  
Yea, far too horrid to relate!  
They spared not one to tell the tale;  
One for the other could not wail  
The other's fate in anguish sighed:  
Loving they lived, together died.  
Reflect, O Reader, o'er their fate  
And turn from sin before too late;  
Life is uncertain in this world.  
Oft in a moment we are hurled  
To endless bliss or endless pain;  
So let not sin within you reign.*



The above view appears in the book **Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar in Old photographs** and shows the Highway, or St George's Street as it was known then, c. 1910. We are looking west, toward's St John's Hill, and Timothy Marr's shop would have been about midway on the left. The premises could be identified as late as 1928. The Highway remained virtually unchanged until the Second World War, when heavy bombing raids during the Blitz destroyed so much of Wapping, including St George's Church, which was left an empty shell. A chapel was later built within the four walls.

**Rosemary Taylor**



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## END PIECE

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**Mrs Ivy Gardner, 19, Meadow Close,  
Cirencester. Gloucs:**

I should like the **Changing East End**, I believe that would be what I am looking for, as my husband and myself lived in London until 1980, when we moved to Gloucestershire (having been evacuated here in 1939). We lived on the Isle of Dogs, Bow, Devons Road and Roman Road, then Warner Place, so that is our scene, so to speak.

We have been back only last year, as my brother and sister in law live next to Bancroft Library, and my - how it is all changed! We are both now 75, so it was quite a shock.

I did myself attend Clara Grant's farthing bundles hand-outs, also I have a lovely photo of her as she was headmistress at Devons Road school, my mother was there at the time and knew her well. She went to its once a fortnight sale where if you lived in the district with two children you could buy second hand clothes. Waiting for my Mum to come home was quite something I can tell you!

Some time in 1942 (?) I got a job in Burdett Road trouser tailors, took my Dad's suit to be pressed, the turner said it was not my Dad's suit, as it was made in Saville Row. Can you imagine how shocked I was, and what a treasure!

Pictured, volunteers handing out Farthing Bundles at the Fern Street Settlement.



# SPRING COACH TRIP

SATURDAY 12TH MAY 2001

## THAXTED & THE GARDENS OF EASTON LODGE

We will first visit Thaxted. This little town in NW Essex was very prosperous and important in the 14th and 15th centuries, when it was the centre of the cutlery trade. This is reflected in its splendid church and 15th century Guildhall. There is also a windmill to look around. There are many other attractive houses. We shall stop here till the early afternoon. There are a number of place for lunch, or bring a picnic.

The socialist Vicar of Thaxted, Conrad Noel, was a friend of Daisy, Countess of Warwick, the early 20th century owner of Easton Lodge, which we shall visit next. She was the daughter and heiress of the last Lord Maynard, whose family had owned the estate since Elizabethan times. She became the Countess of Warwick, and was one of the Prince of Wales's lady friends. However, in 1895 she turned to socialism and good causes.

In 1902 she had extensive gardens laid out by Harold Peto. The work ws done by men from he Salvation Army Inebriates Home. Much of these have now been restored, and this will be the main focus of our visit - little of the house itself survives.

Little Easton Church, nearby, is also interesting, with mediaeval wall paintings, Maynard tombs, and 17th century and modern stained glass. Tea will be available at Easton Lodge.

The coach fare will be £7.00, please send this to me with the form below. Entrance to the Easton Lodge gardens is £3.50, which will be collected on the coach.

The pick-up will be at Mile End, opposite the station, at 10.00 am. Please send your bookings to: Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London E4 7PF (Tel: 0208 524 4506)

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AUTUMN COACH TRIP TO THAXTED AND THE GARDENS OF EASTON LODGE Saturday 12th May 2001	
I/We would like _____ seat/s for the coach trip.	
NAME/S _____	
ADDRESS _____	
_____	
_____	
TEL. NO. _____	I enclose a cheque/PO for £ _____
(Cheque made payable to the East London History Society.)	