

## BOW CHURCH

1311 - 2011

1941 - 2011

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## Editorial Note:

At the Annual General Meeting of the East London History Society, which took place in October, the following Committee members were elected:

Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, Harold Mernick, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborne, Sigrid Werner 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@memicks.com](mailto:phil@memicks.com). Check out the History Society's website at [www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk](http://www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk).

We are always looking for articles on East End history, reminiscences, and family histories. We make every effort to publish suitable material, but please note that items emailed to us will get priority! Items of interest, and any queries can be emailed to Philip Mernick, at the email address above.

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.



## Cover picture

This year Bow Church celebrates two anniversaries, although celebration is hardly the correct term for the more recent. In 1311 a petition by local residents for a chapel to be built at Bow rather than having to hazard muddy roads to get to the parish church of Stepney, St Dunstons, was granted. On November 17<sup>th</sup> 1311, Bishop Ralph Baldock of London signed a licence for "unam Capellam in vico Regio vocato Stratford". What this chapel looked like is unknown but its successors are still on the same site in "the middle of The King's Highway" after 700 years<sup>1</sup>.

On the night of May 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> 1941, under the light of a full moon, the church was bombed. The upper section of the tower was destroyed together with most of its bells and the medieval font badly damaged. Temporary repairs enabled the church to reopen for services on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941; see invitation card posted on November 21<sup>st</sup> (page 8).

It was 1951 before the church was fully repaired and the contrast between the new brick upper section of the tower and the medieval stone of the lower section was a deliberate decision. Not for economic reasons (although in those days of rationing it may have been a consideration) but to highlight the renewal of both the church and the district as a whole.

1951 was also, of course, the year of the Festival of Britain, with the rebuilt area around Chrisp Street being a prominent feature.

<sup>1</sup>*Seven Parishioners of Stratford Bow, Michael Peet, 2011*

**East London History Society  
Programme 2012**

**Thurs. 12<sup>th</sup> January**  
**How Britain dug for victory in the  
2nd World War**

Speaker - Dan Smith.

**Thurs. 16<sup>th</sup> February**  
**The reconstruction of the Stepney  
area in the post 2nd World war  
period**

Speaker - Samantha L Bird

**Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> March**  
**Stepney Green since the Great Fire**

Speaker - Isobel Watson

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> April**  
**Excavations of King John's Tower  
and Court - Worcester House a late  
medieval? and Tudor mansion at  
Stepney Green**

Speaker - Dave Sankey

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May**  
**East End film night**

Introduced by Ray Newton and John  
Tarby

The lectures are usually 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 No. 25 and 205.

*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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## **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

If our records show that you haven't yet paid your subscription for 2011-12 you will find a reminder form in this newsletter. If there is no enclosure then your subscription is up to date.

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## **Whitechapel 1600-1800**

Our latest publication is now available and we are so proud of it that we are sending you a flyer and putting it on the back cover! Being serious, however, you will find that Derek Morris has continued his researches proving that East London and Whitechapel in particular, was not the squalid poverty stricken and crime ridden place it is commonly labelled. This book features the rich and the poor, the churches and chapels, criminals and merchants, nurseries, sugar refiners, brewers and much more.

£12.60 + £3.50 UK postage

## TOWER HAMLETS CEMETERY PARK A Dickens Connection

With the 200<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Charles Dickens coming up on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2012, Diane Kendall has found a link between the celebrated Victorian novelist and Tower Hamlets Cemetery!

On the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1890, the East London Observer reported on the funeral of a Chinese man from Cornwall Street, Ratcliff, by the name of Ah Sing, whose sole claim to fame appeared to be that he was once visited by Charles Dickens, and subsequently immortalised in the novel 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood'.

Setting aside all the hyperbole and flowery prose of the journalist, who probably had scant news to report that day, the funeral of Ah Sing attracted very little outside attention. It was a very simple affair, attended by just five mourners, including his wife, Mrs Johnstone, a neighbour and her three daughters, and he was interred in a public grave. He was accorded a Church of England burial, as he had converted to Christianity, and his neighbours confirmed that he read his Bible frequently.

According to this report, Ah Sing was always very proud to relate that his den had been visited by the great novelist, a fact confirmed by his wife.

Ah Sing and his wife lived at New Court, Victoria Street, just to the east of St George's in the East churchyard. The 1871 census shows a John Johnstone, aged 45, baker, born in Amoy, China, and his wife Hannah Johnstone, aged 39, tailoress, born in Bath, Somerset, both living at No. 6.

A further search found the following entry in Dickens' Dictionary of London 1879, an

unconventional handbook, under the heading **Opium Smoking Dens:**

*The best known of these justly named 'dens' is that of one Johnstone, who lives in a garret off Ratcliff highway, and for a consideration allows visitors to smoke a pipe which has been used by many crowned heads in common with poor Chinese sailors who seek their native pleasure in Johnstone's garret. This is the place referred to in "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" (see also Ratcliffe-Highway). A similar establishment of a slightly superior – or it might be more correct to say a shade less nauseating – class is that of Johnny Chang at the London and St Katharine Coffee-house in the Highway itself.*

The handbook is by a Charles Dickens, son of the famous author. So it would seem that John Johnstone and Ah Sing were one and the same person.

If you would like to join Doreen and Diane, and other volunteers of the East London History Society in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, on the second Sunday of every month, recording memorials off gravestones, you would be most welcome, but be warned – it can become addictive! The thrill of discovering another fascinating nugget of information and uncovering yet another facet of history hidden within the walls of the cemetery keeps our members working away.

## NOTES AND NEWS

### Open City Weekend

On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> September, Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park held a Victorian Celebration as part of London's Open City Weekend. Various themed events were held throughout the day, with children and adults alike dressed in Victorian costumes, walks around the cemetery, and a celebratory cake to mark the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September saw the start of the Poplar Festival, with a community parade through the streets, as Poplar celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lansbury Estate and its Festival of Britain heritage. Bartlett Park was the main venue, with an area with a fifties theme, history walks, music and much more.

Cable Street celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street, with special events at Wilton's Music Hall, street theatre, music and food. Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October saw the local community celebrating the event. The next day hundreds of people joined in an anti-fascist march and rally led by 96 year old Mr Levitas. Among the participants was 106 year old Hetty Bower, reliving her part of that memorable event. The placards 'They Did Not Pass' summed it all up.

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### Update on the Former Jewish Maternity Home , also known as Mother Levy's

The previous issue of ELHS Newsletter gave details of Tom Ridge's campaign to save some elements of the former Jewish Maternity Home in Underwood Street from obliteration by Peabody Trust. His campaign continues and much more information than we can put into this Newsletter can be found on the East Waterways Group's web site at <http://residents-first.co.uk/?s=underwood>. Here you will find the series of newsletters covering this on-going campaign. However to summarise the situation Peabody notified Tower Hamlets Council of their intention to demolish the entire site in advance of Council approval at an October meeting (a perfectly legal procedure). However their contractors jumped the gun and started demolition before Tower Hamlets had given permission. They had removed the roof and part of the walls of one of the two cottages Tom is trying to preserve before they were stopped. The campaign's petition is due to be presented to a full meeting of Tower Hamlets Council on

November 29<sup>th</sup>. Peabody would appear to have been taken aback by the strength of the protest and there is hope that they may soften their previously intransigent insistence on total demolition. The campaigners are not blocking much needed local housing, just requesting the retention of two cottages to reflect the important part Alice Model and the Jewish Maternity Hospital played in the life of the area. There are still many people alive who feel a connection with "Mother Levy's", including myself, being born during the war at the Bearsted Memorial Hospital (Hampton) following the closure of the Underwood Street premises in 1939.

**Philip Mernick**

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**“What do you do with four tons of Tudor bricks?”** Crossrail had this unusual problem once Museum of London Archaeology, acting on their behalf had finished their excavation work at the site of the former Worcester House in Stepney Green.

Built for Henry the First Marquis of Worcester in about 1597, it will be the subject of David Sankey's talk to ELHS in April. The site had to be cleared after examination and Crossrail has donated the bricks to English Heritage for restoration projects around the UK.

*Information from Crossrail Bulletin 24 (November 2011) and image courtesy of Crossrail.*



### **Research Volunteers Needed to Investigate the History and Development of "High Street 2012"**

**The Building Exploratory** is offering a fantastic research training and development opportunity for new volunteers as part of our new Peoples Panorama Project.

The Peoples Panorama Project aims to work with a group of committed volunteers to discover the history and hidden stories of the buildings that comprise High Street 2012 – the 6km road that links the City of London to Stratford and the Olympic Park, and which comprises Whitechapel Road, Mile End Road and Bow Road.

Volunteers will use resources available at the Building Exploratory, at Tower Hamlets Archives and on-line resources, as well as their experiences of visiting 'High Street 2012' to compile a detailed history of the development of this important high street, from its Roman origins to the present day. This research will be combined with a photographic panorama of the entire high street, to form a major online resource. Alongside this resource, we will develop and deliver an ambitious education programme, which we are also seeking volunteers for.

Volunteers will receive comprehensive training in the skills they need to undertake their tasks, as well as full support and regular meetings from the Building Exploratory's learning team.

If you would like more details about the project send an email to:  
<mailto:projects@buildingexploratory.org.uk>

Lizzie Edwards

Projects Co-ordinator

**The Building Exploratory**

8 Orsman Road

London N1 5QJ

020 7729 2023

[www.buildingexploratory.org.uk](http://www.buildingexploratory.org.uk)

## HACKNEY HOARD

The discovery of a hoard of coins often makes the headlines but "The Hackney Hoard" was something different. Many hoards of Roman and medieval coins have been found over the centuries, some of them enormous. The Frome Hoard of 2010 contained more than 52,000 Roman coins, mostly of the third century AD. Usually buried in the ground, although sometimes hidden within buildings, sometimes as a donation to the gods but more often to preserve wealth during dangerous times, it was not always recovered. Samuel Pepys buried his gold in his father-in-law's back garden during the 1667 Great Fire of London and had great problems finding it again. Anyway, back to The Hackney Hoard. In 2007, during excavations for a pond in the back garden of what was 126 Bethune Road, Hackney, a glass jar was found containing 80 gold "Double Eagles", dating between 1854 and 1913.

"Double Eagle" is the colloquial term for a 20 dollar coin of the United States of America. Being the equivalent of 4 British gold sovereigns they are substantial coins and contain just under an ounce of pure gold. Not the sort of coin one might expect to find in a Hackney back garden, there were suggestions that it might have been the result of an old bullion or bank robbery. The hoard was the subject of a formal Treasure enquiry and some good detective work established the true, and remarkable facts.

The coins had been brought from Germany by German Jewish banker Martin Sulzbacher when he had to flee the Nazis in 1938, shortly before "Kristallnacht". He joined the rest of his family who had set up home in Hackney and deposited his coins in a City deposit box. At the outbreak of war he was interned as an enemy alien and sent to Australia after surviving the disastrous sinking of the *Arandora Star* (torpedoed by a U-Boat, with loss of more than 800 lives, many of them German or Italian). His wife and children were interned on The Isle of Man while his parents

and brother (a naturalised British citizen) remained in Hackney.

Eventually Martin and his family were released but when they got back to London they found that the bank vault was empty. His brother had withdrawn all of the coins but he and the rest of the family had been killed in 1940 when the house in Hackney had been hit by a bomb.

The gold was thought lost until 1952, when a jar of gold coins was found during the clearance of the rubble from the Bethune Street house. The suspicion that more had been hidden nearby was confirmed in 2007. Martin died in 1981 but his son, Max, was found to be living in Israel and the hoard was declared to be his property. One coin has been donated to Hackney Museum, two will be retained by the family and the balance, 77 coins, will be auctioned by the London firm of Morton & Eden on the 29<sup>th</sup> November.

The £4 bullion value of a, between the wars, "Double Eagle" is now approximately £1,100 and it will be interesting to see if the "Hackney Hoard" label will add even more.

**Philip Mernick**



The 'Hackney Hoard'  
Image courtesy of British Museum

## Bishop of London joins Bow Church in Celebrating 700 Year History

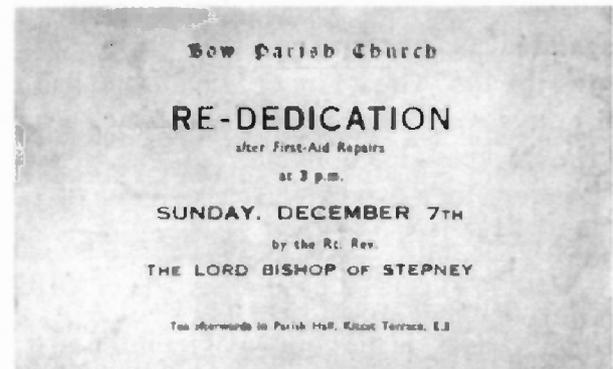
On 18<sup>th</sup> November 2011 the Bishop of London, Dr Richard Chartres joined the congregation and local community at St Mary & Holy Trinity Church, known as 'Bow Church', to mark its historic anniversary. The Bishop joined the service of celebration 700 years to the day after the then Bishop of London, Bishop Ralph Baldock, signed a licence establishing a church on the site in 1311. Following the service, the Bishop dedicated a memorial tile in the chancel of the church that records the 700 years of Christian worship on the site.

The service is the culmination of a series of events marking the anniversary, including a pageant based on the history of the church and the first major refurbishment of the building for more than 60 years. The occasion was especially poignant as it comes after the passing of the Church's former Rector, Michael Peet, who served the local community for 22 years and authored a book of local history centred on the church.

As well as marking the history of St Mary & Holy Trinity, the day was a celebration of 700 years of Christian worship in the area, with neighbouring Roman Catholic and Methodist parishes and their priests participating in the service. Local churchgoers were given an opportunity to share their recollections of being a Christian in Bow. The service included music with contributions from local choir, Bow Singers, and orchestra, Docklands Sinfonia.

The iconic Bow Church, which has leant its name to the nearby bus terminal and Docklands Light Railway station, has a vibrant history. George Lansbury, MP for Poplar and 1930s Leader of the Labour Party, was a long-term member of the congregation and churchwarden. A new memorial in the church

was dedicated to his memory in May this year and one of his great-grandchildren joined the anniversary service. The present church building dates back in parts to 1490 and, in 1899, was the first restoration project of C.R. Ashbee and the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings, an organisation founded by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to further the sensitive renovation of ancient buildings. Ashbee described Bow Church as: 'an important building saved from destruction'.



Invitation card (posted 21/11/1941) for the re-dedication service to be held at Bow Church, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 after "First-Aid Repairs". Postage cost, then, was 1d = 0.5p!

Eve Farrow (Chalfont St Giles) wrote: I was so sad to hear of the death of Jennifer Worth, she was a gifted & caring person. I have her trilogy, *Call the Midwife* which I enjoyed reading. How cruel & uncaring the local authority was about the way they treated the old folk they displaced nor cared where they went. I had an old aunt who suffered the same fate as J.W's old friend.

It's a small world isn't it! Some years ago I met by chance a lady living in a road near me who came from Bow. We went to the same school, Fairfield Rd, so now & again we meet, drink coffee & remember when we were young. Thank you for the Newsletter. I enjoy reading it & keeping in touch.

## EAST END PHOTOGRAPHERS No 11 - Henry Shearman

Henry William Shearman (1837 - 1903) launched his first studio in the East End as the first wave of *carte de visite* mania swept the rather sedate world of photography. Queen's Terrace, later absorbed into Commercial Road, proved an outstanding success as a studio location and after only 4 years was succeeded by the nearby Warkworth Terrace, and in 1867 by the most successful of all, in Regent's Terrace, which Shearman ran for seven years. As an East Ender, born in Spitalfields on June 1 1837, and brought up in Whitechapel and Poplar, where he spent his early years as an artist, Shearman represented the archetypal image of 'local boy makes good'.

In common with all photographic studios of this period, Shearman's large front shop window was filled both with a selection of his own work, but also with cartes of the great and good. The usual arrangement included the Queen in the centre display, surrounded by a phalanx of cabinet ministers and politicians; beyond them, lawyers, generals, clergymen, successful businessmen, and celebrities of the day. In an outer ring, the notorieties - writers, artists, actresses (i.e. pin-ups), and criminals, especially murderers. Finally, bringing up the outer edges, a few specimens of the local 'Arries and 'Arriets. It all seems extremely democratic - but this was not necessarily the way it was received at the time. For many, these displays, depending on one's political persuasions, manifested either a levelling up, or a dumbing down of the fairly rigid, class-ridden society. In other words, local nobodies were being elevated to a level in society for which they were not intended, and to which it was wholly inappropriate that they should aspire.

It was the era of Mrs Cecil Alexander's well-known hymn 'All things bright and beautiful', first published in 1875, with its now rarely sung third verse :

'The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, God made them high and lowly, And ordered their estate'. And over and above these considerations was the sheer vanity and vulgarity of these displays - as the Reader magazine commented in an editorial of September 1864 : These photographic likenesses bring out all that is vulgar and pretentious in our age - officers and civilians attitudinising in their respective uniforms, and, worse still, clergymen with the Bible in their hands, in their preaching attitudes ... ladies in moire antique and babies in long clothes - all bidding for public notice. There may be, and we believe there is, an amiable motive at the bottom of it all; but surely the great majority of these good people might forbid the public exhibition of their beauty or ugliness... The exhibition of their photographic likenesses in every shop -window is perhaps one of the penalties imposed upon public characters ; but ordinary individuals are not called upon to exhibit their portraits in a photographic exhibition, unless there is really some remarkable improvement in the process by which they are gibbeted for public display".



Cartes de visite photographs with differing addresses

In May 1874, Shearman made the move from Commercial Road to the Mile End Road, and his largest and most lavish studio. But times had changed ; the *carte de visite* mania had waned by the end of the 1860s, and its successor, the cabinet size photograph had never enjoyed the same popularity. Shearman quickly found that he had overreached himself, and within two months of opening in Mile End Road, found himself bankrupt. It

must have been a bitter blow, made harder by the illness of his wife, Sarah Pullen, the daughter of a Poplar trader from Grundy Street. Shearman in fact rescued the business after a few months' hiatus, but moved his operations a few yards down the road, to no. 325, at the start of 1877, shortly after his wife's death. This fifth and final studio only lasted some 18 months, and in the summer of 1878, Henry Shearman closed the studio down for ever. It would seem likely that he had enjoyed a good run of business over his 17 years as a working photographer, despite the occasional drawbacks and he retired, initially to West Ham, and later to Leytonstone, still continuing to act in an advisory capacity almost up to his death at his Leytonstone home on Boxing Day, 1903.



Some examples of Shearman's work 1860s and 1870s

Henry Shearman had an elder brother, James, who briefly practised as a photographer in the early 1860s, at the superb address of 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> John Street, Limehouse. Most of his career, however, seems to have been spent as a labourer. Like Sarah Shearman, James died prematurely in 1873. Henry Shearman, who was himself one of 7 children, had twelve children of his own, 2 of whom, Arthur and William, worked with their father in the photographic business. Large families clearly ran in the Shearman family - William Shearman, who suffered the odd periods of unemployment, had 13 children himself. It has to be added that not all of the various extended families survived; after the Second World War, the surviving members of Henry Shearman's family moved down to Brighton,

where the last of the family, Louise Amelia, died in 1975, only a few weeks short of her 100th birthday.

For the less overtly cynical connoisseur of shop window displays by Victorian photographers, the following editorial from *Photographic News* in October 1875 seems appropriate: What infinite charm the gay-loving eye appears to gain in the contemplation of those photographs of pretty women which abound in the windows of every shop in the city which can produce any possible or impossible reason for having them there ... which mix up, in such delicious confusion, the pictures of the spiritual and the temporal that hosts of innocent crowds pause at its windows, and gaze enraptured on the coloured realisation of their best fancied actress.

The other side of this admittedly rather idyllic portrait, and one probably nearer to the type of display on view at Shearman, is mentioned by the *British Journal of Photography* in 1864: The amiable features of the murderer ... will go down to posterity along with the Bishop of Oxford, the Prince of Wales, Cardinal Wiseman and the other celebrities of the day, whose portraits are so winning and so easily obtained. Immortality, it would seem, is becoming tolerably cheap, and indeed is within the reach of any ambitious and resolute inmate of the dens of Whitechapel. ... The gaolers and turnkeys may all swear to the striking nature of the likeness. But few honest men will buy it; or if they do, they will be men of feeble powers of reasoning.

A cynical lot, those mid-Victorians.

David Webb

## "IT'S COMING IN TOMORROW"

**Hackney Wick from the 'Thirties', compiled  
by Roy Hayes.**

In theatrical terms, that heading would be regarded as a 'catch-phrase' which was certainly used frequently by the proprietor of the shop at the corner of Berkshire Road and Eastway (formerly Gainsborough Road), in Hackney Wick. Although the descriptive term was not used much in those days, it was our 'corner-shop', run by Bill Clark and his wife, where one could obtain most of the daily necessities - assuming they were in stock. Small shops such as theirs, which often supplied 'on credit' could not be expected to carry large quantities of any particular item, hence "It's coming in tomorrow!". The list ran from groceries, ie. flour, sugar, margarine, to firewood and paraffin, and I was fascinated by the enamel dish of salmon and shrimp paste which lurked, uncovered, apart from its layer of fat, on the counter, to be dispensed in one's own saucer or dish or, failing that, in a 'twist' of white greaseproof paper. The firewood was stacked in front of the counter at a suitable height for 'the lady from round the corner' to sit and chat.

The only other shops in that particular part of the Wick were Hillyard's, on the opposite corner of Berkshire Road from Clark's, and Baker's, at the top corner of Plover Street. Hillyard's was a mixture of tea-room and ice-cream/sweets and tobacco, catering mainly for local workers with teas and snacks. The basement of Baker's Dining Rooms, always with steamy windows, offered the full, two-course, midday dinner, providing the sustenance for the long working day when no factory canteens were available.

Those three establishments were on the very edge of the area; 'Wick' can mean village, or hamlet, or district, and any of them would suit

Hackney Wick, probably village being the most appropriate. The Wick, part of the E.9. (Homerton) Postal District, was almost entirely self sufficient, insofar as main services were concerned, and, like all good villages, the heart consisted of the Pub' and the Church.

The eastern boundary was formed naturally by the Lea Navigation Canal, known locally as the Cut, which took out the bend of the River Lea from Lea Bridge to Old Ford, although some suggest Waterden Road as the boundary. The northern boundary was Gainsborough Road, re-named Eastway in the mid-1930s. Remaining borders were vaguer but included part of Cadogan Terrace down to Wallis Road, thence on to Carpenters Road on the border with Stratford. Those living on the western fringe sometimes preferred to say they lived in South Hackney but everybody knew whether or not they came from the Wick.

It was a densely populated area, particularly prior to WW2, when it took quite a hammering, and contained a number of large manufacturing companies employing local people. Names that come to mind include Ellis, the Timber Merchants; Wood Wool & Fibre, makers of stuffing for chairs, beds, etc.; and Lloyd Loom & Lusty, who made the well known wicker furniture, which then was mainly for bedrooms rather than patios and conservatories. Ingrams Rubber Company (the Rubber); Barringer, Spice Grinders; as well as County Perfumery, makers of Brylcreem, and Clarnico, the sweet factory were also there together with many smaller workshops in Engineering, Ropeworks and Furniture. The Atlas Perforated Paper Company, known as the Perf., and makers of Bronco toilet paper, was probably the largest single employer and we must not forget Carless, Capel & Leonard, petrol and oils, the potential bomb in our midst which, luckily, never materialised. Most had access to the canal, providing transport for raw materials and finished goods.

The pub., in the centre of the village, was the **Queen Victoria**, at the corner of Gainsborough Road and Wick Road, and stood firm when a large section of Gainsborough Road, containing several businesses including the all important Pawnbrokers and Mudd's, the Newsagents, was completely wiped out. For the Pawnbrokers it might have been some form of divine retribution as they had only just started a small car showroom, giving 'Wickites' ideas above their station.



The Church, opposite the Victoria, was correctly known as the Church of St. Mary of Eton, being designed by George Frederick Bodley and erected in 1890/92, with the tower, by Cecil Hare, added in 1912. With the destruction of St. Augustine's Church, St. Mary's now carries the full title of St. Mary of Eton with St. Augustine. The mission, founded in 1880 by Eton College, lasted until 1965 and the College still provides Patronage.

Along the stretch of Eastway, between the canal and the Church, the Public Baths and Washhouse were opened during a visit from King George VI in the late 1930s and there was an establishment, known as the Casual Ward, where the Gentlemen of the Road queued from mid-afternoon to obtain a bed for the night. The site later housed one of the early care homes, which, for its time, was far better than many of the first residents had ever experienced.

Separated from those buildings by the Red Path, a pedestrian way which was ideal for the noisy, ball-bearing wheeled, scooters popular in my time, is the bus terminus (not a bus garage). Buses numbered 6 and 30 turned there; the 6 serving the route from Hackney Wick to Kensal Rise, via Bishopsgate and the City, and the 30 to Putney, both through much of central London. The other bus, passing along Eastway, was the single-decker No.236, Leyton to Finsbury Park/Stroud Green, and along the road, via Wick Road and Cadogan Terrace, was another single-decker route, No.208, Clapton Pond to Bromley-by-Bow. The coal yard, with railway sidings, was between the bus terminus and the church. Several local coal merchants stocked up at the sidings, one name coming to mind being Charlie Pollington, who offered 'Nuts' or 'Best'- none of the fancy smokeless fuels then.

Around the area of the Victoria and the church there were shops for most basic commodities: without going into too much detail I recollect two greengrocers, two butchers, a bakers, three fish shops, three newsagents, a post office, corn chandlers, two for grocery and provisions, two cafés, barbers, haberdashers, second-hand clothes, and so it goes on.

One of the fish shops was Larby's, who had their own smoke house producing kippers, bloaters and smoked haddocks for which, during the war, the women queued for the rationed items to supplement the household's meagre allowance. Later, at the corner of Gainsborough Square, a public convenience was erected and, eventually we had a bank branch, used mainly by the businesses. After the war, where the pawnbrokers and several others had been wiped out, some prefabricated houses were built and, next to the pub, was a temporary branch of the Public Library. Before the war the nearest Library branch was in Brooksbys Walk, Homerton.

Further along Wick Road, under the Broad Street Line railway arch, there were more

small businesses - second-hand footwear (football boots a speciality) and Munn's Cycle Repairs and accumulator re-charging, and another pub., the **White Lion**. There were two more pubs. in the area, the **Elephant and Castle** and the **Tiger**. Opposite the White Lion was a farrier, getting plenty of pre-war trade from the businesses that still relied on four-legged transport.

On the topic of horses, I recall a pair of chain-horses being kept at the lower level of the Gainsborough Road bridge over the canal which provided extra power for horse and cart combinations needing help up the slope when carrying heavy loads. Beyond the 'Elephant' was another shopping area although the stretch between the pub. and Homer Road was devastated; the 'Elephant', however, survived.

A marvellous toy-shop, run by a French lady, disappeared completely, never to be replaced. Among those that were able to re-open, sometimes in different premises, was Seaman and Thorp, gents' outfitters; Feinberg, radio, records and electrical items; a dairy; another grocers; a post office; butchers, ladies hairdresser; two undertakers and, best of all, Fanny Green's Fish and Chip shop. The latter was run single-handed by Mrs. Green, using coal fired pans, from whom most youngsters received one or two complimentary chips whilst waiting for their mothers to be served. Two undertakers might seem a lot for a comparatively small area but they both seemed to be busy. Coffins were 'made to measure' from solid wood before ready-made chipboard came along, and the workshop part of the premises was easily seen by passers-by as the undertaker worked away in full view, often well into the evening.

In addition to Eton Mission, there were other churches; the Wesleyan Methodists were in Chapman Road and there were several small chapels, including Bethany, and its Medical Mission, in Victoria Park Road. By 1932 all of the small places with various Methodist

persuasion were combined into one Methodist Church.

The Catholic Church, with its own school, was in Sydney (later Kenworthy) Road, next to the Tiger and at the corner of Ballance Road. When St. Augustine's, which stood in Victoria Park just opposite Homer Road, was destroyed its Hall, and a small piece of land, remained in Cadogan Terrace, eventually becoming the Headquarters of Victoria Park Harriers as well as providing accommodation for one of the club's long serving officials, George Hemsworth, who also helped to develop the London Fire Brigade Athletic Club.

Other public houses included the **Lord Napier**, at the bottom of Berkshire Road; the **Perseverance**, in Wallis Road; the **Morpeth**, at the corner of Cadogan Terrace and Wallis Road, and the cosy **Railway Tavern**, known locally as the Rabbit Hutch or, merely, the 'Rabbit', which consisted of one small bar next to Victoria Park Station on the Broad Street line. The station closed in 1939 but the 'Rabbit' lived on. The railway line has re-opened to passenger traffic in recent years, with a Hackney Wick Station.

Education was not overlooked and Hackney Wick had two good L.C.C. schools. Berkshire Road catered for eleven to fourteen year-olds, the minimum leaving age, and the Gainsborough Road School, which, by 1939 was being described as Gainsborough L.C.C. School, Eastway, reflecting the the change of name for the road. That particular school had originally been erected, in the nineteenth century, for the School Board for London but, in 1904, the Board was abolished and the L.C.C., established by the Local Government Act of 1888, became education authority for the whole of London (although different from what we now know as Greater London). The standard of literacy was high and very few, whatever their eventual aims, left school without a good grounding in the basics of reading and writing plus the ability to

undertake simple arithmetic without a calculator.

With the emergency measures of 1939 many Hackney schoolchildren were evacuated, most from the area going to Northampton, and both Berkshire Road and Gainsborough Road Schools were closed or used for civil defence purposes.

I had already been left to live with an aunt and uncle in Ashford, Kent, but I was somewhat relieved when illness took me back to Hackney Wick although the Blitz was soon upon us and I had no school whatsoever. Other former evacuees drifted back, for a variety of reasons, and soon, late in 1940, word was about that the Misses, Coward, from Gainsborough Road School, were back and had obtained the use of two classrooms in the previously mentioned Catholic School, in Sydney Road, although coping with a broad age range. Finally, some classrooms were re-opened at Berkshire Road, and, for a few more months, my own education took off again until it resumed, away from the Wick, in 1941. Many of us, though, both boys and girls, had gone without proper schooling for close on two years.

Leisure time for the younger people in the Wick, particularly the boys, was a strong point. Eton Mission had both Boys' and Men's Clubs from its early days but, before the first world war, the new boys' club was formed, as Eton Manor, using premises at the corner of Daintry Street and Gainsborough Road prior to moving into a purpose built club house, in Riseholme Street, in 1913. Local boys between fourteen and sixteen were eligible for membership and, at eighteen, progressed to the Old Boys' Club. Thus raw sporting talent was developed from within, producing champions in a wide variety of sports. None were imported as ready-made champions.

This look back at Hackney Wick is almost entirely from memory and I take full responsibility for any errors, with apologies for any omissions of which I am sure there are

plenty. I have written earlier about the Bath House and the Speedway in greater detail and this latest offering contains brief references to many other places and people worthy of more attention.

*(If you have any comments or opinions of the above article, or disagree with any of Roy's views, he would be delighted to hear from you. Please email Philip Mernick, at [phil@mernicks.com](mailto:phil@mernicks.com) and he will forward your comments to Roy.)*



Just down the road from St Mary of Eton Church was A.F. Suter & Co.'s Victory Works at 83/84 Eastway. They manufactured shellac there from 1927. The site is now the terminus of the number 30 bus.

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**STOP PRESS: MOTHER LEVY'S** (page 5)  
Information received from Tom Ridge  
November 30th

A unanimous vote by Councillors at last night's Full Council Meeting called on the Mayor of Tower Hamlets to urgently negotiate with Peabody Housing. Also, for Peabody Housing to reconsider their designs to spare the cottages. The motion was proposed by Councillor Judith Gardiner (Labour) and seconded by Councillor Helal Uddin (Labour). The motion noted that Peabody has a duty to optimise the amount of housing they provide but also to protect the Borough's heritage. Councillor Peter Golds (Conservative) spoke in support on behalf of his group.

## CHRISTMAS FAYRE

My dad, John Donovan, had a regular job working for a timber company at Mile End. They made packing cases for various companies and as a charge-hand he was considered to be in lower management. One of the companies' customers was a wholesale meat and poulterer in Leadenhall market from whom each Christmas the company purchased a number of Turkeys along with Christmas plum puddings that were then given to the staff as part of their Christmas box.

As a charge-hand, Dad was entitled to this 'perk' enhanced with a rather fat pay packet. The Turkey came 'undressed' and weighed anything from 15 pounds upwards. The Christmas pudding was around 3 to 4 pounds in a china basin wrapped in muslin cloth that was also the carrying handle. All this was associated with a good deal of consumed drink.

At this particular time we lived in a first floor flat in Bromley-by-Bow named Twelve Trees House and from the front room window you could see who ever was coming around the corner. It was at this window that Mum would position me every Christmas Eve to watch out for Dad, and when I saw him I had to rush down, and because he was always the worse for drink, assist him in climbing the stairs. When seen, I would give a shout of "here he is" and belt down the stairs and get to him just as he was about to cross the road. With a slurred "Hello my Son" and looking really tipsy he would consider himself in safe hands.

How he ever managed to get home I'll never know, for he would have to have boarded a tram from his works (I guess someone must have put him on it with instructions to the conductor to put him off at Bow Bridge) and then walk the whole length of St: Leonard's Street to get to Twelvetrees, but in his staggering way, he managed it.

This particular incident comes to mind. It was the one time I got to him just too late and before I could grab the pudding, he dropped it. It virtually exploded---BANG. Never mind, picked it up still wrapped in it's cloth and holding Dad with one hand and the pudding in the other, we would manage to negotiate the stairs and once through the front door, he was no more trouble. When drunk, Dad wasn't troublesome. He would flop out on the settee and usually sleep it off - but he always had his wits about him. I remember once Mum tried to discover how much money he had in his back pocket, so giving him time to get into a deep slumber she slipped her hand beneath him only for him to awake snorting for her to get away.

As for the pudding. The basin had smashed into smithereens and Mum and I spent hours removing the splinters of china that had impregnated the pudding---but we managed it

As for the Turkey - it was huge; don't think they came any bigger. It was only partially plucked and the 'inners' head and neck were still intact, so we would have to set about cleaning it. Remember, this was our Christmas dinner for next day and it yet had to be cooked. We would start by completing the feather plucking taking out any quills that had been over looked and then singe the hairs from the surface with a lighted taper. Off would come the head, the neck being kept for stock. One leg would then be tied with string formed in a loop that would be draped over the kitchen door for us to hang on to in our endeavours to remove the leg sinews - having done one, then the other. Then it was inside to remove the 'inners' taking care not to rupture the Gall other wise the meat became bitter. Mum would then truss it up and present it to the oven that would just about hold its size.

I have to say that there wasn't many working class families had Turkey at Christmas, Chicken perhaps but this too was rare unless you had raised one in the backyard just for the Christmas. After many, many meals of Turkey

in many, many forms (there were 7 of us in the family) it was customary for me to take the carcass with considerable meat left on it over to one of Mum's 'poor' relations and this would provide a couple of additional meals.

This annual ritual went on for as long as Dad worked for the company. He died in 1948.

**George Donovan**

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## A Request

From Eddie Chambers,  
[jenedv@ntlworld.com](mailto:jenedv@ntlworld.com)

I have been on my family history quest for several years now but have encountered a number of 'dead' trails and am turning to the ELHS and its membership to see if anyone out there can help in any way.

I am seeking information of any kind, of any date that relates or has anything to do with a block of flats by the name of College Buildings, in Wentworth Street, Stepney. These flats were immediately adjacent to Toynbee Hall in Commercial Street in the part of Wentworth Street east of Commercial Street, as opposed to the part west of that street, which is better known possibly as part of Petticoat Lane.

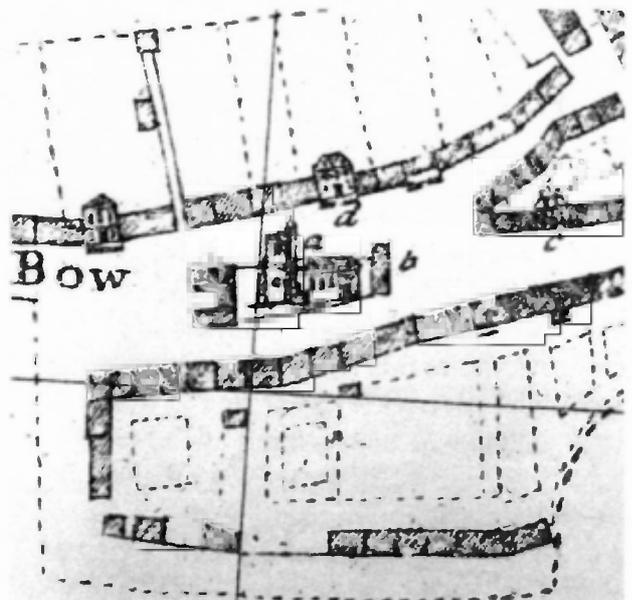
My grandparents were the Caretakers of College Buildings from around 1912 until my grandmother retired in 1946, my grandfather having been killed when the flats fell foul of two German bombs, on the night of 21st. October 1940.

I was the only other person in the kitchen with my grandfather that night, when one of the bombs fell in the courtyard outside the kitchen window but escaped with only slight injuries. I would be so grateful if anyone knows ANYTHING about my grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. Richard and Bessie Ayres, their children or anything at all about the ownership of the

flats etc. etc - maybe ex residents? Copies of any photos would be a massive bonus!

I was only 11 years old when my grandmother retired but some names of residents who lived there I can still remember. Mr. & Mrs. Irwin, Connie Doyland, Julie Abrahams (also injured in the bombing) Abby Levy and the very well known in East End circles, Edith Ramsey etc.

I am told, at the Tower Hamlets Local History Library, that all the wartime records of the borough of Stepney were destroyed - Fire, Rescue and Demolition services etc. So, there you are. If you could solicit any info or personal recollections from any members, via the Newsletter or any of your contacts I would be most grateful.



Bow from Gascoyne's maps of Stepney 1702-04. Bow was then still a rural village and its market gardens lasted until the 1850s. The letters a to d are all buildings mentioned in William Ford's poem on pages 17 to 19.

- a) Bow Church
- b) Sir John Jolles' School
- c) Prisca. Coborn's School
- d) The Old Rectory

**Some Account of the Antiquities of Bow,  
Middlesex and its immediate  
neighbourhood.**

**By An Old Inhabitant of Bow (William  
Ford). Hunt & Co., Bow and Bromley  
Printing Office. 1853**

Bow, though a place of ancient date,  
Has been so much improved of late  
That little can be seen  
Remaining of the former day;  
For almost all is swept away  
That told what it had been.

Some few old relics yet remain;  
And I, the memory retain,  
Of others now no more.  
The first arched Bridge was built at Bow,  
It's History Antiquarians know:  
And now its loss deplore.

Across the Lea, there was a ford  
That caused disaster to Queen Maud:  
(She was first Henry's queen),  
Who called the churchmen to her aid,  
And very soon a bridge was made,  
The one that I have seen;

Ancient, or curious, all give way  
To the convenience of the day,  
And that has been removed;  
Now a new bridge, both Grand and wide,  
Stands in all Engineering Pride:  
To mock the one I loved. NOTE 1

The Church is not of modern day,  
Henry the seventh's time they say,  
And I suppose they're right:  
It stands in middle of the road;  
That all may see the House of God,  
And makes a pleasing sight.

It's masonry decayed by time:  
In the year Eighteen Twenty Nine  
Part of the Tower fell,  
But soon it was built up again:  
And may for many years remain  
If it is treated well.

This church for some time was defaced:  
The fine old oak roof was encased  
With lath and plaster o'er;  
But that has been removed away;  
For better taste now rules the day,  
To have all as before.

Now 'tis as pretty a little church,  
As you will find with all research,  
And looks of olden day;  
The gallery injures the effect:  
But use, we cannot quite neglect  
So that I fear must stay.

A School House stood at the East end;  
Removed the public to befriend  
To make more Church Yard space;  
Half timbered in the ancient style;  
King James the first then ruled this Isle  
So thus its age you trace,

Founded by Sir John Jolles Knight,  
By Will, he named sufficient quite  
To pay the Teachers then:  
But such great Changes now have come,  
That was enough - is now no sum  
To pay to clever men.

And the result is clearly shown,  
The School is now but little known,  
Though still 'tis carried on;  
The Founder meant that it should be  
A blessing to posterity:  
When he was dead and gone.

The funds he left are plenty now,  
Most ample salaries to allow  
To Teachers of the best:  
But he dictated just the pay,  
That was sufficient for his day,  
And That is made the Test. NOTE 2

This Parish yet - one school can boast,  
Well managed, and as good as most,  
The Coborn School I mean:  
Founded by one of pious fame,  
And Prisca Coborn was her name:  
Much honor'd has it been.

For a great blessing she has proved,  
 To many now, and more removed,  
 In easing want and woe;  
 And wisely educating youth,  
 In virtue's ways and holy truth,  
 As many hundreds know. NOTE 3

An Ancient Gateway may be seen,  
 But I know not what it has been;  
 'Tis by the Old Ford Road:  
 Now no antiquity you trace,  
 More than the Gateway at this place,  
 Where once some building stood. NOTE 4

Some houses standing now in Bow,  
 The badge of seventh Henry show;  
 But there is one fine house  
 In rich Elizabethan style,  
 The modern front may make you smile,  
 Or indignation rouse.

I knew it once almost complete,  
 And oftentimes have had a treat,  
 In viewing it well o'er;  
 It's Ceilings, Chimney pieces, all  
 So well preserved: they would recall  
 Just what it was before.

The front was little injured then,  
 But speculating trading men,  
 Who thought upon their gain,  
 (Not having antiquarian taste  
 All which they count as so much waste)  
 Would not let it remain. NOTE 5

The inside has been partly spared,  
 Blake House, has much the same fate shared:  
 And as we look around,  
 Some little specimens we see,  
 Of what the Village used to be,  
 But they do not abound.

Glanvil on witchcraft perhaps you know  
 Tells of a haunted house in Bow,  
 And tricks of witches there;  
 What games the furniture all played,  
 Driving a wild and hellish trade,  
 Whirling about in air. NOTE 6

Strange, such delusions should have been  
 Acting on minds and judgments keen,  
 But such we find the case;  
 And superstitions still are found,  
 In Rural places they abound,  
 Where ignorance we trace.

At Bromley (that's the village near)  
 Some ancient relics still appear,  
 You see the Abbey Wall,  
 The Church, which was of Norman date,  
 But very lately met its fate:  
 'Twas curious, but 'twas small.

Its mural monuments were grand:  
 They now in the new building stand  
 All carefully preserved,  
 The church is still in ancient style:  
 In Norman arch, chancel, and aisle;  
 Good taste has been observed. NOTE 7

Great James the first, that sapient King  
 Whose praises I delight to sing:  
 Ironically I mean,  
 For he was treachrous, mean, and base,  
 And seeking High and Mighty place:  
 Forsook his Mother Queen :-

But let him have been what he may,  
 He lived at Bromley in his day:  
 His hunting seat remains:  
 And some apartments there you'll find,  
 Most rich examples of their kind,  
 Will pay you for your pains.

Outside there's nothing now, to show  
 The house was built so long ago:  
 But inside you will see,  
 The pendant ceiling, pannell'd wall,  
 Rich chimnies, Royal Arms, and all  
 Just as it used to be. NOTE 8

Then all was country round,  
 The Forest near - then open ground  
 With Stebonheath close by,  
 And hunting was the favorite sport,  
 Of James the first, and all his court:  
 To make the hours fly.

In several houses at this place,  
 Marks of antiquity you trace;  
 But I sat down to write  
 More about Bow, than places near:  
 So I will close my story here:  
 And wish you all goodnight.

### Appendix.

Since printing what I knew of Bow,  
 I have learnt some facts I did not know  
 Which now I will reveal;  
 And beg forgiveness for my crime  
 In not acquiring them in time,  
 Which is a fault I feel.  
 Lysons, a man of much research, NOTE 9  
 Tells all the History of Bow Church  
 From very early day;  
 And thinks the Building now the same  
 Erected in third Edward's reign,  
 Upon the Public way.  
 But Architecture forms a test,  
 By which we find out ages best  
 For each age had its style.  
 And there is nothing now to show  
 About the present Church of Bow  
 That speaks so old a Pile.  
 But it proclaims the date I name -  
 With all respect for Lysons' fame,  
 I think he was misled;  
 And that the old Church past away  
 About the seventh Henry's day  
 And this was built instead.  
 Lysons describes the House that stood  
 Near the arched Gateway, Old Ford Road,  
 Once known as Gissing Place;  
 'Twas of importance in its time,  
 But ages back had past its prime;  
 And now there's not a trace,  
 And further Mr. Lysons saith  
 In reign of queen Elizabeth,  
 In tenements 'twas let:  
 To several of the poor of Bow  
 As parish documents did show,  
 And perhaps they may do yet.

(Contributed by Philip Mernick who copied  
 it from the original manuscript in Bancroft  
 Library and Archives)

William Ford was an architect with an office  
 in the City of London. Bancroft Road has an  
 1829 invoice from him for work planning the  
 extension of Bow Churchyard.

NOTE 1: Bow Bridge was rebuilt in 1838/9  
 and again in 1903 and 1967.

NOTE 2: Sir John Jolles School opened in  
 1701 in a room above the market hall just west  
 of Bow Church. In 1830 it was moved to Old  
 Ford Road and closed around 1890.

NOTE 3: Prisca' Coburn's school, opened ?  
 was also to the west of Bow Church but by  
 1848 was located in Fairfield Road. It moved  
 to Tredegar Square in 1873 and Bow Road in  
 1898.

NOTE 4: Called (for no apparently good  
 reason) King John's Palace

NOTE 5: Probably "The Old Rectory", later  
 Bow Workhouse. This may also have been  
 where Bow Porcelain was first developed,  
 before the "New Canton" factory was built on  
 the Essex side of the River Lea..

NOTE 6: Joseph Glanvil (1636-80)  
*Philosophical Considerations Touching the  
 Being of Witches and Witchcraft*, first  
 published 1666.

NOTE 7: Bromley Parish Church was rebuilt  
 in 1842 and destroyed in 1941.

NOTE 8: "The Old Palace". Demolished 1874  
 but the ceiling & panelling mentioned are now  
 on display in the Victoria & Albert Museum

NOTE 9: Daniel Lysons (1762-1834), *The  
 Environs of London*, 1811

**WHITECHAPEL, 1600-1800**  
***A SOCIAL HISTORY OF AN EARLY-MODERN***  
***LONDON INNER SUBURB***

**DEREK MORRIS**



**THE FIRST BOOK TO DESCRIBE THIS UNIQUE AREA OF SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LONDON. FEATURES THE RICH AND THE POOR, THE CHURCHES AND CHAPELS, CRIMINALS, MERCHANTS, THE NURSERIES, THE SUGAR REFINERS, BREWERS, THE HAY MARKET, THE MILITIA AND THE LONDON HOSPITAL. EXTENSIVE INDEXES TO NAMES, PLACES AND SUBJECTS**

**Peter Guillery of the Survey of London, English Heritage, has written in the Preface:**

Whitechapel has not fared well with history. Stereotyped if not neglected, it has stayed a shadowy and myth-ridden place. In this book Derek Morris sets about shedding some historical light. Through systematic, thorough and, above all, indefatigable documentary research he takes hold of a broad range of material from two centuries of the recent past of a complex, variegated and mutating district, peoples it with communities and individuals, and organizes its affairs into intelligible categories.

His sources, both primary and secondary, are numerous, but, as in his earlier work on other parts of east London, he makes especially enlightening use of Land Tax returns, wills and inventories. The subjects of investigation range from servants to freemasons, silk throwsters to butchers, bell foundries to bagnios, sugar refining to gun making, the Hay Market to the Rag Fair, and the London Hospital to the Tower Hamlets Militia. Merchants, their careers and networks, and industries are strong elements in the story.

Whitechapel, it is clear, has long been cosmopolitan. This book helps to give Whitechapel a stronger historical identity, and has wider value for all those interested in London and early-modern urban history more generally.

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Details of the Society from Philip Mernick, Chairman, ELHS, 42 Campbell Road, Bow, London, E3 4DT  
email: [mail@eastlondonhistory.org.uk](mailto:mail@eastlondonhistory.org.uk) <http://www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk>