

George Yard Ragged School (See Page 7)

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Editorial Note:

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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.



Season's Greetings to all our Members.

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park are on a mission to discover more about First World War Casualties who are buried or commemorated in Tower Hamlets Cemetery (Bow Cemetery). We want to reveal previously untold stories that emerge from people's family albums, diaries and other memorabilia. 'If we don't do this now the people who are able to help us will no longer be with us and their memories and stories will be lost forever.'

Tower Hamlets was heavily bombed during the First World War. Were your ancestors killed or injured by the Zeppelin raids?

Did your ancestors die in the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918? It is thought to have killed from 30 to 100 million people worldwide. About 228,000 British died and millions more were sick, and ironically, as if youth had not sacrificed and suffered enough, this virulent Spanish flu, contrary to form, killed a disproportionate number of people in their 20s and 30s. Pregnant women had the highest death rates.

Is a member of your family commemorated on the war memorial or died in action and is buried elsewhere and commemorated on a private memorial stone?

If you have information or memorabilia you would like to share or allow the FTHCP to copy, please contact friendsthcp@yahoo.co.uk or contact Diane Kendall c/o The Soanes Centre Southern Grove London E3 4PX.

Join Doreen and Diane Kendall and assist in recording monumental inscriptions in Tower Hamlets Cemetery on the second Sunday of each month, from 2-4 pm.

All volunteers welcome.

**East London History Society
Lecture Programme 2015**

Thursday 22nd January
London's Sailortown in the 18th Century
Derek Morris

Thursday 19th February
*Minnie Lansbury - East End suffragette,
socialist, school teacher, champion of the
victims of war, rebel councillor and my hero!*
Janine Booth
NOTE CHANGE OF SPEAKER

Thursday 19th March
The Spitalfields Nippers,
The Gentle Author

Thursday 16th April
*History and Living Memories of the
Regents Canal in Shoreditch,*
Carolyn Clark

Thursday 21st May
*The legacy of Lax and the records of
Poplar Methodist Church,*
Natasha Luck

*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. Bus No.
25.*

Suggestions and ideas for future topics and/or speakers for our Lecture Programme are always welcomed. If you can suggest someone or indeed if you would like to give a talk yourself, please get in touch with David Behr, our Programme co-ordinator, either at one of

our lectures or, alternatively, email our Chairman Philip Mernick with your comments and suggestions. **Email: phil@mernicks.com**

The Docklands History Group

The Docklands History Group usually meets on the first Wednesday of the month (except January) at 5.30 – 8.00 pm at no 1 Warehouse, West India Quays, Hertsmere Road, London E14 4AL.

It is an independent body created to encourage the interest in all aspects of maritime, industrial and social history of the River Thames, the Port of London, and Docklands.

Visitors and new members welcome.

Next talk – February 4th 2015
‘Father Thames Still Alive and Kicking’ by David Hilling.

If late and the Museum's main door is closed, use the ‘schools entrance’ at the back of Hertsmere Road, down steps and knock.

Contact point: John Gamet
gamet@rustlings1.fsnet.co.uk

ELHS Record and Newsletters. You can now download from our web site (no charge) PDFs of all issues of East London Record and the last three series of Newsletter (1992 to 2013). They can be found on our publications page together with indexes to aid selection. We have sold all hard copies of our Mile End and Wapping books but PDF copies can be supplied for £6 each – contact us for details. All of the PDFs can be searched for specific words. We also have older Newsletters (from 1962) scanned but the quality of printing means that the PDFs can not be searched. If you have any Newsletters from the 1950s or 1960s please let us know, I am sure we are missing some issues.

Owen and Thomas

376/8 Bethnal Green Rd, London E2 0AJ.

I have lived in Stratford and Forest Gate since 1980, and often drive through Bethnal Green but never did I imagine the family history connection discovered recently.

My family is all from North Wales of relatively humble origins. I was aware though that I had a great uncle Edward Anwyl Owen born in 1867 in Bodfari Flintshire who ended up in London running a shop.

I was following this up checking early twentieth century directories showing:

1921

370 Woodbury John, baker

374 Begernie Francis Edward, tripe dresser

376 & 378 Owen & Thomas, linen drapers

... here is Mape Street

380 Vesey Rose, grocer

The real breakthrough came a couple of years ago when my brother unexpectedly handed me an old family photograph album I did not know he had – and in it was this photo, taken probably in the 1920s.



I was then able quickly to establish the location and went to visit, and was amazed to find the old lettering on the side of what is now a Halifax Bank, corner of Mape Street. It is clearly the same building – see the upper window details.



Given I had driven down Bethnal Green Road many times over the years, I was surprised this paintwork had not registered with me – and then I solved that mystery too. A quick check on Google street view revealed that until a few years ago the writing was covered in a large advertising billboard!

In the 1870s Edward Anwyl Owen was apprenticed in a drapers shop in Liverpool called Frisby Dykes. He moved to London at some point and is in the 1891 census at Fetter Lane in the City of London living in some kind of accommodation aimed at that trade, a hostel possibly owned by a charity associated with the Drapers Company or Guild. His brother Owen Tamblyn Owen (known as Tam in the family born 1875, Forge Farm, Bodfari) is there too.

In about 1899 Edward obtained a lease on the drapers shop in Bethnal Green, and he had this shop for the next thirty years and at some point installed Tam as the manager. By 1911 Edward was also running a shop at 7 York Road, Battersea and it here he married. Further investigation on the internet using newspapers online reveals the following:

THE LONDON GAZETTE, OCTOBER 20, 1896. 5745

NOTICE is hereby given that the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned John Pellow and Edward Anwyl Owen carrying on business as Linen Drapers at No. 156 Goldhawk-road and Nos. 163 and 165 Askew-road Shepherd's Bush in the County of London under the style or firm of Pellow and Owen has been dissolved by mutual consent as and from the fourteenth day of October 1896. All debts due to and owing by the said late firm will be received and paid by the said John Pellow.—Dated this 19th day of October
JOHN PELLOW.
E. A. OWEN.

So Bethnal Green was not his first business. And then later –
NOTICE is hereby given, that the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us, the undersigned,
Owen Tamblyn Owen and Edward Anwyl Owen, carrying on business as Drapers, Hosiers, Haberdashers and House Furnishers at 376 and 378, Bethnal Green-road, London, E., under the style or firm of OWEN AND THOMAS, has been dissolved by mutual consent as and from the twenty-sixth day of April, 1926. All debts due to and owing by the said late firm will be received and paid by the said Owen Tamblyn Owen.—
Dated this 27th day of April, 1926.
O. T. OWEN.
(147) E. A. OWEN.

Source
<http://london1912.co.uk/streets/BethnalGreenRoadSouth2.shtml>

Tam married, in Wesley's Chapel City Road in June 1913. He managed the shop in Bethnal Green until the late 1920s, lived above the shop, and had children there. The shop may have been renamed after 1926, given the above notice – I have not discovered who Thomas was. I am not clear what Tam did after about 1930 as my trail goes cold, as I have not

been able to track down his children but the picture with Edward is clearer. Like many Welshman who came to London in Victorian times to run shops or dairies (*) he did well for himself and became wealthy. He was a very keen horseman and rode on Epsom Downs.



Here is a family photo of him on his horse and in his will he left money to his horse vet! I obtained a copy of his will from York and it reveals bought an expensive house called Littlewood, Chaldon, near Caterham Surrey, an area that remains very wealthy Surrey commuter belt.

Family lore is that he has further shops in Wimbledon or possibly Barnes but I have not been able to trace these despite enquiries in archives there. His romantic life in the 20s and 30s was a little complex and I still researching that. He died in 1952 with no legitimate children of his own that I can discover.



Edward Anwyl Owen far right taken in the late 1940s or early 1950s in the garden in Surrey. Any reader with any knowledge of the shop in Bethnal Green Road can contact the author at petros.williams@btinternet.com. I would love to know for example when the shop closed, or if there are other photos of it.

*there is a fine Welsh dairy building called Jones with its original signage surviving corner Conway Street and Warren Street in Fitzrovia. My son lived in the accommodation above a couple of years ago.

Peter Williams

Columbia Market

Linda Whitehead, Glemsford, Sudbury, Suffolk, in correspondence with Doreen Kendall, our stalwart researcher, when she enquired about the circumstances of the bombing of Columbia Market on the very first day of the Blitz, 7 September 1940:

Thank you so very much for all the information. How very kind of you to take such a lot of time and trouble in order to help me.

And I have found them! Finally, after all this time of searching. Apparently, Elizabeth, Edward and David are buried together in a 'trench grave' at the City of London Cemetery (Aldersbrook Road), and their names appear on a memorial at the cemetery. I shall be visiting the cemetery in the near future, along with my con and a cousin.

I can't begin to tell you how pleased and emotional I feel about finding them. Although I never met them I do have just one photograph of each one, and little David's school cap. The circumstances of their deaths has always struck a chord with me.

I wondered if you had any information or knowledge about the burials during the Blitz. As the three are in a 'trench grave' would they

have separate coffins, and who paid for this? My mother's family, like many in the East End, were very poor and I doubt they could afford a burial for three. With the Blitz killing hundreds of people every night, how did the country cope with this? How were things organised?

The three died on September 7/8 1940 and were buried September 14th. My mother married my father September 28th. The wedding had been arranged and went ahead, despite the tragedy, because my father had been called up and my mother was desperate to get pregnant in case he didn't come back from the war. It is very poignant looking at the wedding photos to see them smiling, yet knowing what they had been through.

Further to this correspondence:

Thank you so much for the newspaper article. I particularly liked the small picture at the top of the page. I had always assumed that Columbia Market was simply an open market that happened to be in Columbia Street!

I have added my name to the online petition regarding a memorial for the Columbia Market tragedy. I don't know if it is the centenary of WW1 which has prompted people to review past events, but it seems more is being done now to mark and remember events than has happened previously.

Note:

A campaign is being organised to erect a memorial plaque at the site of the Columbia Market, which was demolished in the 1960s. If you want to contribute or take part in the campaign, visit columbiamarketwarmemorial.wordpress.com.

George Yard Ragged Schools

The 'Black Horse' in George Yard off the High Street, Whitechapel, had been one of the most notorious gin shops in the land; by the second half of the nineteenth century it was thriving as one of the branches of the Ragged School Union. To call the institution in George Yard merely a ragged school was, however, something of a misnomer. It provided social services for the whole area, for residents of all ages.

The Ragged School Union was established in 1844, and the George Yard school had been going for 23 years by the time the annual report for 1876 (which can be seen in the British Library) was produced. The first Education Act had been passed in 1870, but attendance was poor in many schools subsidised by government grants. Furthermore, 'ragged' schools already existing before the act often were found to be inadequate, usually because the teachers had received little training or indeed education themselves; consequently, these schools received no grant, though they catered for children most urgently in need of help. And so, as that 1876 annual report explained, 'While ragged, shoeless and neglected children are found in the court ways, alleys, and back streets, the necessity of Ragged Schools will remain.'

Conditions in the district had improved over the 23 years they had been at work there, though whether all the credit was due to their own efforts, as they implied, is questionable:

Twenty-four years ago the cry of "Stop Thief!" fell upon the ears fifty times a day; then no respectable person could pass through the neighbourhood without being molested. Then it was not safe for constables to patrol the street in less numbers than three or four. At the present time, one constable can do the duty, and patrol in safety. 24 years ago, factories, warehouses and stables, nearly half the neighbourhood was un-let; now, there is seldom a place unoccupied.

The age at which children were accepted for schooling was presumably four, as the Flowers of the Forest Day Nursery for Infants looked after children from two months to three years for 4d a week per child, or 2d if the mother was widowed. By the time they were 14 or 15 youngsters were considered 'Elder Boys' or 'Elder Girls' and had separate provisions made for them in the evenings. Most of these young people would be working, when work was available. Above the age of 20 they counted as adult.

Teaching Christianity, along with basic numeracy and literacy, was the prime object of the ragged schools, but merely in order to attract people to attend, and to see they were fit to listen and learn, other services had to be provided. Almost as important as religion in the Union was an underlying assumption that thrift and abstinence must be inculcated in order not only to save people's souls, but to turn them into useful and law-abiding citizens.

So sewing classes for girls, savings banks, and clothing clubs were set up. The Band of Hope, a temperance organisation for children, was run, and so were Temperance meetings for adults, as well as the Mission to Inebriate Women and Girls, the Christian Women's Total Abstiners Society, and the Gospel Temperance Meeting for Adults (all listed in the 1885 report). It looks as though temperance might not have been popular, as numbers attending were not recorded, with the unexpected exception of the Gospel Temperance Meeting for Adults, which claimed an attendance of 200. One wonders whether promoting sobriety to men was considered hopeless, or whether drunkenness in women was more reprehensible, as no separate temperance meetings for inebriate men are recorded. The Accounts for 1880 comment: We have seen children of the tender age of 5 and 7 years in a state of intoxication, and we have known the helpless little one to be under the influence of alcoholic drink while being carried in his drunken mother's arms.

Frequent religious services were held by the organisation, of course, Christian but non denominational. Every effort was made to teach children and adults not only how to read, but what to read, as 'pernicious literature of the present day' was influencing the young, and so there was a library, and prizes would often consist of books.

Warmth and company would have attracted many people to put in an appearance. Food was provided; not as much as was needed, but bowls of soup and a piece of bread a few days a week in winter was routine, and cost altogether £8,000 in 1884. Meals were sometimes provided for the 'Destitute Poor', such as the inmates of lodging houses, and the sick, and probably there was a once-a-year tea or dinner for all who attended George Yard. Every Tuesday a dinner, worth 6d, for which only a penny was charged, was served to about 30 invalid children.

A few people were given an annual trip to the country for a fortnight, listed in the report for 1885 as 'Change of Air and Scene in the Country for the Weary and Drooping'. During the two years 1883 and 1884 they claim to have sent more than 700 men, women and children away for a break. Others only got a day out in the country, to a total cost of £8.12.6d in 1884.

Those running the George Yard Ragged School did their best to encourage self-help, but sometimes dispensing charity seemed the only way. 'On account of the great want of employment, thousands of the poor have endured much suffering' the 1885 report recorded: Every year brings with it an increase of poverty, but the people are patient, and look for better times when work is plentiful; the exorbitant rents charged for wretched rooms consumes nearly all the money earned.

A special fund, the 'Emily' Fund, was devoted to girls and women who were street-sellers, helping to tide them over difficult periods. For men, the 1885 Accounts show a Working

Men's Benefit Society, 60 men attending. The Labour Loan Society is also recorded with no attendance figures given, and with only an unusually curt comment: 'The members of the Society subscribe their own funds and find their own capital, and borrow their own money'. Perhaps, despite all the talk of self-reliance, co-operative self-help without the usual controls was not altogether welcome.

The school must be given credit, however, for badly-needed support in the neighbourhood. Dr Barnardo set up his first children's Home nearby on Stepney Causeway in 1870, but the Ragged School in Whitechapel was providing sanctuary for many children and young adults at the same time. During the year 1884 about 3,000 boys and 8,000 girls used the Day and Night Shelter for Homeless Boys and Girls. The Shelter for Boys was run for those 'who are homeless, and those who require to be kept from bad company.. The number of boys living on the streets had decreased, it was claimed, only ones and twos to be found sleeping in passages or under stairs; they 'do not lay about in carts, empty pipes and boxes, as in days gone by'. They are nevertheless 'very shy and hard to get at.' The decrease in numbers was at least in part because many had been 'driven into Reformatories and Industrial Schools.'

The 1885 records show Classes for Rough Boys, 40 attending, and Mutual Industrial Classes for Big Boys, with 24 attending, while only 20 attended the Rest for Big Boys. In contrast, attendance at the Classes for Elder Girls and Young Women was 200. The report tells us that the Shelter for Houseless Girls catered for those who are without homes, or those who live in neighbourhoods where vice abounds, or inmates of low lodging houses. There are many poor and un-fallen girls, who, if sheltered and watched over, will be kept from entering upon a life of sin. While they were there, the girls were taught to wash and scrub, and a little cooking. The work that the Ragged School Union had originally been set up to do, teaching children, continued. Six years after the 1870 Education Act, the George

Yard school reported: A very large number of children are still outside of Day Schools ... On Tuesday evening, we have been surrounded by 60 of these poor children ages varying from 7 to 14 ... it was of little use asking them to come to School, for they would run away very quickly, thinking a trap was being laid to catch them, with a view to sending them to a Reformatory School.

The solution was to set children already in the school to persuade others to come on Tuesday evenings. Not one of the sixty present, the school claimed, had been induced by any adult.

Although George Yard did not qualify for a grant, it did receive a 'donation' from government, which covered a little more than rents, amounting annually to £39.3.4d for the George Yard Ragged School, and £53.14.9d a year for premises in Angel Alley, the shelter and separate class rooms. Progress in reading was usually slow, but in religious instruction 'they commit a lot to memory'.

Expectations were not high for these children. Boys were often put to sea as fishermen or sailors, or sent to Canada. The 1876 report said: 'We hope that many of our present scholars will turn out intelligent labourers and good domestic servants.' In their own terms, at least, the schools must be accounted a success, except perhaps in turning the population into church-goers. Present-day levels of education and opportunity were beyond their imaginations.

Pat Francis

Family Songs

In response to Phil Mernick's request to send reminiscences of family songs, I jotted down a few thoughts.

As I was born in 1931, my extended family was still singing songs from the music halls, although in the thirties film and radio ('the wireless') were taking over as the major influences on popular music. Individuals still had 'party-pieces' they were expected to sing at every family get-together until the war put a stop to family parties in London. They never revived for us.

My mother's party-piece was 'My Old Man Says Follow the Van'; my father would sing 'Fall In and Follow Me', leading the guests in a conga-like line all round the house and garden, causing congestion and confusion in the narrow passages and on the stairs as the line doubled back on itself. Was it because he had served in the 1914-18 war that he chose a song with 'Fall In' in the title?

My great-uncle's song was 'Silver Star'. I don't actually remember hearing it myself, but my mother always demonstrated how he flung his arm dramatically to the ceiling as he sang, the star always being in the same corner of the room, according to her. 'Silver Star' sounds as if it was a Victorian parlour ballad, sentimental ballads being another source of familiar songs. Around the house, not at parties, my mother would sing other such parlour-songs, mockingly over-dramatising the already melodramatic style: 'Alice, Where Art Thou?' was one of these. Another was obviously from a setting of Tennyson's lines from his poem 'Maud': 'All the blood that was within me leapt to meet her, leapt to meet her'. But these were mere snatches sung to amuse us, not complete songs, and almost certainly sprang from memories of an earlier time.

Songs from the Victorian period were still familiar to me in my childhood, songs such as 'The Man on the Flying Trapeze' and 'Daisy, Daisy' – properly called 'Daisy Bell', I believe,

dating as it did from the early days of the bicycle.

During the war, community singing was encouraged to keep our spirits up, and though I remember 'Run, Rabbit, Run', which opens every episode of 'Dad's Army', the favourite in the early days of evacuation and gas-marks always seems to me to have been 'Deep in the Heart of Texas'. The words had no relevance to our lives at all, but I think everyone enjoyed the way the music would suddenly stop for a few bars of unaccompanied clapping.

Later in the war, expurgated versions of songs sung by the troops took over, I believe, along with ballads aimed at men in the services, such as those sung by Vera Lynn, and we were into a different era.

Pat Francis

Notes and News:

The London Chest Hospital closed in September 2014, the departments have been moved to Barts. The future of the building has yet to be decided.

The Children's Hospital, Hackney Road, renamed Queen Elizabeth, later the Queen Mother, has disappeared, due to be converted into flats; the main facade which is Grade II listed by English Heritage, has been preserved.

Victoria Park will have a skating rink, stalls and a fair through December, although this newsletter may not be out in time for you to make a visit to the park.

History Hoppers at Bancroft Road

Our new monthly History Hoppers group offers you and your friends the chance to explore and discuss original historical library and archive sources that help to tell the story of your local area in Tower Hamlets, with a slice of cake and cup of tea to wash it all down!

2.30 to 4.30, second Wednesday of every month.

East End Photographers No 18 Thomas Wright

Thomas Wright enjoyed a double career in Victorian London – he operated two successful photographic studios in the East End, and spent his leisure hours up in a balloon. Wright was one of the pioneers in this rapidly burgeoning sport, during what has come to be called the Golden Age of Ballooning, and took some of the earliest aerial views of London from a swinging basket hundreds of feet off the ground.

Wright's aerial career was typical of a man who, self confessedly, had been a bit of a rebel in his youth. Thomas William Wright was born in Olney, in Buckinghamshire, in 1832, ran away from home, and began life as a painter in Luton. He married Susan Gray, from Stansted, in 1855 & commenced as a photographer in Biggleswade in the late 1850s, helped by a colleague, Charles Norman. From here, a move to London was inevitable & Wright opened his first studio at 134 East India Dock Road in 1867. Its success led to a second studio, a little further down the road at 199, in the following year.

It was at this studio where Wright met the man who would change his life. Henry Coxwell, probably Britain's best known aeronaut of the day, particularly for his escapades at Crystal Palace, walked in one day to have his photograph taken. The result pleased him so much that he offered Wright the chance of a flight on his next balloon trip from North Woolwich Gardens. Despite his wife's disapproval, Wright went to see the balloon flight, resolving to ascend at the next opportunity. This duly took place a few days later. Wright reminisced later: 'I was never so frightened in my life. I just peeped over the edge of the car and wished with all my heart that I was safe on the earth again. I asked the aeronaut how high we were, and he said 'four thousand feet'. This made me feel worse still. However, we came down all right, on Marriages Farm near Ongar, and when the

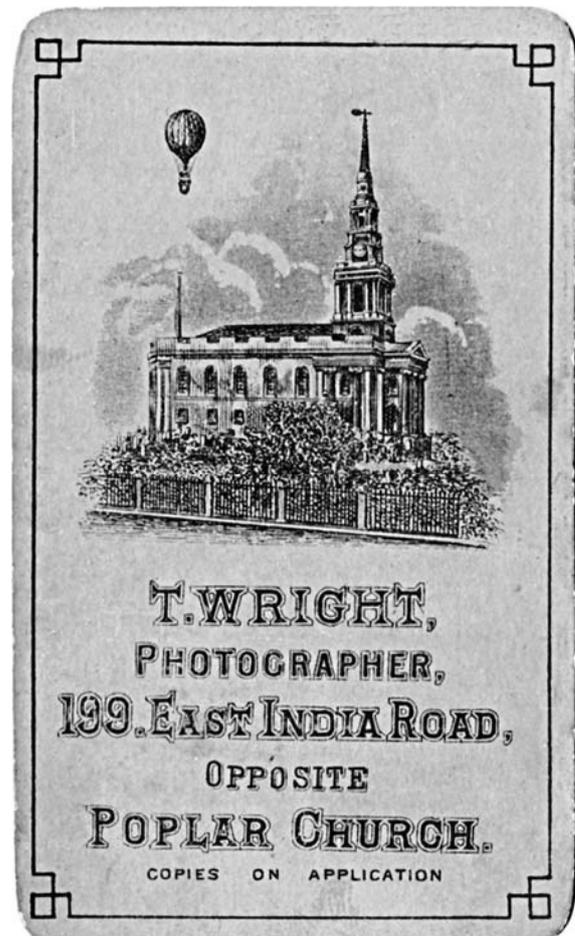
young ladies at the farm came out and asked us in to tea, I walked about as grandly as if I had done it all myself.'

Within a short space of time, Wright became proficient enough to manage flights on his own, and later with passengers. He experienced a few hair-raising moments in his early days: 'I took up a gentleman who wrote to the papers the next day asking whether anything had been seen or heard of me. The fact is I brought him down with such a thump that he was bumped out of the balloon without hurting himself, and I shot up again and was soon out of sight! On another occasion, Wright agreed to ascend at Crystal Palace with a couple of Guards officers, who arrived with a large hamper, including liberal supplies of champagne. At 8,000 feet, the wind bore it off course, until Wright eventually recognised Epsom Race Course - on Derby Day! Wright managed to set the officers down on Epsom Downs, where a passing carriage took them to the race - leaving Wright to the hamper, from which he proceeded to make a very good lunch.

As Wright's enthusiasm for ballooning overtook his appetite for photography, he decided to dispose of his studios and become a fulltime aeronaut. In 1871 the older studio was sold to an assistant, William Bartier (see No. 15 in this series), whose family continued to run it until it was bombed out of existence in 1940. The studio at 199 East India Dock Road was retained until 1882; Wright was assisted by his wife Sarah in the later years, before he decided to sell it to his camera operator, who was also his nephew, and young man named William Whiffin (see No. 5, of this series) who would go on to become one of the East End's most celebrated photographers in the early 20th century. It was all a far cry from the wild days of his youth, when as a lad of 17 he had served 14 days' hard labour in Bedford Jail - for stealing a key!

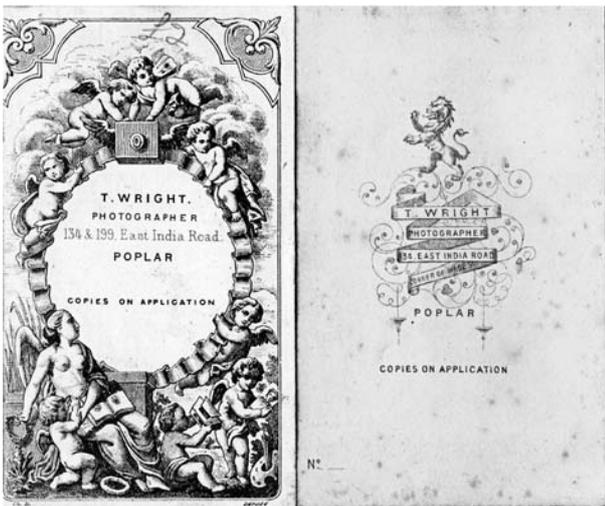
A revealing glimpse of Wright at this time is provided by an article written by Rev. Henry Haweis for the Pall Mall Gazette. 'Arriving at

the People's Palace, I went straight to the balloon ground, about midday on Monday (Bank Holiday). There lay the balloon 'Eclipse' flat; beside it stood my wicker coffin covered with a cloth. I was just peeping in, with a rather creepy feeling, when I turned round and found Mr Wright, the aeronaut, by my side. His aspect was mild, his manner was quiet, his voice subdued; he was already intent upon his work. He looked about fifty, and was of ruddy countenance. 'Like always to be on the spot, Sir, see everything done myself!' 'I suppose these ascents are nothing to you - you never have accidents?' 'Never from the Palace, but got a bad shaking some years ago, from coming down on the chimneypots; but,' he added reassuringly, 'I have had more experience now.'



Haweis was not the only clergyman with whom Wright shared balloon trips. England's 'Flying Reverend', Rev. John Mackenzie Bacon (1846-1904), went up with Wright on

many occasions, mostly from Crystal Palace, in the 1890s, together with Bacon's daughter Gertrude. A non-practising clergyman (after a dispute with the Church authorities) Bacon was a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, and had observed a solar eclipse in North America in 1900. A keen photographer in his own right, both his own and Wright's work were featured in the biography written by Gertrude Bacon in 1907 - 'the record of an aeronaut: being the life of John M Bacon.'



Front and reverse of carte de visites.

Wright moved from Poplar to Plaistow in the 1880's where his assistant Captain William Dale also lived. Dale eventually over Wright's balloon operations, only to lose his life in a tragic accident at Crystal Palace on July 29 1892, when a tear in the fabric caused the

balloon to plunge to the ground. The inquest found that the fabric was old and weak, and patched up from several old balloons.

A recently discovered carte shows Wright in his balloon, probably in the 1880s with Charles Youens (1858-1916), as his passenger. Youens was a fellow photographer, working out of Morville Street, off Tredegar Road - he did not run his own studio, but hired himself out as a camera operator, and may well have worked for Wright at this time.



Sarah Wright died in 1898, and not long afterwards, Wright made his final move to a splendid house which he had specially built - Margery Hall, in Margery Park Road, Forest Gate, just to the north of West Ham Park. In an interview with the Forest Gate Weekly News, in August 1897, Wright said that ballooning had not exactly been profitably. 'I do not think I have lost money over it, but I do not think I have made very much. I suppose I should

average £20 per journey, and I have had all five of my balloons, of from 24,000 to 70,000 feet capacity, going up in different parts of the country on one day. But then I have had to pay as much as £100 damages at one time and the return journeys by road and the hotel charges are very expensive.'

Thomas Wright died at Margery Hall in January 1912, at the age of 79. His death effectively marks the end of the Golden Age of ballooning, in the run-up to the Great War, which would see balloons superseded by the early aeroplanes. Up, up, and away was now consigned to history.

David Webb

The Silvertown Story

In 1852 Samuel Winkworth Silver unintentionally kick-started the Internet. By casing copper wire in rubber for submarine cabling at his India Rubber, Gutta Percha and Telegraph Cable Company he laid the foundations for broadband capability and ultimately the world wide web.

Silvertown is a 62 acre site located to the south of the Royal Victoria Dock opposite the ExCel centre in the borough of Newham. It is in the heart of London's new East End – sandwiched between City Airport and the golden triangle of the O2, Canary Wharf and the Olympic Park. Its landlord is the GLA.

Silvertown, named after its founder, hosted the likes of ICI, the Cooperative, Tate & Lyle and Rank Hovis MacDougall who all had long term associations with the site, and Tate & Lyle still operates close by. But it was best known as the 'warehouse of the world' situated at the heart of The Royal Docks, the destination for all its imports and exports from the British Empire and beyond, from grain to meat to all variety of spices and foodstuffs. At its height it employed over 100,000 workers. Exotic animals were off-loaded at the Docks

destined for London Zoo including elephants and giraffes.

At the heart of this is one of London's iconic buildings, Millennium Mills. Built in 1905 and home to brands like Rank Hovis MacDougall and Spillers, this 450,000 sq. ft landmark was the destination for grain from the wheat fields of the US and Canada and is still intact although derelict today and stands as an iconic London landmark. Spillers created its famous Winalot biscuits there and the Spillers name is still on the elevation of the Mills. The Rank Hovis MacDougall granary for its famous bread came from one wing of the Mills. The term 'toe rag' originated here. Grain workers at The Mills in Silvertown were called 'toe-raggers' for their habit of tying their trousers to prevent grain from getting inside. Female operatives at The Mills were named 'the flour girls'.

Silvertown had an ammunition factory in both World Wars and was the site in 1917 of London's biggest ever explosion, which was heard as far away as Norfolk (and featured in a scene in 'Upstairs Downstairs'), which decimated Millennium Mills. It was also heavily targeted during the Blitz. Churchill visited Silvertown Viaduct in 1940 to witness the effects of bombing first hand.

Following the war, the docks were at their busiest until the early 1960s when changes in ship containerisation amongst other technological advances, and a switch in Britain's trade following EEC membership, led to a rapid decline.

The site was where East End villains in the second half of the 20th century are supposed to have gone to dump getaway cars and the dredging of the area will no doubt produce some interesting finds. It is now a major destination for the music and film industries. Its honours list includes Coldplay, Arctic Monkeys, Dire Straits, Jean Michel Jarre, video game Splinter Cell and TV show Ashes to Ashes.



London is leading the way in many areas: creativity, finance, the arts, technology: but it needs more space and more locations for modern day industries. This part of East London is perfect for the start-up culture fermented by Old Street, Farringdon and Shoreditch, but in a ready-made location with room to spare. By 2017 it will be re-connected by Crossrail, 17 minutes to The West End and it sits alongside City Airport, close to the O2, Canary Wharf and Stratford.



According to CEO of First Base, one of the key partners in the scheme, Elliot Lipton, “Silvertown is a final part of the jigsaw for East London. It has the space, the scale and the access to bring together game-changing individuals and enterprises. These are the people who will hustle, bustle and muscle the Capital to be the world’s first Fast Forward City. And it will have a new centrepiece in Millennium Mills, housing half a million square foot of creativity”.

The end vision over 10 to 15 years is to breathe new life back into this area of London, with homes, community facilities (school, health centre), restaurants, businesses and local retail facilities. The ambition is to attract global organisations from commerce, academia and research while creating a cutting edge future for the Royal Docks. Final planning consent is being heard in late 2014 and DCLG has already granted £12million to start construction on site which will include work to remove asbestos from Millennium Mills. The development will be delivered in phases over a number of years by an experienced team. The initial phase will include the Millennium Mills and the new bridge across the docks. It will create 3,000 new homes, up to 21,000 new jobs in total, 80% of which are expected to be first jobs; 13 million visitors per annum. Additional spending power of £33m per annum when complete.

The development will restore and revitalise historic structures like the listed Silo-D and Millennium Mills will become the home to new business and restaurants and become the centre of 'Silvertown and Royal Docks'

Silvertown will be served by two DLR stations, Crossrail from 2017, the Emirates Air Line and London City Airport. A new and accessible crossing that will connect to Excel and the Crossrail station at Custom House within 5 minutes of the site

A new consortium called The Silvertown Partnership has been created, consisting of Chelsfield Properties Ltd, First Base Ltd and Macquarie Capital. All have a track record of delivering exciting new places across London. The team have been responsible for many of London’s largest commercial and mixed use schemes including Paddington Basin, Stratford City, Broadgate, The Treasury Building and Chiswick Park; as well as some of the capital’s greatest cultural centres, including Tate Modern, The National Gallery and The Royal Opera House.

The Silvertown Partnership is supported by a team who have a considerable track record in delivering new developments across the capital and are aware of the history of the Royal Docks. This includes Fletcher Priest, Civic Arts, West 8, Lord Andrew Mawson.

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A view of Dixie Street. Courtesy Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

The Dixie Street Fire 1897

An account of a fire and funeral of the members of the Jarvis family.

In the early hours of Boxing Day 1897, the Jarvis family was asleep in their two rooms on the upper floor of 9 Dixie Street, Bethnal Green. Only the father was absent. He had entered the workhouse infirmary four days previously and had been diagnosed with consumption.

By six in the morning, all the family at 9 Dixie Street were dead. Killed by fire. The father, Thomas, died that afternoon unknowing of the fate befallen his family.

The names and ages of the victims were:

Mrs. Sarah Jarvis, aged thirty-nine,

Hannah Jarvis, aged sixteen.

Mary Ann Jarvis, aged fourteen.

Thomas Jarvis, aged twelve.

William Jarvis, aged ten.

Louisa Jarvis, aged eight.

Alice Jarvis, aged five.

George Jarvis, aged three.

Caroline Jarvis, aged two.

Elizabeth Jarvis, the eight months' old baby.



A view of Dixie Street. Courtesy Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

The study of fires in the East End at the end of the nineteenth century show that the deaths in Dixie Street were not unique. Reported at the

same time were: a fire in Bromley which killed a 33 year old woman and in Deptford, a fire destroyed the lives of another four children, aged four years, three years, one year and four months. However, it was the deaths in Dixie Street that made headlines in the local, regional and national newspapers. The tragedy even made the pages of the international press.

The Jarvis family found themselves in Dixie Street by 1896. After being expelled from the Old Nichol to make way for the new Boundary council estate, 'The story of the family's initial movements likely reflects the experience of many of their former neighbours; they moved from place to place in the locality, eventually settling in a garage building in another corner of Bethnal Green where Jarvis scratched a living as a box-maker.'

Dixie Street was a small alley off Brady Street - an area known for its poverty. Many families living in the Brady Street area eked out a living as best they could. Often the older males would try and find labouring work while the rest of the family were engaged in the sweating, home-trades, such as, a seamstress or box making, including match-box making. The Jarvis family were engaged in the making of match-boxes for near 50 years. The children's grandmother, Charlotte Jarvis, is recorded as a lucifer-box maker in the 1851 census.



In the good years, match-box makers were paid four pence for a gross. By the end of the century, with the match-box making process being automated, the price had fallen to two

pence and a farthing per gross. It was possible for a skilled matchbox maker to assemble over '14 gross boxes in day' and this was 'considered a very good day's work'.

However, these were starvation wages. A neighbour described the mother, Sarah, as 'a very-steady, hard-working woman, and I believe was ABOUT HALF STARVED.' . . . She was so thin and sickly-looking. (Emphasis in the original) and, 'The family were in a state of absolute starvation.' A further indication of the family's poverty was the children's living grand parents were all residents of the workhouse. Thomas Jarvis's mother, Charlotte was 72, blind and had been in the Bethnal Green infirmary for six years. Sarah's parents, Mr & Mrs Must, were also inmates of the workhouse.

The fire

The fire started in a cupboard below the stairs in which the Jarvis family kept their match-box making materials. The fire had been smouldering for many hours before the alarm was raised and by this time the smoke had suffocated them while they slept. By six in the morning flames had engulfed the whole of the upper floor. Fortunately, the father of the family in the ground floor rooms woke and smelling the smoke raised the alarm and his family was saved.

However, for the Jarvis family there was no hope. All the efforts by their neighbours to gain access to the first floor failed because of the intensity of the fire and the only stairs were ablaze. The upper floor was one mass of flames. Shouts from the street were unable to wake the occupants.

Dixie Street was a narrow lane with houses on one side only. They overlooked the back yards of the houses in the next street. Dixie Street had iron posts at its top and the lane's extreme narrowness made it impossible for the Fire Brigade to gain access. The firefighters managed to save the adjoining buildings but when the fire was doused, the scene on the top floor was horrific. The bodies were so charred

and carbonised that even Sarah's father, Mr Must, was unable to identify all the children. The inquest after hearing reports from the neighbours, police, fire brigade and doctors returned a verdict of accidental death.

As the news of the tragedy spread, the site of the fire and funeral parlour was visited by many East Enders. 'Throughout Boxing Day thousands of people visited the spot' reported a local paper and over the following days the local population would turn up to look at the house.

The whole of Sunday last, . . . in which the coffins were lying, were besieged with sympathisers, both on foot and in traps, many coming from Romford, Chingford, Bromley, and other places, and leaving a subscription.

A collection was taken up. Some local business men had promised to pay the cost of the funeral but the locals took collections boxes round the locality, the object to defray the funeral expenses. The family that had lived in poverty were not going to be buried as paupers.

The funeral

The local population was going to ensure that the family had a real, royal cockney send-off. The procession to the cemetery was one of the East End's most spectacular occasions of the decade. Leading was the brass band and banner of the Wapping Gas Workers, playing the "Dead March in Saul."

'Then came the bodies, borne upon four open cars, the horses wearing plumes and velvets, and by the side of this mournful train came twelve men as pages.'

'About a dozen wreaths were sent by relatives, local tradespeople, and the teachers and children at the Somerford Street School, which the younger Jarvises were in the habit of attending.'

The coffins were followed by three coaches with the immediate family, then two brougham coaches, this was followed by several other

conveyances of all descriptions and then came six omnibuses. The procession was joined on route by other vehicles and also many walked at the rear. On the day of the funeral, 'With that love for spectacles, whether brilliant or sad, East Londoners turned out in tens of thousands.'

At Mile End Gate, wide as the road is, it was none too large to accommodate the many thousands that had congregated there. In fact, such scene has not been witnessed since the memorable occasion when Linnett, (Linnell - PJ) the victim of the Trafalgar Square riots, was buried some years ago. Along the Mile End Road crowds have gathered, and at the corner of Grove Road, Mile End Road; it was of such dimensions as to interfere with the traffic here, however, the assembly was disappointed for instead of passing along the Mile End Road, the cortege turned down Jubilee Street, and proceeded along the Commercial Road, doubtless a wise precaution. In the meantime, at the starting point, all business had been suspended. Shops were closed as a last tribute of respect to the deceased, whilst street vendors carried on a busy trade in the sale of memorial cards.

The cortege passed slowly out of Abbey Street and by way of Vallance Road into Buck's Row and Brady Street, the whole line of the route being thronged with people, who maintained a quiet and respectful silence; rendering the attendance of the large force of police almost unnecessary. After a momentary halt near the late house of the ill-fated family, the procession passed on by St. Bartholomew's. After passing the church, the cortege still escorted by crowds of people, passed on into Mile End Road, and from thence on to Plaistow Cemetery. Here again a vast crowd had assembled, and despite the lowly condition of the family, the utmost respect and sympathy was shown.

Thousands more waited at Plaistow cemetery. A local newspaper describes the scene:

The scene at the cemetery was even more remarkable than that at Bethnal Green. The gates were already surrounded by thousands of people, while from the high road which

overlooks the ground hundreds more had taken up their positions. When the gates were opened, which was not until the conclusion of the service in the church—there was an ugly rush, which at one period threatened to result in accident. For some reason difficult of understanding only one of the small side entrance was used and required all the exertions of the mounted policemen on duty to prevent serious crushing. As it was women and children screamed in affright, and even men, in the front ranks had to use all their strength to avoid mishap.

The following comments well illustrate the devastation and grief that must have been felt by the relatives at their loss.

The most pathetic scene of all perhaps was witnessed as the coffins were borne from the church to the graveside. It was heartrending to look on while coffin after coffin was brought out, the larger ones being carried by two men, while the smaller ones, contained the corpses of the younger children, only necessitated a single bearer. There were not many dry eyes among the vast throng of silent and sympathetic onlookers at this period. It was impossible, too, to feel unmoved at the grief of the mourners, and specially at that of the parents of the elder Jarvisses. They literally tottered to the grave, and but for support would probably have broken down completely. Then the final portion of the burial service was of necessity unusually prolonged owing to the bodies being interred in a single grave. The lowering of the coffins one after another, and the continual thud of falling earth, proved more even than many casual spectators could stand for long. It must have been a terrible ordeal to those who were mourning for a whole, family of relatives, on whose familiar faces they had gazed for the last time in this world. It was over at last. The sorrowing ones took their last look from eyes streaming with bitter tears, into the open grave and upon the floral tributes which lay upon the coffins, and then they re-entered their carriages, and, still weeping, were driven away between the ranks of pitying, respectful strangers, who had been drawn from all quarters apparently to take some part in the ending of one of the most calamitous fires that ever disgraced a civilised city.

Fires such as occurred in Dixie Street are thankfully disasters of the past. Due part to clearance of the slums and thanks to the efforts of and sacrifices of members of the Fire Brigade. There were 43 fire deaths across London in 2013/14.



The monument to the Jarvis family's tragic end still stands and can be found to the right of the chapel in Plaistow Cemetery. Walk along the path and then take the first narrow turning on the righthand side. The grave is situated a few yards along on the left. The stone has recently recently been cleaned - with thanks to Luke who brought back the monument to its previous glory.

Peter Jarvis

Book Shelf

Note: Peter is the grandson of John Jarvis, a cousin to the victims. John's father, Richard, is mentioned in some of the articles and was Thomas Jarvis's older brother.

References and Sources:

This article has been based on contemporary newspaper sources which have been collated into a A4 booklet. You can obtain a PDF format copy by emailing us at: DixieStreetFire@gmail.com. The page numbers in parenthesis refer to the page in the *Dixie Street Fire* booklet:

The Eastern Post and City Chronicle, 1 January 1898
 News of the World, 9 January 1898
 The Secret History of Our Streets: London, Joseph Bullman, Neil Hegarty, Brian Hill, BBC Books
 The Eastern Post and City Chronicle, 8 January 1898 (page 27)
 The Eastern Post and City Chronicle, 8 January 1898 (page 29)
 The Eastern Post and City Chronicle, 8 January 1898 \9 page 27)
 The Eastern Argus and Borough of Hackney Times, 1 January 1898 (page 6)
 The Eastern Argus and Borough of Hackney Times, 8 January 1898 (page 15)
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 The Eastern Argus and Borough of Hackney Times, 8 January 1898 (page 14)
 The Eastern Argus and Borough of Hackney Times, 8 January 1898 (page 14)
 East London Advertiser, Saturday 8 January 1898 (page 22)
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http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/news/LatestNewsReleases_LondonFireBrigadeperformanceontarget.asp#.VGyaqosop0h 24 July 2014.

Voices from History, East London

Suffragettes, by Sarah Jackson and Rosemary Taylor. Published by the History Press. Paperback 190 pages, 24 illustrations. ISBN 978-0-7509-6093-9. Price £ 9.99. Available from all good bookshops. Further information email rftaylor40@gmail.com.

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Getting On With It. A History of London Youth

By Dr Terry Powley, 2014, 118 pages.

ISBN 978-0957087323

The book is available from the author at 43

Glenesk Road, Eltham, SE9 1AG

Terry Powley has been involved with The Vallance Youth Club and The Samuel Montague Youth Centre since 1968 and was a Trustee on The Board of London Youth until 2011. His first chapter is titled 'The Era of Philanthropy, the 1880's to the First World War' but also mentions earlier boys clubs founded in the 1850s and 60s. Subsequent chapters have the concise titles, The Era of Citizenship (1914 to Second World War), The Era of Solidarity (1939-1959), The Era of Expansion (1960s and 70s), The Era of Uncertainty (1976-1998) and The Era of Integration (1999-2013). They cover clubs throughout the London area, and it should be of great interest to anyone researching the subject, although an index would have helped. The final section of the book supplies biographies of "key Figures" George Biddulph (1844-1929), Charles Wrench (1875-1948), Maude Stanley (1833-1915), Clement Attlee (1883-1967) Lily Montague (1873-1963) and Harvey Hinds 1920-2000).

Habits of Thrift & Industry:

Improving Bethnal Green, A new edition of One Square Mile In The East End Of London

by George C T Bartley, 1870, with an introductory essay by Pat Francis, William Shipley Group For RSA History, Occasional paper no. 27. £8 plus £1.25 p&p from Susan Bennett, 47 Barringers Court, Neats Acre, Ruislip, HA4 7JP.

Pat Francis is a member of ELHS and is a frequent contributor to our newsletter. In case you wonder what RSA stands for it is Royal Society of Arts which William Shipley founded. George CT Bartley (bizarrely the T stands for Trout) the author of the rare 1870 pamphlet, worked for 20 years at the Science & Art Department, He was interested in poverty and social issues and published works on education and on building self-reliance He supported technical education, and was treasurer of the Society of Arts. He established a Penny Bank which became the National

Penny Bank (see Pat's article in Newsletter 3-18). He was a J.P. for Middlesex and Westminster (Wikipedia). What is the connection between Bethnal Green and The Society of Arts you may be asking – well it is that big building at the corner of Cambridge Heath Road and Old Ford Road – the Bethnal Green Museum, always a branch of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Pat's introductory essay is, in fact, longer than the republished Bartley paper and gives a lot of background information, illustrated by many interesting and unusual images.

This is Not Your Life. William A. Norman 2013, 106 pages. ISBN 978-0-9575009-5-2

This was written in 1975 but only recently published by the author's son. William Norman was born in Poplar in 1896 but the book also gives a lot of information about his mother who made ships fenders and sewed flags and his father who worked in the docks. William, himself, became a print compositor and later a union official. Although episodic, with some periods virtually ignored, it gives a vivid picture of the hard life endured by most East Londoners. He was called up for World War I but given a medical discharge while still training. He was recalled but not having received the letter spent much of the war as a technical deserter. In the 1930s he moved to Dagenham and helped organise a local Labour Party. His description of how they tried to promote family planning was particularly interesting.

Available from Mr N. Norman, 36 Herongate Road, Wanstead E12 5EG or n.norman732@btinternet.com

Philip Mernick

2014 Accounts

The Society held its AGM in October. We don't have the space here to publish the accounts as presented, but if you want a copy just let us know.