



William Whiffin photograph of boys following Poplar Borough Council water cart, 1919

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### Editorial Note:

At the Annual General Meeting, held on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008, the following Committee members were re-elected: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, Harold Mernick, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborne, and Rosemary Taylor. All queries regarding membership should be addressed to Harold Mernick, 42 Campbell Road, Bow, London E3 4DT.

Enquiries to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green, London E2 0RF, Tel: 0208 981 7680, or Philip Mernick, email: [phil@mernicks.com](mailto:phil@mernicks.com)

Check out the History Society's website at [www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk](http://www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk).

Our grateful thanks go to all the contributors of this edition of the newsletter, with a special mention to David Webb, for his fascinating series on East End Photographers. 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, and any queries can be emailed to Philip Mernick.

The Newsletter is edited and typeset by Rosemary Taylor with assistance of Philip Mernick, and an editorial team comprising, 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.

By the time this newsletter goes to print, the Cemetery Park Open Day and Woodlands Craft Day on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May will be over, but we would appreciate any feedback from those who attended.



Trust we will have better weather than this!  
(Membership Secretary photographed on February 2<sup>nd</sup>)

## Obituary

### Mary Cable (1939-2009)

We were truly saddened to hear of the death of Mary Cable, a stalwart member of the East London History Society. She regularly attended the Lectures, and enjoyed the coach outings with the ELHS, seldom missing the opportunity for an excursion.

Mary was very active in the community, and did some sterling work for the Ragged School Museum. She was made a Life Member for her dedicated years of service when she finally moved from Stepney. Her other interest was the William Morris Society, where she was an enthusiastic member. Mary taught for many years at Ben Jonson Primary School in Essian Street Stepney, this was very close to her flat on The Ocean Estate. Mary moved from Stepney and lived for several years in beautiful Arundle, before moving back to her flat in the East End. Finally she moved again to Surrey, until her final passing. This was close to The Royal Marsden Hospital where Mary received good care during her illness.

Mary was 70 years old, dying one week after her birthday. The day before her birthday she held an open house at her home in Surrey, where 40 of her friends and family joined her to celebrate her birthday and life, as she knew the end was imminent. Mary was in good spirits and enjoyed seeing people from various connections of her life and it was a joyous occasion. One of her friends from the East End contacted as many people who knew Mary from the East End, who now live in many corners of England and abroad, and everyone sent her a special birthday card. Mary was amazed to think so many old friends and contacts had remembered her 70th birthday.

She was very active in the Over 50s Youth Hostel Association and was joined by another East End friend in touring New Zealand in 2008.

### Message from John Cable :

Mum passed away peacefully on the morning of Sunday January 25<sup>th</sup> at St Raphael's Hospice. Both her children - myself and Juliet were there, along with our partners (Cathy and Bob). As was her husband Ken, who had been there with her all the preceding night.

The previous Sunday we had a party to celebrate her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Which was a great success, attended by many of her close friends and family - standing room only! She spent her remaining week in comfort at the hospice, with no pain. She had been as happy as can be expected, maintaining her sense of humour until close to the end.

While it is of course very sad to see her go. I'd like to remind everyone to remember her as the vibrant and adventurous soul she was. Over the last week or so it has been very uplifting, talking to some of the great variety of friends that she has accumulated throughout her life. They have reminded me of what an amazingly accomplished woman she was. Not only in the pursuit of her own varied interests, from art and design, through architecture to botany and travel - just for the sake of adventure. She has worked hard in support of charity, principally The Royal Marsden cancer hospitals, of which she had been a patient. But also in leaving such a positive - apparently deep and enduring impression on so many individuals and families. She will be missed by many.

Mum chose to leave her body to medical research and education. So there will be no funeral. Eventually her remains will be cremated and the ashes scattered at the bases of two trees: One in London - an apple tree in the gardens of the Geffrye museum, which she had planted in remembrance of her parents (Robert and Esther Barker). The other - a Pōhutukawa, which she planted herself (as a large sapling) on our property in New Zealand, in December 2007.

## East London History Society Programme 2009

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May 1009**

**Open Evening**

**Talking about shops and Trades that are no more.**

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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](mailto:phil@mernicks.com)

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### **Note from Philip Mernick:**

**Short videos.** My attempt with the part of Morning Lane, Hackney now under a Tesco store was an interesting experiment and the offer is still open, although I have to admit I haven't yet finished one for Ernest Street. Google Streets (pretty good cover of London) might render the offer redundant but they don't get down all of the back streets. Please email your requests to me at [phil@mernicks.com](mailto:phil@mernicks.com)

### **Olympic site**

Since August 2007 we have been recording the construction of the Olympic stadium from the one publicly accessible viewpoint (on The Greenway). You can see the images on the ELHS web site at:

<http://www.mernick.org.uk/elhs/Stadium/Stadium.htm>

### **Stop Press**

Robert (Bob) Barltrop died on Sunday 26 of April. Robert Barltrop who was born in 1922 wrote a weekly column for The Newham Observer for more than 18 years. From a long line of blacksmiths, his father was a horse fodder dealer, and as a boy Robert used to go all round the East End with him on a horse and cart, delivering fodder. He was educated at Sir George Monoux School in Walthamstow and served in the R.A.F. during World War Two. He had been a professional boxer, a labourer, a strip cartoonist, a schoolteacher and a sign-painter – among other things, he said. He wrote several books *The Monument: Story of the Socialist Party of Great Britain* (1975), *Jack London: The Man, the Writer, the Rebel* (1977), *Muvver Tongue* with Jim Wolveridge (1980), *A Funny Age (Growing up in North East London between the Wars)* (1985) and *Yes Mush: A Cockney Dictionary: The Cockney Language and Its World* (2004).

He was married with three grown-up sons (two in the circus and one a policeman), and lived in Stratford.

### **Cover picture**

William Whiffin photograph of boys following Poplar Borough Council water cart. Bancroft Road has **three** different versions of this. For details see page 6.

## BANCROFT LIBRARY UPDATE - April 2009

Thanks to the continued support of the Leader of the Council, Cllr. Lutfur Rahman and his cabinet colleagues Cllrs. Rofique Uddin Ahmed, Alibor Choudhury and Marc Francis, the promised £255,000 for improvements to Bancroft Library was included in the 2009-2010 budget approved by the cabinet on Wednesday 8 April.

Senior officers in the Communities, Localities and Culture Directorate have also been busy setting up a project (initially under the directorship of Judith St John, Head of Idea Stores) which will involve twice-monthly meetings of the Bancroft Library Steering Group. The campaign will be represented by Brenda Daley, Melissa Parker and Tom Ridge; and representatives from "active Local History Groups in East London" (please email the campaign with your representative's name and contact details). It is also anticipated that council officers on the Steering Group will include representatives from Children's Services, 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games Development and Renewal and the Conservation and Urban Design Team; also a representative from English Heritage.

A Heritage Manager is also being appointed to manage the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives at Bancroft Library; and to direct its future development as a hub for improved local history and archive services. Many details have still to be worked out but there is now a real possibility that the Tower Hamlets Local History Centre (former Bancroft Library) will be fully operational by 2012.

Obviously, further progress depends on fundraising by the Heritage Manager and others. We were very pleased to learn at our meeting with senior officers on Wednesday 8 April that arrangements for the building work are in the capable hands of Peter Fox of THE

**PROJECT AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY.** Peter is already drawing up a short list of suitable conservation architects to specify and supervise the works. This conservation-led approach will meet the requirements of heritage funding bodies, such as English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Clearly, not all the rooms at Bancroft Library can be made suitable for their new uses in 2009-2010. But it is envisaged that the large first-floor front room will be used as the Local History Library and search room, whilst the present Local History Library and search room is being repaired for eventual use as the main search room or reading room.

Unfortunately, the essential replacement of the lift will have to wait until funds are available. An additional archive strong room is urgently needed, together with an archivist's work room on the ground floor. We hope that the front part of the former ground-floor children's lending library will eventually become a large multi-purpose room for school groups and meetings. In the meantime, temporary arrangements should allow this area to be used as soon as possible; and the entrance hall used for reception and exhibitions.

The campaign thanks Tower Hamlets Council Leader, Cllr. Lutfur Rahman for his October 2008 decision to "retain Bancroft for the Local History Library and Archives"; and thanks the Council for setting up the project which will "give the Local History Library and Archives the home it deserves". The world-renowned Bancroft Library can now become an even better centre of excellence on High Street 2012, not only for local residents and visitors from all over the world but also for the borough's school children and students: helping them with their national curriculum studies in local history and geography, and other initiatives such as *Find Your Talent* and *One Tower Hamlets*.

**Tom Ridge**

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## EAST END PHOTOGRAPHERS 5: WILLIAM WHIFFIN

If you need an image of the "Real East End", that Cockney Never - Never Land which allegedly lurks at the back of all true East Enders' imagination, look no further than the photograph on the cover of this issue of the Newsletter. It's a photograph which ticks all the right boxes; cheeky Cockney kids - check; social deprivation - check ; traffic-free streets - check; never-say-die optimism - check; laughably antique equipment - check; endless hot summers - check. The photograph has become something of a cliché in books on London history in general and the East End in particular; this is how we would all like to remember that long-vanished East End, now just over the horizon. In actual fact, this is a photograph of Cotton Street, in Poplar, in the long hot summer of 1919, just after the Great War had ended. And it is quite probable that the photographer "arranged" for the boys to follow the council water-cart laying the dust in the street - it made a much more dramatic picture. So now you can amend one of the headings listed above to "Cheeky Cockney kids playing truant"

The photographer of this archetypal image of Poplar 90 years ago was William Whiffin, whose achievement as the recorder of the daily life of an inner London borough between the wars has never been surpassed. Whiffin was one of a small handful of photographers working in the London area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who looked beyond the confines of their studios to record the every-day, mundane existence of their neighbours - the "locals", if you prefer - in the realisation that the way of life being recorded would be obsolete within a few years. One thinks of William Field in Putney, Thankfull Sturdee in Deptford and Arthur Eason in Hackney. Without these selfless - and usually unpaid - efforts, little visual evidence would have survived.

William Thomas Whiffin was one of a family of photographers, which included his father, William Whiffin Sr, and his younger brother, Ernest. Whiffin Sr was a native of Bedford, where he was born in 1851. His father, Edward was a blacksmith, originally from Leicester; he made the move to Bedford at the time of the Great Exhibition. In the late 60s, William Whiffin made the decisive move to London's East End, where he joined his uncle, the photographer Thomas Wright (1832 - 1912) as a photographic assistant at the latter's studio at 199 East India Road. In 1875 he married Ellen Varley; they were to have 7 children. Wright clearly appreciated the young man's work in the studio since after a dozen years, he sold the studio outright to Whiffin. In the Spring of 1883, Whiffin found himself in sole charge of the studio, while Wright moved out to Forest Gate.

And yet ... When Gladys Whiffin (later Gladys Manister 1909 - 97), Whiffin's granddaughter was interviewed by Geoff Richman for his documentary film "Fly a flag for Poplar", in 1975, her memories were distinctly mixed "My grandfather was a photographer, but he wasn't interested. He didn't live in Poplar all the time, they had a studio in Hackney (137 Shackwell Lane), and the one here. They had a house in Hackney, prior to that he lived in Poplar (242 Leven Road). He did some odd, quixotic things, like buying large statues they held the whole street up to move them, it was a very big studio, with steps down to it, very wide. And there would be statuary on the steps and in between, or in the waiting room, and an enormous mirror ... But he wasn't interested like father".

Gladys Whiffin would never have seen the East India Road studio which closed before she was born, so the stories must have been based on her father's recollections. She was certainly correct over William Whiffin's lack of interest in the business; within four years, Whiffin had sold the studio to Thomas Laroche who continued to work it to the end of the century. Although Whiffin Sr continued

to work in photography for the rest of his life, he never again ran a studio in his own right, preferring to help his son instead.

William Thomas Whiffin, or William Whiffin Jr, was born in Bow Lane, Poplar on February 22 1878. His earliest memories would have been of his father's unsuccessful East India Road studio before the move to Leven Road in the late 80s. The move to Hackney came a decade later, while in the early 1900s, Whiffin made his first independent move to Kensal Rise. He clearly felt confident enough, despite his father's failure, to take over no less than three of the studios run by the prolific Avery family in North, Central and East London.

In 1908, Whiffin bought John James Avery's studio at 770 Harrow Road, Kensal Rise, as well as Frederick George Avery's studio at 237 East India Dock Road, and in 1911 John Henry Avery's studio at 209 King's Cross Road, St Pancras. This clutch of studios was complemented by the acquisition of Montague Randall's studio at 357 West Green Road, South Tottenham, which had a relatively short life, and finally John Simmons' studio at 269 Mare Street, Hackney in 1913. In the short space of 5 years, Whiffin found himself running as many studios. In 1904 he married Minnie Duck; they had two daughters and a son.

The outbreak of World War 1 found Whiffin in his mid-30s, and he was sent to Deepcut for military training with a group of much younger men. The strain soon began to tell, and Whiffin was sent to Yarmouth rather than overseas where he was responsible for many group photographs. He was an inveterate collector - "Anything old or ancient he would collect", his daughter remembered, matchboxes, toys, china - used to worry mother. She'd say "What am I going to do with it if anything happens to you?"

In 1916, Whiffin was offering to supply reproductions of faded photographs in the Poplar Libraries' collections, as well as

enlarged photographs of places of interest in the Borough which were thought to be worth preserving. Whiffin's basic bread-and-butter business, the daily round of portraits, was extremely cheap, despite its designation as a "luxury trade".

Gladys recalled "They used to have clubs - people would pay a shilling a week - someone would run it and bring in ten shillings from ten people and so you could have a ten shilling portrait. But for two shillings you could get six postcards and something else besides. Everyone knew him - they'd say "I've got one of your Dad's photos". It was very popular in those days to have a framed one, eighteen by fourteen, or something like that, which was extremely cheap".

By the early 1920s, Whiffin had consolidated his studios into the two in Poplar and St, Pancras. His brother Ernest had been in charge of the King's Cross Road studio since its opening, and in 1932 Whiffin formally sold it to his brother. In the same year, Whiffin closed 237 East India Dock Road, and moved 2 doors along to the slightly smaller premises at 241. He had never had the street entirely to himself - about one hundred yards up the street on the opposite side was William Bartier's studio, established as far back as 1873, and run by Bartier's son Albert since his father's tragic death in 1915 as the result of an accident while photographing in the London Docks.

It was in the early 1920s that Whiffin's photographic work began to be published in topographical books. The first of these was a collection of essays by the American journalist, Helen Henderson, under the title of "A loiterer in London" (Doran, New York, 1924). Considering that Henderson's book is almost entirely concerned with the cities of London and Westminster, with a brief tail end on London's riverside, Whiffin seems rather an odd choice of illustrator - Poplar is not covered at all. It is not known if Henderson ever met Whiffin, or whether the photographs were specially commissioned or merely taken

from stock. Whiffin is not listed on the title page, nor does Henderson ever refer to him, but each of the 64 photographs bears an appropriate credit. Although the book had originally only been intended for American publication it proved sufficiently popular for a quantity of the sheets to be bound up by Hodder & Stoughton for a British edition in 1925, while in 1928 it was reissued by the London office of the American publishers Brentanos.

A little over a year after Henderson's work, Whiffin was heavily involved in a prestigious part-work, "Wonderful London", edited by Arthur St John Adcock. Originally issued in weekly parts over 2 years (1926 - 27), it is usually found today bound into three handsome volumes.

Whiffin contributed almost 100 photographs to the enterprise, on a wide variety of places and topics, including boundary, pub and street signs, watch houses, watergates and stocks, shops, auction rooms and almshouses, as far out as Woolwich and Twickenham. It also marked the first appearance in print, in the series sepia gravure, of the photograph highlighted at the beginning - the boys following the watercart. In total number of photographs used, Whiffin ranked second only to Donald McLeish, an agency rather than an individual.

In the later 20s, examples of Whiffin's work appeared in at least a couple of Poplar Borough Council's official guides. He carried out work for a number of commercial organizations and firms at this period, including London Transport and the Port of London Authority, as well as the Imperial Tobacco Company and Lusty's "Lloyd Loom" woven furniture company. From his vantage point overlooking the East India Dock Road, Whiffin photographed such historical events as the march of the Poplar Councillors to prison in 1921 for non-payment of the rates, the battles of the suffragette movement, street parties for the 1937 Coronation and the troops

guarding the food convoys from the docks during the General Strike of 1926.

In recognition of his photographic work for them, Whiffin was made a life governor of Poplar Hospital.

When the Second World War broke out, Whiffin offered to "take a series of photographs of happenings which may be of historical interest to the Borough in time to come, including damage by aircraft, if any".

The Council did use him to photograph anti-aircraft defences, Anderson Shelters and other war work throughout the war. The King's Cross studio closed down soon after the War began, while towards the end of the War, the East India Dock Road studio was badly damaged by the fallout from a V2 rocket which demolished the Eagle public house opposite. The studio never reopened; it was in any case, time to retire.

After the war, Whiffin moved to a new house at 11 Woodstock Terrace where he used the basement kitchen as a darkroom. Poplar Council appointed him as their official photographer for the new post-war housing estates.

In the 50s Whiffin began to pass on examples of his early work both to Poplar Libraries and to the Museum of London; by the time of his death, nearly 500 negatives had been transferred.

He celebrated his Golden Wedding in 1954, but sadly Minnie died suddenly just over two years later, in January 1957. They had been a devoted couple, and her death hit him badly; he died barely ten months later in Poplar Hospital on November 13. His daughter Gladys summed up his career "He was interested in everything. I often think he didn't get enough recognition: he was too modest and didn't like the limelight. He was a real professor type ... lots of commissions were never paid for, but he would never dun

anybody - a little praise was of far more value”.

After his death, Gladys Whiffin gave a further 1689 local photographs to Poplar Libraries (now part of Tower Hamlets Archives at Bancroft Road). A further 400 negatives also passed to the Council, which were printed by the London County Council; the LCC Library (now the London Metropolitan Archives) was allowed to keep copies as well as duplicates from previous donations.

In 1976 Tower Hamlets Libraries Department organised the first exhibition from its Whiffin Collection, under the same title as the film “Fly a flag for Poplar”. Just under a hundred photographs were selected, and grouped under such headings as Poplarism, religious celebrations, street parties, Poplar people, leaders and scenes. Of course, it included the boys following the water cart, together with an alternative view of the same scene.

Like many local London photographers of the interwar years, William Whiffin’s photographic legacy lives on, and will continue to enthral future generations of East Enders.

#### DAVID WEBB.

To be continued.



William Whiffin Snr. William Whiffin Jnr.

## Notes and News

### The Arthur Morrison Society has been formed in Loughton, Essex.

Following Stan Newen's talk at the Loughton Festival in 2007 about Arthur Morrison, and the subsequent publication of his book about the author, the Arthur Morrison Society has now been set up in Loughton. For the time being it will continue to be organised under the Loughton Festival banner, but if a committee can be found, it will become a Society in its own right.

Morrison was born in London's East End in 1863, probably in Poplar. He wrote books about the East End of London in Victorian times, including *A Child From the Jago* and *Tales of Mean Streets*. He also wrote plays and detective stories about Martin Hewitt, all of which received excellent press reviews.

For example: For Martin Hewitt has more than ordinary perspicacity, and if he cannot deduce a murderer and his motive from a cigar-ash or a saucer of milk, we know of no one at the present time into whose hands we would so willingly put an undiscovered crime. Moreover, he is improving, and it is just within the bounds of possibility that if Sherlock Holmes should ever appear again he will have to look to his laurels. (Manchester Guardian 31.12.1895)

Morrison was also a world expert on Japanese and Chinese prints. He wrote books about them and gave expert evidence in court on at least one occasion. Morrison lived in Chingford, then Loughton High Road and during the First World War moved to High Beach, which is where he was later buried with his wife and son.

On 18 April there will be a talk about Morrison's collection of prints at the Loughton Festival. The speaker is Tim Clark, who is the curator of the print collection at the British Museum ([www.loughtonfestival.org.uk](http://www.loughtonfestival.org.uk)).

The Arthur Morrison Society website can be found at:

[www.arthurmorrisonociety.vpweb.co.uk](http://www.arthurmorrisonociety.vpweb.co.uk)

Anyone interested in joining the new committee or the Morrison Society should contact Sue Taylor 020 8508 2512 or email: [info@loughtonfestival.org.uk](mailto:info@loughtonfestival.org.uk)

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#### The Idea Store web site

([www.ideastore.co.uk](http://www.ideastore.co.uk)) was completely revamped last year and for a while the Digital Picture Gallery has not been available. It is now back, in an improved form, featuring initially, nearly 100 fascinating images of dock scenes in Tower Hamlets from the collections of the Local History Library and Archives.

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#### 500 YEARS OF LONDON HISTORY TO LAUNCH ONLINE – 77M NAMES Digitisation of genealogical sources at Guildhall Library and London Metropolitan Archives

London Metropolitan Archives and Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section are delighted to announce a new partnership with [Ancestry.co.uk](http://Ancestry.co.uk) to digitise genealogical sources.

The first records will launch on [Ancestry.co.uk](http://Ancestry.co.uk) in early 2009, with the following prioritised for launch in the coming year:

\* Parish records – records from more than 10,000 Greater London parish registers of baptisms, marriages and burials dating from the 1530s to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

\* Poor Law documents – relating to the administration of poor relief, including workhouse registers from 1834 onwards

\* London school admissions – records from 843 individual London schools dating from the early Victorian times through to 1911, providing admission and personal details for millions of London students

It is anticipated that the full digitisation and indexing program will include:

- \* Parish baptisms, marriages and burials
- \* Bishops transcripts
- \* Parish poor law records
- \* Boards of Guardians records
- \* Diocesan marriage bonds and allegations
- \* Non-conformist baptisms, marriages and burials
- \* School admission and discharge registers
- \* Electoral registers, overseers returns and poll books
- \* Land tax records
- \* Wills
- \* City of London Freedoms
- \* Middlesex Sessions – Transportation Contracts
- \* Consistory Court of London Matrimonial and Testamentary Papers

We will provide free access to view the indexes and images through [Ancestry.co.uk](http://Ancestry.co.uk) on the computer terminals in our public rooms. The program will start shortly and we will release further information about the project over the coming months.

You can keep up-to-date with news about the project on the Guildhall Library Manuscripts' website at [www.history.ac.uk/gh/digitisation.htm](http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/digitisation.htm)

**Please contact us at this email address if you require any further information.**

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## Park Improvements

**Two London parks will be improved after receiving National Lottery grants totalling £367,000.**

Victoria Park in Tower Hamlets, east London, has been awarded £295,500 for a new cafe and pagoda, better access and screens to show the 2012 Olympics.

Horniman Gardens in Lewisham, south-east London, will receive £71,500 for a new sheltered area and learning centre.

The Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund grants will enable the parks to apply for major restoration.

### 'Historic spaces'

Tower Hamlets council plans £4.5m of long-term renovation at Victoria Park and a £907,000 restoration is planned at Horniman Gardens.

London's Heritage Lottery Fund head Sue Bowers said: "These projects will inject a new lease of life into two popular historic green spaces which serve densely populated areas and aim to attract a wider range of users."

Tower Hamlets councillor Abdal Ullah said: "Victoria Park is the East End's version of Regents Park and is an important green space which is enjoyed by the whole community.

"We'll be talking to local people to find out exactly what they want to see in their park as a result of these multi-million pound improvements."

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## Strange or What!!

I have often heard it said that in no matter what direction life may take you, you will never be that far away from your roots, be it geographically, by association or even literary--like via this newsletter. For example--How I remember as a kid getting on one of those many London Red buses that encircled Newby Place in Poplar that took us to Loughton or such, an annual outing organised by the T&G Workers Union, and then some years latter visiting family there that had been re-housed as a result of the bombing.

Or again, being part of that crocodile line of youngsters walking from Bruce Road Methodist church to the Bow/North London Railway station in Bow Road en-route to Theydon Bois for an adventurous day out, then finding myself as an adult working there when installing the Central Line Underground track that went on to Epping. Even those that still live in places remote from their roots seem to want at sometime make the pilgrimage back, as a visit to the Docklands Settlement on the Isle of Dogs on their open day can testify. Somehow the shadow of your past never seems to leave you, or you don't want to leave it.

I became to sense these coincidental happenings coming more to the fore when we ourselves moved away out to Essex and I begun an interest in our local history. The village of **North Stifford** just down the road from us was my first encounter. In the demolition of some local institutional buildings that we knew as **Ardale School** and the eventual construction of a housing development on the site, many 'coincidental' factors came to light. First I discovered that as a 'school' it had ties to the **Stepney Board of Guardians** dating back to 1902 when it purchased the land on which to build a children's home for Orphaned or Abandoned children. It was known then as **Stepney Homes** but was not a self contained establishment in itself for the children went to

the village school and the boys formed an essential part of the church choir. These links with the village continued until 1935 when the homes were closed and the buildings converted into an approved school. Since 1969 it had been a community home run by **Newham** Borough Council. It finally closed in total in 1994 and then demolished.

In the development of the site, Persimmon Homes the builders, renovated a dilapidated war memorial to the men aged 18 to 36 who had passed through the home but had died in WW1. I attended the rededication in 2005 and have the names of those inscribed.

Persimmon has paid tribute by naming the streets and roads after the men whose names are listed on the memorial.

My **Stepney** connection comes through my father who in his youth lived at 117 **Earnest Street**. Coincidence!!!!

The reading of the book 'Plotlands' by Deanna Walker brought about another episode of 'I cant believe it', for in the plotlands history we learn that it was constantly making the news with reports of criminal activities when the **Poplar** Labour Colony existed there.

In 1904 the **Poplar** Poor Law Board of Guardians decided to establish a farm colony on land leased to them by an American businessman. The farm was seen as an important experiment in taking men out of the workhouse and placing them in an environment where they could work and learn skills that would make them fit to go on any farm or to emigrate to the colonies. It was hailed as a great success at first but as the years went by the colony experienced many problems like absconding with clothes that belonged to the workhouse, neglecting to perform work duty, drunkenness and assault. In 1907, 75 yards of copper telephone wire went missing from alongside the railway line. A sentence of 6 weeks hard labour was imposed on the culprits. I understand it closed

down in the late 1920s and I now know it to be a residential caravan site. It's in the same area that I do my blackberry picking. Its **Poplar** connection is from my up-bringing in **Bromley-by-Bow** and **Poplar** Council was the landlord of the flats we lived in. Coincidence!!!!

I think the most uncanny encounter of this subject happened fairly recently when I was studying an Ordnance Survey map for this area and found that in the 1920s there had been a Priory/Monastery at the end of our road, something my inquisitive mind needed to discover more of.

It seems that in this part of Essex there have been many religious sects some of which in a fragmented form still exist today. But this one in particular, The Society of Divine Compassion, had bonded well with the residents and the gentlemen of the society were often seen walking the area in their sandaled footwear. Research showed that the society purchased what was once a farm in 1905 from their headquarters in **Plaistow** the purpose of it being to transform it into a 'retreat'. They existed here until around 1947 when the dwindling of numbers compelled them to disband and their activities were taken over by a similar group back in **Plaistow** who still function today at **42, Balaam Street**. In fact 2008 was their centurion year.

The foundation of the sect can be contributed to three men, all of whom had in their past associated themselves in working with the poor of **Bethnal Green** from Oxford House. Further research had me knocking on the door of **42, Balaam Street** where I was made most welcome and met up with Brother Julian and his associates, some being Franciscan Monks

They still conduct themselves in working with the community and carry out their duties as chaplains to **The East of London Cemetery**--the resting place for many many **East Enders** including members of my own families. The most surprising factor of all to me was that

**Balaam Street** is just a stones throw away from the two rooms we had in **Ling Road**, the first address of my married life.

Perhaps a number of people reading this will say, 'Well there's nothing new in that—it happens to me all the time'---that's what I mean, another coincidence.

**George Donovan**

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**Philip Mernick received the following email from Lilian Dell:**

Re Matchgirls' Strike of 1888. I have just clicked on to the internet to check on a few details for my novel. Is that your website? It is absolutely brilliant and very exciting, and extremely erudite.

Whilst I am here, I must say, although all ELHS editions are most interesting, Winter 2008 is particularly so. When the magazine plots through the letter box I drop everything, make a cuppa, and start reading.

I am very happy to be a member of ELHS because of my passion for history, but it occurred to me when reading Winter 2008, that the Society is so very important because without it, and its archives, our East London history would no doubt disappear. What prompted me to reflect on this is your short piece about the plaque commemorating the lives of the two young women firefighters and your comment "A sad reflection of our times!"

I am most grateful for all the hard work, albeit enjoyable, your team put in to the Society.

Best wishes to you and your colleagues.

*(Ed. Note: Thank you very much Lilian for your kind words!)*

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## Bookshelf

**Arthur Morrison: The Novelist of Realism in East London and Essex**, Stan Newens, The Alderton Press, 2008. ISBN 1-978-1-905269-10-5, £4

Our member Stan Newens previously wrote on Arthur Morrison in East London Record 19 (1998). This 42 page A5 sized book with a striking card cover continues his researches. He describes how Poplar born Morrison succeeded in masking his East End origins because he wanted critics to concentrate on the publications and not the author.

The book gives us many details of Arthur Morrison's ancestors and family background and how his successful literary career enabled him to live very comfortably in the much more salubrious environs of Epping Forest. We learn a lot of his books and how he steadfastly refused to romanticise the poor labouring and criminal classes. *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) was the first of his four books based on the East End, being published before his more well known *A Child of The Jago*. I have read this several times and its sharply drawn but unremittingly unsympathetic characters make it not the book to read if you like happy endings.

This little book does not analyse the individual Morrison works in quite as much detail as the relevant section of P.J. Keating's *The Working Class in Victorian Fiction* (Routledge Keegan Paul, 1971) but it does tell us much more about the man and his later life. Like many members of ELHS, he maintained his interest in the East End even though he had moved to Essex!

We are told that Morrison also published many short articles, sometimes anonymously, in journals such as *The (Peoples) Palace Journal*, *the Pall Mall Magazine* and *the Strand Magazine*. It would be very interesting to try to collect these together but UK copyright, in

theory, does not expire until 2015 (70 years after his death in 1945). I say in theory because copyright expires 70 years after publication if the author is unknown. So assuming an anonymous piece is by Arthur Morrison could extend copyright by 50 years! I think a lawyer might be necessary!

**Philip Mernick**

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**The Blackest Streets: The Life and Death of a Victorian Slum** by Sarah Wise

Sarah Wise, author of the acclaimed *The Italian Boy*, has turned her attention to The Nichol in Bethnal Green, one of Victorian London's most notorious slum areas. Much of the research for this book was carried out at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives. The result is a rigorous scholarly work but blended with narrative flair. The Nichol is a popular area of study in the Local History Library and this remarkable volume represents a substantial addition to our resources relating to it.

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**Wapping 1600-1800 - A Social History of an Early-Modern London Maritime Suburb**, by Derek Morris and Ken Cozens  
 Published by the East London History Society  
 ISBN 978-0-9506258-9-8 Price £9.50 plus p&p (£3 UK only, £6 other).

Reviewed in the last newsletter, this book is now on sale, and is bound to be snapped up by historians eager to expand their knowledge of local history and those exploring their family history and roots. Professor Sarah Palmer, Director of the Greenwich Maritime Institute describes it as a 'fascinating, informative and ground breaking study.'

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**East London - A hotbed of football 1867-1918** By Colm Kerrigan. **Price £12.00**

Colm Kerrigan, the leading expert on this subject, investigates such topics as the public school missions and university settlements using football and cricket to deliver their message to the East End urban poor; elementary school teachers enthusing their pupils with their love of games and their battles to provide open space for recreation; the short-lived East End FA and the early days of the South Essex League and the Southern League rivalry between Millwall (The Dockers) and West Ham United (The Irons)

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**New from Friends of Hackney Archives:**

**DVD Stoke Newington** by Bill Hall, 2 hours approx. £6.95

The text on the cover reads:  
 "Stoke Newington can trace its history at least to the Roman Road which defines its boundary with Hackney. This video highlights themes in the village's history, from Tudor times onwards.

Starting with the manor house created by the scholar William Patten, the film looks in sequence at the growth of the village and the development of its parish churches, and at important historic buildings, both past and present, ranging from one of Stoke Newington's finest surviving Georgian residences to the former parish lock-up. From the late 17th century onward the village was a haven for those who found themselves unable to accept the teachings of the established church. The film reflects the area's rich non-conformist heritage, noting its strong Quaker presence and the importance from an early date of the Jewish faith. It goes on to explore the area's links with literary figures, notably Daniel Defoe, Anna Sewell and Edgar Allan Poe, before considering its absorption as a suburb of London.

The film is written and narrated by Bill Hall with contributions from a number of local residents and experts. An initial viewing of this DVD is very encouraging, I know practically nothing about Stoke Newington; but, I suspect, I soon will!

**Discover Stoke Newington: a walk through history**, David Mander and Isobel Watson, 2008, A5, 68 pages, £4.95, ISBN 978-0-9517493-3-3

Sitting watching the above DVD may not be enough: with summer approaching this book should be idea for exploring the area The book contains 9 sections each of which is a walk taking between 20 and 60 minutes. Its detailed maps and lots of history and pictures will make it very easy to explore this northern part of Hackney that still seems to retain a lot of character.

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**Union Bread, BAGEL, PLATZELS AND CHOLAH: THE STORY OF THE LONDON JEWISH BAKER'S UNION**, Larry Wayne, Jewish Socialists' Group, Socialist History Society. SHS Occasional Paper No. 26, 2009. A5, 114 pages. ISBN 978-0-955138-3-1 £6.

**Publisher's description.**

This book was originally written in 1984, and is published now, for the first time, twenty-five years on. It is the first study of the London Jewish Bakers' Union — and indeed the first detailed account of any of the Jewish trade unions. These were part of an important and hitherto unwritten chapter in the full story of the trade union movement - that of the ethnic or "religious" unions. Working alongside their sisters and brothers in the struggle for social justice, these unions sought also to meet the special needs of particular cultural and ethnic groups with their different traditions, dietary laws and religious practices. Amongst these often tiny groups struggling to reconcile progress and tradition, none stand out more clearly than the Jewish bakers with their aim to provide good, cheap, wholesome

bread baked in hygienic and humane working conditions by proper union labour. These issues of identity, language, and cultural difference serve today, just as in the 1930s or 1880s, as an essential "leaven" in the rising of the labour movement. The union's brave attempts at cooperative production and distribution, and its pioneering use of the union label are a part of the great history of co-operation.

UNION BREAD is a story both of division and of solidarity. There were bitter divisions between Jewish and non-Jewish Bakers over the issue of Sunday baking, and between the journeymen and the masters. But there was also great solidarity with many of the other tiny "immigrant" unions - the Mantlemakers, the Tailors, and the Tobacco-cutters, and a history of respected affiliation to the TUC. Though frequently repudiated by the mainstream of Establishment Jewry and sometimes underrated by the British Left, these unions all played their part fighting for justice at home and abroad in the early years of the 20th century.

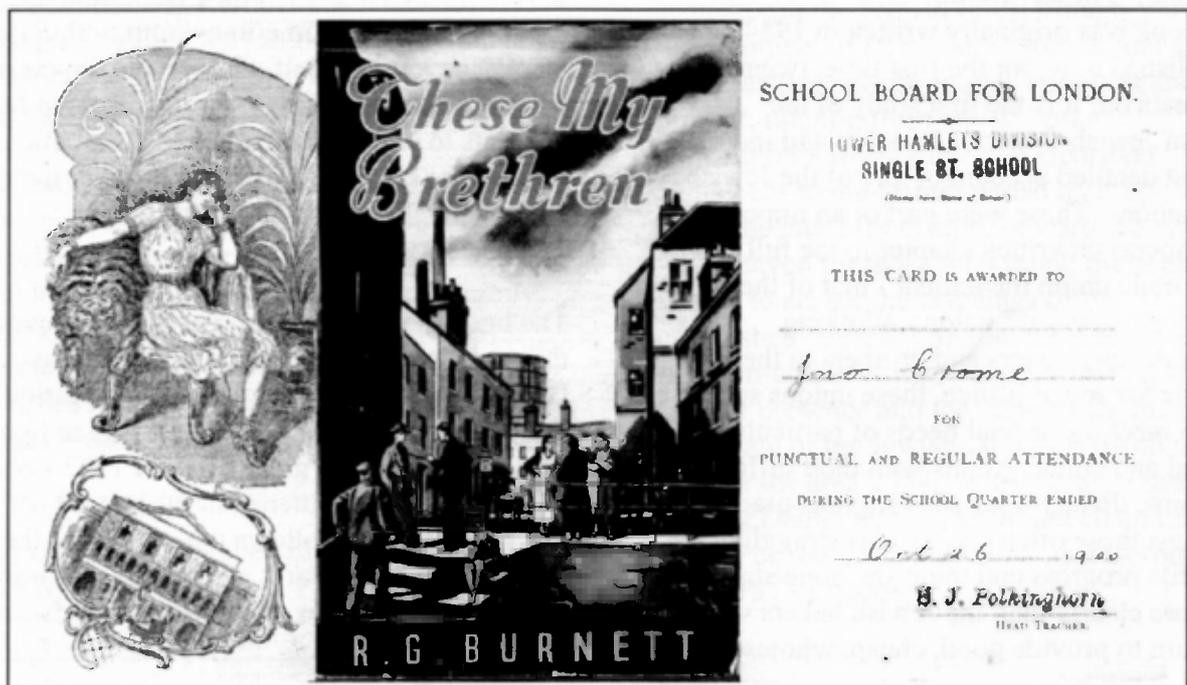
The book unflinchingly depicts the appalling working conditions which persisted in the bakeries from the 1840s until World War 2, the entrenched anti-Semitism from both the establishment and sometimes from within the labour movement itself, the ups and downs of the pioneer co-operative bakeries, and the first attempts to unite production and distribution of a staple (bread) through the introduction of a union label ("Union Bread for Union Workers").

The book marks the union's association over the years with many famous names - John Burns, Keir Hardie, Rudolf Rocker, Charlotte Despard, Eleanor Marx. It also brings to light new material on the great strike of 1913 - one of the longest and bitterest in the history of this country - and follows the union into the years after World War 2 when it was the only Jewish trade union in existence outside Israel.

# Mementoes of Tower Hamlets



We are always looking at ways of adding to the ELHS web site and as inveterate collectors of all things East End we will attempt to show a range of items relating to the history of Tower Hamlets (because that is what we have mostly and it makes a better acronym than MOH for Memories of Hackney). The aim is to have interesting images and a little historical background. We have started with a few items from our "Featured Image" page which, to be honest, we haven't regularly updated and will add items as we see them. Book covers, theatre programs, absolutely anything that tells a (short) story. Some examples below, note they will be in colour on the web site! If you have anything you think could go on the web site let us know, we will give you a credit. Philip & Harold



Left to right, The Peoples Empire (Bow) theatre programme 1898, London City Mission story 1948, School attendance card, 1900, from Single Street, now under Mile End Park.