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Editorial Note:

The Committee members are: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, Harold Mernick, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborne, Bob Dunn, and Rosemary Taylor. All queries regarding membership should be addressed to Harold Mernick, 42 Campbell Road, Bow, London E3 4DT.

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Check out the History Society's website at www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk.

Our grateful thanks go to all the contributors of this edition of the newsletter. We have a wide variety of topics and we trust our members will enjoy reading it as much as I have, whilst compiling the newsletter. 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!!

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



MEMORIAL RESEARCH

Doreen and Diane Kendall, with Doreen Osborne and other volunteers continue their work in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park meticulously researching graves and recording memorial inscriptions. They would welcome any help members can offer. Their work has grown into a project of enormous proportions and complexity, with an impressive database of graves researched, with illustrations attached. Unfortunately, due to pressure of work, Doreen and Diane cannot undertake any research on behalf of individuals, but would welcome any information that has been uncovered through personal searches. Meet them in the Cemetery Park on the **2nd Sunday of every month at 2 pm**, where you can receive helpful advice and suggestions on the best way to conduct your searches.

Note from Philip Mernick:

We are currently working on ways to expand the use of the web site, www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk, and are experimenting with use of short movie clips. I would like to offer members the opportunity of seeing a short clip of any local area. People who moved away years ago might like to see how the place they lived in now looks or the place their ancestor lived. Please email your requests to Philip at phil@mernicks.com

East London History Society Programme 2008

Thursday 10 April 2008

Quick Tongues and Big Hearts – some East End Women before the First World War

Speaker - Pat Francis

Saturday 19th April 2008

Coach Trip to Sudbury and Dedham

Thursday 8 May 2008

Open Evening – Entertainment

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.

Suggestions and ideas for future topics and/or speakers for our Lecture Programme are always welcomed. If you can suggest someone or indeed if you would like to give a talk yourself, please get in touch with David Behr, our Programme co-ordinator, either at one of our lectures or, alternatively, email our Chairman Philip Mernick with your comments and suggestions. Email: phil@mernicks.com

The East of London Family History Fair held on Saturday 19th January at Barking was a great day out for everyone, and provided an excellent opportunity for meeting fellow enthusiasts, amongst the family and local history buffs alike. The East London History Stall, with Philip Mernick in charge, attracted a steady stream of visitors, and Doreen and Diane Kendall were kept busy explaining the Cemetery database and helping with enquiries. Our picture below shows, among others, Sigrid Werner, Doreen Osborne, Rosemary Taylor, Diane and Doreen Kendall and Anne Quade.



EAST END PHOTOGRAPHERS. 2.

JOSEPH MARTIN

When the East London Advertiser interviewed Joseph Martin in his West India Dock Road studio, in the autumn of 1933, he was aged 85 (though he claimed to be 82), and quite probably the oldest working photographer in Great Britain at the time. His earliest reminiscences, of the East End in the 1850s, included a distinct reluctance to attend school. "I was supposed to attend a Spanish and Portuguese School, but they only called the roll at the beginning of the year, and for most of the rest of it I was missing. I used to take my twopence to the Tower Hamlets Swimming Bath and learned to swim. I attended at another time the Ragged School in George Yard, where they had a drum and fife band. Playing in that band had its compensations, for when other schools had outings, we were invited to come long and play for them. When I was nine, I stopped going to school because my father wanted me to help him in his photographic business".

Joseph Martin's father, John Martin (1830 - 97) had started in business as a fancy box maker in Spitalfields in the 1850s, but had moved into photography by the end of that decade. He was thus one of the pioneers in the profession in the East End, almost contemporaneous with Eliza Burrows, who had established her studio off the Commercial Road in 1856. John Martin did eventually manage to open a studio in Cambridge Road, Mile End for just over a year (1865 - 66), reluctantly assisted by the teenage Joseph.

As Joseph recalled almost 70 years later, his father was rather a severe master. "I soon became tired of working for him at 6d a week, and when Derby Day approached I determined to run away from home. On the day before the race I left Whitechapel and walked as far as Brixton, before I plucked up courage to give a performance on the flute outside a public - house. I was ravenously hungry, and after

going round with the hat I spent some of the money on a meal I can remember yet. It consisted of two bloaters, six doorsteps and a pint of coffee. Epsom Downs was reached by three o'clock on the next morning, where I slept in the tent of a caterer. There I joined three other itinerant musicians, and believe it or not, we made £20 from collections during the first race day. I stayed with them for two years, during most of which tit we played to crowds attending functions at the Crystal Palace, until my father traced me and hauled me home".

Martin's first independent studio was set up at 186 Commercial Road East in 1878, just as he reached his thirtieth birthday. It was not a success, and closed within the year. In between his attempts to establish himself as a photographer, Joseph Martin became well - known on the local music halls, playing in orchestras and at functions attended by royalty, and even touring the country on occasions. He finally succeeded in acquiring his first commercially successful studio when he bought out Louis Gumprecht in 1887 in Cannon Street Road. Despite Gumprecht's successful career at this studio over twenty years, Martin found it hard going, and closed it abruptly in 1893, perhaps sensing that the passing trade was moving further east, into the newer docks' area around Limehouse. An attempt to establish a studio on the fringe of the City, in Norton Folgate, in 1891 was a dreadful mistake; it closed within a few months, and Martin was no doubt glad to offload it on to Charlotte Carter, whose tenure was equally brief. It was only finally in 1894 that Martin established the studio which he was to operate for almost forty years, until the end of his life, at 14 (later 62) West India Dock Road. In 1868 Martin married Sarah Ann Braham (1850 - 1914); they had two children.

Joseph Martin had a number of relatives who like himself, opened photographic studios in the East End towards the end of the nineteenth century. They seem to have been divided

between Cannon Street Road and Commercial Road East; Isaac Martin had studios in both streets during the 1880s, while Israel (1829 - 92) ran a studio in Commercial Road East for a few years before handing it over to John (1862 - 1909), who ran it for almost twenty years until his premature death, after running a smaller studio a few doors away in the early 1890s. But it was Joseph who had the connections and the expertise to thrive in a very tough environment, and who comfortably outlasted all of his cousins by several decades.



Photograph from Joseph Martin's Cannon Street Road studio circa 1890

Joseph Martin inherited more than just the studio when he acquired Louis Gumprecht's business in 1887; he also took over the latter's semi - official duties as corpse photographer to the Metropolitan Police. "My job was to photograph the corpses of unknown dead persons, in the Metropolitan Police area. This covers 700 square miles" Martin, in fact, concentrated almost entirely on the riverside area, where the majority of bodies were fished out of the River Thames. "I once entered a mortuary to photograph the body of a man

who had been found drowned. I approached the coffin and saw it was empty. I heard a footstep, and turned round to see a dishevelled figure, who shouted "Where in the --- am I? "You clear out", I said, and the man did. Later, when I described the visitor to the mortuary keeper, he said "That's the man who was found dead on the edge of the tide". Apparently, he was not dead, but dead drunk.

On another occasion, I was asked to take a photograph at one mortuary when I had previously been asked for at one many miles away. As I could not do it, the authorities called in a photographer who had never performed the task before. He propped the coffin up against the wall, and getting behind the camera, focussed it, the face then appearing much bigger than it actually was. He had not propped up the camera sufficiently, with the result that it rocked and fell forward. Seeing this huge face coming rapidly towards him completely unnerved the photographer, who dashed out of the building. He could not be induced to return, and I was called to take the photograph the next day".

It was right at the beginning of his career as a corpse photographer that Joseph Martin wrote himself into criminal history, though for many years this aspect was confused with the work of his predecessor, Gumprecht. It is now known that Martin photographed the victims of the notorious serial killer, known as Jack the Ripper, in the alleyways of Whitechapel and Spitalfields in the autumn of 1888. When these were rediscovered in the 1970s, many of them were mounted on card with Gumprecht's office rubber stamp; it is now clear that Martin was clearly using a job lot of mounts left over from the previous occupant. Reproduced now way beyond exhaustion point in every book published on the subject in the last 35 years, they remain an horrific and graphic record of the East End's most gruesome slayings, especially as, in the same manner as Gumprecht, almost the whole of Martin's photographic work for the Metropolitan Police has disappeared since the 1930s. This is

believed to be the result of rigorous “weeding” of the collection, particularly in the post - war years.

Martin’s interview in the East London Advertiser of October 21 1933, was prompted by an accident in which he was involved a few days earlier. Martin, by then partly blind in one eye, had been knocked down by a tramcar while crossing the East India Dock Road. By chance, the ensuing lawsuit was the first one brought against the newly established London Passenger Transport Board, and the jury’s verdict was for the Board. Martin was asked by his counsel, after identifying himself as the “Official Corpse Photographer” whether he photographed corpses exclusively. “I would not say that”, answered Martin “I occasionally get an order for a wedding party”. This reduced the court to helpless laughter.

Barely two months later, on December 20 1933, Martin, refusing to acknowledge his defective eyesight, was involved in an identical accident on the same street. This time, sadly, he was not so fortunate; he died in the ambulance on the way to Poplar Hospital. He would have enjoyed the obituary which he received in the Times.

When the East London Advertiser asked him for his most remarkable experience, it no doubt imagined that a lifetime spent in close proximity to the dead would yield a blood - curdling nugget. But Martin surprised the interviewer by relating an incident from his early years, in 1878. “I often used to play in the orchestras of the steamships that went from London Bridge to Southend and Margate. On one occasion, I was asked to play on the “Princess Alice”, and my sister and brother - in - law, who were arranging a day out, agreed to take tickets on the same boat. On the evening before, my employer told me that I would be required to play at the Holborn Restaurant instead. I was disappointed that I could not get in touch with my relatives, but I went to the restaurant. I finished playing there in the early morning, and whilst on my way

home, called at a coffee stall. There, men were talking of the tragedy of the sunken ship and the many lives lost. I walked home stunned, and thinking of the fate which must have overwhelmed my sister and brother - in - law. To my great amazement, when I went to the house of a relative to ask if any details had been received, I met them face to face. I said “I thought you were dead”, and they replied “We thought you were”. It transpired that they were held up on the way to Woolwich, and when they arrived the steamboat was already in midstream. I consider that the miracle of my life”. (TO BE CONTINUED)

David Webb



Photograph from Isaac Martin’s studio, circa 1890 showing proprietor (enlarged below)

Correspondence

Ken Gay, 201 Alexandra Park, London N22 7JB, wrote:

Congratulations to all in continuing to publish the Newsletter, which I always enjoy. Mr. Percival's early life was so similar to my own that I have written him the enclosed letter. I would be most grateful if you would pass it on to him. (We found Ken's letter very interesting and a good follow up story to the article, that we asked him permission to publish his letter, suitably amended, which he very kindly gave.)

I was so pleased to read the article in the ELHS Newsletter and am writing this because our early years are so similar in time and location. I was born a few weeks before (Mr. Percival) on 18th August 1923 at 12 White Road, a turning off Vicarage Lane at the Electricity Showroom end. My father was also a postman, and at age five I went to the school in Ham Park Road, known as Park School.

My father found his outlet in church work and every Sunday, usually in the evening, our family of four (I have an older brother born in 1920) would walk up Vicarage Lane to the old parish church. I remember well the alley with cottages which were the almshouses for ladies and sometimes the elderly inhabitants would stand or sit outside. Behind was a C of E school where I went for Sunday School lessons. Further on, down the Portway, as you know was Meeson Road with the tall hall, which I attended for Cubs. I remember one early evening in the 1930s a long line of unemployed marching along the Portway.

West Ham Park was a haunt of mine; I read comics there or played. I remember that halfway down Vicarage Lane was a yard with a cow. My mother used to send me there for fresh milk sometimes, though usually we were delivered milk from a churn on a handcart with the milkman filling a metal canister which hung by our front door. The butchers

yard was opposite White Road and once a cow escaped and ran down our road, making me frightened. All the children in our road played together, swinging on the lamp post in the usual way with only horses and carts as traffic. We also used the Co-op in the Lane. On Saturday nights we went to the Broadway and Angel Lane where the stalls might be selling off their meat and fruit.

My mother's parents lived in Caistor Park Road (number 9) and we went there often till they died when I was about eight. My grandfather had come up from Crowborough to work on the London Tilbury Southend Railway and ended up as Station Master at Plaistow Station. My father's father had died when he was eleven and he left Bridge Road School at 14 to become a Post Office messenger boy. My father, grandfather, and great grandfather had all lived in roads near Stratford Market. My father took me to the Sorting Office in Martins Lane where I saw him sort letters. He had delivered in Carpenters Road, and claimed he got dermatitis from some of the chemical packets. Later his round was in Manbey Grove area. He got some promotion during the war and had to cycle to Hackney wearing a steel helmet during the Blitz.

In 1934 I passed my 11 plus and like my brother went to Tennyson Road, West Ham Municipal Secondary School. When I was 13 my father inherited a thousand pounds from a rich uncle who lived in a mean house in Stratford and he used £600 to buy a house in Upton Avenue, Forest Gate, so no longer having to pay ten shillings a week out of his three pounds ten shilling income on rent. The new house had a bathroom, something new to us, but my brother and I did not like it, although I soon found friends to play with in the street. I used to walk across West Ham Park to school and back twice: four times a day (difficult in fog). The house was made unlivable by a bomb in September 1940 and we were again bombed out when we lived with my mother's brother in Hounslow. My

school by then had gone to Cornwall and in October 1940 I joined them. A hard driving teacher got me into the London School of Economics and I graduated. I was Grade III at my Army Medical and never called up.

From Tilo Amhoff. Via Email
tilo.amhoff@web.de

I am working for a project that is investigating the history of the Chinese community in London and we plan to do a walk in the area of the first "Chinatown" in Limehouse. We are looking for some original traces of the community in the area and where wondering if there are any graves of Chinese citizens at the Tower Hamlets Cemetery or the East London Cemetery that could be visited. I am not entirely sure if you are the right people to talk to, but you are one of the contacts I found on the website and at the cemetery. If you cannot really help us maybe you no someone who could. Thank you very much for your time and your help and we will keep you informed about the progress of the project and when we plan to do our tour in Limehouse

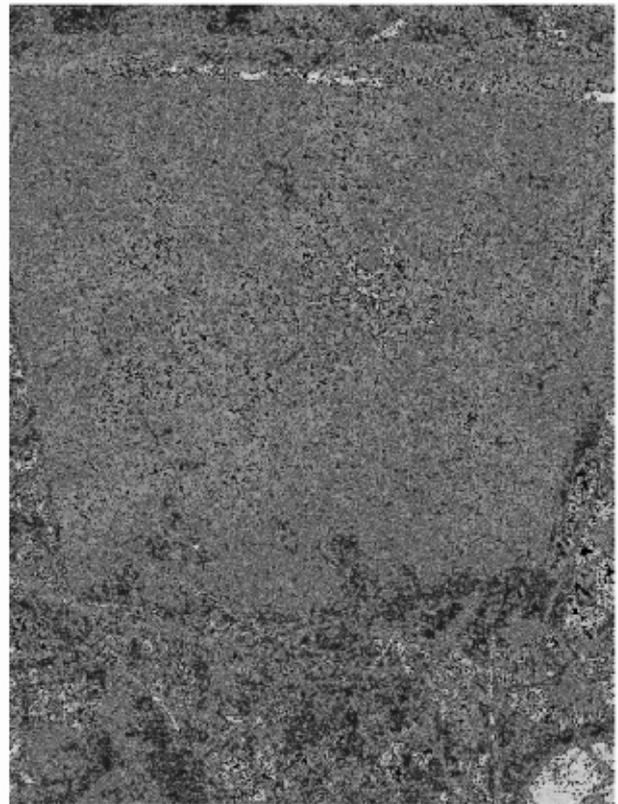
(Rosemary Taylor replied: We found just one or two Chinese graves in Tower Hamlets Cemetery, from what I remember off the top of my head, without getting out my notes, they used the East London Cemetery, mostly. There are some Chinese names on the War Memorial in the cemetery, which might be worth looking at, those who were killed on board ship, along with other merchant seamen. The graves in THC are in the area roughly from the Snooks grave to the end of the path. I believe there is a large grave with an anchor further along the path and the Chinese grave was about two rows back from it. I would be happy to assist the group with material I have collected.)

Geoffrey Lomas of Bingley, West Yorkshire wrote:

I had a stroke seven years ago, and now as a rehabilitation project I am trying to trace my

family tree, my great- Great Grandfather, Fasham Venables, was at one time, I believe, Proprietor of a store on Whitechapel High Street bearing his family name, Later he married his son off to the family running the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. I am told that the company paid rent to my Grandmother until the 1960's for some parts of the foundry. What I am wondering is if you can point me towards any sources that can give me more information about this shop.

(Philip advised: Venables had two shops, either side of Commercial Road (102-105 and 115 Whitechapel High Street). The building at 102-105 is still standing, the one at 115 has gone. They are listed as linen drapers, silk mercers, carpet warehousemen and house furnishers. Do any members remember using the Venables stores (almost opposite Gardiners)?



Grave with Chinese Inscription

BOOK REVIEWS

HACKNEY HISTORY VOL. 13

Just published, the latest issue of *Hackney History* includes articles about the Shoreditch parish library founded by John Dawson in the 18th century (Margaret Willes); the Quaker apothecaries Silvanus and Timothy Bevan and their home at Barbers Barn in Mare Street (Isobel Watson); the local effects of outbreaks of cholera in the 19th century (Dick Hunter); the philanthropist Harper Twelvetrees – who was featured in a recent edition of this Newsletter – and especially his role in campaigning for justice for an escaped American slave (Julia Lafferty); and post-1945 council housing in Shoreditch, with especial reference to Fairchild House (Stefan Muthesius).

The volume is available at £4.00 (plus £1.50 postage) from Hackney Archives Department, 43 De Beauvoir Road, N1 5SQ (telephone 020 7241 2886; email archives@hackney.gov.uk), who can on request supply a list of the contents of earlier volumes still in print. Cheques should be made payable to London Borough of Hackney.

THE ROMANCE OF BETHNAL GREEN
by Cathy Ross, with photographs by Peter Marshall. 122 pages, 26 b&w illustrations
ISBN 978 1 901992 74 8. Price £11.99 from **Eastside Bookshop, 166 Brick Lane, London, E1 6RU. www.eastsidebooks.co.uk**; or Museum of London bookshop
By post for £12.99 (including p&p) from: Bacton Books, PO Box 60410, London E2 0WA. Please make cheques payable to 'C. M. Ross'

As you might guess from the title, this is not a conventional local history. Rather it is a meditation, or series of essays, on the theme of how Bethnal Green has at different times fitted into the national consciousness. This is largely

teased out by considering how 'outsiders' have viewed, and developed, local institutions over more than two hundred and fifty years. It begins with the mid-18th century when the new parish of Bethnal Green was formed out of part of the ancient parish of Stepney, and moves through the early 19th century campaign to get the urban poor into the established church – leaving Bethnal Green as one of only two parishes in the country with a church dedicated to each and every one of the twelve apostles, though these churches remained mostly empty. Then came the Baroness Burdett-Coutts and her Columbia Market – which also remained empty; and the Bethnal Green Museum, established in 1872 lacking a coherent vision of its purpose. That it was supposed at the same time to find a convenient dumping-ground for a ragbag of objects unwanted in the South Kensington museums, and bring education and cultural enlightenment to benighted east Londoners ('Metropolitan orientals'), speaks volumes about Establishment attitudes to the latter.

There follows a chapter considering the craft weaving industry, its rise and fall, its working and living conditions, and its royal patronage. This is probably the most succinct and accessible account of this subject currently available.

Though disparagement and stereotyping in the press was not taken lying down by mid-Victorian Bethnal Greeners, this was exceptional. It is not surprising, or unusual, that the author has found it broadly speaking easier to identify the views of contemporary outsiders about Bethnal Green past than to isolate the views and voices of the Bethnal Greeners themselves, right down to the mid-20th century. All this changes in the final chapter, which considers recent and continuing demographic change through the prism of the 2005 Parliamentary election, and local voices predominate.

Throughout, a dialogue between Bethnal Green and the rest of the world – in so far as

the rest of the world is conscious of Bethnal Green – is presented through the metaphor of a ‘romance’: an engagement of mutual fascination, based on the ‘otherness’ of the apparently strange and exotic. This is not a topographical work with formal boundaries: it is about people, and their perceptions. It is thoughtful, entertaining and original, and has all the charm of enthusiasm. The author is clearly in love with her subject.

Isobel Watson

THE ROMANCE OF BETHNAL GREEN

By Cathy Ross, with photographs by Peter Marshall
 Published by Museum of London Archaeology Service for Bacton Books, 2007
 £11.99

Work brought Cathy Ross to London from the north of England as a reluctant incomer to Bethnal Green in 1995; she fell in love with the district. As ‘a born-again Bethnal Greener’, as she puts it, she views its history as the interaction between settled residents and incoming strangers, and as that between west end and east end, middle class and working class. These relationships she sees as a romance, with all the fascination, the falling out and making up, that this implies. An individual viewpoint, therefore, lively and stimulating to read. If you don’t agree with the conclusions, at least the questions are worth raising. The photographs are superb. It is a pity that the book lacks an index, and the notes are not always easy to tie to the text. But if you have a collection of books on Bethnal Green, you won’t have one quite like this. If you haven’t any yet, buying this would be a good start. My bookshop had difficulty in prising one out of the wholesaler, so be persistent if you want a copy.

Pat Francis

BOW & BROMLEY-By-BOW, Gary Haines, Sutton Publishing, 2008. ISBN 978-0-7509-4791-6, £12.99. 128 pages, 186 illustrations.

I reviewed ELHS member Gary Haines’ previous book on Bethnal Green in Newsletter 2-05 (Spring 2003) and I am delighted to see this new work covering, now fashionable, Bow and still unfashionable Bromley (renamed Bromley by Bow in the nineteenth century to avoid confusion with its, then, more rural namesake in Kent). This book follows the usual Sutton system of lots of pictures, almost all of which are drawn from the extensive collection held by Tower Hamlets Local History Library at Bancroft Road; and concise, but relatively little, text.

Because of their source the book benefits from having a higher than usual proportion of illustrations from original photographs rather than from commercial postcards. Not that I have anything against postcards (I have collected them for many years) but the photographs Gary has used often show more spontaneous scenes and are certainly much less familiar.

Bow is here defined rather loosely, including Roman Road and Old Ford (how did The Royal Cricketers get into Bow, Gary) but not Tredegar Square (counted as Mile End Old Town). I am, however, delighted to see so many pictures of neglected Bromley. So neglected and mistreated that Bromley Ward has been renamed Mile End East by seemingly historical illiterates in distant Mulberry Place.

The book follows the familiar style of subdivision into sections, here named The Streets, Shopping & Industry, Places of Refreshment, Churches & Religion, Looking after the People, Education & Leisure, and finally The People. There are so many varied and interesting images here that it will appeal to anyone with an interest in the area. I am also delighted to see that Gary has revived the old Bow heresy by suggesting that

Bow bells really are in Bow: the floating cat was new to me (you will have to buy the book to understand this!)

Philip Mernick

LONDON HISTORY – 100 Faces of the East End by John Rennie ISBN 978 1 4116 6608 5.

For details of price and availability please email John Rennie at jrennie@gotadsl.co.uk

John Rennie writes a regular history column for Tower Hamlets community newspaper, East End Life. He has put together a selection of 100 lives- famous and infamous, who lived and died in East London and helped to create the area and its vibrant character. Thieves, charlatans, seers, architects, revolutionaries, poets, artists, sportsmen, soldiers, sailors, politicians, inventors and entrepreneurs are all featured. Characters as diverse as Atlee, Walter Raleigh, John Wesley, Lew Grade, Stalin and Gandhi and many more are featured.

Cover picture

This shows Walter Hancock's steam carriage Automaton. It is taken from "Arcana of Science 1837" which is quoting issue 811 of "The Mirror" which is itself quoting a letter from the inventor to the Mechanics' Magazine!!

" This machine is more powerful than its predecessors as it had bigger cylinders (12 inch as against 9 inch diameter). It is also larger, having seats for 22, while they are only calculated for 14 passengers. It is an open carriage; it has carried 30 passengers at once, and had then surplus power to draw an omnibus or other carriage, containing 18 more passengers without any material diminution of speed. Its general rate of travelling is from 12 to 15 miles per hour: on one occasion, when put upon the top of its speed, and loaded with 20 full-grown persons, it performed a mile on the Bow road, at the rate of 21 miles per hour. On the day of proving, or first starting this carriage, in July last, it conveyed a party to Romford and back, at the rate of 10 or 12

miles an hour, without the least interruption or deviation in its working. Mr. Hancock then gives the following return of the actual work done by his steam carriages, on the public roads and streets of the metropolis during five months:

The miles run, about 4,200
 Passengers carried 12,761
 Trips: City to Islington and back 525
 Paddington 143
 Stratford 44

Supposing the Carriage had always been full, the Passengers conveyed would have been 20,420

Average time the Carriage has run each day: 5 hours 17½ minutes.

This carriage has gone through the City several times; and in one of the morning trips from Stratford to the Bank, it became entangled with a wagon at Aldgate, this being the only accident worth recording.

There have been consumed in the abovementioned traffic, 55 chaldrons* of coke, which are equal to 76 miles per chaldron, or about 2½ per mile for fuel; but this, on long journeys, would be much reduced, by the application of the movable fire-place patented by Mr. Hancock; for his greatest expenditure of coke in these short journeys, is in lowering and again raising the fire.

Mr. Hancock concludes his letter by observing: "Years of practice have now put all doubts of the economy, safety, and superiority of steam travelling on common roads at rest, when compared with horse travelling; and I have now in preparation calculations founded upon actual practice, which, when published, will prove that steam locomotion on common roads is not unworthy the attention of the capitalist, though the reverse has been disseminated rather widely of late by parties who do no desire that this branch of improvement should prosper against the interests of themselves"

* A chaldron was a measure for dry goods and equaled 36 bushels. A bushel of coal weighed about 84 pounds. This means a chaldron was approximately 1.3 tons.

EDWARDIAN WOMEN AND THE POOR LAW

Until 1894, a certain degree of prosperity was required before any resident could become a Guardian of the Poor. After that date, property qualifications were lifted, but prospective Guardians still needed to be able to make time to attend meetings and carry out inspections of the workhouse and infirmary, often in daytime. This was a still a barrier for workingmen, although by Edwardian years a few trade-unionists had been elected. The new rules also provided more opportunity for women to gain experience of public life, and so people such as Minnie Baldock, a fitter's wife in West Ham, began to play their part.

Women were also caught up in the system, of course, as victims: the sick, the old, the widowed mothers, the deserted and abused. Yet other women found paid employment as Matrons, attendants or nurses in the poorhouses. Girls could earn a little as maids, doing hard work in unpleasant conditions. Five ward maids left the West Ham Union infirmary in February 1906, for instance, giving as their reason 'work too hard'; in January four of them, including one probationer, left for the same reason. A Mental Nurse and an Ambulance Nurse were appointed about this time, at a salary of £1 monthly, with dinner, tea, and supper.

The dreariness, even squalor, of the surroundings where these women worked can be imagined if we look at life there through the eyes of an inmate, Alice E. Foster. Alice had not lost her spirit, and could make a nuisance of herself. She had the initiative to write to the Local Government Board (to which the amateurs on the Board of Guardians reported), demanding a 'surprise' visit to the West Ham Union. She complained about the quantity and quality of the food, especially Sunday dinner. Women over 60 had in the

past been given a small allowance of tea-leaves from which they could make themselves a pot of tea. This little pleasure had been taken away from them, and they were now presented with a jug of nearly tasteless 'rubbish' to drink all at the same time, 2.30 in the afternoon, in the hall. Alice Foster concludes her letter:

The water closets are not sufficient in number for the large body of women in the Laundry and three Wards of old women, and being left in charge of a certified imbecile, are not kept sanitary, especially the two just outside the Mothers' Nursery, the smell of which comes in at 44 Ward window. It would be a blessing if some official would come unexpectedly.

The year before, Alice Foster's name had appeared in the minutes along with the names of six other women and fourteen men, with the note 'That the following inmates, having frequently discharged themselves without sufficient reason, be required to give 168 hours notice before taking their discharge'. The bureaucratically precise 168 hours stipulated, instead of the everyday 'a week's notice', gives some indication of the way sympathetic human relations were discouraged. Even talking in the dining hall could be forbidden. Under a heading 'Females Rogues and Vagabonds' the *East End News* reported in July 1906 on two girls:

The couple have on many occasions been sent to gaol for offences committed while pauper inmates of the workhouse. On Sunday they were in the dining hall, and when told by the assistant-matron to cease talking they both abused her.

Out-relief was discouraged by the Government, but practised nevertheless. Receiving a pittance would be preferable to being taken into the workhouse, but Relieving Officers did not go about their work gently. The Out-Relief Committee of West Ham Board of Guardians interviewed a Mrs Walker and a Mrs Prior, both of whom had

complained of the language used by the Relieving Officer, Mr Bishop, when they applied for relief for their children. The committee was dissatisfied with Bishop's 'method' when dealing with Mrs Prior and 'recommended that he be requested to exercise greater discretion in future'. Bishop was called before the Board and severely censured by the Chairman.

Guardians were required by law to make the workhouses undesirable places to be, and the Local Government Board watched their expenditure, as did the ratepayers, whose votes were needed for election to the Board. Ratepayers saw paupers as little but a burden on the rates. Between government and ratepayers, there was little room for generosity, but Guardians made some attempt to be fair. In the East End of London, where unemployment and sharp distress were endemic, many on the Boards tried to soften the indignities and privations that were the usual lot of inmates, and in consequence were themselves accused of profligacy. Both Poplar and West Ham Unions were taken to court.

To take a few examples of Guardians attempting to meet the needs of poor families, in January 1906, the contribution Edwin Osborne made towards the support of his parents was reduced by West Ham from 2s to 1s a week, and his arrears remitted; in February 1906 Frederick Williamson was supplied with a wooden leg; and in April the Guardians ordered 'That the sum of 1s.6d. found on Norah Sullivan, on her admission to the Workhouse, be returned to her'. Contributions were nevertheless exacted from families, and not only for parents. The 'grandfather of the children Patson' was required to pay 2s 6d per week towards their maintenance. Sarah Denton had her allowance increased from 3s to 4s a week, but her three sons, William, Albert and Walter, were called upon to pay 1s a week each.

The Guardians of Poplar seem to have been harsh towards a woman with three children who had walked some way to the workhouse at night; she was charged with being 'drunk and unruly' but the magistrate said she could not have been so drunk as the Guardians claimed, or she would have been picked up by the police. She was nevertheless bound over to keep the peace.

Married women who entered the workhouse often suffered an added indignity when their husbands were pursued for contributions towards their maintenance. In January 1906 West Ham began proceedings against the husbands of Frances Danger, Martha Simmonds, Jessie M. Trenwith, Mary Staley, and Susan Palmer for neglecting to maintain their respective wives and families. In April 1906 the husbands of Rose Rowe, Agnes Milton, and Adelaide Gale were ordered to remove their respective wives and children from West Ham workhouse 'forthwith'. William Mallett and James Charles Sexton, on the other hand, were allowed out for two weeks, though their families had to stay behind. The men had probably found a couple of week's work, as Sexton was supplied 'with suitable boots'.

The most affecting cases are perhaps those of women who were forced to send their children to the workhouse. The House Visiting Committee of West Ham Union reported on 3 May 1906 having received a letter from a widow, Elizabeth Selby, of Canning Town, applying to have 'her child, Ethel Elizabeth Selby, aged 8 years' admitted. 'Acceded to' the minutes dryly note.

We can glean little about the lives and temperaments of Guardians by scanning the minutes. Even the way they voted is rarely recorded. The historian Patricia Hollis says 'boards were dominated ... by small shopkeepers and business men in towns, who saw themselves primarily as guardians of the rates rather than as guardians of the poor'. Boards in our area show also a strong presence

of clergymen, and some women, such as Miss Kerrison, who were associated with university settlements. Patricia Hollis also suggests that it was easier to get onto the Board of Guardians than the other potential opening for women wanting useful work outside the home, the School Board. 'Poor Law seats were far more numerous', she writes, 'and less contentious. They attracted little publicity, less prestige, and were not part of the local political career ladder for men'. Even so, women needed to be strong and determined to hold their own on committees with a predominantly male membership, and in the face of public opposition to women playing any kind of public role, expressed by men (and some women) from the Chancellor of the Exchequer down. The press constantly portrayed active women, whether as suffragettes or 'scorchers' on bicycles, as ridiculous.

But undoubtedly, women of determination came forward; some were downright tough, if there is any truth at all in press reports. In Poplar, the name of Mrs Corderey, or Cordery (the name was spelt both ways), appears again and again. Mrs. Corderey seemed to be on the platform of one public meeting after another. During the court case brought against the Poplar Guardians by political opponents of George Lansbury and Will Crooks, *Reynolds's Newspaper* reported evidence given by one member of the Board, Barney Diamond. Diamond said that when a committee 'consisting of Mrs Corderey' was examining some furniture, he, Diamond, 'ventured to say that the goods were not up to quality', Mrs Corderey threatened to smack his face. On another occasion, he objected to a tender going to a firm using the same address as Mrs Wilson, who was also on the Board. Mrs Wilson promised to punch him on the nose.

Until a meagre old-age pension for the over seventies was introduced in 1909, there was no help for the destitute, or even the temporarily sick, other than charity or the Poor Law. Fear of the workhouse hung over much of the

population of West Ham and Poplar. The shillings prised out of the pockets of families to help support relatives who had absolutely nothing were hard come by, and put yet more individuals at risk of the same fate. Women had no vote they could use to change the law, but a small number of them did what they could to bring some feeling, if not always the greatest delicacy, into administration of the Poor Law.

Sources: West Ham Union, minutes 1905, 1906; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 15.7.1906; *East End News*, 3.7.1906; *East London Observer*, 3.6.1905, *Ladies Elect: women in English local government 1864-1914*, by Patricia Hollis, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987;

Pat Francis

AWARD WINNING ARTIST CAPTURES EAST END BEFORE OLYMPIC CHANGES

East Ender and award winning artist Clare Newton has embarked on an ambitious project using photography to capture the history and diverse culture of East London, before much of it changes beyond all recognition with the coming of the 2012 Olympic Games.

By creating giant size artwork consisting of 200 stories, using unique combination of photographic montage, dynamic lighting and sound, to tell a story, Clare aims to bring to life a unique east London tourist experience of historic buildings, cultural events and local heroes in an inspiring way, giving local communities a sense of pride for the area.

The adventures are only just beginning. Claire explains:

It all started when my eagerly awaited Christmas present from the beloved turned out to be a beige jumper no frills and spill just plain beige.

Feeling that I deserved something a little more special I decided to spend my savings on a camera. I had no knowledge how it worked or why I wanted one. The shop assistant's farewell was 'why don't you make this camera work for you, make a bit of pocket money'. I spent the next two months teaching myself how to use it - being quite complex it required me to thoroughly read the manual and try out everything. Quite a challenge if you haven't been near a camera for 30 odd years.

I became more and more engrossed until I had a chance to put some of my work up in a special place for the Homeless. It was working out the topic, when I really became interested in the heritage, because the images I chose to photograph had to be rugged and earthy reflecting the not so glamorous aspects and all about the things the homeless people would normally encounter.

After it went up I had this weird dream that told me to take it further. And this is the result: A photographic documentary of east London and what's around us. It has taken me on some wonderful adventures; the first story is all about the Great Bell of Bow. I wanted to capture the ringing of the great Tenor bell. It took around two months to track down the right people and ask permission but finally I was allowed into the bell chamber.

The steeple keeper planned 12 ringers to come and practice a sequence of 365 changes, which takes around 40 minutes with ten minutes break in the middle. That meant all twelve bells would be ringing at the same time.

I had to be very careful as the volume would seriously damage my hearing. So I decided to look up the bell foundry and ask their advice. 110 decibels was the answer - that's louder than a jumbo taking off.

This scared the pants off me, how on earth will I protect my ears. It took 30 phone calls to find a pair of ear defenders that would reduce sound by 38% making it just adequate. They

are so strong that when I tried them on they practically sucked me ears out of my head! I just needed a bit more - so found ear plugs finished it off. The night before I couldn't sleep. Apprehension got the better of me - maybe if I stand by the doorway I can choose to photo or if it's too loud I can back away down the stairs.

I packed my bicycle with two large panniers and a tripod and wheeled off down through St Paul's to Cheapside. The beautiful white stone tower glistened in the fresh morning air. I met the steeple keeper in the archway then we climbed the long stair way up to the first chamber. This is where the ringers work their magic. Golden light flooded in - this looked a much safer bet. But Simon the Steeple keeper beckoned upstairs to the most famous bell in the world.

The dark dusty room was brought into life when Simon switched the light on. Two great bells sat centrally in the room hugged by a grid of oak ship's beams. A network of noughts and crosses round the perimeter sunken below the edges of the rafters housed 10 smaller bells.

A suspension of time - the bells waited to be called into action, to sing their beautiful song. Each bell dusty and stained with oil but each with a loving inscription. The first letter of which spells out D Whittington - clever these artful clergy.

In order to get the image of the bells ringing, Simon carefully guided me across 4 inch beams - with no hand rail or other helpful footholds across - which by the way had a 15-20 foot drop below. Up a fine 19th century wooden ladder to a narrow balcony that was only 18 inches wide. I nimbly scrambled up the ladder on to the edge where I had to work my way round in between large heavy shutters, each one 10 feet high and about 8 inches thick to muffle the sound.

It suddenly dawned on me that I was not going to make my quick get away, if the sound was too loud. Then Simon briefed me - I was going to be shut in, as it was too dangerous if someone came in while they were ringing the bells. The bells are 2 tons in weight and would draw someone off balance and kill them. The blood drained from my face but I had to get a grip... this was it I had to be brave and get on with it. Without warning the bells start swinging my fuzzy brain slowly reacts and I get the earplugs in then the ear defenders on top.

It all went blank! I was OK Although I can't move too much - I got to work quickly. There was only approximately 15minutes to photo before they stop. I had to think quickly - the image is all in the idea of how I craft the shot, there's no practice run either I have to get this once in a life time experience right.

The soft sound was enchanting - besides having all this ear stuff I could just make out the delicate notes - not rough and coarse but sweet and pure like a blackbird. Unbelievable. Time sped by what seemed only minutes was in fact 30. I could have stayed there the whole afternoon. Simon opened the door and athletically bounced across the beams to see if I was still in one piece.

I was fine and wanted more!! He offered saying any time - What an absolute treasure we have in these bells - I hope that I can bring the magic down to earth and share their intoxicating sound and history.

I would love any Volunteers to contact me or Rob who has an interest in heritage detective work.

Clare Newton
Newton's Historical Art Project
East London

email Brandsell@equinoxpartners.co.uk or
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Researching the Family Gravestone of John Scurr MP in TH Cemetery Park

Or How far should we trust printed secondary sources?

Sigrid works at the Soanes Centre in TH Cemetery Park. This spring the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, who manage the park, were clearing away a lot of overgrowth around some gravestones near the centre and so made a number of gravestones more easily accessible. One of these gravestones caught Sigrid's eye. It had four sides and the side Sigrid saw first commemorated what appeared to be a young mother and her two young children, all dying in the summer of 1866.

Sigrid had just had had a long discussion with a student researcher from Islington about the last London cholera epidemic, which had hit the East End in just that year, so was intrigued to find what appeared to be likely deaths from that epidemic on the gravestone. The family name was Scurr, but that did not ring any bells yet.

The people commemorated on two other sides of the gravestone all had different surnames, but the 4th and last side commemorated a Captain John Scurr and his wife, dying in 1900 and 1907 respectively. At the Soanes Centre Sigrid works with the local primary schools and one of them is named after one of Tower Hamlet's famous politicians, John Scurr (1876-1932). He had been a councillor, Mayor of Poplar and MP for Stepney Mile End. Sigrid asked herself if the Captain John Scurr she just found had been his father.

John Scurr's wife Julia (1871-1927) was also a local councillor and reputed to have been a suffragette, working to obtain votes for women in the early 1900s. (The right to vote in Parliamentary elections was eventually given to women aged 30+ in 1918 and to women aged 21+ in 1928).

Sigrid first went on the Internet and found an article on the younger John Scurr in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (www.oxforddnb.com). Later when she contacted historical researcher Michael Gandy she found out that this was an enormous revision, first published in 2004, of the old Dictionary of National Biography, which had been published between 1887 and 1902.

Young John was said to have been born in Brisbane, but his name at birth was Rennie and the article said he was a son of Captain John Scurr's sister. She died and John was brought to England at six months of age and brought up by his uncle after whom he had been named and who presumably was on a voyage in the area. Further research by Michael revealed that in the 1881 census he is recorded as Caroline's nephew (Captain John is away) and called Rennie but in the 1891 census he has the surname Scurr and is called John and Caroline's son.

With increasingly good indexes it was hopefully going to be fairly easy to find out what sisters Captain John Scurr had and which of them married a Rennie. However it quickly began to look as if he didn't have any sisters, just a brother called Joseph (who was of course a Scurr).

Casting around after that setback they found the marriage of (Captain) John Scurr in 1858 at Bethnal Green - his wife was Caroline Renney. She was the daughter of John Renney and Caren Johnson who married at Bethnal Green in 1834. Her father died fairly young and her mother remarried Hugh Chambers and lived on to 1888. The name Caren was very rare in England in the 1800s and it turned out that her father was Louis Johnson, a Danish seaman born in Copenhagen.

Caroline Renney had two brothers, John and Louis James. Louis Renney (not Rennie) married Elizabeth Barrett at Bethnal Green in 1862 but she died later that year. In 1865 he remarried Emily Long but out in Victoria so

now they knew roughly when he had gone to Australia. In the meantime Bev Dwyer, a researcher in Australia, had found young John's birth certificate in Brisbane. He was born on 6 April 1876 and his parents were Louis Renney and Mary Connor who married on Feb 11 1875 at Sydney where Emily had died in 1874. (They did not follow up if there were any children of the marriage of Louis and Emily)

The article in the Oxford DNB doesn't say what happened to Louis who may have gone on to have other wives and more children!

In his political life John Scurr was well known for defending Catholic interests, particularly as regards schools and he was said to have been brought up as a Catholic. Neither the Renneys nor the Scurrs were Catholic and we now assume that John's Catholic ancestry came from his mother Mary Connor (what odds her family's origins were in Ireland?). The Scurrs could easily have ignored that but John was apparently brought up Catholic enough by his Anglican aunt and uncle and the article said that in 1910 he married Julia O'Sullivan who sounds obviously Catholic and Irish.

Well, yes, OK. Except that when we went to double-check the date, her name was Julia Sullivan and they married in 1900. Her father John Sullivan was born in Cork but Julia herself was born in Limehouse, East London, and her mother was Martha Elizabeth Rapp who was born in Bethnal Green. Irish? No - a Cockney, though she had an Irish father. Catholic? Maybe, if her father felt strongly about religion and her mother didn't but not from a centuries -old Catholic background.

Sullivan/O'Sullivan. Same difference but not if you are trying to find people in indexes. It does remind us that in the 19th century very few Irish surnames began with O'. The use of this grew steadily with the rise of Celtic nationalism and many families have used the O' throughout the 20th century but did not use it at all (or much) before that.

Hm, Rennie/Renney.
Sister's son/wife's brother's son.
1900 not 1910
Sullivan, not O'Sullivan.

You might have thought we didn't need to do any original research. The basic fact we wanted (Were the MP and the Captain related?) was available on-line at the click of a mouse - and in a well-trusted source.

But it was wrong. This is what we found on the gravestone: (In Square no. 64)

Front:

Louis Johnson
Died 20th January 1862
Aged 79 years

Also
Caron Rebecca Chambers (Caron is not a spelling error, that is how it is spelled on the gravestone)
Daughter of the above
Died 24th September 1888
Aged 75 years

Right hand side:

Also
Captain John Scurr
Died 21 August 1900
Aged 66 years
Interred at Ilford cemetery

Also
Caroline Scurr
Wife of the above
Died 31 December 1907
Aged 71 years
Interred at Ilford Cemetery

Back:

Also
Jane Scurr
Died 18 July 1866
Aged 26 years

Also
Jane Scurr
Died 30th July 1866
In her 3rd year

Also
Caroline Scurr
Died 7th August 1866
Aged 9 month

Left hand side:

Also
James Wilson
Died 24th September 1866
Aged 61 years

Sarah Wilson
Died 15th June 1873
Aged 71 years

See the family tree below of the people named on this stone:

The first name is that of Louis Johnson (1862), the second is that of his daughter Caron (who married twice) and the third and fourth is his granddaughter Caroline (Renney) and her husband. So far it is nice and simple. We had thought at first that the two children would belong to John and Caroline but it appears not. John's brother Joseph Scurr married Jane Wilson in 1862 and the three Scurrs are her and their two children. So those three Scurrs don't appear to be any blood relation to the Johnson/Chambers pair. And as mentioned before the dates of their deaths (all three within a month of each other in the summer of 1866) make it very likely that they died in London's last cholera epidemic. This was almost entirely in the East End because only that part of London still did not have proper sewage disposal.

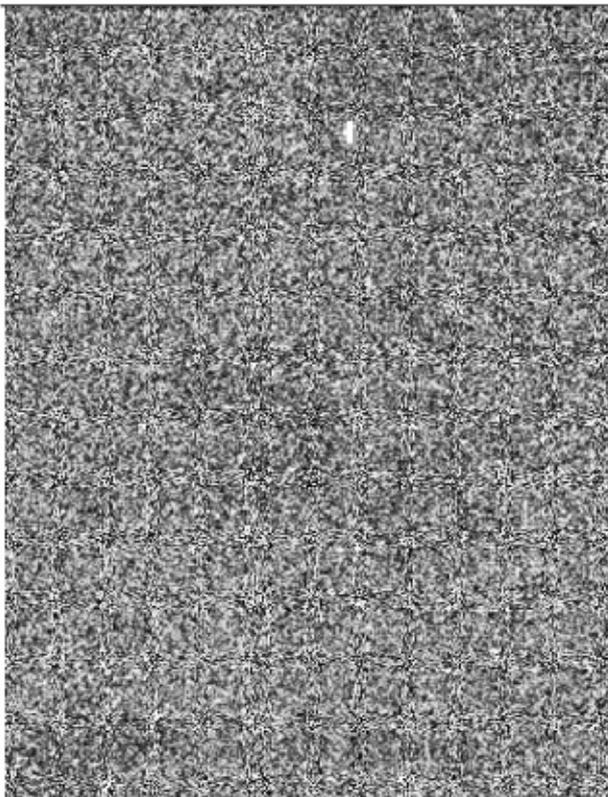
James and Sarah Wilson turned out to be the parents of Jane Scurr and at first sight they are even less related to Louis Johnson with whom the list begins (daughter's husband's brother's wife's grandfather!). However it then turned out that Louis Johnson (the Danish seaman)

had married Sarah Wilson in 1812 at Bethnal Green. If James Wilson was her brother (we haven't researched this but why not?) then Louis Johnson and James Wilson would be brothers-in-law. This brings the whole network together and it would mean that the two Scurr brothers were married respectively to Louis Johnson's niece and granddaughter.

So what began as a simple question became a lengthy detective story and a lesson in the importance of original research.

PS: The burial registers of Tower Hamlets Cemetery begin in 1841 and end in 1966 and are held at the London Metropolitan Archives. They have been transcribed and indexed for the years 1841-1853 by John Hanson and Monnica Stevens and have been available on microfiche for many years. They are now also available on the Society of Genealogists' British Origins (www.originsnetwork.com). This is a pay-per-view site but has a level of free access for SoG members.

Sigrid Werner and Michael Gandy



Memories of Tower Beach

The Tower of London is undertaking an oral history project to capture people's memories of the old beach on the Tower's foreshore, which used to be a popular attraction for hundreds of thousands of people.

The beach opened in 1934, and was designated as a beach for local children – a place for them to have fun. The beach had to close in the 1970s, but it had still given several generations great pleasure.

Over the coming months, in conjunction with Eastside Community Heritage, the Tower of London would like to hold reminiscence sessions with people who remember the beach, record oral histories and written memories of the beach, to put on a website in time for the 75th anniversary of the beach's creation in 2009.

If you – or someone you know - would be interested in taking part, please call: 020 3166 6637, or e-mail: outreachandcommunity@hrp.org.uk

Renney-Scurr-Wilson Family Tree

