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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, Diane Kendall and David Behr.



**Subscriptions for the 2017/18 season are due on September 1**

**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](mailto: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

I took this on a sunny Sunday August 6<sup>th</sup>. The rebuilt pagoda epitomises why Victoria Park is so popular and wins so many awards. At a time when Councils are under great pressure to reduce costs Tower Hamlets has realised that having such a great resource as Victoria Park is very beneficial for people's contentment and well-being. Opened in 2012 together with new access bridges it replaces the original pagoda, first used as an entrance to the Chinese Exhibition in Hyde Park (1841-43) and purchased for Victoria Park in 1847. Suffering from war damage and neglect it was demolished in 1956.

**East London History Society  
Lecture Programme 2017-2018**

**Thursday**

14 September 2017

*East London Markets*

Philip Mernick

**Thursday**

26 October 2017

*Industries along the Regents Canal  
from Bethnal Green to Limehouse*

Carolyn Clark

**Preceded by short AGM at 7.15**

**Thursday**

16 November 2017

*East End Vernacular, Artists who  
painted London's East End streets in the  
20th century*

The Gentle Author

**Thursday**

14 December 2017

*Film and short talk about the Festival of  
Britain*

Ray Newton

Suggestions and ideas for future topics and/or speakers for our Lecture Programme are always welcomed. If you can suggest someone or indeed if you would like to give a talk yourself, please get in touch with David Behr, our Programme co-ordinator, either at one of our lectures or, alternatively, email our Chairman Philip Mernick with your comments and suggestions. **Email: [phil@mernicks.com](mailto:phil@mernicks.com)**

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

**More on Graves:**

**From Sam Halsey-Jones:**

I'm part of the team at Funeral Zone, the online resource which supports the bereaved. I thought your members might be interested in our newly-launched Famous Graves Finder – and help us make this interactive history resource even bigger and better!

We've pinpointed the final resting place of 50 significant figures from history on an interactive map ([www.funeralzone.co.uk/famous-graves](http://www.funeralzone.co.uk/famous-graves)) of the UK.

We are hoping that it will inspire people to visit these burial sites and find out more about their history. We're also keen for people to suggest who we should include on the map, in our next update. We'd love it if you'd share our news about the Famous Graves Finder with your members – and look forward to hearing who should feature on the map.

**Digital Outreach**

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## Short Stories from our Members

**Philip Mernick, our Chair, sent out a plea to our members for contributions to the current newsletter, and the response has been tremendous! Thank you all for responding so swiftly with such a varied selection of articles. We hope to get as many as we can into this newsletter. We will hold the remaining over for the next edition, but we will endeavour to use all the material you have so generously provided.**

### “A REAL ENGLISH GENTLEMAN”

This was said of my father by his Welsh neighbour before he died in 2008. He was an only child born in 1921 in Clapton Hospital and he grew up in Bethnal Green. His father, my Grandad, came from Bethnal Green and his mother, my Grandma, hailed from Shoreditch. Dad rarely spoke of his upbringing, there was a great pride there, but he wouldn't easily be drawn on the subject. Only when pressed would he say “You don't really want to know, we were so poor and I do remember we were often so cold”. And that coldness for him was to continue during World War 2 when he was on the Arctic Convoys.

He met my mother during wartime, they married and I was born in 1952. By this time, we lived in Watford and as I grew up East London was pretty much a closed book to me for many years. As an adult, I lived and worked in London, then I moved to Hong Kong and much later settled in Yorkshire. By this time Mum and Dad had long since retired and were living far away in South West Wales.

A close friend I'd met overseas, and who had returned to the UK in the 1980s, was working in London and subsequently settled in Bethnal Green. My interest in the East End was re-kindled by my visits to her when we regularly

walked and explored the area. I felt in a curious way that I belonged there even though it was all still quite new to me, but I wanted to find out more about Dad's background and if possible his family's history. I joined the East London History Society but still Dad was reluctant to discuss his East End roots. It wasn't until his death in 2008, by which time the internet had made family history so accessible, that I started to research his ancestry.

In 2011, I made contact with two of Dad's cousins who are sisters. “Did you know that your father had 24 cousins?” said one. Grandad was one of 11 children; he was the second oldest and their mother was the second youngest which meant that these two cousins were nearer to me in age than with Dad. We corresponded regularly, we met, we became close and this has been a wonderful gift that I never would have expected. They've shown me photos of other family members and I can see a likeness between them and me. I've been told so many stories; it's been a jigsaw of pieces fitted together. The wider family has spread over continents to and from Europe, the Americas and Australia. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were ancestors who arrived in Spitalfields from the Vendee in France, as Huguenot refugees, working as silk weavers. As a spin off from this, the family, who by this time lived in Bethnal Green, became horse hair dressers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

To return to where I began about a “real English gentleman” – what is it that really makes an “English gentleman”?

Dad was a quiet somewhat introspective person. He was a composed contained man of great dignity. He was strong and very often deadpan although tucked away was a man with a wry sense of humour who could always appreciate irony and the absurd. You would say that in this sense he was very English and stiff upper lip. He had a strong moral and ethical sense and always said when referring to the two World Wars that this must never ever

happen again. “We have given you this freedom, remember that. Strength is by being together”.

Earlier this year one of the cousins and I decided to each take part in a DNA test and when the results arrived it showed that we were related and also revealed a cocktail of nations. We are a pair of “mongrels”. My DNA comprises: British, Irish, West Europe, East Europe, Iberian Peninsula, Scandinavian and West Asia. It presents a picture of a fluid family history and geography over the centuries. These days when there is the trend to move towards fixed borders and nationalist tendencies we should reflect how we humans throughout our evolution have always been migrants.

### Elizabeth Lofthouse

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#### A DULL THUD

Sitting in the nine pennies with mum in a Dalston Cinema, whose name evades me, was a weekly thrill for a little boy of seven, adding to this, the siren had gone outside along Dalston Waste. An apt name that, for that is where peoples' waste ended up, mostly. Rummaging through it whilst drinking a sarsaparilla drink bought just along the road.

So the film was running and then a dull thud. My mum and I took no notice of it although it didn't seem to fit with the leading actor kissing his leading lady. I was waiting impatiently for the cartoon.

The film show having ended, we walked back home, about a mile. The all clear had sounded and we turned into our road. Strewn along it were the remains of roofs, windows, bricks and dust.

We came to our little terraced house whose pieces of roof we had trod upon, coming along the road. A land mine had landed in the garden

opposite and the bomb disposal hadn't succeeded in disposing of it.

So that was how this little boy found out what a dull thud was and what it could do.

### Albert Noble

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#### A Yorkshireman in the East End

I started as an undergraduate at Queen Mary College in October 1964 and graduated in English the summer of 1967. In those days, there was advice given from teachers at school about possible places to apply but no one did the grand tour of college campuses to see which one might be most suitable as is often the case today. My only previous visit to London had been almost a decade earlier for a week's holiday with my parents.

There was perhaps a slight frisson when thinking of the East End and its association with Jack the Ripper, Limehouse, Wapping and the docks, the cheap squares on the Monopoly board and the sense of being in an area apart from the tourist attractions when it seemed that visitors rarely ventured further east than the Tower of London. I soon got into the routine of walking up to college from Mile End underground station after my journey from where I lodged in my first two years in Leytonstone, and in my final one Woodford Green and enjoying the feeling of being part, at least temporarily, of a vibrant community.

There were few places on offer in the sixties at college halls of residence and the few students who did live there had to travel to South Woodford. Strolls around the area more recently have taken in the student village by the Regents Canal and the on-site accommodation when must compare with the best on offer elsewhere and the linking of Mile End Park and Victoria Park provides a green lung which was not fully developed when the area was undergoing regeneration after the ravages of the second world war.

I lodged in Leytonstone with a very hospitable couple, Frank and Edith Bourne, who talked a lot about their life in East London. If I remember rightly, Frank's brother had been mayor of Leyton and the family were staunch supporters of the Labour Party. Politically there was a link between my home town of Halifax and Stepney as the local MP Peter Shore, had stood unsuccessfully in Halifax in the election of 1959. I seem to recall at some stage in my years as an undergraduate that the local council, just before Tower Hamlets was created as an authority, consisted entirely of Labour members apart from three Communists. That created quite an impression on me at the time.

My time at Queen Mary College coincided with the last years of the London Docks as the destination for imports by sea before containerisation meant most goods now came into Tilbury and other ports on the east coast. Jack Dash was a prominent union leader and her once came to give a talk at college about his life as a dock worker and what he felt the future held. The transformation in the Isle of Dogs in the last fifty years could scarcely have seemed conceivable in the middle of the swinging sixties.

One of my tongue in cheek boasts is that the Kray twins never gave me any trouble. There was, however, one bizarre albeit tenuous link with an incident directly involving them. I played rugby for Queen Mary and a history student friend who also turned out, mainly for second fifteen, had attended a faculty dinner in college involving members of the student body and lecturers. Several of them planned to continue fraternising after the meal and had, at around 9.30 pm, decide to walk a few minutes up the road towards Whitechapel to a hostelry they had never been in before. It was a very wet evening so they changed plans and went to the pub just across Mile End Road.

Their original destination was to have been the Blind Beggar and earlier that evening George Cornell was shot in the pub so I am sure that

had they got there the local constabulary might have pointed them in the direction of an alternative venue.

Leading up to my finals I often worked late in the college library and before going home to my lodgings I called with friends for a pint in the Old Globe pub and occasionally had a game of darts with some of the locals. That brief period was a welcome relief from studying and enabled me to have a brief connection with local people who certainly brought you down to earth.

To this day I have never been in a pie and mash cafe but I have eaten jellied eels and remember Tubby Isaac's stall in Aldgate although those I consumed were in the George Inn near Borough Market.

After graduation, I stayed for a further year in London to do my Postgraduate Certificate of Education at the London Institute of Education based in Bloomsbury. During that year I shared a maisonette with a friend in Forest Gate and so became acquainted with another part of East London. During my last few weeks before returning to my home area to teach there was the disaster at Ronan Point with the building, I believe, named after a long serving local councillor for the area of Newham where we were living. From time to time I used to read the East London Advertiser and its Newham counterpart as a means of keeping up with local news.

My teaching practice school was Central Foundation Boys School near Old Street. Although the school was part of the Islington Local Authority there were boys from Wapping and Aldgate. One young man wrote an evocative account of the view of the Thames from where he lived whilst the father of another student was the licensee of a pub, The Bell, I think, on Middlesex Street or Petticoat Lane. This brought home the reality of people have to work for a living in a place that many regard as just a tourist destination.

In recent years, I have read quite a number of books about the history of East London and this eventually prompted me to join the society. I am pleased to have had the chance to live and study for a while in the area which has borne the brunt of waves of newcomers down the centuries and which has shown great resilience, in spite of not always finding the going easy. Philanthropists have played a significant role in the area and charitable organisations which were founded in Tower Hamlets have gone on to have national and international renown and in spite of so called ordinary people not always having an easy time of it, community spirit has often been a factor in offering support and encouragement.

**Andrew Pearson**

**From Margaret Wiltshire:**

Hello,

This might start a ball rolling. How many of us are out there who attended The School of Engineering & Navigation in Poplar High Street during the war?

After children were evacuated those of us left in Poplar from various schools were rounded up & sent to that school. Some were from Gill Street, or Ricardo Street, we were from Woolmore Street. Our teachers were mostly retired & brought back to teach for the duration.

I remember Mrs Bixley who was very strict, & Mr Hizer who could be side-tracked if we didn't like his lesson & he would tell us all sorts of interesting things. Mrs Hopkins was another. She called John Sullivan 'John L.' after the boxer(?)

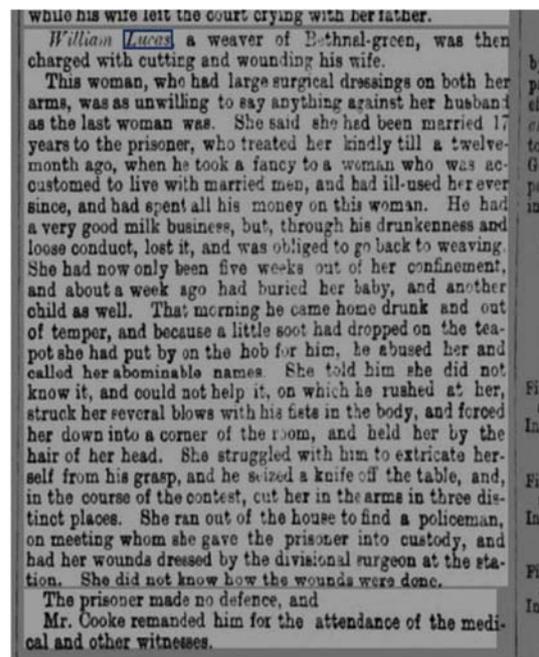
A few names I remember are Rene Laver, Peggie Carrington, & Joyce Harding.

I was Margaret Conroy & my brother was Billy. One of his friends was Alfie Copp? I suppose the school served till the end of the war but we were bombed out & moved away.

One other thing that stays in my mind was that we sang Eternal Father every morning at assembly.

Come on then let's have some more memories.

**Finding out your 2 x Gt Grandfather is a wife beater!**



Attached newspaper report about my 2 x Gt Grandparents William & Elizabeth Lucas. I must say, it is not a happy event to find that your great grandmother was treated so very badly. The evils of drink and a husband taken with another woman. What a hellish life Elizabeth must have lived. William died on 1st October 1872 of 'sudden disease of heart', the very next day, my great grandfather Henry Lucas was born. Poor Elizabeth probably gave birth in shock of recent events and Henry grew up never knowing his father.

Elizabeth lived on until 1898, twenty six years of life longer than her husband. She had work as a 'Mangler' and lived with one of her daughters. The newspaper find is a snap shot of her life and a snap shot of social conditions in the East End of that time. Grim!

## Christine Osborne

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### The Great Smog of December 1952

I have memories of the smog in December 1952. Having just returned to London after two years of National Service with the Royal Signals in the Suez Canal Zone, I had just started work in the laboratory of a pharmaceutical company in Stamford Hill and used to cycle to Aldgate after work to evening classes at the Sir John Cass College in Aldgate. On a few evenings, fortunately when there were no classes, it was impossible to see well enough to ride my bike and I had to push it back to Homerton, navigating along the kerbs and avoiding the stationary cars and trolley buses.

For hundreds of years, the mists and fogs of Britain's major cities were frequently polluted by smoke and noxious emissions from domestic fires and industrial processes such as charcoal burning, ironworking, tanneries and waste destruction. The fogs endangered health and also contributed to the hazards experienced by travellers in the unlit towns after dark.

Early in December 1952 London was enveloped in a cold fog when the moist air at ground level cooled to dew point and condensation occurred. Cool air drained into the Thames Valley and a light wind stirred the saturated air upwards to form a layer of fog 100-200 metres deep. Along with the water droplets of the fog, the atmosphere beneath this inversion contained the smoke from innumerable chimneys in the London area and further afield. Elevated places such as

Hampstead Heath were above the fog and grime, and from there the hills of Surrey and Kent could be seen.

During the day on 5 December, the fog was not particularly dense and generally had a dry, smoky character. The following day, the sun was too low in the sky to make much of an impression on the fog, but that night and on the following nights the fog again thickened. Even in the drier thoroughfares of central London it was impossible to see at night for pedestrians to find their way. In the Isle of Dogs visibility was at times nil. Not until 9 December did the fog clear, but in central London visibility remained below 500 metres continuously for 114 hours and below 50 metres continuously for 48 hours from the morning of 6 December. At Heathrow Airport visibility remained below 10 metres for almost 48 hours from the morning of 6 December.

Huge amounts of impurities were released into the atmosphere during this period. It has been estimated that on each day some 1000 tonnes of smoke particles, 2000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, 140 tonnes of hydrochloric acid and 14 tonnes of fluorine compounds were released, and in addition, 370 tonnes of sulphur dioxide were converted into 800 tonnes of sulphuric acid. At London's County Hall the concentration of smoke in the air increased from 0.49 milligrams per cubic metre on 4 December to 4.46 on the 7th and 8th.

The infamous fog of December 1952 has come to be known as 'The Great Smog', the term 'smog' being a portmanteau word meaning 'fog intensified by smoke'. The term was coined almost half a century earlier by H A Des Vouex, who first used it in 1905 to describe the conditions of fuliginous (sooty) fog that occurred all too often over British urban areas. It was popularised in 1911 when Des Vouex presented to the Manchester Conference of the Smoke Abatement League of Great Britain a report on the deaths that occurred in Glasgow

and Edinburgh in the autumn of 1909 as a consequence of smoke-laden fogs.

The death toll of about 4,000 was not disputed by the medical and other authorities, but exactly how many people died as a direct result of the fog will never be known. Many who died already suffered from chronic respiratory or cardiovascular complaints. Without the fog they might not have died when they did. The total number of deaths in Greater London in the week ending 6 December 1952 was 2,062, which was close to normal for the time of year. The following week, the number was 4,703. The death rate peaked at 900 per day on the 8th and 9th and remained above average until just before Christmas. Mortality from bronchitis and pneumonia increased more than sevenfold as a result of the fog

Legislation following the Great Smog of 1952 took the form of the City of London (Various Powers) Act of 1954 and the Clean Air Acts of 1956 and 1968. These Acts banned emissions of black smoke and decreed that residents of urban areas and operators of factories must convert to smokeless fuels.

However, fogs continued to be smoky for some time after the Act of 1956 was passed since these residents and operators were necessarily given time to convert. In 1962, for example, 750 Londoners died as a result of a fog, but nothing on the scale of the 1952 Great Smog has ever occurred again.

The fog was by no means the first to have brought death and inconvenience to the capital. On 27 December 1813 fog was so dense that the Prince Regent, having set out for Hatfield House, was forced to turn back at Kentish Town. The fog persisted for almost a week and on one day was so thick that the mail coach from London to Birmingham took seven hours to reach Uxbridge. Contemporary accounts tell of the fog being so thick that the other side of the street could not be seen. They also tell of the fog having a distinct smell of

coal tar. After a similar fog during the week of 7-13 December 1873 the death rate in the Administrative County of London increased to 40 per cent above normal. Marked increases in death rate occurred in the fogs of January 1880, February 1882, December 1981, December 1892 and November 1948.

Air pollution had been recognised as a public-health problem in the cities and larger towns of the British Isles as long ago as the 13th century and the burning of coal was identified as the principal source. Four centuries later, John Evelyn wrote of the “hellish and dismall cloud of sea-cole” that lay over London and recommended that all noisome trades be banished from the city. The authorities did not, however, take his advice. The burning of coal continued and the pall of soot over London grew worse.

“Pea-soupers” have become a thing of the past, thanks partly to pollution legislation but also to slum clearance, urban renewal and the widespread use of central heating in the houses and offices of British towns and cities. As recently as the 1960s, winter sunshine totals were thirty percent lower in the smokier districts of London than in the rural areas around the capital.

We should not, however, be complacent. The air now contains other types of pollutants, many of them from vehicle exhausts. Among these pollutants are carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, benzines and aldehydes. They are less visible than the pollutants of yesteryear but are equally toxic, causing eye irritation, asthma and bronchial complaints. To some extent, we have simply replaced one form of air pollution with another and we may question whether or not the major cities of the British Isles are any less polluted than they have been for hundreds of years.

*Footnote:*

Neither should we be complacent about the now scientifically well-established fact of

global warming and its potential, if not the actuality, of its occurrence, as a consequence of the increasing world population and the greatly increased use of combustible fuels throughout the developed world.

Discounting for the moment the generation of energy through the use of nuclear reactors (with their attendant potential for disasters and the problem of containing radioactive waste), despite the development of renewable energy sources such as solar electric panels, wind power and coastal water power systems, and the logical and proposed practical methods of achieving them, the political will and foresight necessary to implement such measures seems to be entirely lacking by the governments of many developed nations intent on continuing the excavation of coal and extracting natural gas for sale to overseas buyers and for the benefit of multinationals. What should concern us and our governments is not merely the health of our human populations, our food resources and the Earth's animal and vegetable inhabitants, but also the health of our planet – let's face it, our Earth the only one we have! Otherwise, if we don't starve, we may well drown as the sea levels continue to rise.

*Note to Editor:*

The following article is based upon information obtained by the author via the internet from [www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/great\\_smog.htm](http://www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/great_smog.htm) I. British Meteorological Reports and other sources in February 2014

**Ian Juniper**

## **Shelter**

Too young to understand risk  
but feeling fear her stomach churned  
more at the unrelenting pulse  
of planes than the shock of bombs.

Above ground London burned.  
She watched the woodlice  
poised above her bed ready  
to curl into a ball and drop.

The shops the streets the houses turned  
to rubble. She watched her mother  
knit, one plain, one purl, making  
that old familiar click.

**Pat Francis**

## **The East End, 1940**

The Kellys called their chickens  
Gert and Dais; cramped  
in the backyard coop  
Gert and Dais soon sickened  
and died.

The Kellys kept on  
digging for victory  
in the little plot  
attacked by shrapnel  
soot and the sulphurous  
fog from factories.

Land not even a memory  
they worked  
their few square yards,  
grew tomatoes  
on earth piled over  
the air-raid shelter.

No chance lost to cherish  
that small green spot  
in the heart.

**Pat Francis**

## THE UNUSUAL CASE OF ALBERT LAURIE YOUNG

It is clear that the stories of many of the ancestors we research are relatively easy to uncover. These people will either have unusual and easily identifiable names, or there is something unusual about their life story, or place of origin, that makes them stand out in the records. However, when we are looking for the career details of a serviceman there is always the chance that the name we find in our family tree appears to lead nowhere when research is undertaken in the census or birth, marriage and death records; when this happens we have to accept that there is an issue with the name, and this is usually because the serviceman changed his name before or at enlistment.

This is not an uncommon phenomenon at any time in history; people have run away from home from time immemorial, often changing their name in the process. When accurate and reliable records are not readily attainable, from a time when so many people were illiterate, the original name of any particular serviceman can be hard to trace. Census records can help, but as these were taken only every ten years, many occurrences of name changes could easily be disguised. Sometimes these changes can be discovered by rigorous (although extremely time-consuming) research, but sometimes it requires what is often referred to as lateral thinking. Going through the research process, often with few clues as to the correct birth name, can be tedious, but it is very satisfying when all the threads come together. One example is the relatively simple, but nonetheless initially confusing, case of Albert Laurie Young. This appeared to be a relatively easy research project as the name looked rather unusual. However, there was no birth record for a man of this name, nor did he appear with this name in the censuses from 1891 to 1911. I thought that there was a chance that he had served in the Great War, so I researched Soldiers Died In The Great War and struck lucky. I found him in the 2nd

Battalion of the Yorkshire Regiment; the record showed that he was born in West Ham, and that he enlisted at Stratford, being given the number 10222; the Commonwealth War Graves Commission added that he was twenty when he died on 15 June 1915, and gave the address of his parents in West Ham. I then revisited the records that I had already searched, but unfortunately without a service record there was nowhere else to go.

By this time it was clear that there were two reliable facts. First, a man called Albert Laurie Young was a soldier who died in June 1915. Second, no man of this name was traceable in birth or census records prior to his becoming a soldier. This required some consideration, and I put the research aside for some time. When I went back to it, after having discussed the problem with a fellow researcher, I decided that I should try a change of name, and this soon paid off.

Albert Laurie Young was registered as Alfred Laurie Young. How this young man could have changed his name to Albert I have no idea. It could have been nothing more than a clerical error; perhaps the recruiting Sergeant or Officer mis-heard and wrote Albert instead of Alfred at attestation, but that seems unlikely. On the other hand, Alfred could have changed his name to avoid being discovered by relatives; he was after all six months under age. Presumably he either did not want to change the name back or he was unable to do so for another reason.

For the record, he was born 1 November 1895 at 36 Caistor Park Road, Portway, West Ham, the son of William Young, a general labourer, and his wife Elizabeth Ann (nee Ilesley). In 1901 he was living with his family at 72A Evesham Road, West Ham, the youngest of the six children of his parents. He was recorded as age five, born West Ham, named Alfred. In 1911 he was still living with his family, in four rooms at 21 Stephens Road, West Ham; he was age fifteen, born Plaistow, his occupation

recorded as being in machine printing. His name was recorded as Laurie Young. He enlisted into the Yorkshire Regiment 3 May 1913 at Stratford, Essex, under the name Albert Laurie Young. He claimed to be eighteen years six months, measured five feet four inches tall, weighed 110 pounds, had a fresh complexion, blue eyes and auburn hair. His occupation was news vendor. He was born in West Ham.

He was killed in action 15 June 1915 at Givenchy. The CWGC records state that he was age twenty, the son of Mr & Mrs Young of 19 Stephens Road, West Ham; he is remembered on the Le Touret Memorial (having no known grave). SDGW recorded that he was born in West Ham, and that he was living there when he enlisted in Stratford. Alfred Laurie Young's Medal Index Card records that he disembarked in France on 5 October 1914 with his battalion, 2/Yorkshire Regiment, part of 21st Brigade in the 'immortal' 7th Division. He would therefore have been intimately involved in the First Battle of Ypres, when his battalion was reduced to about a third of its original strength of nearly a thousand men.

By analysing the data in *Soldiers Died In The Great War* it is clear that, in fact, 156 soldiers of the battalion were killed or died during this battle, but something like a further 500 must have been wounded badly enough to be taken out of the line. In my experience of researching army records, 'wounded' means disabled and unfit for fighting; if a man could continue to fight he was not recorded as wounded. During the Great War the *Green Howards Gazette* (GHG), the regimental magazine, published lists of soldiers of the regiment who had been killed and wounded, and Young was not listed as wounded during this time. It is possible that he had been what might be termed slightly wounded, but not disabled, and thus he was not included in the 'wounded' list.

Unfortunately Alfred Laurie Young's luck could not last for ever, and it ran out on 15 June 1915 at Givenchy. He was one of those recorded as killed in action on that date when his battalion led an attack on the German positions. Although there is no way of knowing for sure, it is quite likely that he was in one of the two attacking companies in the first wave. This attack was a classic example of its kind, presaging the failed attack on 1 July 1916 on the Somme, with many of the elements of the Somme attack having already been played out at Givenchy. The details of the background to the attack at Givenchy need not detain us here, but the setting out of some of the planning will help readers to understand what Alfred Young and hundreds of soldiers like him had to face at that time.

Christopher Thomas Atkinson, the author of *The Seventh Division 1914-1918* [John Murray, 1927] started his description of the attack by indicating that this was necessary for military reasons: the line needed 'tidying up', and the Germans overlooked the British trenches from their slightly higher ground: 'It had been decided...to try yet another attack, strong as the German lines in front of Givenchy and Festubert had proved themselves to be...Its objective was a line running due east of Givenchy to the southern end of Rue d'Ouvert, the 21st Brigade being detailed for the task and employing the Yorkshires on the right and the Wiltshires on the left...'

However, the condition of both 2/Yorkshire and 2/Wiltshire was suspect. After First Ypres the 7th Division had been in action at both Neuve Chapelle in March and at Festubert in May, and had taken heavy casualties among its trained regular and reservist personnel. After Festubert the division withdrew to rest and reform, but the men were back in the front line on 31 May; Atkinson (who served with 7th Division) took a dim view of this, referring to the eleven day interval as 'all too brief to give the shattered battalions the rest they required and the chance to assimilate their drafts...'

Although the start of the attack was timed for 18.00, in midsummer this would have been a virtual daylight attack; in fact, as it was planned for 21st Brigade to assault in the direction slightly north of east, the men would have had the setting sun almost at their back as they went forward. The war diary of 2/Yorkshire Regiment [The National Archives WO 95/1659] described what happened.

‘15 June 1915. At about 3 pm the battalion got into position of assembly... A and B Companies lined the British fire parapet, each Company on a front of about 200 yards. C and D Companies were in support and communication trenches behind A and B Companies respectively. Battalion Headquarters were in a support trench between the leading and reserve companies. The Machine Gun Section was with A and B Companies. Whilst in this formation the Battalion was subjected to very heavy shelling. The trenches occupied by the Battalion were good, but during this time, prior to the assault, there were, owing to the heavy shell fire, a certain number of casualties, particularly in D Company.

‘At 6 pm after a heavy bombardment of the German Line, A and B Companies climbed over the British parapet and advanced in two lines to the assault. B Company came under very heavy shell fire whilst they were climbing over our parapet and during that time suffered heavy losses. A Company came under very heavy rifle and machine gun fire almost as soon as they had got over our parapet. Both Companies advanced to the assault under a very heavy artillery, rifle and machine gun fire. B Company, although they advanced in most admirable order got held up and were unable to get up to close quarters with the enemy. Their losses were very heavy and of 5 Officers and 180 Rank and File who went into action, only 1 Officer and 31 Rank and File came back... The second line owing to very heavy casualties could not get on. The Company lost very heavily; out of 5 Officers and 170 Rank

and File who went into action, no Officers and only about 40 Rank & File came back...’

A and B Companies of 2/Yorkshire Regiment almost literally ceased to exist. By the time that *Soldiers Died In The Great War* was compiled the total number of deaths of Other Ranks on 15 June totalled 119, a shockingly high number, greater than many battalions reported on 1 July 1916. Of these, 92% comprised regulars (like Young), known Regular Army reservists and 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion soldiers, identifiable by their regimental numbers.

The GHG for July 1915 published a letter from an anonymous battalion correspondent, dated 18 June (by pure chance this was the centenary of the battle of Waterloo): ‘And so, a few minutes before six, everything was ready - the men in grand form and full of confidence and only waiting for the signal to jump over the trenches and rush across the 150 yards to the first German trench. As soon as our heavy bombardment commenced [at 17.30] the Germans replied very violently aiming especially along our parapet, and at two minutes to six their machine guns and rifle fire commenced. This was difficult to understand, as we thought no-one could be living in that German trench. At six o’clock to the moment the signal went... Without the slightest hesitation, and in spite of a regular hail of bullets and continuous shells, the men, most gallantly led by their officers and NCOs, rushed out to the attack. They might have been on parade they went in such perfect order and when leaders were hit others were ready to take their places. It was a grand sight. But our hopes of getting across were stopped; the Germans were able to line their trenches and simply stand up and shoot, for no covering fire could be brought to bear on them’.

Atkinson gave some background to this German success: ‘Unluckily the German defences were extremely formidable: the trenches were nine to ten feet deep and very narrow with deep dug-outs admirably

protected; and, accurate as our fire was, only direct hits from our heavier howitzers could produce much effect on such positions. The Germans could thus man their lines with practically unshaken troops in great numbers, and even before our guns lifted off the front trenches the Germans were swarming up from their dug-outs to open fire directly our advance started.' Some of these observations, especially those relating to the belief that none of the enemy could still be alive after such a devastating bombardment, would be horribly reminiscent of what would be written a year later about the conditions pertaining on 1 July 1916, the First Day on the Somme.

Alfred Laurie Young had the misfortune to be one of those killed on 15 June 1915. Very few military historians concern themselves with this particular action at Givenchy as it had no strategic or even tactical consequences or importance, but for all the families of those who were killed on both sides it was as traumatic and devastating as if those soldiers had died on 1 July 1916, or at Passchendaele, or at Ypres.

### John Sly



Alfred Laurie Young

## La Providence – The French Hospital 'Too Handsome for Poor Weavers?'

The Family and Community Historical Research Society (FACHRS) undertook a national project researching the history of Almshouses and their place in the mixed economy of welfare provision\*. The author researched establishments in the area currently included in the Boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Hackney. This article is based on a presentation given at a Study Day during the project.

### Background

French speaking Protestants, also known as Huguenots were the first group to be termed refugees. They were mainly Calvinists and had first arrived in considerable numbers during Elizabeth's reign. The queen was pleased to offer refuge to those fleeing persecution by her enemy Philip II of Spain in the Low Countries and also to her co-religionists who left during the Civil Wars of Religion in France during the 1560s and 1570s. The Massacre of St. Bartholomew in August 1572, a prolonged violent action by the Catholic faction, in which tens of thousands of Protestants were killed, including a number of their leaders, led to an influx of thousands of survivors into southern England.

The accession of Henry of Navarre, formerly a Protestant leader, to the French throne as the Catholic Henry IV in 1593 and his proclamation of the Edict of Nantes in 1598 eased the situation somewhat. Huguenots had a measure of freedom of worship and a range of civil rights.

However following Henri's assassination in 1610, things became increasingly difficult under Louis XIV, with Protestants subjected to forced conversions, torture, imprisonment and banishment to the galleys. This culminated in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. In the years immediately following the Revocation an estimated 50,000 refugees fled

France and settled in England. Ironically England had a Catholic monarch at the beginning of this period, but James II found it difficult to advocate toleration of Catholics without extending the same right to Calvinists and once the Dutch Calvinist William III came to the throne in 1688 there could be no official opposition. The new arrivals were generally welcomed for their expertise in silk weaving and luxury trades such as gold-smithing, and making boots and shoes, wigs, clocks and guns.

Like many immigrants, the Huguenots were determined to be as self-sufficient as possible. Although the English authorities did make contributions for the aid of the new arrivals, many of whom had no possessions or assets, the established leaders of the community, some of whom had become wealthy merchants and master craftsmen, rallied to set up churches, charities and schools for their co-religionists.

### **The Development of the French Protestant Hospital**

In 1681 a shelter for about 60 destitute, infirm or sick refugees was set up in a City of London Pest House built for victims of the Great Plague. It was run by a management committee drawn from community leaders and gave board and lodging and nursing care. The building became dilapidated and too small for the needs of the rapidly expanding community. In 1708 when Jacques de Castigny, one of the committee, died he left £1000 to improve and extend the building. The community decided to collect more money and build a completely new institution to be called La Providence.

In 1718 La Providence was granted a Royal Charter of Incorporation and the new Hospital opened near Old Street. It flourished on this site throughout the eighteenth century, ably managed by a Court of Directors headed by a Governor, all scions of leading Huguenot families. Judicious investment in property

in the City meant that considerable extensions were funded in the 1730s and the 1760s. At its peak the Hospital housed over 200 residents coming mainly from the large population of silk weavers in east London and the artisans of the area around Soho with occasionally a member of the Canterbury congregation.



La Providence provided a place of safety and considerable comfort not just for the elderly, but also for the sick, but all residents had to be incapable of earning a living and able to prove descent from French Protestants. It was one of the first institutions to provide for the mentally ill in specially constructed ‘petites maisons’ where, unlike other institutions of the time, public viewing was not allowed.



As the years passed the Huguenots intermarried with local people and lost their distinct identity. By the mid-nineteenth century the building in Old Street was far too big for the falling number of applicants and very expensive to maintain. Therefore the Court of Directors purchased a 3.5 acre site near Victoria Park, South Hackney – ‘a perfectly healthful neighbourhood’ on which to build a smaller establishment. Robert Lewis Roumieu (1814-1877) an architect and one of the Directors designed a new building for 40

female and 20 male residents which opened in 1867. It resembled a French Chateau and he waived his fee. Within this building residents received what today would be known as a 'total care package'. Only widowed or single people were admitted over the age of 60 years. All had to prove their Huguenot descent before admission.

They received full board and lodging, housekeeping and laundry services and medical and nursing care. True to the Protestant work ethic residents were expected to contribute what they could to the daily life of the Hospital. The women occupied themselves with needlework, both practical and decorative. Looms were set up in the Day Rooms for the old weavers and four residents wove a black silk dress presented to Queen Victoria at her Diamond Jubilee in 1887.

One of the four, James Dabbs, had, as a young man, woven the silk for a white dress with a silver ivy pattern for the young Princess Victoria. His sister Mary Bond presented the Directors with a framed piece of her needlework and left the Hospital the £50 in her Post Office Savings Bank on her death in 1884 'in gratitude for the care and attention shown to her'.

Almost all residents died in the Hospital and if necessary additional specialist nurses were hired for particular cases to allow that to happen. Unless their family wanted to pay, the Hospital met the funeral expenses and residents were buried in the Hospital Burial Ground next to the Hackney Building and later in one in Ilford Cemetery.

As with all charitable institutions La Providence was subject to periodic inspections by the Charity Commission. In 1875 the Commissioners were not at all impressed by the provision, not because of its deficiencies, but because it was 'too handsome indeed for the purpose for which it was designed, viz. the board and lodging of aged weavers and weaveresses, ordinary labourers and domestic

servants.' It was thought to be 'eminently adapted to aged and decayed French Governesses who have been accustomed to more care, better accommodation and greater consideration than were ever dreamt of in the wretched hovels of Spitalfields'. Luckily the Directors ignored these strictures and continued to provide poor weavers and their like with a comfortable place to end their lives.

After evacuation during WW2 the Hospital briefly moved to Horsham and Roumieu's building became a Roman Catholic School.

The last move was in 1958 to Rochester where it is today. Just off the High Street in a square of converted Victorian houses where 49 sheltered housing units provide homes for individuals and couples, all of whom can trace their family back in the French Church records to those first refugees fleeing persecution. La Providence is now a Housing Association still run by the Court of Directors, which meets in the Court Room at Rochester headed by the Governor, who for eight generations was the Pleydell-Bouverie Earl of Radnor and is now Richard Chartres, the former Bishop of

One of the most interesting aspects of La Providence for social and family historians is the quality and availability of its records. An alphabetical list of all those applying for admission with all their personal details as submitted to and recorded by the Hospital have been published in 2 volumes by the Huguenot Society. Most of the earlier records are in French, but the entries are formulaic and a basic knowledge of the language should suffice.

This article has provided a quick overview of the French Hospital and don't forget that, if like the author and many others with East End ancestry, you can prove your Huguenot descent, La Providence may prove to be a pleasant place to spend your retirement! (see [www.frenchhospital.org.uk](http://www.frenchhospital.org.uk) for details)

To find out more about Britain's Huguenot Heritage, why not visit the Huguenot Museum at 95 High Street, Rochester (for details of how to get there and opening times see [www.huguenotmuseum.org](http://www.huguenotmuseum.org))

□ The FACHRS Almshouses Project resulted in the publication of *The British Almshouse - new perspectives on philanthropy c1400-1914*, 378pp, edited by Goose, Caffrey and Langley, published by FACHRS Publications, 2016. The book includes a chapter by the author on the sixteen Almshouse establishments along Whitechapel and the Mile End Road.

**Janet Cumner**

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Danish Church, Well Close Square  
© London Metropolitan Archives, City of London,

## Daniel Solander in East London

From his arrival in London in June 1760, until his death in 1782, Daniel Solander had two important links with East London: with James Gordon the famous nurseryman in Mile End Old Town, and with the Danish church in Well Close Square.

The life of Daniel Solander (1733-1782) is reasonably well-known: “a close and scientific colleague of Joseph Banks”, who, after his

time in *Endeavour* as a naturalist, was subsequently employed in the British Museum, and as a Fellow of the Royal Society served on their Council from 1774.<sup>1</sup>

So what links Solander, an intelligent man at the forefront of 18th century science, to the life and people in East London, an area notoriously stereotyped with anarchy, dirt, poverty and crime, and how is he commemorated today?

### *First Link*

The first link was with the hamlet of Mile End Old Town, just a mile east from Aldgate and the home of Captain James Cook and James Gordon.<sup>2</sup>

In eighteenth-century London there were two equally-famous nurserymen: James Gordon in Mile End Old Town and Philip Miller at the Chelsea Physic Garden. Gordon's nursery was opposite the Bancroft Almshouse, now the site of Queen Mary College in the Mile End Road. The importance of James Gordon was noted by John Harvey in his book of nurserymen. Harvey wrote, “he launched himself into trade about 1740 by starting or taking over a nursery at Mile End. The poor soil and the bitter weather there were the cornerstones of Gordon's plantsmanship: if a plant could be grown against such adverse conditions, it would succeed anywhere.”<sup>3</sup> Gordon is chiefly famous for the original single red *Camellia japonica* and for *Ginko biloba*. He was probably the first to introduce the China Rose. Gordon had been gardener to Lord Robert James Petre, FRS, at Thorndon Hall in Essex, and became well known to all the great plant collectors from 1740 until his death in 1780. Thus John Ellis, FRS, a famous naturalist, told Linnaeus in 1758 that if you want a correspondent, I shall recommend you to James Gordon, gardener, in Mile End. This man was bred under Lord Petre and Dr. Sherard and knows systematically all the plants he cultivates. He has more knowledge in vegetation than all the gardeners and writers on gardening in England put together, but is too modest to publish anything. If you send

him anything rare... he will make you a proper return.<sup>4</sup>

Dr William Sherard, FRS, (1659-1728) was a famous botanist, who for a time lived on Tower Hill.

In 1760, Solander wrote with even more enthusiasm to Linnaeus, that he had travelled outside the city, to a gardener named Gordon, considered here in London to be the greatest in his art, to have the most beautiful and the most abundant garden and to have far more insight than Miller and to cultivate several plants not found at Chelsea... The owner has become rich through his garden, since there are people here who pay well for rare plants. To receive 10 to 15 pounds for a Magnolia, he considers common.<sup>5</sup> Solander went on to take a room at the nursery, and was permitted to roam around the gardens at will. An interesting link between Gordon and Cook was recorded on 10 May, 1769, when *Endeavour* was moored in Matavai Bay, Tahiti, and Joseph Banks wrote in his journal, "This morn Captain Cooke planted divers seeds which he had brought with him in a spot of ground turnd up for the purpose. They were all bought of Gordon at Mile End and sent in bottles seald up, whether or not that method will succeed the event of the plantation will shew. Plenty of Bread fruit and coconuts today."

#### *Second Link*

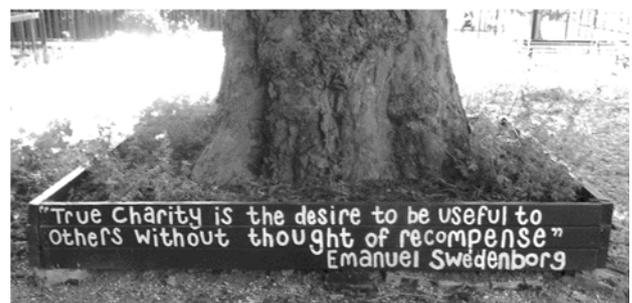
Solander's second link with East London was with the considerable Scandinavian community that clustered around Well Close Square, a few hundred yards east of the Tower of London. This large square was laid out from 1678, by the notorious developer Nicholas Barbon. With its range of tall, spacious town houses it attracted many Scandinavian timber merchants. After the Great Fire of London in 1666, there was a great demand for timber, and there was a saying to the effect that "the Norwegians warmed themselves comfortably by the Fire of London".

In the centre of the square a Danish church was established in 1694, with funds from King Christian V of Denmark. The Danish sculptor and architect Caius Gibber completed the building, which continued as a church until 1816.<sup>6</sup>

Solander would have been drawn into this community. Although the church records have not survived, it is thought that he was involved with the church, and that he was instrumental in having trees planted around it.

In May 1782, Solander "suffered a massive cerebral haemorrhage and died five days later".<sup>7</sup> At the time of his death, he was lodging in the house of Mr Blomberg, upholsterer, 21 Union Street, near the Middlesex Hospital, north of Oxford Street. His executors were the Reverend Aron Mathesius, 24 Princes Square, St George-in-the-East, and Claus Grill, 2 Dunster Court, Mincing Lane. They subsequently insured Solander's household goods for £250, his books for £50, his clothes for £50 and his plate for £59.<sup>8</sup>

Solander, although Swedish by birth, was buried at the Danish church in Well Close Square, perhaps because it attracted a higher class of men than the nearby Swedish church in the smaller Princes Square to the east. Princes Square is now Swedenborg Square, for the Swedish scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), who was buried there. Due to their close proximity, and change of street name, the Danish and Swedish churches are frequently confused with each other.



Today Solander is marked by two simple signs atop a plot of rather higher ground near a memorial stone for the Danish church. Swedenbourg is commemorated by a board close to that of Solander.



Finally, Daniel Solander is remembered today by the Solander Gardens Estate. “The first part of the London County Council’s Solander Garden was completed in 1901: gaunt cliffs of six-storey tenements closely grouped in pairs”.<sup>9</sup> It is remarkable that whilst Solander, who never lived in East London, is remembered by this large estate, Captain Cook, who lived in the area from 1762 until his death in 1779, is only commemorated by a small wall plaque.<sup>10</sup>



## Derek Morris

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## Bookshelf

**East End Jewish Cemeteries, Brady Street & Alderney Road, Louis Berk, Amberley Publishing, 2017, ISBN 978-1-4456-6290-9, £14.99**

I was going to write a review but Louis Berk sent me this explanatory text, which I am sure members will like more.

An Oasis in Whitechapel: Brady Street Jewish Cemetery

I am a secondary school teacher and since 2004 I have worked at a school in Brady Street in the heart of Whitechapel. I did not realise until I was looking out of a second story window one day that my school adjoins one of the oldest Jewish Cemeteries in the UK.

Brady Street cemetery was founded in 1761 and closed almost 100 years later in 1858 when the grounds became full up. Having no connection to the cemetery I thought it unlikely I would ever see inside. Then, one day as I was in school I heard the sounds of activity as groundsmen were carrying out maintenance and they kindly allowed me to take a look around.

Once inside the walls it was as though I had been transported to a forest as I was surrounded by trees, shrubs and at one point an inquisitive fox that trotted past me down a path. An idea formed in my mind: it would be wonderful to capture this hidden oasis in photographs, as a record of an interesting environment and to make it visible to others. I was fortunate that when I approached the owners of the cemetery, The United Synagogue of Great Britain they readily agreed to my request. They even made it possible for me to have access to the cemetery whenever I wanted.

Undertaking a long term project right next door to where I worked allowed me to photograph very early in the morning. During the winter months this was before and during dawn and also at sunset. In the summer it allowed me to capture the sometimes delicate early morning sunlight before the day became bleached out with too much sun.

I began the project in July 2011 with the objective of recording a year in the life of the cemetery. By the same time in 2012 I had a lot of material to work with but I was missing one important element: snow. The winters at the start of this decade were surprisingly mild and I had to wait until 2013 for a reasonable covering. This was no real hardship as I enjoyed my time alone in the quiet solitude of the cemetery and continued to visit and take photographs. I also chose to work mainly with medium format film cameras. This requires considerably more concentration than working with digital cameras. It is a slow and careful process. This entirely matched the ambience of

my surroundings.

When at the end of the second year I showed my work to the owners they asked me if I would also photograph in Alderney Road Cemetery, in nearby Stepney Green. This is an even older cemetery than Brady Street, established in 1696 very close to the time that Jews began to settle in the UK.

In 2016, I approached Amberley Books with a number of ideas for titles and they were immediately enthusiastic about a book containing my photographs of Brady Street and Alderney Road.

The book contains 96 pages, mostly filled with photographs and also an introduction to the cemetery by the recognised authority on its history Rachel Kolsky, who is an award winning London Blue Badge guide and author.

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**Barking & Dagenham History Tour, Michael Foley, 2017, 96 pages, ISBN978-1-4456-68888-8, Amberley Publishing £6.99.** This is Michael Foley's third History Tour, although he has many other history books to his credit. I reviewed London's East End History Tour in Newsletter 4-07 and enjoyed it although I did rather play the grumpy old man card. No quibbles however with this one. I have been to Barking many times (shopping) but there was an awful lot new to me and Dagenham is unknown territory. The book has the same small format (168mm x 124mm) as the previous one with a double page map showing the location of each of the 50 places described. Each has a short descriptive text and nice old pictures, often with a modern one as comparison. It clearly tells how Barking and much smaller Dagenham were town and village but the gap filled in during the twentieth century. The book has made me want to visit such places as Barking's Town Quay and Dagenham's Parsloes Park which I haven't been to and revisit the splendid Barking Park and Valence House.

**Philip Mernick**