



Tower Hamlets Local History and Archives Library, Bancroft Road

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Editorial Note:

The Committee members are: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, Harold Mernick, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Howard Isenberg, 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.

Save Bancroft Library

The East London Advertiser has mounted a spirited campaign to save Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, in Bancroft Road, from being dismantled and dispersed.

Queen Mary University has approached the Council with a view to buying the building housing the library and archives, in order to house the Weiner Library, which has been offered to them. It beggars belief that the Tower Hamlets Councillors have all but agreed to the sale of the building, and various proposals, such as sending the library to the Museum in Docklands, and the Archives to the Royal London Hospital (neither of whom have confirmed that they are willing to accept them), and the pressure to reverse any such proposals, and to maintain the status quo of the library is gathering pace. We have just heard that 10 Downing Street has agreed to support the Advertiser's campaign. **Please go to <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Bancroft-Road> and sign up in support.**

Letter sent by our Chair to Councillor Rofique Uddin Ahmed, c/o Executive Support Office - Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent London E1 4RD

I wish to express my strong objection, both as an individual and on behalf of our members, to the proposal to close the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives and sell the Bancroft Road building to Queen Mary College. The Local History Library is a vital resource for all those studying the history of the Tower Hamlets area, be they local residents, or from outside the area.

If Tower Hamlets wishes to provide a building to house the Wiener Library then selling the old Poplar District Board of Works Building at 117 Poplar High Street would achieve that purpose without depriving researchers of a facility that brings credit to Tower Hamlets.

Yours sincerely
Philip Mernick
Chairman

Reply from Councillor Ahmed

Re: Bancroft Road Library and Archive Storage

I would like to reassure that there is no possibility of our history archive being lost. A proposal regarding Bancroft Library and the borough's Local History and Archive Service is due to go before cabinet, the council's decision making body, shortly.

I will outline the proposal, which includes the transfer of ownership of Bancroft Library to Queen Mary, University of London, and clear up any confusion surrounding the issue. It is important to note that this is currently only a proposal and there are many factors to be considered before any decision is taken.

Also I want to reassure you that we, as a council, understand the importance and value of our history library and archive. Any future plans will ensure that it is available and accessible to this and future generations of East Enders as well as Expert researchers so we can all lean from it.

Queen Mary, University of London has expressed an interest to purchase Bancroft Library. Along with refurbishing the building to a high standard, the prestigious Weiner Library would also move in. This would be a welcome addition to the borough's researching and referencing facilities. As one of the world's leading archives on the Holocaust, the historic heartland of Britain's Jewish community would be a fitting home. This would not just be tokenistic symbolism, but a positive practical step towards helping create better understanding between our diverse communities.

Should the sale of the Bancroft Library go ahead, there are well developed plans in place to ensure that our Local History Library and Archives Service is properly relocated, the books and archival material properly protected both at the removal stage, in their relocation and in their retrieval. The Service staff would remain unchanged; all that would differ is the location in which they work.

The archive store at Bancroft Library has reached capacity and we are committed to ensuring the future of the Service regardless of whether the Bancroft Library is sold or not.

This move would be a temporary measure. Most important, is that we find a long term solution that keeps the archive together and increases public access to our History Library.

TOWER HAMLETS CENTRAL LIBRARY

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

The question of a public library in Mile End was first raised in 1859, but the Vestry delayed adoption of the Public Libraries Acts until 1896, and even then their negotiations for the transfer of the People's Palace Library proved fruitless. In 1900, the Vestry was succeeded in its functions by the Stepney Borough Council, and between 1901 and 1902 the Vestry Hall was adapted for public library use, with the lending library on the right of the entrance hall, and the reading room occupying the present lending department. The reading room was opened by Canon Barnett in January 1902, followed in April by the other departments. Reference library provision proved quickly inadequate, and in 1905 the Council approached Andrew Carnegie for funds to extend this service: as a result of his gift of £6,000, an extension consisting of the lecture hall and, on the first floor, office accommodation for the Borough Librarian and a reference library, the present Local History Library, was built on the site of a disused

mortuary and yard at the rear of the building. The designer was M. W. Jameson, the Borough Engineer, and the builders Messrs. Patman and Fotheringham. The new rooms were opened by the Duke of Argyll on the 23rd April, 1906.

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

During World War II, the children's library was used as an A.R.P. first aid post, the reference library for storing Civil Defence materials, and the entrance hall as a civil defence station. The Stepney Central Library was chosen as the Central Library for the new borough of Tower Hamlets when Stepney, Poplar and Bethnal Green amalgamated in 1965, and the combined Local History Collections of the three boroughs were housed in the former reference library.

Cover picture

A post card published by George J Warren, 29 Rhodeswell Road, Mile End showing the Vestry Hall (now part of Mile End Hospital) and The Public Library, Bancroft Road. The card is unused so we can not tell if it was published before or after the Carnegie funded extension which would not be visible from the road.



**East London History Society
Programme 2008 - 2009**

Thursday 25th September 2008

Victorian photographers in East London
David Webb

Saturday 4th October 2008

Coach Trip to Wimpole Hall and Home Farm, Cambridgeshire

See back cover of newsletter for details

Thursday 30th October 2008

Health Through History Initiative in East London from an African & Caribbean perspective
Philip Morgan

(preceded by AGM at 7.00)

Thursday 13th November 2008

Memories of a London lad 1945 - 1958
Tom White

Thursday 4th December 2008

Crimean War gunboats and The Thames
Clive Chambers

Thursday 22nd January 2009

Magic Lantern to Multiplex
Richard Gray

**February
TO BE CONFIRMED**

Thursday 26th March 2009

Farthing Bundles: Fern Street Settlement
Michael Peet

Thursday 2nd April 2009

Background to "Chapters in the life of Arthur Harding"
Stan Newens

Thursday 14th May 2009

Open evening: talking about shops and trades that are no more.

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. Buses: 25, 205, 339 to Queen Mary College, D6, D7, 277, 323, 425 to Mile End Station

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

V H FRIEDLAENDER, Writer and Suffragette

Violet Helen Friedlaender wrote under her initials as V H Friedlaender; the surname was sometimes anglicised as Friedlander.

She joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1908, and became honorary secretary of the Forest Gate branch during the summer of 1909. She was born 'in the East', probably Palestine, as it was from Palestine that she travelled as a child to foggy London, where she was sent to boarding school. Her book *Pied Piper's Street* records memories of going home for school holidays in horse-buses coloured 'blue, green, red, yellow, white and chocolate-coloured', but lacking a display of numbers or destinations; how the colour-blind ever got home is a mystery. Friedlaender's father seems to have died while she was still young, but her mother and brother shared her enthusiasm for women's suffrage.

By 1909 the women's movement had split, and although the WSPU was still dominant, the women of East London, who had been so prominent in it in the early days, were largely sidelined, and the Canning Town branch was in disarray, if not totally disbanded. When a serious attempt to revive the fortunes of the movement in West Ham was made, it happened in the more prosperous side of the borough, in Forest Gate. There had been open-air meetings in the north of the borough before V H Friedlaender set about reinvigorating the WSPU there.

That same year in summer she and her mother organised a WSPU camp on the coast, and the following year VHF was busy organising WSPU publicity during the two General Elections that occurred in January and December 1910. The WSPU grew increasingly militant nationally in its tactics, and in 1912 she took part in a window-smashing campaign, and was sentenced to four months' in jail.

Somewhere about this time, West Ham WSPU made a banner, in silk and velvet, inscribed with the words 'Courage, Constancy, Success' beneath 'West Ham' and a logo – a medallion adapted from Sylvia Pankhurst's 'angel of freedom'. The lettering was produced by V H Friedlaender and her brother. (The flag is now held by the Museum of London, and an image can be viewed on their website. Search the catalogue under the appropriate years to find it.)

In March 1909 the weekly paper *Votes for Women* published the words of a song VHF had written to the tune of 'Marching to Georgia'. It goes with an appropriate swing:

Hurrah! Hurrah! We battle for the right,
Hurrah! Hurrah! For peace with honour fight;
Prisoners of war, we greet you!
Victory is in sight;
March with the Women's Army.

The Woman's Press, the publishing arm of the WSPU, also produced two calendars for the year 1910. The cheaper one cost a shilling, and was said to include 'mottoes', the number and authorship of which were not noted in advertisements. The dearer calendar, costing 1/6d, was designed by Sylvia Pankhurst, and a motto was provided for each day by V H Friedlaender.

Since both Sylvia Pankhurst and V H Friedlaender were writers, it seems very likely that they belonged to the Women Writers' Suffrage League, which was very active about this time; in 1909 the League was co-operating with the Actresses' Franchise League to put on shows starring Ellen Terry at the Scala Theatre. Friedlaender's novels show she was very conscious of her position in society as a woman and an artist. Her first published novel came out in 1922. In *Mainspring: the Growth of a Soul*, a man says to the leading female character: 'And in all these years I've never met the woman – the woman *artist* – who was willing to burn her boats; who, when it came to the point, really

had the nerve to do it, and to know she had done the right thing, as I see you know it'.

Friedlaender published poems for many years, and a collection was brought out in 1931, called *Mirrors and Angles* (often miscalled *Mirrors and Angels*). Most of the verse had previously appeared in *Country Life*, but poems were also culled from a wide variety of other journals and newspapers, from the *Spectator* and the *Nation* to the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Queen*.

Her time in West Ham cannot have been entirely to her liking. In the poem 'Solace' she asks:

*How do the city folk, when their hearts are aching,
Keep them from breaking?*

This sounds as if it was written for *Country Life*, but sometimes she is sharper, and some of the satire is not irrelevant today. 'Ripe for Development', for instance:

*Green is the pleasant glade
Where birds and children go.*

*In the oak's broad pool of shade
Five sun-flecked horses show*

*But soon, where the tree is laid,
Shall squat a bungalow.*

The series 'Impossible Epitaphs' is more dated, but the types she describes are still recognisable:

The Gentleman
He greeted his inferiors with such excess of
bonhomie
That they could spot his equals
When he spoke with more economy.

The Lady
Her nod held such infinite condescension
That it was more a slight than an attention.

V H Friedlaender's stay in West Ham was brief, but it was a time of intense excitement and activity. After living in various parts of the country, in 1950 she died at Buckhurst Hill, on the Essex fringe of East London.

Her collection *Mirrors and Angles* had come out only a few years after women had finally achieved equality in the franchise. Suffragettes such as Friedlaender knew that in time the rights they had fought for would be taken for granted. One of the poems reprinted in the book could have served as her epitaph:

Swan-Song of any Pioneers

They reap with singing where through bitter
days we sowed the seed;
They eat the bread for which our dearest
perished their need;
They say, "Behold our easy, just reward who
never went
Your unenlightened way to work." They reap;
we are
content.

Votes for Women, 5 March 1909
Pied Piper's Street; and other essays, Bristol:
J W Arrowsmith, 1922
Mainspring: the growth of a soul, London: W
Collins, 1922
Mirrors and Angles, illustrated from pencil
sketches by Margaret Dobson, London:
Country Life Ltd, 1931

Pat Francis

New Book

Into The Abyss, The Life and Work of G.R. Sims by W.J. Fishman, preface by Beryl Bainbridge. ISBN 978-1-904027-63-8, 2008. 95 pages £9.99. Another very interesting book from Bill Fishman: about the author, playwright and journalist George R Sims (1847 – 1922) who played an important part in bringing the plight of London's poor to the notice of the general public.

East End Photographers 3 The Perkoffs

The Jewish photographic studios of Victorian London can be divided, like Caesar's Gaul, into three divisions. In the first division is Frank Haes (1833 - 1916), a pioneer from the days of wetplates, whose portrait work was almost entirely eclipsed by his time working in Australia in the 1850s, and his photographs of the animals at London Zoo in the 1860s. Much of his early work had disappeared by the time he retired, and it is said that he could often be seen at Islington Cattle Market on Fridays in the 1890s, looking for photographic treasures to remind him of his youth.

The second division is represented by Hayman (Haim) Mendelssohn (1847 - 1908) and Stanislas, Count Ostrorog (1835 - 90), who used the studio name of Walery. Both started their careers in the 1870s, after colourful and flamboyant experiences in some of Middle & Eastern Europe's most notorious trouble spots - Mendelssohn claimed to be a Polish cavalry officer with an army career which reads like an extract from Anthony Hope's "Prisoner of Zenda", while Walery had allegedly been involved in the Hungarian uprising of 1848 on the one hand, and the siege of Paris in 1870 on the other. All three of these photographers, however, had their studios in London's West End, and would never have crossed the line of the City at Tower Hill; Mendelssohn and Walery both ended as fashionable society photographers, with lavish studios and a clientele from the pages of Debrett's Peerage.

The Perkoffs represent the third division of Jewish photographers, who opened their studios in the 1890s, after barely escaping with their lives from the ethnic cleansing pogroms in Eastern Europe, notably in Russia and Poland. The two photographic families of Perkoffs featured in this article were headed respectively by Marks (Max) Perkoff (1844 - 1915), and his son of the same name (1870 - 1940), and by Isaac Perkoff (1870 - 1946). The first studio was opened in Commercial

Road East in 1890, and passed through the families for over a quarter of a century until almost the end of the First World War. It was successful enough for parallel studios to be opened in the Whitechapel Road at various addresses during the decade straddling the opening of the twentieth century. The end of the war in Europe effectively saw the close of the Perkoffs' studios in Stepney and Poplar, and the move to pastures new.

Marks Perkoff was born in St Petersburg (later renamed Leningrad, but now reverted to its original name), and inherited his father's studio there. His wife, Zirel, was also from the town, and it was clearly in memory of a long - lost homeland when he named his second Whitechapel Road studio the "St Petersburg Studio" at the beginning of the new century. He clearly found it difficult to establish his business in the East End, and was the subject of more than one court order in his early years. He had, in any case, started up his studio when he was already over fifty, and not in the best of health. Whitechapel Road may have been busy, but, in the words of a contemporary journalist of the 1890s, it was "a long, narrow thoroughfare so crowded both on the pavement and the roadway that the squalid, greasy passengers trod on one another's heels; a road kerb fringed on both sides with the quaintly - lighted stalls of bawling street - sellers; sidepaths bordered by dingy publicans and dimly - lighted chandlers' shops, and gas - flaring opposite butchers' shops ..." Marks Perkoff died at his home over the final studio in the New Year of 1915, at the age of 70; the studio had been sold to Philip Shankman for the measly sum of £30 in October 1905. His son, Marks Jr. (1870 - 1953), who had been the actual supervisor and camera operator in the studio on behalf of his father, took the opportunity to move away from photography altogether.

Isaac Perkoff was a native of Kiev (then Russia, now Ukraine), and had learnt the trade from his father Marks Perkoff who had also operated a studio in St Petersburg. He arrived



Photograph from Marks Perkoff's St Petersburg Studio at 21 Whitechapel Road, early 1890s

in London with his wife Anuta (Anna) and their eight children -5 boys and 3 girls - in 1887, taking over Marks Perkoff's Commercial Road East studio in 1896. But by the beginning of the new century, Isaac Perkoff had already begun the move from the traditional East End to the relatively wide open spaces of the Lea Valley, beyond Clapton and almost into Walthamstow. It was a route already being trod by the Jewish population of the East End, which by 1914 had declined from a peak of 125,000 a decade earlier to 100,000, and would halve again end of the 1930s.

Isaac Perkoff's first Hackney studio was at Vine House, 18 Lea Bridge Road, opened in 1901. This was only a short tenancy, before he moved to larger premises at no 35 in 1903. The next door building at no 37 was added in 1908, and these became Perkoff's main studios until his retirement in 1931 (he had closed no 37 in 1924). In the 1920s this secondary studio was also partly occupied by the consulting rooms of his doctor son, Alexander Perkoff.

It is fortunate that a splendid archive of the Perkoff family has survived. A collection of thirty photographs showing members of the family over a period of 40 years was presented

to the Museum of the Jewish East End, in Finchley, by Isaac Perkoff's grandson, Vic Parry, in 1991. This includes both individual and group portraits, as well as photographs of contemporary celebrities such as Chaliapin and Einstein. It is probably no surprise to discover that one of Perkoff's assistants was Boris Bennet, whose Whitechapel Road studio was at the height of its fame in the 1930s. Perkoff also took an active part in the cultural work of Yiddish London, and was for many years associated with the London Yiddish Theatre, photographing its stars such as Moscovitch, and even writing several Yiddish plays. Perkoff was a personal friend of several important Yiddish writers, notably Shalom Aleichem, and in 1908 published a little book of letters and reminiscences of the writer Abraham Goldfaden. The following brief excerpt of his poetry was translated by Joseph Leftwich in his anthology "The Golden Peacock" (1939):

For my friend Goldfaden

Thinking and feeling,/For Zion appealing,
/You helped the people to wake.
Singing and dancing,/Playing and
prancing,/You eased their pain and ache.
Starving and suffering,/All for your theatre
offering,/You wrote and worked like a slave,
Yourself not knowing/How fast you were
going /Into your grave.

The reference to Zion in the above poem brings into sharp focus Perkoff's commitment to the Zionist cause. In December 1917 Perkoff was specifically commissioned to take photographs of the delegates arriving for the so-called Balfour Declaration conference in London, which outlined proposals for "Eretz Israel" - British assistance in the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Perkoff's photographs included portraits of Israel Zangwill, Chaim Weizmann, and Lord Robert Cecil. In the mid-1900s Perkoff copyrighted many of his portraits of Jewish celebrities before the introduction of the Copyright Act of



Photograph from Isaac Perkoff c1910, possibly of a nurse at the London Hospital.

1913, and these can still be found in the National Archives at Kew.

Isaac Perkoff died at his home in March 1946, and Anna five years later in 1951. They are both buried at Enfield. Within a generation the way of life in the Jewish East End, which Isaac played such a considerable role in recording, would have passed into history.

David Webb

TO BE CONTINUED.

Notes and News

East London Honours Brave WW2 Women Firefighters

The wartime sacrifice of two female firefighters, who were among those who lost their lives during a bomb attack during the Blitz has been honoured. Swan Housing's conversion of the former Millwall Fire Station in Westferry Road will feature two blocks named after teenagers Violet Pengelly and Joan Bartlett. Family members attended a formal naming ceremony for Bartlett Mews and Pengelly Apartments.

The naming ceremony was on the 16th of July and afterwards they went on to Tower Hamlets Cemetery to lay wreaths for Joan Bartlett and Violet Pengelly, at the civilians memorial, usually referred to as The Blitz Memorial. Violet, 19, and Joan, 18, were among the first women to sign up to the Auxiliary Fire Service in 1938, and were based at a sub-station in the Saunders Ness Road School on the Isle of Dogs when World War II broke out in 1939. They were killed along with 24 other emergency workers when the school suffered a direct hit from a high-explosive bomb on the night of September 18, 1940.



List of casualties:

Firewoman Joan Fanny Mary Bliss **Bartlett** (18)
(telephonist) AFS of 61 Henia Street
Stretcher Bearer Jack **Bauer** (33) ARP of 64 British
Street
Ambulance Driver Mark **Breslau** (20) ARP of 60
British Street
Stretcher Bearer Charles Arthur **Clutterbuck** (32) ARP
of 18 Havannah Street Millwall
Nurse Mary Bridget **Cooke** (36) ARP of 45 Parnell
Road Bow
Stretcher Bearer Horace William **Field** (50) ARP of 14
Phoebe Street
Warden William Frederick **Hall** (38) ARP of 113 Brig
Street
Lilian Gladys **Hawkbridge** (30) Member of FAP of 64
Abbott Road
Stretcher Bearer Cyril John **Hawthorne** (31) ARP of 11
Rounton Road Bow
Driver Cyril Eugene **Jacobs** (46) London Aux.
Ambulance Service of 287 Burdett Road
Stretcher Bearer Arthur James **Jones** (47) ARP of 84
Culloden Street
Stretcher Bearer Albert Edward **Littlewort** (28) ARP of
39 Stebondale Street (died 20 September in Poplar
Hospital)
Stretcher Bearer Albert William **Mears** (31) ARP of 5
Melbourne Buildings Oceana Close
Stretcher Bearer William Charles **Miles** (41) ARP of 25
Salmon Lane Limehouse
Stretcher Bearer David Arthur **Morton-Holmes** (31)
ARP of 21 Grosvenor Buildings
Doctor Leonard **Moss** (36) First Aid Mobile Unit of 658
Commercial Road, Stepney
Driver Reuben **Norman** (20) London Aux. Ambulance
Service of 70 Greenwood Road, Dalston
Firewoman Violet Irene **Pengelly** (19) London Fire
Brigade of 8 Gaverick Street Millwall
Stretcher Bearer Ernest John **Purdy** (27) ARP of 146
Coventry Cross
Stretcher Bearer Edward Henry **Snook** (36) ARP of 19
Chilcot Street
Driver James Samuel **Spratt** (36) London Aux
Ambulance Service of 10 Naval Row
Stretcher Bearer Charles William Patrick **Staff** (23)
ARP of 21 Old Church Road Stepney
Driver Thomas John **Steward** (29) London Aux
Ambulance Service of 24 Pattenden Road Lewisham
Stretcher Bearer Cyril **Swerner** (25) ARP of 39 Morgan
Street
Ambulance Driver Victor Ronal **Tidder** (32) ARP of 45
Lefevre Road
Florence **Tyler** (45) Member of FAP of 2 Dec Street.

Robin Hood Gardens for Demolition?

The concrete heap at the top end of Poplar High Street looks set for demolition after English Heritage rejected calls for the estate to be listed. Narrow, twisting stairwells, prison-like boundary walls, bleak entrance lobbies and isolated parking areas were just some of the shortcomings highlighted. In its day the estate, designed by architects Peter and Alison Smithson was hailed as innovative, impressively monumental and even sculptural, but residents soon discovered the downside of living in an estate generally regarded as a blot on the landscape. Tower Hamlets wants to sell the estate to a housing association, demolish the blocks and build new flats.

East London Heritage Week and trail Guide

The Heritage of London Trust and Tower Hamlets are jointly hosting a heritage weekend on the 13th and 14th September to highlight some of the fascinating cultural treasures that are guarded by the local communities, and not normally open to public view. Trail Guides will be ready in the in the summer, and if you would like to get your hands on one, all you have to do is send a stamped self addressed envelope to The Heritage of London Trust, 38 Ebury Street, London SW1W OLU. (Tel:0207730 9472)

Blast from the Past

Yet another WW2 unexploded bomb was uncovered in East London, this time near the Olympic site just over the border in Newham. This one was discovered in the river at Sugar House Lane, on Monday the 2nd June. The Royal Engineers were called in to defuse the bomb, but until it was made safe, Tube lines and stations in the vicinity, were closed as was City Airport. It does beg the question of just how many more there are in the ground beneath us.

Correspondence

Sister Christine Frost MBE

It is not often that I get to sing the praises of a truly remarkable woman, who has worked tirelessly in Poplar for almost forty years, among the disadvantaged, the frail and the elderly. Known to all as Sister Chris, she has been deservedly honoured in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

I had the privilege of working with her during the twenty years I lived in Poplar, helping out with Neighbours in Poplar, which Sister Chris launched in 1969 not long after her leaving Ireland to live in the community of a religious order in the East End. Whether it was organising summer seaside trips, youth activities, Jumble Sales in the Guild Room, Christmas Meals for the elderly and housebound, fundraising for our own mini bus, or entertaining the elderly in the local Residential Homes, there was always something she had planned for us! But her enthusiasm encompassed all the community, not only the elderly. Another group set up by her, SPLASH (South Poplar and Limehouse Action for Secure Housing) is a powerful force, campaigning for local residents' rights as they threatened to be overwhelmed by the runaway success of the Canary Wharf development. Yes, Sister Chris is on my list of local heroines, and I wish her continued success in her many and varied endeavours.

Rosemary Taylor

Rita Curry, from Broadstairs, Kent wrote:

I am just home from my visit to Tower Hamlets Cemetery, I must say Doreen and Diane Kendall were brilliant along with other tour guides, I would appreciate if you contact them to say how much they were appreciated for their sincere explanations in such a brilliant manner, it gave such pleasure and joy to the visitors from the National Federation of Cemeteries. Tower Hamlets is always put down as the poor of the great seven cemeteries, they all did Tower Hamlets Proud. The buffet for lunch was superb as well.

(Philip Mernick received a query regarding post-war orphanages in the East End. To this, Rita replied:)

As to your question, there were none to my knowledge, the one Mary was referring to was in East India Dock Road, it was a Children's Home and not an Orphanage. I will contact Roy Merrall and old neighbour of mine who was the Emergency Social Worker and I am sure he will confirm my thoughts. Yes, there were orphans amongst the intake but they were not specifically for orphans.

The Barnardos Home which was called an Orphanage, was in Stepney Causeway until the outbreak of the second world war The children were then all dispersed to other homes, mainly to Barkingside Barnardos. After the war the old Borough Councils opened St Leonard's Children's Home at Hornchurch, which was for all children in care not specifically orphans.

Philip Mernick had another enquiry about Chinese graves in Tower Hamlets, and was able to send Walter Fung the photograph which we reproduced in the last newsletter.

Walter replied:

The writing is from right to left! The person is from Guangdong (Canton) province and it looks like Bao'an county which is just north of Hong Kong. I cannot make out the two on the left hand side-I will have to work on them, they are not clear. I think it must be the man's name because the bottom left hand side looks like 'his tomb'. Unfortunately names are not always in the dictionary for some reason! Unfortunately the grass obscures the characters at the bottom on the right hand side. They may be the name of the village or town. I will let you know what I find later. Thanks very much for letting me see this.

20th July

Hello Philip,

Thank you for your prompt reply, I was not expecting anything so fast! I have done a lot of work investigating Chinese laundries in Liverpool (where I grew up in one), in Manchester (where I now live) and several other places. Several of my relations (surnamed Fung but not immediate family) had laundries in the north of England, but there are some names and addresses in London and other areas in my grandfather's and father's address book. Fung was spelt 'Fong' by early arrivals in England in the early 20th century. To add to the confusion, Chinese put their surname first.

There were in fact many 'English' laundries in most cities at that time, but you are probably correct in thinking that there were 'unofficial' ones-or ones which did not appear in the commercial directory for some reason.

I look forward to hearing what your two colleagues have to say.

21st July

Hello Philip,

It was late last night, but I now have more information and couple of questions.

I looked up the Chinese characters in a list of surnames and I think that the man's surname is Shao in Mandarin Chinese-Shiu in Cantonese (pronounced 'Shoe'). His given first name looks like 'Jing' in Mandarin-Ging in Cantonese. Jing is a word which cannot really be translated on its own. (Note that in Chinese there are very few sounds. A sound can have many meanings-it is the written Chinese character which conveys the meaning.)

So his name in Cantonese, his native dialect seems to be 'Shiu Ging'. There are no dates, so we do not know when he died. Or his age-usually there is a date of birth and age. We may get some idea of the date from neighbouring tombstones?

Rosemary is correct, East London Cemetery seemed/seems to be the choice for Chinese people. I had a look around. I met the cemetery manager who was very helpful. There is a War Memorial, I did not think of looking closely for Chinese names. There are also large anchors-presumably marking the grave or monument of a ship which was sunk or damaged with loss of life. Maybe there are some Chinese names on the monument. Many Chinese were in the British Merchant Navy.

I spent about three hours there and found some Fungs (Fong) which could be identified by the Chinese character. Maybe distant relations? One was from my native county. (Please note that the English does not always match the Chinese writing.)

There is a monument to all Chinese who have died in England. This was erected on 7 November 1927 by Mr N G Fook of 33 Cavendish Road, Brondesbury NW. I wonder who he was?

Aimee Macdonald writes via email:

We enjoyed the latest ELHS newsletter very much and was particularly interested in the article about the Scurr family. You may remember that me and my mother Jill are related to Julia Scurr (nee Sullivan), she was my Great Grandmother's cousin, and that you've published information we've sent you in previous issues. If you, or the person who wrote the latest article would like to know more about Julia's ancestry we would be more than happy to share the results of our research.

(This email has been forwarded to Sigrid)

Ted Shepherd Reminisces:

When I moved out of my flat at 48 Senrab Street E1 in July 2006, I was the third and last generation of my family to have held the tenancy as my maternal Grandparents moved in with four children in 1888, the youngest having been born in that year.

There were eight children in all, the last to arrive in 1896, the penultimate one being my mother in 1895.

It was my mother who told me that the heavyweight boxer Billy Wells once lived at Number 66 Senrab Street. This must have been some years before the First World War. I have two books on the 'Streets of London' and neither mentions this (both give the reason for the peculiar street name) but an older sister of my mother (born in 1884) was reported to have walked out with the boxer for a time. Billy Wells was, I believe, the image on cinema screens that introduced British Movietone News in striking a large gong with a large hammer, in the days of silent movies.

An amusing story that my mother told me about her parents was, when her father was working as a crane driver at the Brewers Quay near the Tower. He took his spouse up into the

crane cabin from where they watched the ceremonial opening of Tower Bridge in 1894. My mother, who attended Broad Street School in Ratcliff took part in the ceremonial opening of Rotherhithe Tunnel in June 1908.

Marilyn Roberts, via email:

Just to let you know how much I have enjoyed browsing this site! I was born and brought up in Appian Road, Bow in 1951, moving to Poplar c.1955. I left the East End in 1969 and it's only now, trying to research family roots, that I've come across the site.

The picture and map galleries were most interesting [I think I've spotted a possible ancestor] and the virtual tours excellent! Thank you so much.

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

**Ian Juniper, 28 Rabbett Street, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086, Australia
E-mail: juniper1@tpg.com.au**

I continue to find the articles published in the ELHS Newsletter most interesting and was particularly interested in that by Clare Newton in the Spring 2008 Issue on her enterprising project of photographically recording the history and culture of London's East End. It would surprise me if a similar thought had not occurred to the various borough councils and

public libraries in the region, but Clare's initiative is certainly, as Sir Humphrey Appleby (rest his soul) might have said: "very courageous". Certainly, with digital cameras readily available for a couple of hundred dollars or pounds it is now so much easier to capture images of places with historical or social significance than ever it was before - no waiting for films to be developed and then finding that our shots were not so good after all: another opportunity perhaps not being available for us to return to the scene and have another try.

Much as we would like to be rid of the slums and the impoverished way of life of their inhabitants, where would we be without the written records of Bramwell Booth and Henry Mayhew, and the Gustave Doré illustrations to remind us of how things once were, and to wonder whether we have actually improved matters by material progress - remember Ronan Point?

I'm not sure whether Hackney and Homerton come within the scope of the East End, but I am enclosing a brief article which you might like to consider for inclusion in a future issue of the Newsletter. As so often happens when carrying out our family history and genealogical research, many of the most important witnesses are no longer available for questioning when we finally have the time to think of the things we would like to ask them.

PS: No doubt your readers might already be aware of the vast amount of historical information available on the Victoria County History - Middlesex website at British History Online. Complete articles on each of the London boroughs is downloadable by saving to a file and it might be worth giving it a mention in the Newsletter.

The Juniper bakers of Ongar and Homerton

I wonder if any readers have recollections of the Juniper's bakery which once stood in Brooksby's Walk, Homerton, or of the later business in Wick Road, Hackney Wick?

William James Juniper, born 19 Sep 1864, and Thomas Joseph Juniper, born 6 June 1867, were born in Great Waltham, Essex, and were sons born to James Juniper (born 1 May 1836, Great Waltham, Essex) and Eliza Aylett.

William James Juniper married Eleanor Stonebridge of Madingley, Cambs, in 1888 and settled in High Ongar, where he had a bakery in the High Street. My father, Percy William Juniper, was the only son in their family of six children born in High Ongar between 1899 and 1900. At least three of the daughters entered service as young girls, that is, became servants to other families in Essex, and only two of them eventually married - to Barnard brothers as it happened, in 1922 and 1923. The death certificate of my grandmother, Eleanor Juniper (née Stonebridge) who died at 29 Coopersale Road, Homerton, on 12 April 1936 describes her as the widow of William James Juniper, baker journeyman, so he may possibly have at some time participated in the business in Brooksby's Walk before his death at the age of 68 years at 29 Coopersale Road on 28 January 1928. My father continued to live in this house until March 1993, when my wife and I brought him out to Sydney to spend the last five years of his life in the sunshine before his death at the age of 98 in 1998.

Thomas Joseph Juniper and his wife Frances Francis had five children, all born in Hackney between 1894 and 1906, and they owned the bakery in Brooksby's Walk, Homerton, trading under the name J T Juniper & Son, which was opposite the corner of St Barnabas' churchyard and Homerton Grove. Thomas was a lay Methodist preacher and came to Hackney when young where he worked for a baker/corn

chandler, eventually taking over the business in Brooksby's Walk. I have clear recollections of the shop and the bakehouse as it was just before and during the early years of WWII. At that time it was owned by my uncle Leslie Juniper, son of Thomas Joseph Juniper and Frances Francis and grandson of James and Eliza Juniper, and his wife Frances, with my father's sister Violet Juniper as assistant in the shop. Leslie Juniper and my father, Percy Juniper, were thus first cousins, with a common grandfather ancestor in James Juniper (born 1836).

The bakery at Brooksby's Walk was on the ground floor of a four-storey building and had a wooden shop front set back from the road by broad wooden steps. I recall that on the wall of the adjoining building was an advertisement for "De Reszke Cigarettes - Of Course!". The bakehouse had two large ovens and long wooden benches on which dough and pastry were mixed and rolled out. Above the arched entrance under the building and reached by a stepladder was an area where sacks of flour were stored, and the basement was a storeroom with butter, milk powder, etc. An archway under the first floor to the right of the shop led through past the bakehouse to a narrow lane bordered on one side by a number of small lock-up bays, which probably once housed horses for the baker's delivery carts and now (in the late 1930s-mid 1940s) contained several old wooden handcarts once used for the baker's bread rounds but now disused. Further down the dog-leg lane were some larger lock-up garages, some still in use as storages in an age when private cars were few and far between, and others containing various kinds of rubbish.

The J T Juniper bakery at Brooksby's Walk was destroyed in late 1944 or early 1945 by a VI 'doodlebug' which struck, so I was told, the ornate cast iron public convenience at the corner of the churchyard opposite. Our house at 29 Coopersale Road was in the next street behind the bakery and separated from it by the Clark's sheet metal factory building which

shielded it from the worst of the bomb blast. I was at that time living in Kings Lynn, Norfolk, with the remainder of the staff and pupils of Hackney Downs School, which had been evacuated to Lynn in 1943. Following the loss of their bakery, Leslie and Frances Juniper moved to another, smaller, premises in Wick Road, Hackney Wick, and carried on baking.

If any reader has photographs of the Juniper bakeries at Brooksby's Walk and Wick Road or any other information which they are willing to copy for me I should be most interested to hear from them.



Photo of High Street, High Ongar, circa 1905 with the Juniper bakery (not sure which building it is).

A Wartime Childhood in the East End

(Ron Victory was born on 26th December 1934, in Purdy Street, Bow. A frank and more than candid account of a young lad growing up in the East End of London during the Second World War. This should come with a health warning – not for the squeamish, or for the 'we were poor, but honest' East End raconteurs.)

I spent the war years running around bomb ruins. All the air raids were going on around us, and machine guns as well. We were sitting on a wall in Purdy Street and the Messerschmidt went over and we could see the lights on the wings and the bullets went all over the wall. Later we saw the Doodle Bugs come over and stop and then *Bomp!* You could see them come and then stop, and you knew you were safe. It was the rockets that come down and you didn't know where they were going, but you were too young to take any notice. You were brought up with it.

I can remember lying on a canvas bed as a child in school. That must have been before the war started. I went to a couple of schools but they got knocked down – bombed. We went to Knapp Road, Devons Road, Marner Street and Botolph Street. We went to all those schools for a couple of days, then they were bombed. When I went to Marner Street I was only there for a couple of days. The teacher asked for my dinner money. She had a go at me so I walked out and never went back.

I have been chased in the old ruins, by the school board bloke and threw a chopper at him and it stuck in the wall. I don't know why he was chasing us as there was no school to go to anyway. There were boys around between 5 and 14 all doing the same. My brother was four years older than me and he didn't go to school, and we younger kids would follow the older ones.

They said we had to be evacuated but we said we didn't want to go. That was it. Dad was doing essential work repairing gas mains as they were being bombed. He was out day and night sometimes.

I wasn't at school very often. If a shop was hit we would go and help clean up, we would take any kind of stock, take it away to sell it. Cigarettes were all over one shop. We put some back in a box and more into our pockets.

We used to dig up tarry blocks when the water blew up the roads. We used to split them in halves and sell them for firewood. There were hundreds everywhere. When the schools were bombed we dug up the parquet floor for firewood. We used to go down Bromley Gas Works and get coke in carts and take it round to people. There was a place in Violet Road where you could get free disinfectant. We would get some in a cart and take it round the streets to sell it.

In Devons Road was a place where they kept all the bodies. We kicked in the door and saw all the body bits. My father came home once and said he had seen a dog with a woman's head in its mouth. He kicked the dog to make it let go. He also found a woman's hand with rings, and that had been blown off.

Between 10 and 14 I went to Devons Road School. When I started there we were given a piece of paper and told to write our names. I asked the boy next to me how to spell my name. He was no help, 'cos he couldn't write his own name. From 10 to 14 I stayed at Devons Road School. I'm all right at Maths, but the spelling is still bad. Devons Road school had a playground on the roof. If a teacher had a go at me I would go out.

I don't remember ever being short of food, I mean there was a shop at the bottom of Tibbatts Road, my mother used to send us down there for bacon bones. We said they were for the dog, but she used to make a stew from them. In Devon's Road there were shops

with an alleyway behind them. We used to go there at night, jump over the wall, take a dozen (empty) jam jars, and take them back to the shop the next day and get a half-penny each for them.

Where we had a den in Reeves Road in the bombed houses, we would go in one door, put a lump of timber against it, go up the stairs onto the roofs and run out of a door further down. Once a policeman chased us and we had put a bucket of loose plaster on a door. We went through it, but the policeman pushed the door and it fell on him. He went on down the road like a mad man.

On Bow Common there was another gang and the two gangs would have fights throwing bricks at one another. If you were hit by a brick you really knew about it.

We ran around bombed houses. There was a warehouse nearby and we opened a box full of model cars. We all took one each and the police came round after us. It turned out they were making them to sell to America to pay for arms. At least, that's what we were told.

The police in those days – we had more respect for them. If they caught you they used to dig you 'round the ear or grab my ear and walk me home and the old man had to give me a good hiding in front of him.

The police were always walking around watching for looters.

Up in Arrow Road there was another store that had army stuff in it. We used to take dinghies, take them down to the river, play in it and then sink it. There were rifles – we used to take them, play cowboys, then throw them in the river, 'cos we couldn't take them home. There was no ammunition.

We were always in an out of bombed houses. We had barrel ladders like they use to deliver beer to the pub cellars. We used them to go into the upstairs of bombed houses, and down

into others when the ground floors were boarded up. We used to jump down from the windows onto mattresses. It's a wonder we didn't break our legs.

There were stores in various places. The Americans had plenty of food. These were dark Americans like we hadn't seen before.

When the Americans were in Devas Street they had their stores there in a church. We used to get their sandwiches for them. There were cafes where, if you had money, you could buy food, ham sandwiches. We used to get them for the Americans and they would give us gum and sweets. That's the only way we had sweets.

There were churches being used as warehouses, stacked to the roof with stores and had high wire fences around them. There was a church just over the bridge in Devas Road on the corner of Fern Street. My brother used to go up the tower and catch pigeons, shine a light on them and they wouldn't move. It was very dangerous going up rickety ladders. He used to put them in a sack and take them to the Chinese restaurants. He was about 12 or 13 then. He used to get money for them, there wasn't much to buy. He probably gave the money to the family. Once we thought we had bought a skinned rabbit, but when we got it on the table and opened its mouth, it had two pointed teeth and we knew it was a cat. I've never eaten rabbit since. If they had chopped its head and tail off you wouldn't know the difference once it was skinned.

We used to go down to Millwall and fill our pockets with peanuts. We used to make a day to go to Woolwich to swim in the river and travel on the free ferry. If you swam when the tide was out you came out smothered in mud. We went up and down on the ferry for nothing.

I had scabies twice. In Glabor (Glaucus?) Street there was a place where they took all your clothes off, put them in a big oven to

bake them. They bathed you and painted you with a big brush with white stuff that stunk. You got your clothes back that had all been baked, but a month later you were back again 'cos you'd got it again. Every night you used to sit on the floor between your mother's knees, and she used to crack nits.

There was a big fire at the end of the street. My father pulled some people out of a dugout that the firemen had given up on, and saved their lives. They came to live next door to us. One night he came in retching. He had been down a cellar to see if there was anyone there and there was a body blown up like a balloon in the mud.

We had a dog who used to howl half an hour before the sirens went. He could hear them from some distance before we could hear them.

My father never went down the shelter. When we went down, he'd sit down with a pint of beer. Once an incendiary bomb fell and the blast knocked the beer out of his hand. One night I was in bed with my brother and woke up after a bang and found a huge lump of jagged glass in the bed between my brother and me. Another night we woke up with all the wire mesh from the windows, ('cos there was no glass in them) tangled all around us. My father had been hit, he had been sitting in an armchair and he and the chair were blasted through a wall.

Where the railway used to split around Purdy Street we called it the island. We used to get on the line there and they used to have detonators like fog signals. We used to take them out of the box and sometimes put about ten of them on the line. A train would come through it sounded like a machine gun – bang, bang, bang. The old driver must have done it in his trousers. We used to put things on the train rails, to flatten them. Six inch nails made good throwing knives. The line there was mostly for goods.

My father kept chickens. One strayed onto the railway lines and he threw a brick at it. The chicken flew up in terror and was killed by a train, and landed on the head of the woman next door and knocked her over.

We used to run across the steam train lines and the electric lines. At the Chemical Works there were great big mounds of sulphur that we thought was sherbet and tried to eat it.

There were shelters at the end of some roads, but they wouldn't stop anything. We used them to play in. There was an electric point and you had to get an electric shock before you could join the gang. All those blokes who were around then ended up villains.

My mother said that if Dad's going to go, we will all go. There were hardly any occupied houses in the road.

At the end of the war there was a street party. They laid the tables out in the street. The only thing I didn't like, I had a grey, sort of army tunic and shorts. I hated it and didn't want to go out in it. Afterwards they had a bonfire in the middle of the street and the firemen came round and put it out.

Ron Victory (in conversation with Mary Cable)



AUTUMN COACH TRIP

SATURDAY 4TH OCTOBER 2008

WIMPOLE HALL AND HOME FARM

TWimpole Hall and its farm and park form the grandest estate in Cambridgeshire. The house is mainly Georgian, with splendid interiors designed by great architects.

There are 60 acres of gardens, including a walled kitchen garden which still supplies food to the restaurant.

The Home Farm is now a rare breeds farm. There is also an extensive park.

We shall be going straight there, visiting the farm first. The house opens later, at 1pm. Lunch can be in the restaurant or cafes at the farm and house, or bring a picnic. We shall be leaving by 5p.m.

The house is National Trust, so free to members. Members have to pay £3.50 at the farm. For others, house and farm combined cost £10.75. The coach fare is £11.00. Please send the coach fare with your booking, I will collect entrances on the coach.

Please fill in the booking slip below and send to me, Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London E4 7PF. Tel. 020 8524 4506. (Photocopy it if you don't wish to spoil your newsletter.)



AUTUMN COACH TRIP
SATURDAY 4TH OCTOBER 2008

I/We would like _____ Ticket/s for the coach trip Wimpole Hall and Home Farm.

NAME/S _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL NO. _____ I enclose a cheque/PO for £ _____

(Cheques to be made payable to the East London History Society.)

NATIONAL TRUST MEMBERSHIP (IMPORTANT)
YES NO Some of us (please give number)