



NEWSLETTER

Volume 4 Issue 04

Summer 2016



Canary Wharf 1987

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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.



Contributions invited!

We can't produce your newsletters without content. Don't be modest, Send us your recollections or family history and we will try to publish them. We know from past correspondence that people enjoy reading them.

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park are always seeking to augment their store of information on the burials in the cemetery, and any history related to the area.

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.


Cover picture

The West India Docks declined from 1960, and finally closed in 1980. The Docklands Light Railway was intended to aid redevelopment, but the cover picture, taken just three months before its official opening on August 31 1987 shows how little had, at that stage, been achieved. Two months after the picture was taken, they realised the station would be too small and took it down! It did not open for passenger use until 1991. The Canary Wharf project was sold to Olympia & York in 1988 but by 1992 the property market had collapsed and Olympia & York, Canary Wharf Ltd. filed for bankruptcy. They were bought out in 1995 and today the area is almost unrecognisable. Only the surviving watery environment and the row of former warehouses that include the Museum of London Docklands remind us of its past. The picture was taken by somebody working on the DLR construction project and comes from a set of photo albums bought at a local antiques fair. Many more can be seen on the Internet at <http://www.mernick.org.uk/dlr/>

East London History Society Lecture Programme 2016

The programme for the forthcoming season is currently being put together by David Behr, and will be available in good time before the end of August. 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

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 cannot be searched. If you have any Newsletters from the 1950s or 1960s please let us know, I am sure we are missing some issues.



OBITUARY

MILDRED GORDON MP

Tower Hamlets mourned the passing of former Bow and Poplar MP Mildred Gordon, who died on 8th April at the age of 92.

The politician, activist and campaigner for social justice was born in Stepney in 1923 and lived in Wapping. She was a pupil at Betts Street and Christian Street schools and later attended Raines School.

Her father and grandfather were stallholders in Watney Market.

The former teacher served as MP for Bow and Poplar from 1987 until 1997.

In recognition of her services to the borough, Mrs Gordon was made Freewoman of Tower Hamlets in 1999. She was also founder of the Tower Hamlets schools' public speaking competition. In 2006 Mrs Gordon opened Thirza House in Shadwell, a block of flats for older people, which was built by Tower Hamlets Community Housing (THCH).

Michael Tyrrell, THCH chief executive, said: "I first met Mildred in 1985. She was so proud of being an East Ender and was delighted that she was invited to open Thirza House. Shadwell was part of her old constituency and she had lived nearby in the Highway. Every year since, Mildred attended the hop festival that was held in the grounds of Thirza House and was so happy to be in the company of fellow East Enders, who she said knew how to work hard and play hard as well."

The funeral took place on 22nd April at 11 am at Golders Green Crematorium, 62 Hoop Lane, London NW11.

Update on temporary closure of Reading Room – Bancroft Library

Access to more collections and extended opening hours!

The Reading Room at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives remains closed to the public after a partial collapse of its ornate plaster ceiling. Repair works have begun and are scheduled to conclude at the end of July.

In the meantime we are pleased to announce that we now have access to the majority of our collections and are extending the appointment-only sessions to view material in our ground floor Education Room to three days per week, including one evening slot, and some additional Saturdays. You will be able to book a 3 hour appointment to view items in our ground floor Education Room in which you will be able to view pre-booked items from any of our collections except maps which, unfortunately, remain inaccessible. You must provide references of the material you wish to view when booking your appointment. There will be a limit to the quantity of material that can be consulted in each session - please discuss this with staff when booking your appointment. Bookings can be taken up until midday the previous day.

We are now taking bookings for sessions as follows, beginning Tuesday 3 May until the end of July:

Tuesdays and Wednesdays: 1000-1300 and 1330-1630

Thursdays: 1330-1630 and 1700-1930

In addition we are taking appointments for the following Saturdays (1000-1300 and 1330-1630):

May 7

June 4 and 18

July 16

To book your appointment please contact us (email localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call 020 7364 1290) stating your preferred time and date, and the references of material you would like to view.

When booking an appointment, readers can book

up to six individual items from across the following categories:

Books

Pamphlets (individual, or all at a given classmark)

Archive file or item

Photographs (individual, or all at a given classmark or street name)

Folder of press cuttings (classmark)

Bound newspapers/periodicals

Periodicals on microfilm

Please refer to the online catalogue to obtain references and search the collections, and the subject guide or classification scheme (available under the What's in the Catalogue tab) for a list of all available classmarks.

Excavation of All Saints National School at Allen Gardens Park

By Matt Hoskins

With Dave Sankey and Josh Frost.

Allen Gardens is a public park and garden located on Buxton Street, Spitalfields, E1. The park is between the prominent tourist areas Spitalfields City Farm and Brick Lane. Thanks to Tower Hamlets Museum of London Archaeology conducted an archaeological training excavation of the south east corner of the park, where we found the remains of a 19th century school.



The park is named after William and Joseph Allen who were two of the known founders of Spicer Street British School, later known as All Saints

National School, which once stood on Spicer Street (now Buxton Street) at the location of our trench. Other well-known founding members were Peter Bedford, Dr George Birbeck and Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, a politician and social reformist, after whom Spicer Street was eventually re-named. The men were also members of the Brick Lane Soup Ladling Society, which formed in 1797 to help those in poverty in the area by providing a soup kitchen. The society opened Spicer Street British School on February 3rd 1812, a school room consisting of 104x42 feet. to combat the widespread illiteracy amongst the poorer children in the Spitalfields and Mile End New Town area. After further research it seems the group were particularly interested in championing girl's education, an area vastly overlooked at the time.

The original boys school was run under Thomas Harrod, and although many of those involved with the school were Quakers, the school was non-sectarian. Children between the ages of six and fourteen were admitted on the payment of one penny per week, though due to the extreme poverty of the area, the school had fallen into debt by 1816 and was closed sometime between 1833 and 1840. During this closure the school was taken over by the National Schools of All Saints' Church and All Saints' National School was re-opened in 1840 under Robert Hanbury, a local brewer of Truman, Hanbury & Co.

The building itself was designed by architect Alfred J Mason and consisted of two storeys. The walls were constructed of stock (possibly reclaimed) brick and the roof was made of slate tiles to match the neighbouring All Saints' Church. The main entrance to the building was on the south wall, below a gable flanked by pinnacles, a seemingly common design feature of Alfred J Mason who also designed St Philips School on Newark Road, opposite the Royal London Hospital.

The school eventually fell out of use some time before the 1950s having been badly bomb damaged during WWII. The building was then used as a warehouse until being demolished in 1957.

The excavation of Allen Gardens began on Tuesday, 6th of October 2015. And lasted six weeks, digging a trench of 10x4 metres. The objective was

to give trainees somewhere to learn the skills of excavation for our NVQ and Traineeship but was also an opportunity to involve local schoolchildren with an open day and assemblies. Many interesting finds were excavated from the start, including a 1980s pager! (as obscure and historic object as a Roman sword to modern schoolchildren), many clay pipes and various examples of Victorian pottery. As the excavation continued we uncovered masonry features, three walls and four brick plinths (two originally supporting cast-iron columns and the other two, floor joists) as well as the 18th-century brickearth quarry that lay below it. Finds such as writing slates and inkwells, the children of St Ann's Primary School, opposite the park, were able to see and compare with modern pens and paper. The inkwell was made by "Geo M Hammer & Co" a specialist school and church suppliers, with a showroom on the Strand and works in Bermondsey. The clay pipes collected include 70+



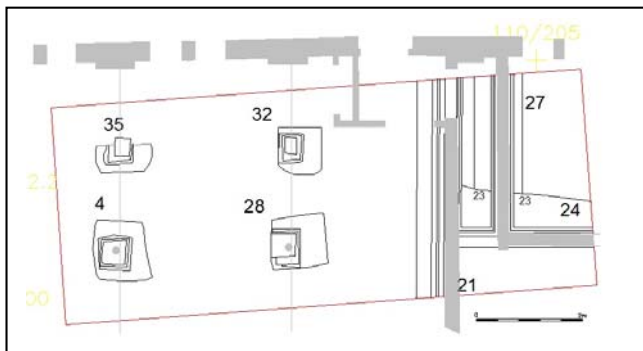
pipes with identifiable maker's marks, they were mostly made in the Old Street and Spitalfields areas and several by Thomas Balme of Mile End (a prominent member of the Tobacco Pipe Makers Company who resided where Wickhams department store was later to be built).



The brickearth quarry had removed earlier remains to natural terrace gravel, although a 17th century clay pipe, found in a secondary context, may have been lost around the time that the Civil War defences (a bank and ditch) were built nearby.

The main objective was to teach trainees the techniques of archaeological investigation but the project has opened a small window onto the East End of the past.

Grey represents Alfred J Mason's original drawing; black lines represent archaeological remains.



Photos copyright to MOLA

Strange or What!!

I have often heard it said that in no matter what direction life may take you, you will never be that far away from your roots, be it geographically, by association or even literary---like via this newsletter. For example--How I remember as a kid getting on one of those many London Red buses that encircled Newby Place in Poplar that took us to Loughton or such, an annual outing organized by the T&G Workers Union, and then some years latter visiting family there that had been re-housed as a result of the bombing. Or again, being part of that crocodile line of youngsters walking from Bruce Road Methodist church to the Bow/North London Railway station in Bow Road en-route to Theydon Bois for an adventurous day out, then finding myself as an adult working there when installing the Central Line Underground track that went on to Epping. Even those that still live in places remote from their roots seem to want at sometime make the pilgrimage back, as a visit to the Docklands Settlement on the Isle of Dogs on their open day can testify. Somehow the shadow of

your past never seems to leave you, or you don't want to leave it.

I became to sense these coincidental happenings coming more to the fore when we ourselves moved away out to Essex and I began an interest in our local history. The village of North Stifford just down the road from us was my first encounter. In the demolition of some local institutional buildings that we knew as Ardale School and the eventual construction of a housing development on the site, many 'coincidental' factors came to light. First I discovered that as a 'school' it had ties to the Stepney Board of Guardians dating back to 1902 when it purchased the land on which to build a children's home for Orphaned or Abandoned children. It was known then as Stepney Homes but was not a self-contained establishment in itself for the children went to the village school and the boys formed an essential part of the church choir. These links with the village continued until 1935 when the homes were closed and the buildings converted into an approved school. Since 1969 it had been a community home run by Newham Borough Council. It finally closed in total in 1994 and then demolished.

In the development of the site, Persimmon Homes the builders, renovated a dilapidated war memorial to the men aged 18 to 36 who had passed through the home but had died in WW1. I attended the rededication in 2005 and have the names of those inscribed. Persimmon has paid tribute by naming the streets and roads after the men whose names are listed on the memorial.

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

The reading of the book 'Plotlands' by Deanna Walker brought about another episode of 'I can't believe it', for in the plotlands history we learn that it was constantly making the news with reports of criminal activities when the Poplar Labour Colony existed there. In 1904 the Poplar Poor Law Board of Guardians decided to establish a farm colony on land leased to them by an American businessman. The farm was seen as an important experiment in taking men out of the workhouse and placing them in an environment where they could work and learn

skills that would make them fit to go on any farm or to emigrate to the colonies. It was hailed as a great success at first but as the years went by the colony experienced many problems like absconding with clothes that belonged to the workhouse, neglecting to perform work duty, drunkenness and assault. In 1907, 75 yards of copper telephone wire went missing from alongside the railway line. A sentence of 6 weeks hard labour was imposed on the culprits. I understand it closed down in the late 1920s and I now know it to be a residential caravan site. It's in the same area that I do my blackberry picking. Its Poplar connection is from my up-bringing in Bromley-by-Bow and Poplar Council was the landlord of the flats we lived in. Coincidence!!!!

I think the most uncanny encounter of this subject happened fairly recently when I was studying an Ordnance Survey map for this area and found that in the 1920s there had been a Priory/Monastery at the end of our road, something my inquisitive mind needed to discover more of. It seems that in this part of Essex there have been many religious groups some of which in a fragmented form still exist today. But this one in particular, The Society of Divine Compassion, had bonded well with the residents and the gentlemen of the society were often seen walking the area in their sandaled footwear. Research showed that the society purchased what was once a farm in 1905 from their headquarters in Plaistow the purpose of it being to transform it into a 'retreat'. They existed here until around 1947 when the dwindling of numbers compelled them to disband and their activities were taken over by a similar group back in Plaistow who still function today at 42, Balaam Street. In fact 2008 was their centenary year.

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

They still conduct themselves in working with the community and carry out their duties as chaplains to The East of London Cemetery---the resting place

for many many East Enders including members of my own families. The most surprising factor of all to me was that Balaam Street is just a stone's throw away from the two rooms we had in Ling Road, the first address of my married life.

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

GEORGE DONOVAN

Local history monographs from Bow Church.

Members may find something of interest in a group of A5 monographs available from Bow Church for £1 each. Most were written by the late Reverend Michael Peet, Rector of Bow Church and/or Raymond Port, both members of ELHS.

In no particular order they are:

Clara Grant, the Farthing Bundle Lady of Bow
The Story of St. Leonard's Priory (Bromley by Bow ed.)

The Story of Bow Fair

Bow Church and The First World War

Grove Hall - Bow's Lunatic Asylum

Mr Fitkin's War – An East End Vicar's view of the blitz

The Tower Hamlets Rifles, a short history, by Major T.L. Craze (Retd).

Some of the subjects may be well known but I was particularly impressed by "Grove Hall" and "Mr Fitkin's War". The former takes us back to the 19th century when private care of the mentally ill was both profitable and very variable in quality. Grove Hall Park was built (1908) on the southern third of the asylum's grounds. The asylum site itself, being under Bow Bus Garage.

James Wayland Fitkin (1881-1964) was Rector of All Hallows, Church, Bow Common from 1927 to 1947 and Michael Peet found his wartime correspondence when he became Rector of that church. He also took over responsibility for the bombed St. Andrews Church, Bromley, which I have to admit I didn't even know existed.

The Queen Mother's Rebel Cousin

Roger Mills, author of Everything Happens in Cable Street, is currently researching the life of Lilian Bowes Lyon, a forgotten and barely-documented woman from an aristocratic background who committed herself to the East End in the Second World War. Some would describe her as 'The Queen of the Slums,' but Roger prefers to call her 'The Queen Mother's Rebel Cousin.'

The house at 141 Bow Rd is not remarkable other than because it survived Hitler's Blitz and the ravages of post-war demolition, which saw traditional housing stock replaced with imposing tower blocks and maze-like estates. What is remarkable is the story of the woman who occupied this house during East London's darkest hour. There is no plaque on the wall to tell her story to passers-by on the busy highway. There is no book to be read or documentary to be viewed. There is – in fact – very little of her story to be found anywhere. This is surprising, given her background, her voluntary and literary work, and her close connections to the Royal family.

One autumn day while wandering along the Charing Cross Rd, I noticed a slim volume of poetry in one of the second-hand bookshops. On seeing the cover I realised that the author, Lilian Bowes Lyon, must be part of the illustrious and well-known family of that name. What intrigued me was the title, *Evening in Stepney*. Stepney is my part of town. Why, I wondered, had the high-born poet chosen to write about East London? What I uncovered gave me some of the answers, none of which I expected.

Lilian was a first cousin of the Queen Consort of King George VI – better remembered today as that much-loved matriarch, the Queen Mother. Lilian was a novelist, poet and, at one point in her life, the mistress of the man who would go on to become Prince Charles' personal guru-in-chief. Yet during the Second World War, despite being born into a wealthy and aristocratic family, she chose to work and live in the desperate, bombed-out streets of East London. Here, she befriended dock-workers and dustmen. Some would describe her as 'The

Queen of the Slums' or 'The Florence Nightingale of the East End.' Yet today, she is totally forgotten. Over several decades of research into the history of East London, I have not found a single reference to her in many hundreds of histories, autobiographies and studies that I have read. Apart from one brief account, she appears only as a footnote in the histories of men. Am I alone in being curious that she remains an unknown figure?

Lilian Bowes Lyon was born, the youngest of seven, just before Christmas in 1895. Her parents were the Honourable Francis Bowes Lyon and Lady Anne Lindsay. As a child, she was waited on by servants at Ridley Hall in Northumberland and free to roam through acre upon acre of the estate's dense woodland and landscaped gardens. She was five years older than her cousin, Elizabeth. Lilian joined the future Queen in Scotland's Glamis Castle to help nurse injured servicemen when it was used as a convalescent home during the First World War. She later studied in London and at Oxford. She travelled extensively, spoke several languages and between the wars wrote two novels, the second under an assumed name. 'Not because it was libellous or indecent or politically tendentious,' her friend, William Plomer, wrote, 'but because it did not conform to [her family's] conventions either that she should write, or that she should write fiction, or that, if she did, she should write fiction suggesting that life was not a wholly comfortable proceeding.'

The books are those of a modern freethinker, with hints of taboo sexuality, and in *The Spreading Tree*, outright condemnation of a class-ridden England. Plomer wrote, 'I used to tease her and call her a Bolshevik, but I am not sure that she was a political being at all... She was a poet with an acute response to the creative stirrings, however blind and dumb, of every human being.' Lilian was ahead of her time – William Plomer's homosexuality was fully accepted by her in a time of anti-gay prejudice, to the extent that she helped him financially to buy presents for his lovers. Bohemians' begat beatniks begat Beatles and hippies. She never lived to see the sixties and the flowering of freedoms that she championed. But if she had, I like to imagine her, an eccentric old dame, turning up to do readings at basement jazz clubs, 'happenings' and Pop Art exhibitions. She

was to be cheated out of that by a premature and tragic death.

The thirties saw her reputation as a poet grow with publications such as *The White Hare*, and *Bright Feather Fading*. That decade also saw her conduct an affair with the white South African adventurer, Laurens van der Post, nine years her junior and already married. Laurens would become a household name in later years, beguiling the Prince of Wales and the television viewing public with his tales of encounters with the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert and his wartime experiences as a Japanese prisoner of war.

Lilian became a member of the Women's Voluntary Service before the outbreak of war and assisted in the evacuation of the capital's children to the countryside. She also guided bombed-out and traumatised Stepney children to the Hampstead War Nursery, partly run by Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund. But her main association with the East End was to begin in a most unlikely place.

The Tilbury Shelter was formed from the arches, vaults and cellars of the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway goods station and an adjacent eight-story warehouse. Not being fully underground, it made a strange refuge from the bombs of the Luftwaffe. Yet every night it was bursting at the seams with East Enders desperate to escape the raids. At the start of the Blitz, the Tilbury was run by two separate bodies. On one side, vaults requisitioned by the borough council were authorised for shelter use. The connected warehouse site, however, was still being used as storage space. When bombing began it became clear that the vaults would not contain the numbers trying to get into them, and consequently the desperate crowd – aided by members of the local Communist Party – broke into the restricted area. Evidence indicates that it was occupied by up to 16,000 people every evening.

In all the shelters there was concern about the spreading of disease – scabies, impetigo, tuberculosis, diphtheria – and there were reports of lice. But anecdotal and official sources indicate that the Tilbury was the most filthy and disgusting of them all. 'Hell Hole' was a common description for it. There were just twelve chemical toilets in a curtained-off area, with some overflowing buckets

for the children. As cold as the night might be, the temperature would rise, bringing about a foul stench from thousands of bodies who lacked any washing facilities. And at the heart of it, a mountain of rancid margarine, abandoned when the warehouse was overrun.

Lilian was a regular in the shelter, probably taking refuge when carrying out her work and, given her position in the WVS, almost certainly assuming a supportive role there. Eventually, the soiled margarine was removed and a clean-up operation begun when the situation – and the stench – could no longer be tolerated. So notorious was the Tilbury that it became a sort of subterranean cause célèbre, with artists such as Henry Moore and Edward Ardizzone joining the crowds. Also documenting the scene was the self-taught Rose L. Henriques, wife of Basil Henriques, founder of the local Oxford & St George's Jewish Boys' Club. Although she is known for philanthropic work, Rose's paintings are less well remembered.

During 1942, Lilian Bowes Lyon came to live in Bow and composed her epic poem, *Evening in Stepney*. A brief entry about Lilian's time here appears in *The Queen Mother's Family Story*, written by James Wentworth Day and published in the sixties. It contains an interview with Lilian's wartime housekeeper, Ellen Beckwith. Ellen recalls a royal visit – 'The Queen Mother came one day. No fuss. She had a cup of tea with Lilian in the flat, and Lilian told her just what we needed down here.' Other anecdotes feature the Duke of Kent dropping by and Lilian summoning Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, to Bow Rd to 'give him a good talking-to and just show him what Bow needs.' Lilian supposedly obtained a direct line to the Queen's rooms at Buckingham Palace to berate one of the ladies-in-waiting for lack of free food and hot drinks during the VE Day celebrations. Ellen also recounts an incident of how during a bomb blast, Lilian was kicked in the leg by a hysterical woman. The inference is that the injury exacerbated a long-term diabetic condition. Lilian was resident in Bow until at least February 1945, but when her physical condition deteriorated she found herself swept back into the world of privilege she had attempted to escape.

I tracked the locations of Lilian's life – the site of Tilbury Shelter, 141 Bow Rd, the series of West London houses where she spent her last days recovering from a series of grisly operations and her final dwelling in luxurious Brompton Sq. In constant pain, with both legs amputated, Lilian passed away there in the summer of 1949, yet continued to write her poetry until the end. Later, I made a pilgrimage to the place of her birth in Northumberland and her final resting place. I was granted access by Durham University Library to her handwritten letters to William Plomer. Perhaps the most significant discovery I made was an article – she refers to it as a 'letter' – that William urged her to write about her time in, as she calls it, 'dock-back-street-canal-and-sewer-land.' The piece remains unpublished since it appeared in 1945. In it, she writes passionately about the lie of the ingrained class system in the 'Two Nations' of England and how social change could come swiftly, 'if the whole lot of us faced the lie as we have faced the War.'

Her focus was the hardship faced by ordinary working class people, especially women and children. 'The synthesis Marx had in mind, the social re-organisation on a higher level ... depends on children,' she wrote. 'In one district here, where the Great North Sewer comes out, a district of gluey canals, of grinding machinery, of smells that are sour or sweetish according to which factory's boilers were last cleaned, there is a children's play-centre, where I often go, because it helps me believe that even the grimmest cocoon can't kill the spirit of man. Except for this little centre ... the children have nowhere to play, except the street. No room at home, often two large families divide the home between them, rents being high and the shortage of accommodation acute.'

The 'letter' tantalisingly refers to a diary kept by Lilian. It would be a fascinating read, possibly containing more of her views on politics, her local contacts and of another affair that she conducted with a married Jewish doctor while in East London. What happened to the diary on her death? Enquiries made to the highest family in the British social scale have brought about the reply that no archive relating to Lilian Bowes Lyon exists. The Royal circle tend to keep their secrets. I wonder if because of her left-leaning views, her romances,

her circle of outsiders and her questioning of the accepted social order, Lilian is one of those secrets?

Roger Mills



Lilian Bowes Lyon remembered outside the house she lived in from 1942-45, 141 Bow Road

A FAMILY OF SHIPWRIGHTS AND MARINERS IN STEPNEY 1671-1764

My grandfather, Harry Gordon Clark (1861-1951), ran what he liked to call "an old City firm" of wine and spirit importers. It had been started in 1810 by his grandfather, Matthew Clark. Harry knew a certain amount about Matthew's father, Charles, an Excise official on the Thames and later Gauger for some of the City merchants, and about Charles's father, also Matthew. He described Matthew as "a well-known shipbuilder on the Thames", and I imagine thought of him as holding something of the same position as he did himself: a person running a significant business, well established in the upper echelons of London business life. The reality has turned out to be rather different –

but no less interesting. Finding it began with research into the registers of the huge old parish of St. Dunstan's, Stepney. A friend, who'd been asked to keep an eye open for "Matthew Clark" around the 1720s, found (I think through ancestry.co.uk) a rather curious entry not very easy to read on-line but clearly including the unusual name "Witterance". This name appeared twice in the later Clark family records: William Wittrance Clark (1749-52), the eldest son of the first Matthew, and Matthew Wittrance Clark (1832-7), a grandson of Charles Clark.

I went to the London Metropolitan Archives and looked at the original entry. It read: "Mathew Witterance, son of Thos. Clarke of LH [Limehouse] marr [mariner] & Sarah", and the infant was baptised in St. Dunstan's parish on 12 February 1726, aged 11 days. It looked as though Thomas Clark(e) and Sarah Witt(e)rance had not been married, and that there was some uncertainty as to which surname the child would grow up with. This was confirmed when Thomas's will appeared among the many wills made by sailors and proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. They tend to be formulaic, "considering", in the words of Thomas's will, "the Perills and dangers of the seas and other uncertainties of this Transitory life". Thomas made his will made in November 1725 and named as his heir and executrix "my very Good ffriend Sarah Witterance of Lymeouse aforesaid Spinster". When Sarah proved the will early in 1731/2 she was described as "Sara Clarke alias Whitterance Vidua [widow]", and the will had not been invalidated by a subsequent marriage, so it sounded as though this was what later became known as a "common law marriage", that is not solemnised and legalised in church (the only way of marrying until over a century later), but generally recognised. So shortly before Matthew's birth Thomas thought it proper to make his will in her favour, "for avoiding Controversies after my decease", which might easily have happened if she was not actually married to him.

Inconveniently, further research by the friend showed that Thomas and Sarah had been married - in St. Botolph, Aldgate, on 25 September 1722: "Tho. Clark Bar and Sarah Whittrance Spr both of ys Psh." There were a number of Thomas Clarks around; but Sarah Wittrances, however spelled?

One possibility is that the banns had been called but the marriage was cancelled at the last minute, and the clerk was working from the banns certificates and not realising that the marriage had not taken place. Maybe they just had a row, or maybe Thomas had an offer of a voyage which he could not turn down, and it took him three years to get Sarah back, during which time he consoled himself with episodes such as that with Elizabeth Mordaunt, below. Another answer might be that they eloped to get married in 1722 (this could explain why they got married in Aldgate, instead of their home parish), and were still keeping quiet about their marriage three years later. Sarah would have been 19 in 1722, not needing (before Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753) parental permission to be married, but perhaps still wanting to rebel. Yet another possibility is that the marriage was bigamous – that Thomas had a wife in another port, or in another hamlet in Stepney!

Be that as it may, Sarah's family were revealed by future research, and also the family of Matthew's wife, Elizabeth Griffin, and a possible candidate emerged for Thomas's father.

Sarah, baptized 1703, was the daughter of Mathew Wittrance, sometime of Limehouse, sometime of "Poppler", bricklayer (1671-1736), and his second wife Katharine Alder. Matthew's parents had been Matthew and Margaret, and the father had also been a bricklayer. They had been prosperous enough to own a silver tankard marked W M M, which the son mentioned in his will. The younger Matthew Wittrance was of Three Colt Street, Limehouse, when he was buried on 23rd September 1736. He left a will, with a well-written signature. In it he made provision for his wife Katherine and after her death for his two daughters Margaret Tolman and Sarah Hopson (sic). He stipulated that if Margaret did not have any children then the freehold house in Three Colt Lane which would ultimately come to her should go to 'Matthew Wittrance Clarke son of Thomas Clarke late of Limehouse, deceased'. If she did have children, then Matthew was to be given the sum of £10 in lieu of the freehold house as soon as he reached the age of 21 years.

Again after Katherine's death, Sarah was left the leasehold of a house in the same street. 'I give unto

my daughter Sarah Hopson Mother of the aforesaid Matthew Wittrance Clarke the lease of a house in Three Colt Street known by the sign of the New Church together with all the stock of drink that shall be at the time of the decease' (of Katherine). So he had done quite well in his bricklaying career, and perhaps had a side-line in the drinks trade, like his Clark descendants. Let's hope a decent amount of drink was still in the house twelve years later when Sarah came into her inheritance.

Wittrance (or Witterance, or Whitterance or Witherance or Wittrens) is a very uncommon name in London, most of the people called that being found in Staffordshire, Derbyshire, or Cheshire. But there were others in London from the early 17th century, whose relationship to the bricklayers I can't elucidate. The younger Matthew had a brother John, born on Christmas Eve 1672 but not baptized until 23 September 1673. John, who died in 1700, was also a "mariner", clearly, from details in his will, in the Royal Navy. Perhaps Thomas knew Sarah because he had been a shipmate of her uncle John. This connection for Thomas would mean that he was at least 15 by 1700, and indeed a Thomas, son of John Clarke of Rattcliffe, shipwright, and his wife Frances, was baptized in 1681. Ratcliff is next to Limehouse on the river, and Thomas' son Matthew became a shipwright, so this is a quite plausible, though not provable, parentage for Thomas. There were several Thomas Clark(e)s baptized in Stepney at this time. Incidentally, there were baptisms in Stepney practically every day, usually several in a day. They can't have been more than fairly perfunctory affairs, I imagine.

After Thomas Clark's death Sarah married Jeremiah Hobson in September 1732 at St. Benet's, Paul's Wharf. The marriage was remembered in the family tradition as having been of Matthew Clark's sister, not mother, to "a Mr. Hobson". Sarah was now living, like her parents, in the new parish of St. Anne, Limehouse, just carved out of Stepney, and given a fine new church by Hawksmoor. In March 1734 Jeremiah Hobson, son of Jeremiah and Sarah, was baptized there. The father was described as a "waterman", that is he carried passengers on the Thames. An address is given, "3 Colt Street". St. Anne's is in Three Colt Street, and as we have seen Sarah's father owned two houses there. Jeremiah

senior had been baptised at 13 years in St Dunstan's, Stepney, presumably at the time of apprenticeship. This was perhaps a superstitious unwillingness to take on an unbaptised apprentice, not surprising in a mildly hazardous occupation such as one on water.

Thomas and Sarah's son Matthew Clark described himself as a carpenter when he married Elizabeth Griffin at St Katherine by the Tower in 1748. It's not in the record of their marriage, but in the bishop's transcripts of applications to marry. He has a fine legible signature on two separate documents sworn at the same time, on one of which he had to promise to pay £200 if they were not married in the proper place and in the proper way. Elizabeth Griffin is described on the marriage allegation as "twenty one years and upwards" and as being like him of St. George in the East parish. This did not exist when she would have been born, and in fact her baptism is in the register of St. Paul, Shadwell, for 11 January 1728/9, so she was not actually twenty one, but I don't suppose anyone checked.

Elizabeth Griffin had a younger brother, Charles, baptized at seventeen days on 27 December 1731. Their parents were William and Mary, of Spring Street, Shadwell. This was a street immediately south of St. Paul's church, destroyed when the Shadwell New Basin was built as an extension to the London Docks in the 1840s (part of the churchyard was taken too!) William is described when Elizabeth was baptized as a shipwright, when Charles was baptized as a carpenter. So Matthew was marrying within his trade. William Griffin of St. Paul's and Mary Hall of St. Dunstan's had been married at St Mary, Whitechapel on 11 November 1722. Matthew and Elizabeth gave their first son, who died young, the name William Wittrance. Giving a first boy the mother's father Christian name was very common: Matthew had been so named; his son Charles carried on the tradition; so did his son Matthew, and his son Gordon. William Griffin was probably the son of William and Elizabeth baptized at St. Dunstan's on 27 March 1704. The older William was a mariner. There was another son Samuel born in 1697 and at his baptism William and Elizabeth were recorded as living handy for the river in King Street, now Prusom Street, Wapping. (Samuel was probably the

widowed Shadwell victualler who died in 1760 leaving no children). The older William Griffin is presumably the Stepney sailor in the Royal Navy who made a will on a standard navy form in favour of his wife Elizabeth on May 23rd in the ninth year of King William, that is 1796-7, the will being proved in April 1708.

Matthew's name does not seem to appear in the surviving "registers of duties paid for apprentices' indentures", so he may have done an informal apprenticeship as a carpenter. He showed what sort of a carpenter he was when their second son Matthew was baptized in 1750 at St. George in the East; he described himself as a "shipwright". St. George's was the second of the handsome new churches built by Hawksmoor a generation before for a parish cut out of Stepney. It was a parish whose inhabitants later in the century were said to be "employed, for the most part, in rope-making, and the manufacture of other articles for the rigging of ships". The registers of this parish unusually gave whereabouts in the parish people lived, so we know that Matthew and Elizabeth were then living in Silver street in Wapping (now called Apsley street), but must have moved before Charles was born in 1757 as he was not baptized there.

My grandfather understood that Matthew "was connected in business with the East India Company, and through the instrumentality of Lord Clive went to Bombay in connection with the Government dockyard there.... Mrs. Elizabeth Clark died in September 1762, and Mr. Matthew Clark shortly afterwards in Bombay." I have learnt that there is always a foundation of truth in family legends, but that they are never completely correct! In fact, Matthew obtained the position of ship's carpenter on the East Indiaman Winchelsea, which was due to make the usual three years' voyage to India from March 1762 to 1765. (It is conceivable that somehow he obtained the interest of Clive, who was in London from late 1760 to early 1765, famous and much in demand for favours.) Before leaving London, Matthew petitioned the Honourable Company to be allowed to indulge in "private trade" while in India, a common practice among senior members of ships' companies who had some capital of their own.

As ship's carpenter, Matthew was paid £4/10/- a month, more than anyone else except the captain (£10 p.m.) and the Chief Mate (£5 p.m.) and the same as the second mate. Reading the log of the Winchelsea it is easy to see why; only a fortnight into the voyage the fore topmast fell over the larboard side, and for the next two years the carpenter had much similar work, not to mention following a meeting with a French ship "Carpenters Employ'd stopping shot-holes."

The East India Company had an efficient method of ensuring the welfare of those its sailors left behind. Before sailing in March 1762 Matthew drew six months' pay. In September representatives of the dependents went to an office near St. Mildred's Bread Street (off Cheapside) and drew one month's pay, repeating this every three months. But Elizabeth Clark, as the family tradition remembered correctly, died that September. It was her brother, the hitherto unknown Charles Griffin, who drew the money and continued to do so until 4 October 1764. By then the news must have reached London that the Winchelsea was no more, and neither was Matthew.

On her second visit to the mouth of the Hooghly (having been to Bombay, Madras, the Hooghly, Acheh in Sumatra, Bombay again, and various smaller EIC forts), on Tuesday 20 March 1764, the Winchelsea "Struck and Stuck fast upon the long-sand. The time and direction of the Tide (at the top of the Spring tide) rendered ineffectual all attempts to get ye Ship off again; shor'd her up on ye starbd side wh a Topmast and two topsail Yardes; but when ye water forsook her she Bilged; and on return of the tide she filled. In the Night and morning After, got all the People safe on board the Pilot sloop. On Wednesday Noon her larboard Quarter only was above Water. And part of the Poop deck blown off. Nathl Paul."

So ends the log book. The ship's company, presumably, went into the notoriously unhealthy town of Calcutta to wait for another ship. On 10 May 1764, Matthew was buried there.

Three of the grandparents of the five orphan children of Matthew and Elizabeth Clark were dead already and Sarah Hobson, living in Back Lane, was buried at St George in the East in

February 1766; very likely Matthew's mother, but unfortunately no age or condition is given. Charles Griffin must have brought up the children and it is to his credit that all survived to adulthood. He never married, and left his property to the four still alive when he died in 1808. He had been in the Excise, so it is more likely that that is why Charles Clark, third son of Matthew and Elizabeth, spent the first part of his working life with the Excise than the family tradition that it was through Lord Clive...

Charles Clark's life had momentous episodes, beginning with his kidnapping to work on the "plantations", continuing through his capture of pirates on the Thames to his dismissal from a senior position in the Excise for hanky-panky, a second career of prosperity under suspicion, and tranquil old age in Harwich – but all that is another story.

And Elizabeth Mordaunt? She was a good time girl who accosted a sailor named Thomas Clark in the Halfway House on Stepney Fields in August 1732 and stole from him a sealskin purse containing the seven golden guineas he had just been paid for a voyage with "Merchant Forward". Forward had the contract for transporting prisoners, and so it was only fitting that Mordaunt was herself transported, the jury having kindly found her guilty only of stealing the purse – the guineas would have seen her hanged. I devoutly hope that her victim was our Thomas, because if so we have his verbatim testimony at the Old Bailey, as we have those, twice, of his grandson Charles.

CHARLES GORDON CLARK
Bromyard, Herefordshire.

Letters and News

Dr. Melvyn Brooks, Israel, 17/4/2016

I have been trying to find out biographical details about F(rederick) Allard. The one CDV I have from his studio gives the address as:- 10, Homerton Tce (I assume Terrace) Hackney. The reverse side is blank. 6.9cm * 4.5cm. The only other reference I have come across is from the Hackney Terrier Autumn 2010, 86.6 in a small note about a postcard in the HAD asking about information of the postcard – sized photograph taken by the studio of Frederick Allard at 116 Wick Road taken between 1908 and about 1911. There are no other references to Allard in any of the issues of the Hackney Terrier.

My CDV shows a rather small child with what looks like Myaesthesia Gravis. I have a senior Paediatric Endocrinologist looking into it (She is often invited to Great Ormond Street) and I am hoping to come up with an interesting article for the Hackney Terrier. Not too medical!

Do you have any ideas where I could find out anything about Fred Allard. I think he was based around the Hackney Wick Area 1890-1911.

Philip Mernick replied to Melvyn Brooks 25/4/2016

Dear Melvyn,
Michael Pritchard's A Directory of London Photographers 1841-1908 gives Frederick Allard at 55 Homerton Terrace in 1907 and 116 Wick Road from 1908 on (no closure date. that would require checking the London directories). He isn't listed in the PhotoLondon database because that only covers the 19th century. I have just spoken with David Webb (who passes on his best regards) and he thinks he might have something on Allard. If he does he will send it to me and I will email it on to you (he doesn't use email).

David Webb replied to a query about the life of Frederick Allard, East End Photographer.

Frederick Allard was born in Bethnal Green in 1874, at 17 Gibraltar Walk, Bethnal Green Road. As soon as he had left school, he was employed in

his father's boot-making business, as a boot clicker. In the early 90s he moved to Hackney, where he worked briefly as a tram conductor.

In 1906 he opened his first photographic studio at 55 Homerton Terrace, a long-vanished turning off Morning Lane. It seems not to have been successful, since less than a year later, Allard moved a few hundred yards down the road and opened a 2nd studio at 116 Wick Road. This too apparently failed, since in 1910 he closed it and moved next door, to 114, to open a fancy goods warehouse.

Allard married a local girl, Harriet Butcher, from Shoreditch, on Boxing Day in 1894. At some point, probably during the War, they were divorced, and Harriet emigrated to Australia. She died in Redfern, New South Wales in 1923.

Allard soldiered on with the Wick road shop into the 1930s – it closed in 1937. Allard died in Hackney in 1957, aged 83.

In the 1980s I saw a carte and a cabinet photo from Allard's studio at Hackney Archives, but when I enquired again c. 5 years ago, they could not be found.

My best wishes to Dr Brooks, and I hope he is enjoying his retirement.

The Widow's Son

In ELHS Newsletter, Volume 3, issue 19 (Summer 2014), I mentioned the possibility that the famous, Grade 2 listed, pub The Widow's Son might close. Well it happened late last year. The occasion seems to have passed the world by in spite of the current hoo-ha about the closure of East End pubs. At least I can't find anything about it on the web apart from its mention in some recent Spitalfields Life blogs about the campaign to save the Queen's Head pub in Limehouse – they hosted this Easter's bun ceremony.

The building still seems to be secure and I recently saw somebody on the roof, hopefully a workman not a burglar. The site of The Widow's Son and

that of the, now demolished Bow Business Centre, next door, all appear on the site plan of Peabody Estates' current Merchant Quarter E3 scheme. Savilles, who are handling the sale of the already built portion, seem to know nothing about that, and I have been unable to get a response from Peabody themselves.



The Widow's son Pub – closed but not shuttered. (Below) Interior view of the pub taken a week or so ago.



If anyone knows what is planned for the Widow's Son, please let me know and I will print it in the next newsletter.

Philip Mernick

Two post card images of a post-World War One war memorial. The pictures are from the studio of C. Dunlop, Exmouth Street, Stepney. It doesn't look like Stepney but is presumably somewhere in East London. Do any of our members recognize its location?



New Bancroft Road Exhibition

Radical Housing in Tower Hamlets 20 June-22 September 2016

From the rent strikes of the 1930s to the squatting movement of the 1970s and the formation of the first housing co-operatives, the fight for decent and affordable housing has a long history in London's

East End. Drawn exclusively from our archive and local history library collections and curated by our Learning & Participation Officer Perdita Jones, the upcoming exhibition will provide an overview of tenant action in Tower Hamlets, highlighting some of the key events and movements which have taken place over the last 100 years. The exhibition has been programmed to tie in with the forthcoming conference Radical Histories; Histories of Radicalism organised by the Raphael Samuel History Centre, taking place next door to us at Queen Mary, University of London, from 30 June - 3 July.

We have so far confirmed the events below to accompany the exhibition, with more being added to the programme over the next few weeks. All activities in the programme are free and take place here at THLHLA, with the exception of the guided walk. Further events will appear on our website in due course. To book, please call or email using the contact details at the bottom of this newsletter.

Exhibition Launch

Thursday 7 July 2016, 6-7.30pm

Join us for the formal launch of the exhibition with guest speakers to be announced. Free, no booking required.

Workshop: Printmaking

Saturday 2 July 2016, 1-4pm

Due to popular request we have invited back Rudy Loewe to lead another free printmaking workshop. Design and print a poster inspired by housing activism in the East End. Limited space, advance booking essential.

Walk: Housing in Bethnal Green

Saturday 20 August 2016, 2-4pm

A guided walk exploring the housing heritage of Bethnal Green. Free, booking essential.

Film screening: *Goodbye Longfellow Road*

Saturday 17 September 2016, 2-3.30pm

A free screening of rarely seen *Goodbye Longfellow Road* (1977, 78 mins), a documentary originally broadcast on ITV, telling the story of the residents of a Stepney street. Declared a slum in the 1930s, earmarked for demolition in 1943 but still inhabited in the 1970s: what happened when the bulldozers finally moved in? No booking required.