

# EAST LONDON RECORD

No. 19

1998



THE HOUSE IS AT  
THE JUNCTION OF  
BURDETT ROAD &  
MILE END ROAD.  
BUSSES & TRAMS  
FROM THE BANK  
& ALDGATE

THE GUILD & SCHOOL OF  
HANDICRAFT:  
ESSEX HOUSE, MILE END  
ROAD, E., & 15 LINCOLN'S  
INN FIELDS, W.C.

EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY

## **East London Record**

Editor: Philip Mernick with assistance from Rosemary Taylor.

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The editor would particularly like to thank the proprietors of Van Den Bosch, Shop 14, Ground Floor, Georgian Village, Camden Passage, London N1. for permission to use illustrations from their trade cards. Van Den Bosch specialises in the decorative arts 1850-1950 and usually has examples of the work of C.R. Ashbee and the Guild of Handicraft for sale.

Front cover illustration: from a printed invitation to a reception and garden party (on Saturday June 27th 1891) to celebrate the third anniversary of the Guild and School.

Back cover illustrations: (Van Den Bosch)

- 1) Silver biscuit barrel, C.R. Ashbee, 1899
- 2) Silver and opal pendant, Guild of Handicraft Ltd, c1904
- 3) Silver salt, Guild of Handicraft Ltd, 1901
- 4) Silver box, Guild of Handicraft Ltd, 1903. Enamel by William Mark.

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## GEORGE LANSBURY AND THE BOW AND BROMLEY BY-ELECTION OF 1912



On 11 November 1912 The Times reported that two days previously George Lansbury MP had crossed the English Channel to Boulogne with the suffragette leader, Emmeline Pankhurst, to confer with her exiled daughter, Christabel, who had fled from the English police to the Hotel Cite Bergere in Paris as "Miss Amy Richards".<sup>(1)</sup> A few days later, Lansbury dramatically resigned his parliamentary seat to fight the by-election over "Votes for Women". According to his son-in-law and biographer, Raymond Postgate, the Pankhursts, who led the militant women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.), had persuaded the Labour MP and champion of the East End working-class that, he would strike a brilliant publicity coup for the women's cause in Edwardian politics.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Bow and Bromley by-election attracted national attention as suffrage and anti-suffrage societies poured into the poor East

End constituency. In a straight fight George Lansbury lost by 751 votes to the Conservative and Unionist candidate, the anti-suffragist Reginald Blair, and was out of Parliament for ten years.

In the turbulent years immediately before the First World war, parliamentary votes for women was a major political problem troubling Asquith's Liberal government. Emmeline Pankhurst had established the W.S.P.U in 1903 with a new strategy of direct action after decades of unsuccessful campaigns by constitutional methods. "Suffragette" became synonymous with strident public demonstrations, disruption of politicians' meetings. Window breaking, arson and attacks on property led to the prosecution and imprisonment of many suffragettes.

George Lansbury was one of a small group of male politicians and journalists

sympathetic to women's suffrage. As a local Liberal party agent in the 1888 he ran Jane Cobden's campaign to be the first woman returned to the London County Council. By 1890 Lansbury converted to socialism and became a poor law guardian, local councilor and LCC member. As national organiser of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), he spread the socialist gospel throughout the country before joining the Independent Labour Party (ILP). With a reputation for immense compassion and generosity, George Lansbury was easily recognised where ever he went, a large framed man with ruddy complexion, side whiskers and a resounding voice.

Bessie and George lived with their large family at 105 St Stephens Road, next to the Brine saw mill and timber yard (which Lansbury managed after his father-in-law's death) and later at 39 Bow Road. According to their son, Edgar, the family household was run on democratic lines with the boys sharing the housework. With her brothers and sisters, Daisy Lansbury distributed SDF literature in the 1890s at their father's Sunday meetings in Victoria Park.<sup>(3)</sup>

In the East End there was a strong tradition of women's political activity, symbolised by the famous Match Girls' Strike in 1888 at the Bryant and May factory in Fairfield Road. The deprivation and hardship of East End life shaped Lansbury's politics and his attitude towards equal rights for women. In 1906, guided by his election agent, Marion Coates Hansen, he campaigned in Middlesborough for parliamentary votes for women.<sup>(4)</sup> The Lansbury family was associated with Sylvia Pankhurst who opened W.S.P.U. centres in the East End. While her sister Christabel preferred to recruit W.S.P.U. members from middle class and upper class women, Sylvia renovated 198 Bow Road, a disused baker's shop (opposite St Mary's parish church), with Lansbury help for her East End campaign.<sup>(5)</sup>

As the Socialist and Labour member for Bow and Bromley from December 1910 George Lansbury rebelled against his party's support for the Liberal government, especially on the National Insurance Bill. He wrote to Marion Coates Hansen:

'Ever since I have been in the House I have been more or less at loggerheads with them, and they with me. Hardly a meeting of the (Labour) party has taken place without my being reproached that I was a member of the party... and that I continually when beaten on a vote, refused to abide by the decisions of the majority.'<sup>(6)</sup>

Lansbury tirelessly championed the suffragette cause. On 25 June 1912 the Speaker suspended him from Parliament. The pacifist Lansbury, white with rage over the forcible feeding of imprisoned suffragettes, had shaken his fist in the Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith's face, shouting 'You will go down to history as a man who tortured innocent women.'<sup>(7)</sup>

In 1912 the Liberal Government introduced the manhood Suffrage Bill, with the possibility of a women's suffrage amendment. Though the Party Conference had passed the resolution, 'no Bill can be acceptable to the Labour and socialist movement which does include women', Lansbury despaired at the ambivalence of Ramsay McDonald's leadership.<sup>(8)</sup>

As Lansbury believed that women's rights took precedence over all issues, including Home Rule for Ireland and trade union bills, he canvassed local Labour parties to oppose every government measure, until a women's franchise bill was introduced. His last action in Parliament was to support Philip Snowden's unsuccessful amendment to give Irish women votes in the Government of Ireland Bill.<sup>(9)</sup> In 1912 total disenchantment with the Labour leadership, allied to the cause of women's rights provoked George Lansbury to resign, without consulting party officials.<sup>(10)</sup>

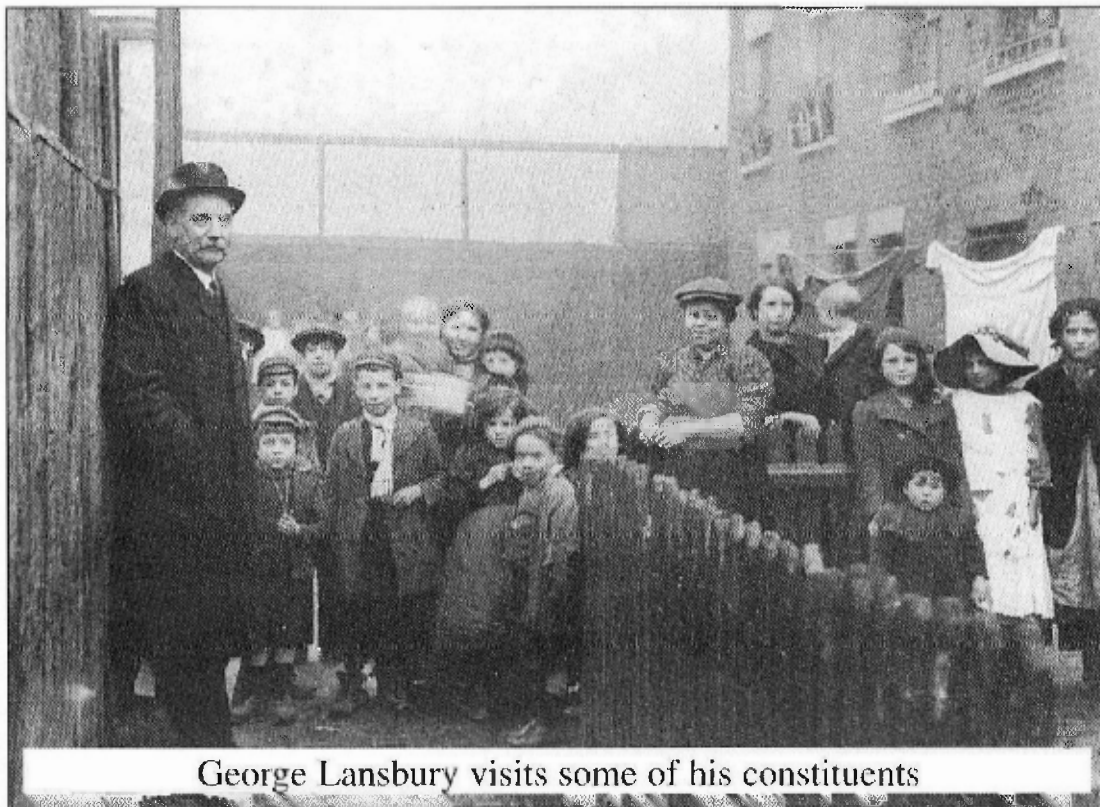
### Bow and Bromley Constituency

Predominantly working class Bow and Bromley formed the northern part of Poplar. The constituency contained a high percentage of the casual poor below the poverty line, some skilled craftsmen but few middle class inhabitants. A vast area intersected by railways and canals, Poplar characterised Outcast London: chronic unemployment, poor housing extreme poverty and deprivation.

By the late nineteenth century, the local economy comprised traditional port and riverside industries with a growing number

and May workforce of 1200 was mainly women and girls.<sup>(11)</sup>

Besides the Matchgirls' Strike, Bow and Bromley witnessed considerable political activity and outbursts of working class militancy, notably the London Dock strikes of 1889, 1911 and 1912. In 1905-6 the Poor Law Guardians' battle with the government (resulting in the investigation of the Royal Commission) revealed the growing power of East End socialism. Though local leaders, such as Will Crooks and George Lansbury, remained in a minority on municipal authorities before the First World War.



George Lansbury visits some of his constituents

of factories, producing matches, jam, confectionery, chemical and rubber products alongside small-scale workshop manufacture. The East India and West India docks employed largely casual labour and nearby large industrial enterprises included the Bow and Bromley Gasworks and the Blackwall Shipyard. Besides food processing and chemicals, women and girls were employed in domestic service and sweated homework (such as tailoring, paper bag and box making). The Bryant

### The Election Campaign

With no Liberal candidate, the by-election was contested by two opponents of the government: the fifty-three year old George Lansbury (Women's Suffrage and Socialist) and Reginald Blair (Conservative and Unionist), a thirty-year old wealthy Scottish accountant from Harrow.

Disowned by the national leadership, the Bow and Bromley Labour party rallied

round their candidate, supported by individual MPs, such as Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden and Josiah Wedgewood.<sup>(12)</sup> The Poplar councilor and guardian, J.H. Banks organised the campaign with Lansbury's son Edgar, a local councilor, as treasurer. Bessie Lansbury made a special election appeal:

'I have felt for many years the very great need for women on all our public bodies and therefore feel glad indeed to support him in our great movement for VOTES FOR WOMEN.'<sup>(13)</sup>

George Lansbury's election headquarters at 150, Bow Road were on the same thoroughfare as those of the Women's Social and Political Union, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Votes For Women Fellowship and the Men's Political Union for Women's Emancipation. Even nearer at 151 Bow Road were the principal Unionist committee rooms and at 142 the National League For Opposing Woman Suffrage.

There were in effect several campaigns waged by feminist organisations besides those of the two local parties. According to the Suffragette which established a by-election fund, women selling in the Roman Road market took it in turns to go in relays to hear the feminist speakers.

The Daily Telegraph reported:

'The Purple, green and white of the Women's Social and Political Union and the green, yellow and white of the Women's Freedom League are to be seen floating from motor-cars and vans all over Bow and Bromley; and in addition to street corner gatherings there were no fewer than three indoor meetings addressed by Mrs Pankhurst yesterday....(one meeting ) composed almost entirely of women, many of them carrying babies. There were not a score of men in the hall.'<sup>(14)</sup>

The charismatic Emmeline Pankhurst spoke throughout the constituency and at

Bow Baths Hall defended the W.S.P.U. window smashing campaign:

'At the end of nearly fifty years (of constitutional lobbying) ... they had to adopt militant methods... She wondered whether men would have been as patient for 50 years.'<sup>(15)</sup> By contrast, Millicent Fawcett, President of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, campaigned 'as the widow of Henry Fawcett who represented the Borough of Hackney for nine years ... to vindicate the independence of another East End constituency by returning Mr. Lansbury to parliament.'<sup>(16)</sup>

The official Labour Party newspaper, The Daily Citizen surprisingly photographed Lansbury's campaign. The candidate visited local factories and workshops during the day and held at least three main meetings each evening in halls and schools. In the streets children sang election songs (a common feature of a Lansbury campaign). In The Worker, Poplar Trades Council and Labour Representation Committee's newspaper, Lansbury wrote'.... it is all to do with your mothers and your sisters..... we want that they shall have the vote ... much nicer homes, much better food and better home life for you all.'<sup>(17)</sup>

At St Gabriel's school in Morris Road, Lansbury maintained that as a socialist 'matters had arrived at a point in the history of women's suffrage which necessitated that it should be settled. Why did he believe that women should have votes? Because they were human beings, the same as men.'<sup>(18)</sup>

George Lansbury supported the suffragette demand for female suffrage on the same terms as men, rather than votes for women as part of adult electoral reform. At the Poplar and Bromley Tabernacle, he argued that 'to give the vote to some men and not give it to women was the greatest possible insult ... (Hear, hear.)'<sup>(19)</sup>

Reginald Blair's campaign publicly endorsed by Unionist party leader, Andrew Bonar Law, was aided by the Conservative women's Primrose League and the National

League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. Their election posters proclaimed 'WOMEN DO NOT WANT VOTES' and 'BLAIR IS FOR GOVERNMENT BY MEN, LANSBURY BY WOMEN'

At a packed meeting at St. Stephen's Hall in Saxon Road, Blair announced his opposition to the National Insurance measure and the payment of MPs. A staunch anti-suffragist, he refused to campaign only on votes for women:

'It was said ... that the election was to be narrowed down to one issue. Well ... his fight was ... against the actions of the present government. He stood for the restoration of the British Constitution-(cheers) the Union between Great Britain and Ireland -(cheers) ... the integrity of the Church of England in Wales (Renewed cheers) ... the efficiency of our national defenses ... for a land ..... and last, but not least, he stood for the policy of Tariff Reform.'<sup>(20)</sup>

On the Saturday before polling with a mass meeting for Lansbury at Bow Baths in Roman Road, The Times reported:

'Every train, tram car and motor omnibus on Saturday afternoon brought fresh reserves of feminine canvassers and bill-distributors. There seemed to be thousands of suffragist volunteers in the division, and the pavements were white with their discarded gifts.'<sup>(21)</sup>

On the eve of polling day, the suffrage societies' combined outside Bow Church for a last spectacular torch light procession and rally with swinging coloured lanterns and banners, proceeded by a brass band playing the Marseillaise.

#### Polling Day, 26 November 1912

The weather was wild and blustering, with the rain teeming down in wind driven torrents by the evening. Suffrage women remained at every polling booth, sometimes without cloaks and umbrellas, drenched to the skin, until voting picked up as factories

closed. Little rowdyism was reported, except for a broken window at Cllr. Bassett's shop at 250, Roman Road and mud slinging at campaign vehicles. While Blair had 90 motors at his disposal, owing to a dispute between the W.S.P.U. and the local labour Party, suffragette cars were not used to convey Lansbury voters to the polls until Mrs Pankhurst's belated intervention.

The bizarre feature of the Bow and Bromley by-election was the existence of three women voters on the parliamentary register, though only one was in the constituency on polling day. Despite a personal visit from Mrs Pankhurst, she declined the offer of a suffragette vehicle. On the afternoon of 26 November 1912, Unity Dawkins of 135 Campbell Road described as 'the widow of a strong Unionist worker', traveled defiantly to Bromley Town Hall in a Tory car, festooned with a large blue card of Mr. Blair, to vote for the anti-suffragist candidate.<sup>(22)</sup>

Just before ten o'clock the returning officer, J. Kynaston Metcalfe, declared the result inside Bromley Town Hall:

Mr Reginald Blair (Unionist) 4,042  
Mr George Lansbury (Socialist and Suffragist) 3,291  
Unionist Majority<sup>(23)</sup> 751

While a disappointed George Lansbury addressed his supporters near the Obelisk in Devons Road, the result was greeted with blue lights and rockets at the Bow and Bromley Conservative Club. A triumphant Reginald Blair declared 'I have stood for the principles of the Unionist party'.<sup>(24)</sup>

The Times believed the result 'renders impossible any pretence that women's suffrage has been approved by a constituency'.<sup>(25)</sup> The Eastern Post and Chronicle condemned Lansbury for causing the by-election on a subject 'that had been brought before the public by means of violence, arson and outrage.'<sup>(26)</sup>



From Paris Christabel Pankhurst wrote 'Whatever the result the fight has been gloriously worthwhile.'<sup>(27)</sup> The distraught Marion Coates Hansen described Lansbury's defeat as a double catastrophic for the women's cause and for those campaigning to establish socialism within the Labour movement

'You risked the weapon the Lord granted to you to hold for a spell, and you lost. ... A more unhappy time I have never lived through.....'<sup>(28)</sup>

#### Reasons for George Lansbury's defeat

In her memoirs, Sylvia Pankhurst told a sorry story of friction between the local Labour Party and the wealthy feminists who invaded the constituency and upset the largely proletarian male electorate. A young ally of Christabel Pankhurst, Grace Roe, inexperienced and unsympathetic to Labour, ran the W.S.P.U. election campaign instead of Sylvia, with little co-operation between her and Lansbury's agent, Joe Banks.<sup>(29)</sup>

One of "GL"'s workers complained:

'You cannot rely on all ... of the women's organisations ... when some of their

canvassers go round saying that they do not agree with your socialism ...'<sup>(30)</sup>

Labour MP Will Thorne commented: 'I am firmly convinced that no constituency could be won on "Votes for Women". I do not think that my majority of over 4,000 could win on a question of that kind.'<sup>(31)</sup>

Many years later, George Lansbury believed some constituents still refused to vote for him, as they felt let down by their Labour MP. His famous saying, 'Never Resign!', suggested he miscalculated in 1912 in surrendering Bow and Bromley, not a safe seat for any Labour candidate.<sup>(32)</sup>

In 1910 Lloyd George's public declarations for 'my friend, George Lansbury' probably meant Liberals voted for "GL". Two years later, the absence of Liberal posters, reported by *The Morning Post* as 'Silent windows... all mean abstentions tomorrow', was an augury of a Lansbury defeat.<sup>(33)</sup> Not till normal party politics resumed after the First World War, with an increased working-class electorate, was the popular George Lansbury unassailable as the member for Bow and Bromley from 1922-1940.

#### **John Shepherd**

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1 The Times, 31 October 1912.

2 Raymond Postgate, *The Life of George Lansbury* (1951), p.127.

3 For glimpses of Lansbury family life, see Edgar Lansbury, *My Father* (1933) and Daisy Lansbury, 'A Child in George Lansbury's House', *Fortnightly* 164 (Nov. 1948) pp. 315-22 & (Dec. 1948) pp. 390-4.

4 George Lansbury, *Looking Backwards and Forwards* (1935), pp. 93-4.

5 Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (1993) pp.-6.

6 Lansbury to Hansen, 31 October 1912, *Lansbury Papers* Vol.28. f. 87

7 *Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, Vol.XL.,25 June 1912, col. 217-19.*

8 *The Common Cause*, 2 May 1912.

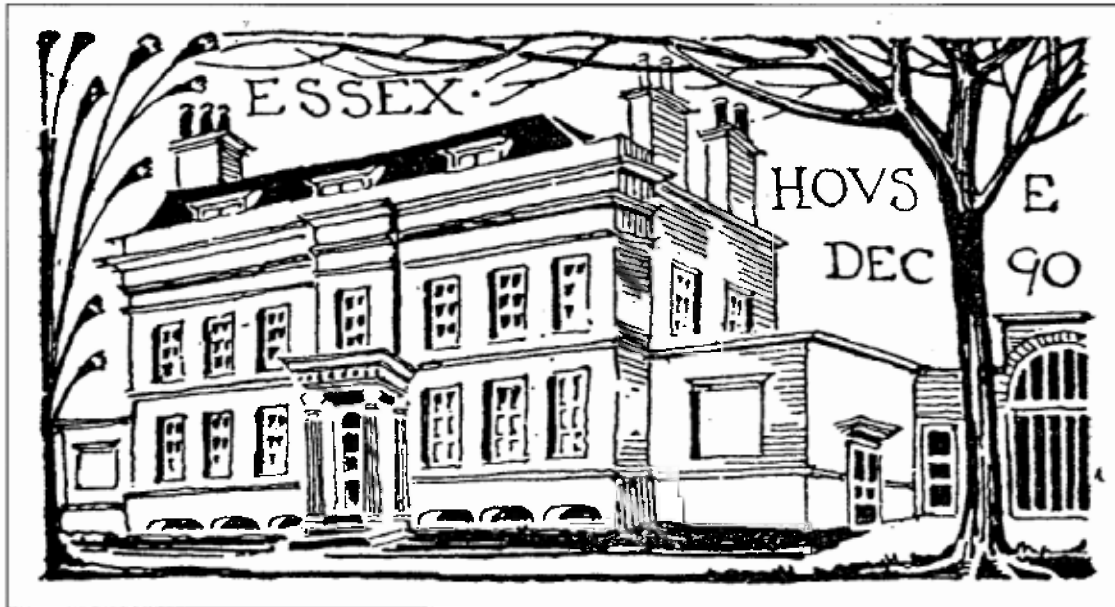
9 *Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, Vol.XLIII, 5 November 1912, col. 1103-7*

10 *The Labour Leader*, 5 December 1912

- 11 For a detailed analysis, see Francois Bedarida, 'Urban Growth and Social Structure in Nineteenth-Century Poplar' in *The London Journal*, Vol. 1 No.2, Nov. 1975 pp.159-188.
- 12 For the election campaign, see *Votes for Women* 22,29 November; *Daily Citizen*; *Daily Herald*; *Manchester Guardian*; *Daily Telegraph* 12-29 November; *The Suffragette*, 15,22,29 November; *East London Observer*; *East London Advertiser*; *Eastern Post*, 16,23,30 November 1912
- 13 *Votes for Women*, 22 November 1912
- 14 *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 1912
- 15 *East London Observer*, 23 November 1912
- 16 *Eastern Post and City Chronicle* 23 November 1912
- 17 copies of *The Worker*, October and November 1912, are in the Local History collection, Bancroft Road Library.
- 18 *East End News*, 22 November 1912.
- 19 *East London Observer*, 23 November 1912.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *The Times*, 25 November 1912.
- 22 Only the *Daily Mail* named the two women who did not vote, as Vincent Gerrard ('in a convent') and Augustine O'Bryen ('removed to Scotland'). The electoral registration officer may have mistaken their unusual Christian names for male householders. *Daily Mail* 23, 27 November 1912; see also *Eastern Post and City Chronicle*, 30 November 1912, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 November 1912.
- 23 comparison with general election result:
- | Election          | Electors | Turnout | Candidate     | Party     | Votes | %    |
|-------------------|----------|---------|---------------|-----------|-------|------|
| 1912              | 10,863   | 67.5    | R. Blair      | Con.      | 4,042 | 55.1 |
|                   |          |         | G. Lansbury   | Ind Lab   | 3,291 | 44.9 |
| Unionist majority | 151      | 10.2%   |               |           |       |      |
| 1910 (Dec)        | 10,330   | 75.2    | G. Lansbury   | Soc.      | 4,315 | 55.6 |
|                   |          |         | L.c.M.S.Amery | Lib Union | 3,452 | 44.4 |
| Soc. majority     | 863      | 11.2%   |               |           |       |      |
- 24 *Daily Telegraph*, 27 November 1912.
- 25 *The Times*, 27 November 1912.
- 26 *Eastern Post and Chronicle* 30 November 1912.
- 27 Pankhurst to Lansbury, 24 November 1912, *Lansbury Papers*, vol.6 f.200.
- 28 Hansen to Lansbury, 27 November 1912, *Ibid* f. 242.
- 29 E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement An Intimate Account Of Persons And Ideals* (Virago, 1977), pp. 424-426.
- 30 Sanders Jacobs to Lansbury, 27 November 1912, *Lansbury Papers*, vol.6, f.245.
- 31 Thorne to Lansbury, 27, November 1912 *Ibid*, vol.28.f.85.
- 32 For Lansbury's resignation of the Labour Party leadership in 1935, see John Shepherd, 'George Lansbury, Ernest Bevin and the Labour Leadership Crisis of 1935' in *On the Move: Essays In Labour and Transport History Presented To Philip Bagwell* (eds) Chris Wrigley and John Shepherd (The Hambledon Press, 1991), pp.204-30.
- 33 *The Morning Post*, 25 November 1912.

# The Simple Life At Essex House In Bow

C R ASHBEE AND THE GUILD OF HANDICRAFT



C R Ashbee first visited Toynbee Hall in Commercial Street, Whitechapel in the summer of 1886, led there by the idealism of his undergraduate days. He was twenty-three years old and fresh from Cambridge, with a promising career as an architect ahead of him. He was soon writing enthusiastically to his friends Roger Fry and Lowes Dickinson in Cambridge that 'there are some splendid men here and a great deal of silent unostentatious heroism.'

Toynbee Hall was the inspiration of the Rev Samuel Barnett, who took over as Vicar of St Jude's at Whitechapel in 1872. Barnett and his wife Henrietta were soon to realise that he had been given "the worst parish in London." Believing that the influence of intellectual and talented young men could have an uplifting effect on the minds and morals of the inhabitants of the East End slums, Barnett appealed for University undergraduates to spend some time working to improve the lot of

their less fortunate brothers in and around Whitechapel. To understand what a bold and outrageous suggestion this was, one needs to look at the conditions in the East End during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Conditions among the working classes inhabiting the area of London East of Aldgate was the cause of considerable concern, both to the government and to the affluent West End. Whilst Stepney attracted the Jewish immigrants in search of a haven from persecution, the building of the East and West India Docks saw an influx of Irish labourers, employed firstly in the construction of the docks and later in the loading and unloading of ships. In 1883 the Rev Andrew Mearns published a pamphlet called "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London", exposing the overcrowding, disease, prostitution and sweated industries. Other writers followed suit, and public social conscience was

stirred. There was a dual response, on the one hand philanthropic activity increased whilst on the other hand press accounts of the East End teeming with vice and horror inspired a pastime of 'slumming'. West End ladies and gentlemen in evening dress would take conducted tours of the slums to view the dens of iniquity and depravity.

The first University Settlement came into being, called Toynbee Hall after Arnold Toynbee, an earnest and brilliant undergraduate who had died the previous year. Money to support the settlement flowed in, and Toynbee Hall soon had its own buildings in Tudor collegiate style. Barnett also held exhibitions at Whitechapel where paintings of Holman Hunt and Burne-Jones were on display. Concerts and musical evenings, as well as lectures of various subjects were also a feature of his work.

The residents of Toynbee Hall were expected to spend some of their time in social or educational work, and they organised a wide range of evening classes, clubs and lectures. Ashbee offered a class on the writings of Ruskin, and to recruit members to his class he also lectured on the Work and Teaching of John Ruskin at working men's clubs. Here he came face to face with the 'British Working Man,' when he addressed the Beckton Co-operative Society, and he was horrified by what he learnt of the lives of the gasworkers. The Ruskin class started with only three members, but he soon found new recruits as its popularity increased. In the summer of 1887, after a discussion on the dignity of manual labour, the class decided they would respond by decorating the dining room in the new Toynbee Hall buildings with a frieze of modelled bosses of the coats of arms of Oxford and Cambridge colleges together with free-hand painting. Between these were medallions with a crudely stylised tree, the T of Toynbee Hall putting forth leaves and branches. The original decoration has long since disappeared, though the heraldic frieze with the medallions remains and is clearly visible, but it is virtually

impossible to visualise what it originally looked like.

For six weeks the class worked enthusiastically, the men and boys giving over 2000 hours of their spare time. The dining room was formally opened in September, although the frieze was unfinished and the class only completed the project the following year. As a direct result of this group activity, Ashbee began to formulate a plan for a practical East End scheme to which he could commit himself. Ashbee was at this time under increasing strain. Pressured by his father, HS Ashbee to enter the family business, his refusal to do so led to a breakdown in the relationship between his parents (he was always very close to his mother). But Ashbee continued to pursue his plan.

In August he had lunch with Burne-Jones to talk over the idea of an art school. In October he discussed the possibility of a guild with Edward Carpenter, and in December of that year he went to see William Morris, probably looking for support and the blessing of the artist whose work Ashbee deeply admired. But Morris was by now convinced that the salvation of the arts lay only in the remaking of society, in a total revolution that would sweep away the corrupt fabric of society. William Morris was still recovering from the events of Bloody Sunday. He could see no point in art schools or guilds. Ashbee wrote: I could not exchange a single argument with him till I granted his whole position as a Socialist and then said "Look I am going to forge a weapon for you; and thus I too work with you in the overthrow of Society." To which he replied, "The weapon is too small to be of any value."

Ashbee did not allow this disappointment to deter him. He believed that social change would come about through the influence of idealist groups such as his. He wrote a "Proposal for the Establishment of a Technical and Art School for East London" in the winter of 1887-8, which he circulated amongst the influential he believed were concerned with the East End. Essentially, the

proposal was to set up a workshop and a school together. The men in the workshop would teach in the school - the pupils in the school would be apprentices for the workshop. Ashbee estimated that £300 would cover the rent, tools and salaries for the first two years, and the workmen would begin with simple but high class work in wood and metal.

Ashbee approached Barnett with his idea and enlisted his support. Holman Hunt was asked to advertise it at the annual Whitechapel Picture Exhibition in March. Walter Crane, Edmund Gosse and Alma-Tadema spoke at Toynbee Hall, and on each occasion the press was supplied with copies of the proposal. Ashbee was fired with enthusiasm for his scheme and spent the spring of 1888 gathering in money, support and contacts. By June a little more than the £300 asked for had been given, the top floor of a warehouse at 34 Commercial Street, almost next door to Toynbee Hall was rented as a workshop and on 23 June 1888 the School and Guild of Handicraft was formally opened by the Rt. Hon Sir William Hart Dyke, Vice President of the Council of Education. The guests toured the workshops and The Times published a favourable report.

The School and Guild of Handicraft was founded at a time when the conscience of the nation over conditions of the worker in the East End had been brought into fever pitch. The year 1888 is a milestone in East End history. The Socialists were still smarting from the effects of Bloody Sunday in Trafalgar Square at the close of the previous year. Journalists and writers such as W.T. Stead, William Burrows, Clementina Black and Annie Besant were exposing the plight of the child-workers in East End match factories, which culminated in the Match Girls Strike of July 1888, when Annie Besant successfully fought for better conditions for the Bryant and May workers. This was also the year of Jack the Ripper and with the East End murders splashed over the front papers of the national press, society read of little else but the poverty and degradation of East London.

Ashbee was also drawing on the experiences of others within the decorative arts movement of the 1880s. The City and Guilds of London Institute, established in 1878 allowed the funds of City companies to be used to support trade classes, and soon technical education began with the founding of polytechnics and the National Association for the Promotion of Technical Education in 1887 (Canon Barnett was one of the founding members.) The Art Workers' Guild had been formed in 1884 and it became the focus of the revival of craftsmanship in London, a club for architects, artists and designers, who formed the elite of movement. At a meeting on 25 May 1887, T.J. Cobden-Sanderson coined the phrase **Arts and Crafts**, and the meeting culminated in the formation of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888. Ashbee's idea of a craft school in the East End with a workshop at its centre simply took these ideas one stage further, for as he said: "Our endeavour will be to make work of such quality as shall satisfy the demand of the professional public rather than of the Trade". He presented the Guild as decorators catering to advanced architectural tastes, and placed it in a line of descent through William Morris's Company, established in 1861, who produced stained glass, furniture, fabrics and wallpaper, down to the Century Guild, a loose association of architects, designers and craftsmen producing fabrics, furniture, metalwork and ceramics.

Ashbee saw the Guild of Handicraft as both the cultivator of skills and the provider of worthwhile work, and the products and their commercial success were of secondary importance. Compared to the activities at Toynbee Hall they were distinctly more down to earth and closer to the socialist ideal. The Guild was certainly original in concept, founded by a young architect, just twenty-five years of age, who saw his idea come to fruition despite lack of professional help or family support.

The Guild of Handicraft was formed with four others besides Ashbee, and a capital

of £50. The remaining £300 + raised from subscriptions was to be reserved for the school. The members of the Guild were Fred Hubbard, formerly a city clerk nursing unsatisfied artistic desires, John Pearson, a metalworker and skilled craftsman and designer, John Williams, an enthusiastic though unskilled metalworker, and C V Adams, a cabinet maker. There was also an apprentice, Charley Atkinson.

Fred Hubbard was a gentle, slightly prim idealist. He was responsible with Ashbee for decorative painting and general administration. John Pearson specialised in decorative repousse work and his wares were useful in attracting favourable attention at exhibitions and the art loving public began to sit up and take notice of the Guild at Toynbee Hall. However Pearson did not seem to grasp the collaborative spirit of the Guild and did not appear to teach at the School, although in 1890 he was almost expelled for running his own workshop outside the Guild. He appeared to be unco-operative and difficult to work with. John Williams was another shy and quiet, though talented young man. With Ashbee's coaxing he became one of the most active and committed members of the Guild and a metal designer of some skill. C V Adams, the cabinet maker, was the most important member of the team, who was able to turn Ashbee's ideas into reality, although Ashbee found him difficult to get to know. Adams was a staunch trade unionist and organised the Guild as a co-operative workshop. As shop steward and later, manager Adams' opinion carried weight and prevented Ashbee from being carried away by enthusiasm when there could have been a danger of him becoming dictatorial. When he left in 1897 Ashbee described him as the man who had done more than anyone else in making the Guild what it was. A man who had great strength of character and tact, with absolute power over the men.

The publicity surrounding the founding of the Guild brought in enough work to keep the five men busy, and in addition they

prepared for the first Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society held in the autumn of 1888, where Pearson and Williams showed their repousse work. Undoubtedly Ashbee and the guild were nervous of this first showing of their work, but the Exhibition was a success and Walter Crane wrote to Ashbee congratulating him on the Guild's work.

Then the first real commission for the Guild came at Christmas 1888, when an order for furniture and metalwork arrived from Herbert J Torr of Riseholme Hall, near Lincoln. Over the next three years the workshop supplied Riseholme with various items.

Canon Barnett, who appeared to have a controlling influence over the School of Handicraft, had formed a committee for the school, and in January 1889 the Guild formed its own committee. Ashbee had the title of Honorary Director and rules were formulated on democratic lines for the conduct of the workshops and the sharing of its profits were carefully regulated. Those who earned the most in wages received the largest share of the profits, but the first £20 of each Guildsman's profits went towards capital investment in the Guild, and the idea was that the Guild's capital could be built up and also each Guildsman would have a stake in it. The committee appeared to have the final authority in the running of the Guild, and it worked on the lines of a co-operative, giving the members a sense of involvement in the workshop, a feeling of control over their own work and a share of the profits, though in the latter years of its existence as the Guild grew and the profits shrank, the last point became less significant.

The Guild made steady progress in 1889 and as more craftsmen joined and apprentices taken on from the School, new contacts were formed and new commissions came in. The Guild now had seven members and around four apprentices. Three new cabinet makers had joined, including Walter Curtis, an unassuming man who was to remain with the Guild for almost twenty years.

Holman Hunt asked them to make the repousse copper frame he had designed for his painting *May Morning on Magdalen Tower*, Oxford. Hunt was nervous of the outcome, but Williams and his craftsmen came through with flying colours and Hunt was more than delighted. As the Guild came to be better known, Ashbee was invited to lecture on his work. He spoke at Edinburgh on *Decorative Art from a Workshop Point of View*. He contrasted the ideal of the artist in a Studio with the craftsman in a workshop and commented: "The destinies of British art and industry must eventually be decided by the British working classes, even as they are at present slowly and surely solving our social and economic questions..."

By 1890 two important members joined on the metalworking side, Bill Hardiman and W A White. Hardiman used to earn 15 shillings a week selling cat's meat from a barrow in Whitechapel, White worked as a cutter in a city bookshop. Both had well paid jobs by East End standards, but Ashbee saw in them the essence of what the Guild was all about: with no experience or contact with metalworkers, they would be moulded into the ideals of the Guild and its traditions of skill and style would be worked through them. Ashbee and Hardiman began to teach themselves the technique of modelling and casting in silver, working towards a Guild style in metalwork. They learnt from the materials, from tradition and from each other.

Canon Barnett's control and influence over the School of Handicraft began to be a source of tension and it was soon evident that there was disharmony. Barnett chaired the school committee and there were two other Toynbee Hall representatives on it. The school was an immediate success, attracting a great deal of philanthropic interest. In the first year it had about eighty students and some had to be turned away. The classes were held on weekday evenings at 8 pm. Williams taught metalwork, clay modelling, wood carving and plaster casting; Adams and

Hubbard taught carpentry; Ashbee took the men's decoration class, and the boys' was taken by Hubert Llewellyn Smith, helped by Roger Fry. Students were generally in their early twenties and from the main craft trades, jewellers, engravers, sign-writers and decorative painters.

By the end of 1888, however, Ashbee and the other young men resident at Toynbee Hall were becoming disillusioned with Barnett and his methods, although there is a possibility that Ashbee's expressed preference for male companionship contributed to the tension. Some of the men felt they were not getting to know the ordinary people of East London, or being able to share their socialist ideals. They decided to move to 49 Beaumont Square in Stepney. The move took place in April 1889, just after Easter. Along with Ashbee went Arthur Laurie who taught at the People's Palace in Mile End Road, Hubert Llewellyn Smith who was helping Charles Booth with his survey, Arthur Rogers, and Hugh Fairfax-Cholmeley whose family were Yorkshire landowners. In May Ashbee gave an address at the opening of the Guild's Craftsman Club, and announced that they had moved, and that 'these five have planted the flag round which the Guild and School may rally later.'

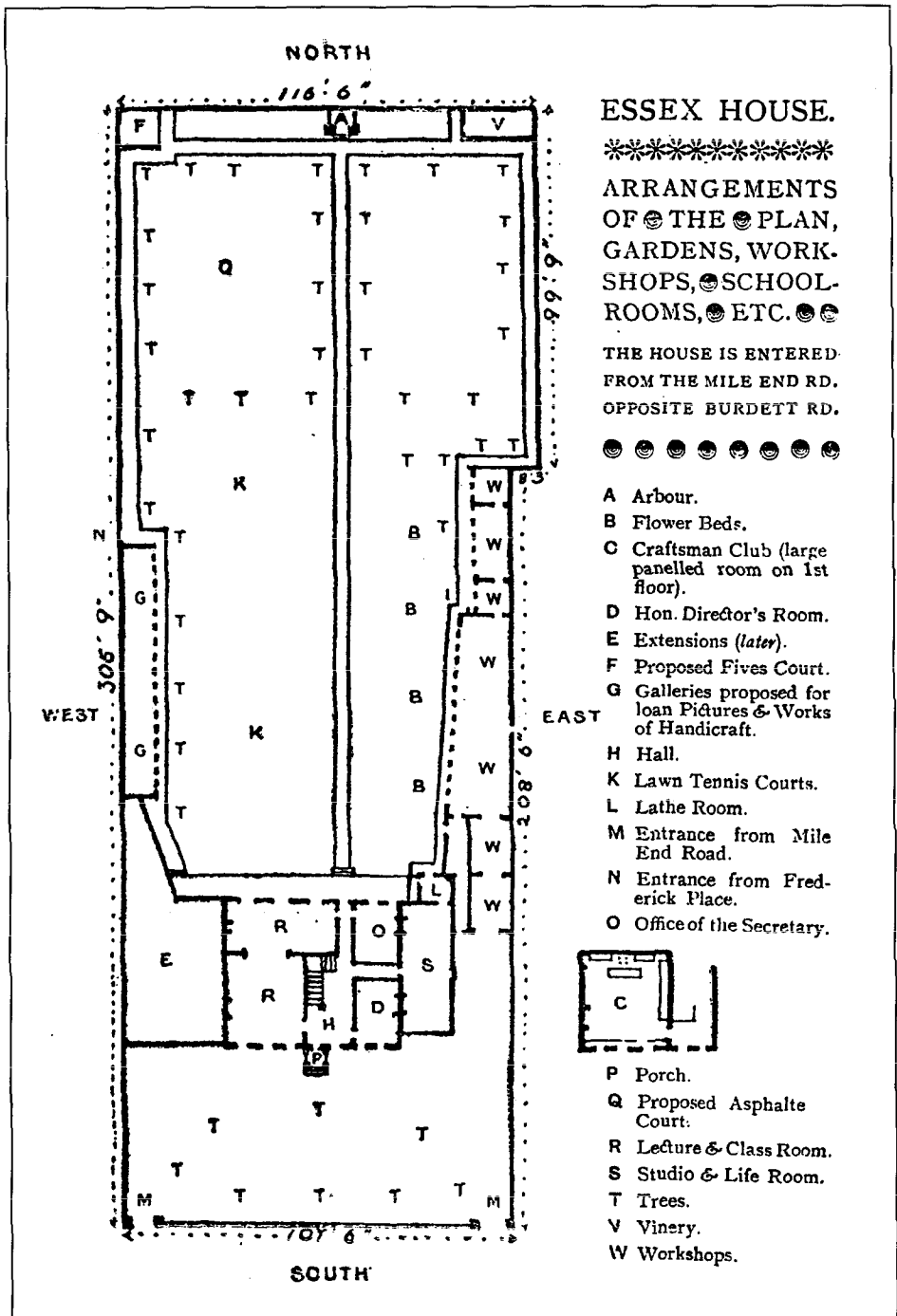
The Guild and School however, did not move to Beaumont Square, although control of the School passed from Toynbee Hall to the Beaumont Square group with the addition of Ernest Debenham, a friend of Ashbee's. In the summer of 1889 Ashbee took the School's boys club on holiday to an oast house in Kent, belonging to a relative of his. This idyllic scenario was soon to be destroyed by dissension. In 1890 the School committee drafted a constitution giving them sole and absolute control over the management, direction and finance of the School. This separation of the School from the Guild was totally against the principles under which it was set up. Through the months of August and September Ashbee fought against the move, but matters came to a head when all the committee members

with the exception of Ashbee and C V Adams of the Guild, resigned. His idea of the Guild subsidising the School and training the boys towards a future with the Guild was at odds with Llewellyn Smith and the rest of the Beaumont Square group who preferred the School to be independent.

The crisis caused a complete split between Ashbee and the Guild on the one hand and the Beaumont Square group and the School on the other. Ashbee left 49 Beaumont Square and lived for a while elsewhere. It must have been very painful losing friends he had worked with and admired. It must have been a bitter blow when in January 1891 Llewellyn Smith opened the Whitechapel Craft School in Little Alie Street, near Toynbee Hall, for on the committee there were Charles Kegan Paul, Hugh Fairfax-Cholmeley, Arthur Rogers and his dearest friend, Arthur Laurie. It was as though Ashbee was out of step with the rest of his comrades. Now he had the Guild all to himself and his comrades were the Guildsmen, and they were banded together against the forces of commercialism. He still felt the same zeal burning inside him. The fame of the Guild was spreading, and other workshops were springing up, inspired by his work.

Soon the Guild was to move to a new home. In the summer of 1890 Ashbee had inspected Essex House, 401 Mile End

Road, almost on the corner of Grove Road. On the site there now stands Onyx House, almost opposite Mile End Station. Essex House was a large, plain brick house, well built with a fine staircase and panelled rooms. Built around 1700, it was now owned by Samuel Southey and William Towell. The land had been leased in 1829 for a period of seventy-three years by Daniel Austin, Thomas Dobson and William King from Sir Charles Morgan, Lord Tredegar, who had extensive





landholdings in Mile End Old Town, as this part of Bow was then. C R Ashbee leased the property for a period of 12 years from 1891 to 1903, which was when the present leaseholders agreement with Lord Tredegar came to an end.

Essex House had a large garden to the rear with some trees, including several fruit trees. This was in a fairly affluent neighbourhood, for just round the corner



was Tredegar Square with its fine houses, and there were similar houses along the Bow Road, one of which, Tredegar House, is still standing.

It was decided to use the main house for Guild offices and meeting rooms, and some of the lighter metalwork would also be done in the house. Ashbee had a bachelor flat in one section.

Permission was given for a workshop in the garden and on 17 January 1891 Ashbee signed a twelve year lease on behalf of the Guild, and by the spring they were all safely established. A large plaster medallion showing the Craft of the Guild was hung on the stairs and a bellpush was designed for the door. In the garden shoots were pushing up through the earth, and soon a mass of white pinks covered the ground. The Guild adopted the flower as

their emblem, and Ashbee was soon using it as a symbol in his work.

Once the Guild had moved into Essex House, Ashbee and John Williams went on a six week holiday to Italy. On their return Ashbee threw all his energy into establishing the work of the Guild and building up his architectural practice. He lived at Essex House for several years, but he also had an architectural office, first at Lincoln's Inn and then in Chelsea. He started teaching for the University Extension movement and at this time he started an ambitious survey of London's historic buildings. He lectured, wrote and travelled. He seemed to have an extraordinary capacity for work.

However, by July 1891, the Guild began to experience difficulties. Work was slow in coming in and they began to show a loss. By February 1892 things had not improved and first John Williams, then Adams and Ashbee had to make loans to the Guild to tide them over. Then a large order came in for Bryngwyn, a country house in Herefordshire. This resulted in them making a modest profit by the end of 1892. In 1893 the Guild received a large order for furnishing a town house in Chelsea, which Ashbee was building for his mother.

New problems now beset the Guild. When there were only five or six members, committee meetings were straightforward affairs, but by 1892 there were a dozen members and as the Guild grew in size more management was needed. It was proposed that an executive committee consisting of Ashbee and a representative of each workshop be formed, and the full Guild would meet once in six months. The proposal threw the Guild into turmoil. First John Williams resigned, saying he no longer had any confidence in the members of the Guild. Three days later John Pearson offered his resignation. Finally it was decided that Ashbee and Adams as manager would run the Guild and that the full Guild would meet only twice a year. This arrangement worked well and the Guild entered a long phase of steady development, as year by year new recruits

entered the Guild and new skills were taken up, such as leather work and enamelling, while silverwork and jewellery became the Guild's strongest lines. There was also a steady rise in annual profits.

The School however was not so successful. Ashbee had brought the School over to Essex House, still determined to pursue his hopes of the Guild providing the teaching, which they even did free for a while. However the School debts grew as the fees did not cover costs and the hoped for grant from the London County Council failed to materialise, though there were months of hoping and waiting. By 1894, despite having made several applications and conforming to the rigid guideline laid down, when no grant seemed forthcoming, classes were closed down. On 30 January 1895 the School closed down completely. This was a bitter blow to Ashbee and his first major disappointment.

At the end of 1890 Ashbee published a book from the Guild called "Transactions of the Guild and School of Handicrafts Vol. 1". The typography and illustrations were heavily influenced by the late Victorian fashion for antique printing, a sort of semi-medieval style, reported by the Manchester Examiner as being of antique simplicity, the old style letterpress and illustrations smiling forth quaintly in red ink and black from the surface of the best and quaintest looking hand-made paper. The book was printed by Penny and Hull of 53 Leaman Street, just across Whitechapel High Street, not far from Toynbee Hall. Three years later Ashbee produced "A Few Chapters in Workshop Re-construction and Citizenship", also printed by Penny and Hull. They also did most of the publicity leaflets for the Guild.

From Essex House, Ashbee would walk down the Bow Road to the ancient St Mary's Church, the River Lea and Bow Bridge. Just before reaching the bridge a turning on the right, High Street Bromley led to Bromley by Bow. Once a charming village, it had been absorbed into the

rapidly expanding East End where manufacturers found the water of the Lea ideal for their use. The River had been traditionally used for grinding corn and for breweries. The ancient priory of St Leonard's had stood there for centuries, and a mansion known as the Old Palace, reputed to have been built by James I. In 1893 the London School Board bought the mansion, intending to build a school on the site. Demolition work had already started when Ashbee was alerted to the fact that the building was in fact a 17<sup>th</sup> century manor house, with rare panelling, ceilings and staircases. He was too late to save the building but was able to arrange for part of the interior to be given to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where it is on display as the Bromley Room. This act of sheer vandalism infuriated Ashbee and the realisation that something needed to be done. Although William Morris had set up the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, a lot more had to be done, for in order to save and preserve buildings from damage and demolition, they had first to be identified.

In March 1894, Ashbee sent out a circular, formulating a plan for a Watch Committee for Greater London, which would compile a register of all work of an artistic and historic nature. He appealed to the Architectural Association and its newly founded Camera Club. William Morris, Walter Crane and George Frampton were among those who sent in donations. On 25 June the Watch Committee met for the first time in Essex House. Ernest Godman was elected secretary and the eleven strong group endorsed Ashbee's plan that a start should be made right there in East London. The members of the group divided the area in twenty six survey districts and set about their work. Ashbee estimated that it would take them a year to complete their task. In fact, despite coaxing, cajoling and at times almost despairing, the first volume of the Survey of London appeared in 1900, almost six years later.

The group now called themselves the Committee for the Survey of the Memorials of Greater London. Further volumes continued to be published over the years and the work continues to this day in the Survey of London.

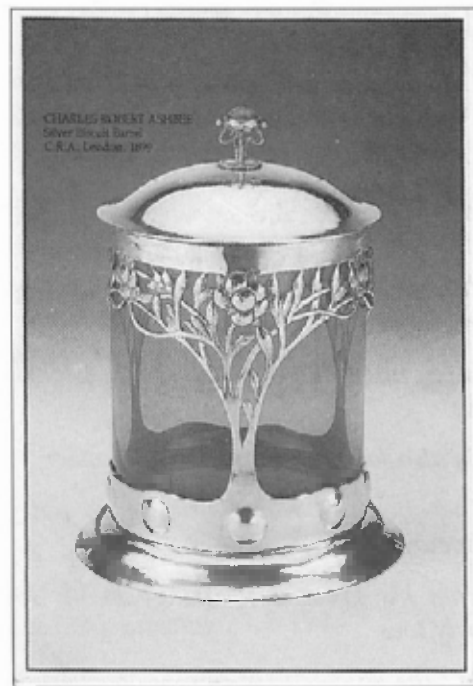
Whilst Ashbee was busy with the affairs of the Guild in the East End, over in Hammersmith, West London William Morris was exciting attention, notably in the printing world. Morris had developed the Kelmscott Press, which between 1891 and 1898 produced fifty-two titles in its own unique style. The idea of private printing caught the imagination of other craftsmen and several printing presses were set up in turn. Ashbee was also attracted by this development and had visited Morris on several occasions to see the workings of the Kelmscott Press. After William Morris's death, Laurence Hodson, a brewer from the Wolverhampton who had been a major patron of Morris and Company, approached Ashbee early in 1898 with a proposal that the Guild should take over the Kelmscott Press. Ashbee leapt at the opportunity of taking over the press of a master craftsman.

In March 1898 Ashbee wrote to his fiancée Janet Forbes the wonderful news that he had arranged to take over the presses and three printers from the Kelmscott Press, including Thomas Binning; they would now be known as the Essex House Press. That year the Guild had their best year, with more than £100 in bonuses for the Guildsmen. Ashbee revived the idea of registering the Guild as a limited company. They had tried unsuccessfully before, but now an offer came from Rob Martin Holland, a young director at Martin's Bank. On 8 July 1898 the Guild was registered as 'The Guild of Handicraft Limited.' The Guild was now a financial success, attracting large commissions and exhibiting work throughout Britain and in Europe.

In 1897 Ashbee had met the young Janet Forbes, fifteen years his junior, and proposed to her. He was 34 years of age,

she was 19 years old. On hearing that she had accepted him, he wrote to her explaining his sexuality and sexual preferences and assuring her that his choice of her as his wife did not mean that he held her in any less regard than his men and boy friends. The young, idealistic Janet seems to have accepted the situation with equanimity. This was also a hectic time for the Guild. The Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse had placed a large order with them, and was pressing for completion. C V Adams, for so long the mainstay of the Guild left for a better paid job at Heal's.

On 8 September 1898 Janet and Ashbee were married at Godden Green in



Sevenoaks. After the wedding they took a train to Cannon Street, and then a cab to Mile End. It had been Janet's idea that they spend the first night of their married life at Essex House. The house was empty except for the housekeeper, and after a light supper they retired to the bedroom and to their separate beds. After a honeymoon at Alfriston on the South Downs, they settled down to married life at 74 Cheyne Walk Chelsea. From the

outset Janet took a keen interest in the Guild and every Wednesday evening she and Ashbee would bicycle across London to Essex House for supper. She was soon accepted by the young apprentices and Guildsmen of her own age as companion and confidante. The Guild now had about thirty workmen, among them W J Osborn, now manager of the Guild, Reinhart Read, Tom Jelliffe, Walter Curtis and A G Rose. A young man Sid Cotton had joined the Guild in 1896 at the age of thirteen, a promising cabinet maker. When they sat down to supper on Wednesdays it was usually with the younger apprentices and Guildsmen. Cyril and Sid, Arthur and Alf Pilkington, the wild man of Poplar, and Lewis Hughes, the Welsh blacksmith. After supper they would gather round and sing songs, folk songs and traditional roundels. Janet Ashbee's contribution to these sing-alongs was "The Essex House Alphabet". It began:

*A stands for Arthur the Cameron bold,*

*Our great Cockney Craftsman in silver  
and gold,*

*With his hair and his eyes and his gestures  
and shape,*

*He is just chuka-chuka, the Music Hall  
ape!*

*A's also for Alfred, our gay Volunteer,*

*(The effects of whose drilling do not yet  
appear);*

*From his great curly fringe to his long  
curly toes*

*He's the Wild Man of Poplar, as every one  
knows.*

The ditty continued through the names of all the Guild craftsmen and apprentices to W A White.

The song's light-hearted banter reflected the spirit of comradeship within the Guild.

In 1899 the Guild opened a shop at 16a Brook Street, just off Bond Street where they sold the work of the silversmiths and jewellers. But Ashbee was already toying with the idea of moving to the countryside.

He talked of the Guildsmen 'going home' to the land, which was a contradiction as in reality they were almost all Cockneys and the sophisticated trades they practised were traditionally those of the city. But this was in keeping with the Arts and Crafts Movement and its romanticism. There was a lot of enthusiasm for what was termed "The Simple Life". Ashbee equated the good old days with medieval society and pre-industrial revolution times.

The lease on Essex House was due to expire in September 1902 and after several disappointments, Ashbee finally found the ideal place in Chipping Campden. The Guildsmen were consulted and the majority of them decided on the move. The workshops moved from London by stages. The last to move were the printers who installed themselves on the ground floor of the silk mill which had been taken over and renamed Essex House. Ashbee's long association with the East End was over.

After Ashbee's departure to Chipping Campden in 1903, the house which had now reverted to Lord Tredegar, was leased by Lady Mary Fitzalan Howard. The first Catholic settlement in the East End of London had been set up by Lady Margaret Howard at No 24 Tredegar Square, and was called St Philip's House. This moved to Essex House in 1903. It was a convent for the Sisters of Charity until 1929 when part of it was leased by Barclays Bank.

In 1937 Essex House was demolished to make way for the Odeon Cinema which was a landmark on the Mile End Road until it closed in 1976. In 1985 the Odeon was demolished and the present building with its wide bow front, designed by local architect Piers Gough, was constructed on the site. The extensive garden in the rear is now occupied by a new development of luxury apartments. The new building on the site of Essex House has gone through several names - Kentish House, Besso House and of late Onyx House.

**Rosemary Taylor**



Note: The inspiration for the above article came from a lecture given by Felicity Ashbee, daughter of CR Ashbee, which I attended at Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, followed shortly afterwards by a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Research at the Local History Library, Bancroft Road disclosed the information on Essex House, including the original invitation, as well as other references to the work Ashbee did for the Survey of London. Inevitably, I have drawn heavily on Alan Crawford's excellent and definitive biography on CR Ashbee, published in 1985 by Yale University, whilst Fiona McCarthy's *A Simple Life* was invaluable in its descriptions of the Guildsmen who lived and worked at Essex House and Chipping Campden.

Footnote: In July 1997 I went on a pilgrimage to Chipping Campden "in search of Ashbee", to find that the Silk Mill still held workshops run by descendants of the original Guildsmen, who had followed Ashbee to their rustic Utopia in search of a Simple Life.

## ARTHUR MORRISON



1996 was the centenary of the publication of "A Child of the Jago", the best known novel about the East End of London by Arthur Morrison. Although now neglected, Morrison was a prominent member of the school of realist writers, which later included Israel Zangwill, Arthur Pugh ('Tony Drum') and even Somerset Maugham (Liza of Lambeth).

It is set in the Old Nichol in the West of Bethnal Green, on the Shoreditch boundary, which was considered the worst slum in London at the time. Morrison drew attention to social problems that were coming to the fore of public attention at the time. His novel made an important contribution to a very animated debate. It highlighted conditions in an area that the new London County Council (set up in 1889) was planning to clear and rebuild.

These clearances were initiated in response to representations made by the

Medical Officers of Health for Bethnal Green and Shoreditch in 1890 and related to some fifteen acres of land, bounded by Virginia Road and St Leonard's Churchyard, Shoreditch, on the North, Boundary Street on the West, Church Street on the South and Mount Street on the East. There were some twenty narrow streets - the widest only 28 feet wide - comprising some 730 houses of which 632 were occupied. The remainder consisted of 12 public houses and beer shops, 21 shops and factories, 2 registered lodging houses with 163 beds and 43 empty dwellings. The population - excluding the lodging houses - was 5,566 - 3,370 adults and 2,196 children, who occupied 2,545 rooms.<sup>(1)</sup>

A large proportion was considered to belong to the criminal classes and, in one street, 64 people had served terms of imprisonment. The average number of deaths per annum of children, under one

year old, was 252 per 1000 live births, compared with only 159 in the rest of Bethnal Green. <sup>(2)</sup>

Arthur Morrison was invited to visit the area, by the Rev. Arthur Osborne Montgomery Jay, Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Shoreditch, who had been impressed by reading the author's book "Tales of Mean Streets". Born in India, the son of the Rev. W. Jay who had committed himself to taking Christianity to the benighted peoples of North India, the Rev. Osborne Jay had found his scope for missionary activity among the population of the Old Nichol.

Arthur Morrison was horrified by what he had found and wrote a book that established his reputation as one of the foremost exponents of the new realism just as it was becoming a central feature of creative writing, a century ago. Developing an approach, initiated by writers like George Moore and George Gissing, with parallels in art and other fields of culture, Morrison depicted life in this London slum as crude, violent and repugnant - reminiscent of life in Thomas Hobbes' classic state of nature - "nasty, brutish and short".

Charles Dickens' approach to life in London slums - as exemplified in *Oliver Twist* - revealed an underworld in which crime and villainy flourished. However, his hero, Oliver, after many adventures and misadventures, emerges virtually uncorrupted by the temptations and hardships that he had encountered. The evil-doers get their comeuppance and the moral is that if evil is resisted all will be well in the end.

Arthur Morrison's work, in contrast, is designed to shock and is based on the idea that, in such a climate, evil triumphs over good, rather than the opposite. "A Child of the Jago" has no heroes, who successfully overcome the adverse conditions and

deprivation of the Old Jago, which is the pseudonym for the Old Nichol. Dicky Perrott, the main character, is a miserable and contemptible young thief, who is, in the end, stabbed and killed, after his father has been hanged for murder. Much of the story is taken up with the description of a horrific battle between two families, the Renns and the Learys, and their hangers on. The female champion of the former - stripped to the waist - tears off the scalp of her antagonist, from the other family, but is then stabbed repeatedly with a broken bottle, which lands her in hospital. Robbery, deceit and treachery are the usual features of community life. The only pillar of righteousness, in this sink of iniquity, is the local Anglican Minister, Father Sturt, representing the real life Rev. Arthur Osborne Jay.

The publication of "A Child of the Jago" triggered off a debate as to the accuracy of the author's description. H.G. Wells and other reviewers praised the book as a novel but other reviews, like the one published by the *St James' Gazette* of December 1896, suggested that it was a plagiarism of Osborne Jay's book, "Life in Darkest London" and exaggerated the true facts. The Rev. Arthur Osborne Jay joined in the correspondence generated to support Arthur Morrison and deny plagiarism.

The discussion continued in other literary journals, making Morrison a central figure in the arguments advanced on the literary phenomenon of the new realism. The acceptability of the picture that he painted inevitably depended on his reliability as a witness and led to questions being asked about his experience and knowledge of East End life in the raw.

The author, however, gave few clues about his background and, later in life, appears to have done his best to conceal and mislead enquirers. According to a number of reference books and in his

Times obituary, he was said to have been born in Kent. One account of his life gave his father as the late George Morrison of Blackheath - an eminently respectable suburb. According to some sources, he had been privately educated.

Upon his death in 1945, his widow - on his instructions - burnt all his papers. P.J. Keating, who wrote a painstaking introduction to "A Child of the Jago", when it was republished by MacGibbon and Kee, in 1969 stated:-

"So little is known of Arthur Morrison's early life that any biographical study of him must rely more on conjecture than on established fact" (op. cit. p.11)

Keating reveals that Arthur George Morrison was born, according to his birth certificate, at 14 John Street, Poplar on the 1st November 1863. His father's name was George Richard Morrison, an engine fitter and his mother, prior to her marriage, had been Jane Cooper. Keating failed to find any other reference to the author, until his signature appeared in September 1886 on a cash receipt for his salary, as Clerk to the Beaumont Trustees, a charitable institution, which administered the People's Palace in the Mile End Road. By this time, he was already 23 years of age and even his birthplace was in doubt, as there were two John Streets in Poplar in 1863.

No other information appeared to have survived and Keating came to no conclusion, except to cast doubts on the version of his origins circulated in his later years. It was therefore not possible to link his knowledge of the East End to his own background and experience.

"A Child of the Jago" is one of four books which Morrison wrote on life in the East End of London and all of them paint graphic pictures of the population, bringing out some of the worst aspects of human nature. Those who were not

depraved are frequently victims and are made the butt of his cynical humour. They are treated with condescension rather than sympathy and few of them emerge as worthy of admiration or even respect.

Chronologically, the first of these four books is "Tales of Mean Streets", a collection of short stories, which were first published separately in literary magazines in the 1890s. The style is direct but restrained and suggests a detailed familiarity with the realities of life in lower class London neighbourhoods.

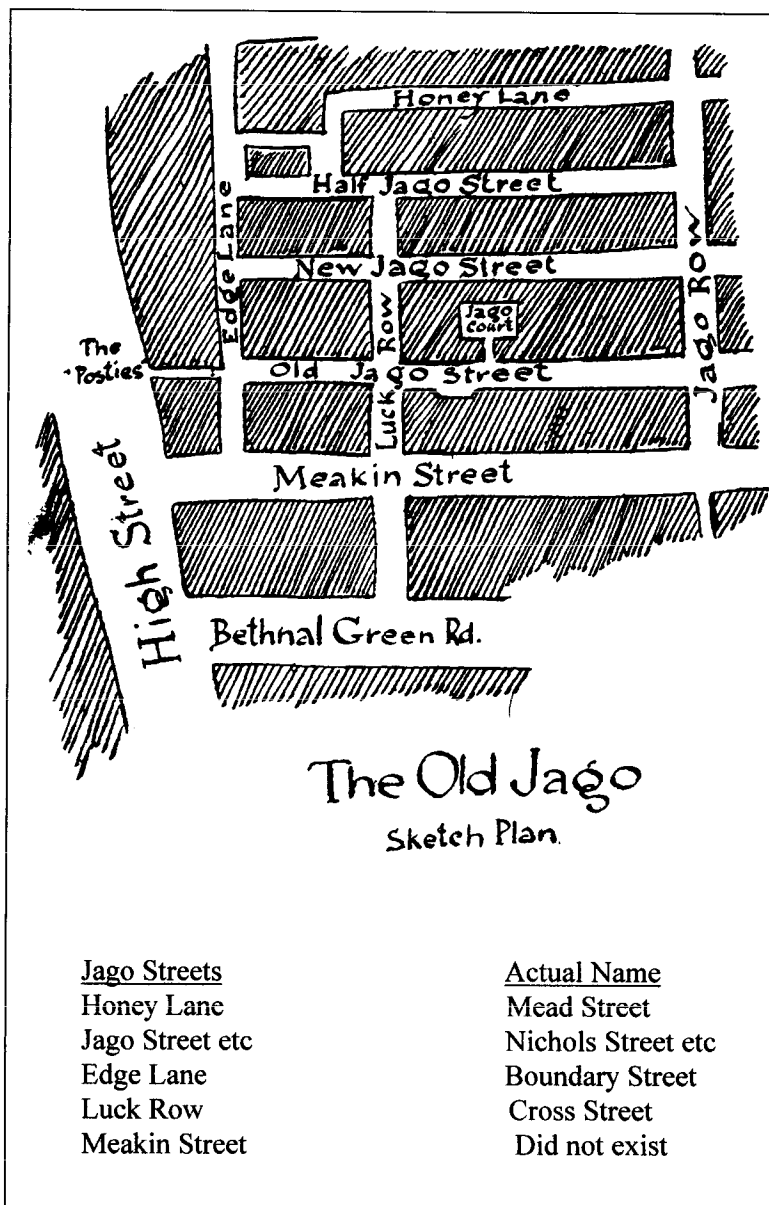
"That Brute Simmons" portrays a henpecked second husband, who is jogged into desertion by the arrival on the scene of the first husband - previously thought to be dead, but clearly a fugitive from his wife's tyranny - who tries to extort a few pounds from him as the price of leaving him alone.

"Lizerunt" (i.e. Elizabeth Hunt), the least well known of these stories, gently makes fun of the courtship and marriage of the female employee of a pickle factory to a particularly obnoxious greedy, violent and workshy young man.

Most of the stories illustrate the selfishness and inadequacies of members of the working classes and Morrison's contempt for the labour movement is clear. Lizerunt's beloved "went to a meeting of the Unemployed and cheered a proposal to storm the Tower of London. But he did not join the procession following a man with a handkerchief on a stick; who promised destruction to every policeman in his path for he knew the fates of such processions".

Morrison's attitude to Christian missions was equally cynical. "A Conversion" relates how a confirmed thief, Scuddy Land, accepts Jesus as his saviour, only to steal the petty takings of a street vendor outside the mission hall.





"To London Town", which first appeared in 1899, is the tale of a boy and his mother, who have escaped from the unattractive environment of London's East End to live in a cottage, situated in Epping Forest, not far from Waltham Abbey. A cruel stroke of fate - the death of the boy's maternal grandfather, on whose income they rely - forces them to return and grapple anew with the problems of survival in a rough, tough and desperately drab dockland area. Here the mother opens a shop and struggles to make it pay by providing refreshments for local workers, while her son is apprenticed to a firm of engineers where his father had worked before his death.

"The Hole in the Wall" (1902) is the story of another boy, deprived of both parents, in this case, and taken over by his none-too-scrupulous grandfather, the landlord of an East End waterside public house in crime ridden dockland.

In each of these books, Morrison only thinly disguises the area in which the action takes place, sometimes using false names, as with the inner streets in "A Child of the Jago", but in other cases accurately describing and naming the features of the environment of Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, West Ham and Thameside and even Waltham Abbey and the roads to the East End in "To London Town". The idea that he dreamt up the

background for his books can be rejected out of hand. Although his misanthropic attitude to the bulk of the working class population of the East End is a matter for debate <sup>(4)</sup>, the description of the areas where the events related in his books take place is both authentic and brilliant.

It is, furthermore, possible to dig out more information about Morrison than P.J. Keating thought possible, revealing a lot more of his early life than was previously known.

Arthur George Morrison was born on the 1st November 1863 at 14 John Street North, which was officially incorporated into Grundy Street, Poplar in 1865. He was the first child of George Richard Morrison, an engineer and his wife Jane Morrison nee Cooper. At least two other children were born to this couple - Ada in 1869 and Frederick in 1871.

George Richard Morrison was the son of another George Morrison, a lighterman, also born in the East End at Stepney, the son of James and Mary Morrison. The only definite connection with Kent was through the author's mother, who was born at Sheerness to Thomas and Jane Cooper in 1840.

Arthur Morrison's father died of phthisis (tuberculosis) at Bath Street, off East India Dock Road in October 1871, when his eldest son was only 7, his daughter 2 and his younger son less than 1 year old. <sup>(5)</sup>

His maternal grandmother, Jane Cooper, supported her family of several children by keeping a haberdasher's shop at 4 Grundy Street, Poplar, <sup>(6)</sup> after she was herself widowed in the 1850s. Arthur Morrison's mother, Jane Morrison nee Cooper took over this shop to support her family in 1879 and was still there in 1903, when another proprietor took over.

The writer was educated at Hale Street Wesleyan School <sup>(7)</sup>, in the immediate

neighbourhood of Grundy Street and in 1881, at the age of 18, employed as Clerk to the School Board architects.<sup>(8)</sup> Later, he became Clerk to the Beaumont Trustees, as P.J. Keating recorded.

Being brought up in a fatherless family in later Victorian East London and remembering his grandmother, as well as his mother, keeping a small shop to support their families, he must have been very familiar with the conditions, the geography and the population of the area. His aim - reflected in his books - was to escape from poverty and the conditions in which it flourished.

This was made possible as the result of his success as a journalist and a writer. His employment as Clerk to the Beaumont Trustees probably gave him the opportunity to develop his knowledge of art and literature, which was the purpose of the People's Palace, as conceived by the Trustees and idealistically projected in Walter Besant's novel, "All Sorts and Conditions of Men". It is even possible that his move from the London School Board Architects to the People's Palace was arranged by W.R. Robson, architect to the London School Board, who was commissioned to draft the plans for the People's Palace. This was opened on the site of the demolished Bancroft Hospital in May 1887 by Queen Victoria. By then Arthur Morrison was already Clerk to the Trustees.

In this capacity, he made his first tentative steps as a writer and, in March 1889, accepted the post of sub-editor of the Palace Journal. Just over a year later, in October 1890, perhaps as the result of a dispute at the People's Palace, described by W.J. Keating, <sup>(9)</sup> he became a journalist on a West London evening paper and in 1891, produced his first book, "The Shadows Around Us" - a selection of ghost stories.

An article "The Street", which he contributed to MacMillan's Magazine, led to a meeting with the well known journalist, W.E. Henley, who encouraged him to write more in the same vein and these stories, which appeared in the "National Observer", were published together in 1893 as "Tales of Mean Streets".

The year previously, in August 1892, Morrison married Eliza Adelaide Thatcher, daughter of Frederick Thatcher of Dover. He now achieved his escape from the East End by moving to a house called Eastwood, in The Drive, Chingford.<sup>(10)</sup> From there he moved to Salcombe House, High Road, Loughton and, in 1914, to Arabin House, High Beech. The last mentioned property was a detached spacious house, surrounded by gardens and set in the heart of Epping Forest, between Loughton and Waltham Abbey, which is still there.

Leaving the East End of London was a liberation to him. Like tens of thousands of others, who later followed him, his aim was to get away from an environment that he had come to loathe and despise. Even to have grown up there was a stigma and in later life, he sought to conceal it.

His East End background nonetheless imbues his work. John May, the central character of "To London Town" lost his father as a child and, upon the family's return to Dockland, his mother earned a living by keeping a shop. In "The Hole in the Wall", the key figure, Stephen Kemp, is a boy deprived of his parents. John May escapes but is forced to return. Stephen Kemp escapes to go to school.

All of Morrison's fiction reflects his knowledge and experience. The first part of "To London Town" reveals an intimate knowledge of Epping Forest and Waltham Abbey and Theydon Bois that no one but a regular rambler would know. Epping

Thicks, the Wake Valley, Honey Lang and Wormleyton Pits are all real places and it is possible to follow the routes described. "A Child of the Jago", as we have seen, reflects the Old Nichol. His detective novels "Martin Hewitt Investigator" (1894), "Adventures of Martin Hewitt" (1896), "Chronicles of Martin Hewitt" (1895) and "The Dorrington Deed Box" (1897) -although not of the same order, demonstrate a meticulous knowledge of London. The Hole-in-the Wall is really on Wapping Wall. Blue Gate, which it mentions, is shown on Cruchley's New Plan of London (1839), branching off to the north, roughly where Ratcliff Highway becomes High St., Shadwell. The road taken by 'the pale man' must have been Gravel Lane, which went over the channel joining two dock basins and then joined Ratcliff Highway/Shadwell St. Cable St. and Commercial St. also feature in the book.

In 1900, Morrison published another novel, "Cunning Murrell" set in Hadleigh, Leigh-on-Sea in South East Essex. On this occasion, he did not even bother to change the surname of the central character, Cunning Murrell. The latter was based on a wizard, a practitioner of magic and a healer, James Murrell (1780-1860), on whom Morrison subsequently published an article in the Strand Magazine (1900). The topography described in the novel, the lifestyle and behaviour of Cunning Murrell mirrored realities, which the novelist had carefully researched. Some of the characters could be identified with real people. Recourse to heating iron bottles, made by the local blacksmith, Steven Choppen, and filled with blood, water, fingernails and hair, until they burst, thus driving out some demoniacal power, was actually practised by James Murrell during his life. All the fictional elements in the story were interwoven with fact by the writer's consummate skill. Comparison between the novel and the article in the

Strand Magazine provides a fascinating insight into the practice of witchcraft and magic within 40 miles of London up to little more than a century ago.

There can be no doubt about the quality of Morrison's realism. What he wrote was authentic and based upon a great fund of knowledge and experience. The locations in his novels were only sometimes concealed by pseudonyms and many of the characters were based on actual people.

When the author had established himself financially, however, he seems to have turned his attention to other fields. After 1902, he produced little fiction to match his best known works. "Divers Vanities", published in 1905, is a collection of short stories featuring characters similar to those of "Tales of Mean Streets". They feature the East End of London and S.E. Essex. "The Red Triangle" (1903), "The Green Eye of Goona" (1904) and "Green Ginger" (1909) mirrored the fact that he was no longer interested in developing himself as a novelist.

His main concern by this time was the study of Japanese and Chinese prints on which he produced a two volume pioneering study in 1911. In 1913, his unique collection of prints was bought by Sir Watkin Gwynne Evans and presented to the British Museum where they joined others presented in 1906. Further gifts were made to the British Museum under his will in 1945 and that of his wife in 1956.

In 1913, Morrison retired as a journalist and, during the First World War, he served from his home in High Beech in the Essex Special Constabulary. In this capacity, he is reputed to have telephoned the warning of the first Zeppelin raid on London.

Morrison's later years were marred by the death of his only son, Guy, at the age of 28

in 1921. The latter was probably a victim of malaria, contracted during war service. Although he produced a further book, "Field O'Dreams" in 1933, Arthur Morrison had in 1930, moved away from Essex to Chalfont St Peter, Buckinghamshire, where he died in 1945. Here he slipped completely from public view and was little known at his death.

Both Morrison and subsequently his wife were buried with their son, Guy, on High Beech Churchyard, within a few hundred yards of their former house, Arabin. This house was the culmination of Morrison's dream to escape from the dreary slums where he first saw the light of day. There is no mention of his literary efforts in the funerary inscription on the grave, which is becoming mossed over and in need of attention. More details are given of their son's short life and few would realise this is the last resting place of a celebrated writer.

"A Child of the Jago", "Tales of Mean Streets", "The Hole in the Wall", "Cunning Murrell," "Martin Hewitt Investigator" and "Chronicles of Martin Hewitt" have been republished but "To London Town" never has been, although it undoubtedly merits it. In fact all his main works listed in this paragraph are now out of print and reprints at reasonable prices would undoubtedly sell.

Arthur Morrison never realised his full potential as a realistic writer but five of his works are classics of particular value to those with an interest in the history of the East End and South East Essex. He was most certainly not a supporter of the labour movement, or a believer in the emancipation of downtrodden humanity, but the best of writings remain what they were recognised to be when they were first published - outstanding examples of realistic writing.

**Stan Newens**

A. NOTES:

1. The Housing Question in London, LCC Sept 1900. P.190/191
2. Op. cit. p.191
3. See Twentieth Century Authors, 1st Supplement edited by Kunitz and Colby NY 1955 and Times obituary, 5 December 1945
4. My maternal Grandmother, and her nine brothers, her father and mother and her grandfather  
and grandmother all lived in the Old Nichol and it is clear to me that Morrison failed to recognise that not all the residents belonged to the criminal classes. My great grandfather joined the Salvation Army and brought up his family to shun alcohol and sin, which included crime. Careful research reveals that by no means all the inhabitants were vicious and depraved, although his novels reflect a very real aspect of East End life. See also Raphael Samuel, *East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981 for an insight into the seamy side of life in the Old Nichol.
5. Information from birth, death and marriage certificates
6. P.O. Directories 1865-1878
7. East End News 21st March 1913. The school stood on the East side of Hale St., north of Duncan's Court and the site was later incorporated in Poplar Recreation Ground. A tablet from the school was set up in the South West wall of the Recreation Ground, inscribed: "Poplar Wesleyan Sunday School. Founded 1806 and supported by voluntary contributions". The day school was opened in 1863 and closed on the 21st December 1906 from notes in Bancroft Rd. Local History Library.
8. 1881 Census return for 4 Grundy Street, Poplar
9. "A Child of the Jago", MacGibbon & Koe Ltd 1969, introduction P.19
10. Salcombe House was erected about 1880 on a parcel of land immediately West of the Baptist Chapel in High Road, Loughton

B. LIST OF WRITINGS:

- "The Shadows Around Us" - ghost stories 1891
- "Zip Zags at the Zoo" - collection of articles 1895
- "Chronicles of Martin Hewitt" 1895
- "Adventures of Martin Hewitt" 1896
- "A Child of the Jago" 1896
- "The Dornington Deed Box" 1897
- "To London Town" 1899
- "Cunning Murrell" 1900
- "The Hole in the Wall" 1902
- "The Red Triangle, Being some further Chronicles of Martin Hewitt Investigator" 1903
- "That Brute Simmons" - adaptation for the stage, produced in London 1904
- "The Green Eye of Goona" 1904
- "Divers Vanities" 1905
- "The Dumb Cake" with Richard Price, produced for the stage London 1907
- "A Stroke of Business" with Horace Newte, produced for the stage London 1907
- "Green Ginger" 1909
- "The Painters of Japan" (2 vols) 1911
- ("Stories") 1929
- "Field O'Dreams" 1933

## BETHNAL GREEN'S 'SAILOR -TAILOR'



The Bishopsgate Institute Library has recently acquired three scrapbooks belonging to James Bedford, a tailor and outfitter with premises at 388, Bethnal Green Road in the late 19th and the early part of the 20th century.

Most of the newspaper cuttings refer to his unsuccessful attempt to become a Member of Parliament. He stood in the 1892 General Election as a Labour candidate on a Liberal ticket, being paired with J.J. Colman, mustard manufacturer, as one of the sitting members for the City's two seats. He was one of the first candidates to stand for Labour, but was beaten into third place. James Bedford was a versatile character with a wide variety of interests and local concerns. In Bethnal Green, as in Norwich, there were both critics and supporters of his actions and motives.

James Bedford was born in Birmingham in 1845, one of eight children. His father was a guard on the London and Birmingham (later the London and North

Western) Railway. An accident disabled him, reducing him to the position of Porter and ultimately leading to his death at the age of forty five.

James was eleven years old at his father's death and got a job as a newspaper seller at three shillings a week, working from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M. each day. Later through the help of his father's friends he moved to Euston station to work for W.H. Smith's bookstall.

His elder brother had gone to sea and James decided to follow him. The family moved to Sunderland where James was bound apprentice, travelling mainly to India and to countries in the Near East. On the completion of his apprenticeship in 1868 he was able to act as an intermediary in a dispute between the captain and crew after the adjudicator ruled in favour of the seamen. Bedford's action saved the crew from being stranded in a foreign port. In another dispute in 1870, he was publicly thanked for intervening, as a result of

which the Captain was removed from command of the ship, having been ruled to have imperilled the lives of the crew.

By this time, James Bedford had become engaged to be married, but his wife-to-be had stipulated that he must leave the sea and settle at home. He returned to London beginning work as a goods porter at Broad Street station, but rising rapidly to the position of weighbridge clerk.

For the next few years Bedford continued his career in the railway service, gaining experience in many departments. He joined the Naval reserve in his spare time, and obtained a rating as Petty Officer first class. He was also active in the General Railway Workers' Union formed in 1889 which amalgamated in 1913 with the National Union of Railwaymen.

He now began a new career in the temperance movement. With the help of his wife he became manager of the 'Victoria British Workman' a temperance public house in London, making it a commercial success. At that time drunkenness and excessive expenditure on drink constituted one of the chief causes of crime and breakdown of family life. The cause was taken up by the nonconformist churches, but also became an issue in Liberal politics of the time. This venture was followed by Bedford touring the country instructing managers of similar public houses on the best means of ensuring commercial success, and speaking generally in the temperance cause. Wishing to be independent he taught himself the skill of cutting cloth and set up business as a tailor and outfitter in Bethnal Green Road. He continued his work in the temperance movement and became an effective speaker at indoor meetings and in the open air.

Having been involved in the founding of the General Railway Workers' Union, he was eventually elected a member of the executive committee and appointed a delegate of the Broad Street branch to the Annual Conference. He was elected President of the conference for that year

and later President of the Union. The Union was anxious to be represented in Parliament, and the executive committee passed a resolution that Parliamentary seats should be sought for the President, James Bedford, and the General Secretary, Campion Watson. It was proposed that the members should be asked to pay a special levy of sixpence with an extra amount each year. The Union was composed of the lowest paid workers, with a weekly subscription of only twopence a week. At the time, Watson objected to the wording of the resolution on whether they had authority to use the General Fund. Soon a letter appeared in the *Railway Herald*, (26.9.1891) questioning whether the executive had taken the opinion of the members. The writer described them as 'self-seeking men using the members as footstools to gratify their own ambition'. 'Their job should be to get grievances redressed, less working hours and more money'. 'Mr Bedford's qualifications may be stated as follows, gift of the gab, great powers of reiteration, his speeches were always the same, telling his audience a portion of his family history, he had been among other things a porter and now he is a tailor'.

'Let Bedford and Watson understand that they and all officers of the Union are its servants and not its masters'. As a result Bedford and Watson became estranged amid criticism from Bedford that Watson was neglecting his duties as general secretary. Watson and two other members of the Union, G.S. Turner and A. Alcock, began a campaign against Bedford, repeating charges which were made later at Norwich. These were:-

That Bedford paid 'sweated wages' for work done for him. That he was not and never had been a loyal Trade Unionist. His private conduct was unworthy and reprehensible, his sole object in associating with the Union being to serve his own personal and selfish ambition.

Bedford promptly took out a writ for slander against Watson and the other two, held in abeyance while the Trustees of the

Union investigated the matter in October 1891.

They eventually declared that the whole of the charges had been unworthy of credence: 'Mr Bedford's position as a loyal Trade Unionist is, and has been, beyond question'. They found that Campion Watson had been the originator and circulator of the charges; he had grossly abused his position as General Secretary and neglected the business and interest of the Union by his conduct towards the President. Turner and Alcock were expelled from the Union.

The City of Norwich was anxious to have a working class member of Parliament. There were two seats - one held by Samuel Hoare (Con) the banker, the other by J.J. Colman (Lib) elected in 1885. James Bedford was invited to Norwich to be considered as a possible Liberal/Labour candidate to partner J.J. Colman. Several members of Parliament had already stood as Liberal/Labour candidates. It was in 1893 that Keir Hardie formed the Independent Labour Party to secure the return of representatives free from any connection with the Liberals. The General Election of 1892 evoked great interest in Norwich and all the meetings were well attended. Bedford was eventually adopted by the Liberal 400 with only one dissentient vote, but accounts suggest that J.J. Colman did not entirely support the radical views of James Bedford. Bedford was a good speaker and impressed many of the electors with his views on the 'eight hour day', the *Irish question and land nationalisation*, among other issues. A virulent campaign was waged against him on four counts: he was an 'outsider'; as an employer he was not a working man; the more serious charge that he paid 'sweated rates' for work done in his business, and that as President of his union he had not encouraged his employees to belong to one.

The campaign against him was led by C.W. Mowbray, an anarchist and editor of the newspaper 'Commonweal'. He claimed at one stage to have worked for

Bedford and was offered a pittance for the work proposed. Bedford issued a writ for slander and Mowbray was forced to recant. Bedford received support from former employees and from Lewis Lyons, President of the International Tailors', Machinists and Pressers Union based in Blakesley Street off Watney Street, E.1. The election provided much interest and comment in the local newspapers with accounts of speeches and notables present. Many of them derisively referred to Bedford as the 'Sailor- Tailor.' The result of the election was :-

S. Hoare	(C) 7718
J.J. Colman	(L) 7407
J. Bedford	(L) 6811
Majority	967

There were 16,623 electors of whom 88% voted. Bedford obtained 31.1% of the poll.

It does not seem that Bedford tried a second time, but Norwich was among the first constituencies to return a Labour candidate G.H. Roberts in 1906 who was twice re-elected in 1910.

In Bethnal Green, Bedford's main contribution was to the Board of Guardians. He had been a member of the now defunct vestry and later a Guardian of the Poor, chairman of the Finance Committee and vice-chairman of the Board. He was also leader and spokesman for the Society of Firewood Choppers who were facing competition from workhouses, while he was, through his contacts with other Guardian Boards, able to restrict competition in other areas of London. The 1891 Census described his household as James Bedford (Head) 45; Sarah (Wife) 47; James (Son) 10; Allan (Son) 9; Mary Currall (Servant) 31; Frank Naylor (Nephew) 18 Shopman.

Bedford was a keen supporter of Queen Anne's Dispensary in Pollards Row and a member of the management committee. He supported the proposal for a site for the new infirmary to be built in Cambridge (Heath) Road and was a founder member of Bethnal Green's Freemason Lodge. He



was connected with Oxford House in Mare Street and with the Excelsior Swimming Baths in Mansford Street.

His wife had been in poor health for some years and, after her death, he married Mrs Scammell of Catford and moved to Clacton-on-Sea where he travelled to his business four days a week. He became Chairman of the Board of Guardians in March 1899 and was re-elected in 1901, serving on the Board for seventeen years. He was taken ill in the early part of 1904 and died on 19 February. There were several obituaries of him in the local newspapers. At a meeting of the Board of Guardians he was described as 'a man of progressive views, a fluent and forcible speaker, not afraid of the courage of his convictions. He had been foremost in reforming the work of the Board. The poor had not a stronger advocate or greater friend; he was large-hearted, upright and an honest man. People often differed from him in debate, but he always extended the 'right hand of fellowship' to his opponents before leaving the Boardroom. He was buried in a family grave at St John's Church Wembley on Friday 27 February.

James Bedford's business continued until 1913 when it was taken over by Henry John Ransen, tailor.

#### Sources:

Bethnal Green News	Obituary 27.2.1904
Eastern Argus and Hackney Times	Report of Guardian's Meeting 27.2-1904
Eastern Argus and Hackney Times	Obituary 5.3.1904
Extract from 1891 Census	
Craig F.N.S. British Parliamentary Results 1885-1918	

The scrapbooks also give an account of an 'excited' meeting of tailors held in Christ Church hall, Hanbury Street, Spitalfields, on November 14 1889. The tailors were on strike and it was estimated that there were 2,000 present. The meeting was called for 8 P.M. but was unable to start until 9 P.M. as many masters were unable to be present before then. Among the speakers were Mark Moses, who presided, Samuel Montague MP, Dr Adler, representing the Chief Rabbi, S. Ansell and James Bedford. Among the Union representatives were Lewis Lyons, Lazarus Goldstein, Secretary of the Pressers' and Tailors' Union and Godfrey Stargatt of the Machinists' Union.

The object of the meeting was to establish a better regulation of the tailoring trade and to reduce the working hours. One of the proposals was for tailors to provide their own workshops and abolish the middlemen. A second meeting was held a week later.

The scrapbooks provide an interesting insight into one man's life at the turn of the century.

#### **Harold Finch**

## TERROR AT WENLOCK BREWERY

Charles Dickens wrote superb stories, all rich in drama but to add geographical reality to fiction the Victorian author placed imaginary people in venues that actually existed. Thus when young David Copperfield, about to become a lodger of Wilkins Micawber, is introduced to this ebullient character, the reader gets taken to a part of Shoreditch (now Hackney). "My address" said Mr Micawber, "is Windsor Terrace, City Road. I -in short," said Mr Micawber with the same genteel air, and another burst of confidence - "I live there"

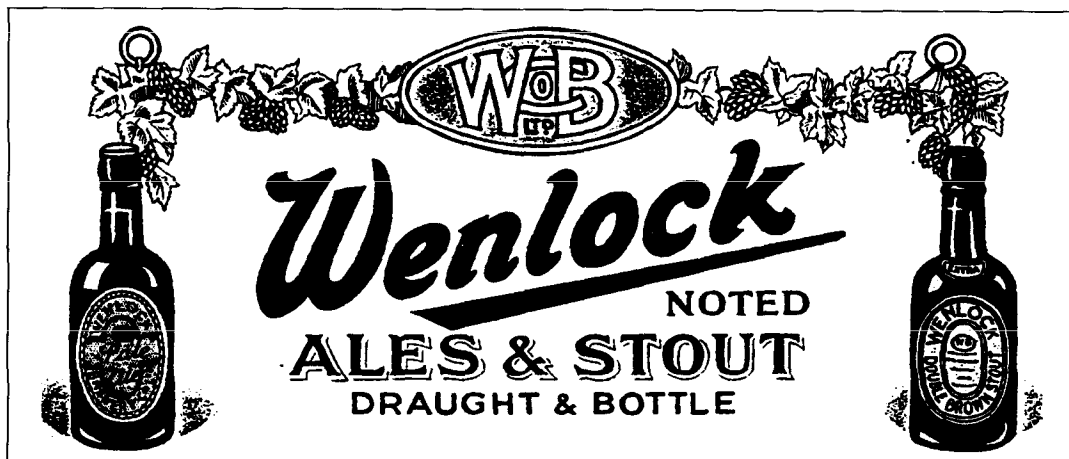
A drawing of Windsor Terrace, Shoreditch, from that era shows a row of Georgian houses. This is how Dickens would have known the Terrace when he published David Copperfield in 1850. In an age when refurbishment was unheard of those houses never altered. From Dickens day they remained untouched, brick upon brick, and were homes to generations of Londoners. In fact right up to the grim events of the Blitz in World War II.

The Blitz began late summer 1940. By early autumn the ferocity of night bombing increased and so Londoners nightlife fell into a regime of survival. After an evening meal they dressed in warm clothing, took to the air raid shelter for the night - where ever that might be - with a blanket and perhaps a few treasured possessions. In this manner, on the evening of Tuesday 10 September

the Pages left their home at 26 Windsor Terrace, for the first time ever, to take refuge in a public air raid shelter: the basement of Wenlock Brewery. The brewery, just at the bottom of the terrace, fronted Micawber Street, a thoroughfare that had acquired that evocative name in the 1930's to commemorate the character created by Charles Dickens.

The family consisted of Widow Emma Page, her two daughters Emma Wain and Grace Goudge, both widows of what had been called The Great War. Then came Emma's three adult grandchildren Janette Goudge, Violet Page, and Ted Simmonds. They were just another group seeking sanctuary on that wartime evening. When the 84 year old Emma Page, flanked by her family, walked slowly along the blacked-out Windsor Terrace she could not have known that for her it would be a one way journey. Destiny decreed that Em would never return to the old house where she had watched her children and grandchildren grow into adults.

The brewery basement, a well used working area by day, became a communal air raid shelter by night. On that evening several hundred locals sat on benches or lay on make shift beds. In dull lighting a few attempted to read by pocket torches. Some child evacuees had returned to London during the period known as the Phoney



War. This is why a few small bodies could be seen bedded down with their families. In this sombre atmosphere Emma Page and her two daughters were found bench seats. The much younger Violet and Janette were nearby seated on the floor. On the far side of the basement, beyond a refrigeration unit, a group of men, including Ted, were in a separate room playing a hand of cards. That part of the basement was considered to be a high risk area.

An air raid took place that night and continued until the early hours of the morning. In the brewery shelter they could hear the nerve wracking screech of bombs whistling through the sky; feel the sickening crump of an explosion and in nervous tension wait for the next cascade of death.

Fearfully the hours dragged on into another day. Just after 4am, 11 September, a series of explosions shook the brewery. The adjacent Wenlock Road School and surrounding houses had been bombed. Debris from those buildings fell into the road and smothered brewery basement doors trapping the occupants inside. Meanwhile bomb damage in the brewery sent masonry falling on to the refrigeration plant, and caused it to leak ammonia gas throughout the basement via the ventilation system. Some of the debris blocked an internal door, the only way in and out of the room where the card school sat.

This disaster resulted in Warden's Post L phoning dramatic messages to local ARP Emergency Services. One hand written report reads "Proceed to Wenlock Brewery, Wenlock Road. Ammonia plant Exploded". Another reads 'Send police to control crowds to Wenlock Brewery'. Each air raid incident was logged, dated, timed and numbered. All reports referring to Wenlock Brewery quote "Serial No of Occurrence 10", indicating that local Emergency Services were coping with nine previous occurrences in the area. All had taken place since midnight. Carbon copies of those rough hand written messages were in Hackney Library Archive.

With that explosion the card playing men in that room - including Ted Simmonds - were in darkness. Their lights had failed. Pocket torches flashed and combined with flickering match lights the group partly illuminated their desperate situation. They discovered the jammed door and that they were unable to get out. Then came an insidious seepage of ammonia gas. Men began choking violently from a build-up of acrid fumes whilst their burning eyes streamed with tears. All realised they would die by asphyxiation unless they got out. Among the group were several brewery workers who indicated their one escape rout. A voice shouted "up through the street lights". These were small glass gratings set in the pavement above to let in natural light.

After an urgent but brief council men clambered up, checked the gratings and found one slightly loose. As there were no tools they decided on rapid team action. Using a combination of intelligence and brute strength the biggest men positioned themselves under the gratings and close to the wall whilst bending their bodies like rugby players in a scrum. Others of less weight climbed on their backs and adopted the same posture. And so they formed a human pyramid with a lightweight Ted Simmonds at the peak, his back firmly pressed against the underside of the grating. Coughing and fighting for breath they heaved together for their very lives were at stake. Mercifully the grating gave way.

Years later Ted described how he popped up in the street like a jack-in-the-box and scrambled on to the pavement. With group assistance others followed but the last man had great difficulty in escaping for no one was left in the basement to help him out. All were dazed but breathing sweet fresh air. Later Ted and his companions went to the First Aid Centre for medication to relieve the effects of ammonia gas.

As those explosions at 4am shook the brewery terror began for the many people already cringing in fear in the main shelter. Falling masonry brought thick dust. That dusty air rapidly became more polluted with a white vapour. With their lights still miraculously working the victim could see

their plight. Eyes streaming, choking and gasping for breath they rushed for the external doors and found them jammed tight. Some people, badly affected by the ammonia gas collapsed, in the rush they were trampled under foot.

In the midst of it all a frightened shout "it's a German gas attack" caused even more panic among the trapped people. Violet, one of the few with a gas mask, slipped it over her head. Because of her spectacles Janette found it difficult to wear a gas mask and seldom carried it. She dipped her handkerchief in a fire bucket and placed the wet cloth over her mouth and nose for protection. Janette vividly recalls a bizarre scene: to calm the fearsome confusion a lone man bravely climbed on a barrel and used precious breath to croak a verse from the wartime song, "Roll out the Barrel".

In a mad melee of struggling, choking bodies, Emma Wain cried out in anguish "where's me Nettie (Janette), where's me Vi?". The two young girls, hearing her desperate cries, fiercely elbowed their way through the crowd. When they joined their three elders they were faced by a massive horizontal pipe. Violet, quickly noting its advantage, pushed her companions under the pipe and followed them into an area that gave some protection from the pressure of a panic-stricken mob. It was also near to a narrow flight of stairs leading up to a door and the street. The door magically opened. A man appeared and shouted, "up here".

That shout came like a start signal to the victims all coughing and desperately fighting for breath. A wild surge of humanity rushed for the staircase and air. When the Page's came from behind the pipe Emma Wain and Grace were carried along in the crush followed by Emma Page. Although supported by Violet and Janette the elderly grandmother could only move slowly. In doing so her roly-poly bulk blocked the stairs and others could not pass. Then a burly figure appeared from the top. He was seen to take hold of Emma by her collar and pull the old lady up the stairs. At that point the family got split-up. But the unknown knight must have used so much

force. In getting Emma Page into the open he yanked the coat off her body. Later the garment turned up on the floor of the brewery loading bay, still buttoned up.

For Janette the memory of her own escape



from the basement shelter lives on in a confusion of ugly sights and frightening sounds: a heaving mass of bodies, contorted faces twisted in pain, scream and shouts. The horrific picture tailed off into a quiet haze. She had blacked out. Then came a voice, seemingly far away, saying "I don't know what's wrong with this one but it's not a faint". As Janette's senses returned she found herself, still in one piece, lying on a stretcher in the Brewery First Aid Centre. Remarkably the first people she saw on that grim morning were her cousin Ivy Richardson with husband Charles - an ARP Warden - and their infant daughter Jean. It proved an odd get-together. As is often the way with relations they had not met for some time.

Janette's first thoughts were for her family. Were they safe? To find them was a must. Shortly after, feeling shaky but back on her feet, Janette decided that the home in Windsor Terrace was the obvious place to go and look. With Ivy assisting a busy Charles, she became a baby minder and took Jean with her.

Outside the brewery Janette found that the dawn light of an autumn morning brought pale colour to the dramatic picture of a civilian war scene: amid the rubble fire appliances and rescue equipment filled the road. Ambulance crew were busy coping with casualties. Some victims had been blinded by the caustic effects of ammonia gas. Others had breathing difficulties. All were dirty and dishevelled. Many were bruised with abrasions, cuts and in shock.

Emma Wain, Grace and Violet had made it safely back to No. 26. When Janette arrived with Jean it was a happy reunion. At that time they were not aware of the full story of what had happened in the brewery and did not know of Ted's escape, or where he was. The excited chatter over cups of tea - a standard Blitz pick-me-up - expressed concern for Emma Page, last seen in an ambulance heading for an unknown hospital. But a younger casualty showed up in their midst. Baby Jean, clearly affected by ammonia gas had breathing problems. The infant became distraught and the Page family got alarmed when her face took on an unhealthy blue pallor.

Fully aware of the lethal effects of ammonia gas. Janette acted swiftly. She wrapped Jean in a blanket and took her to a nearby Casualty Station. Whilst the child received medical attention the overworked staff found a job for Janette. She became a temporary clerk writing name labels for brewery stretcher cases waiting to be hospitalised. Some victims were from families that Janette had known throughout her young life.

Later in the morning Ted returned home nursing a sore back. He and Janette listened with their elders as Violet told of her unsuccessful attempt to trace Emma Page. The three young cousins promptly joined forces and went in search for their grandmother. The night of heavy bombing the role of civilian war dead. MoH figures quote London Blitz deaths for Sept-Dec 1940 as 13,339.

The brewery disaster was horribly unique. Victims severely affected by ammonia gas

had filled local hospitals with injured. But none in the district had Emma as a patient. At St Leonards, Shoreditch, where casualties were constantly being moved about, records were not up to date so they were invited to walk the wards where air raid victim lay and look for the old lady. No Emma.

On a second visit to St Leonards the dejected searchers had entered the hospital courtyard. In fading light they met a nurse carrying a clipper board. Once more they repeated their question, "have you...?" With the aid of a torch the nurse checked her documents. In a prim voice she said "Mrs Emma Page has been transported to Clare Hall Hospital, South Mimms".

The trio had never heard of South Mimms which they soon learned is 20 miles north of London. Determined to make the journey they began by asking endless questions of LT staff and eventually managed to find their way by mix of underground and bus to South Mimms. In darkness they found Clare Hall Hospital (a group of huts in open country built for wounded military in WW1). At reception they asked for Emma, went to her ward and to their joy saw their grandmother sleeping peacefully. Then a long tiring return journey reaching home nearly midnight. By then the Terror at Wenlock Brewery had become history by twenty bone weary hours.

The Page family were soon back on the 1940 treadmill, common to most Londoners: working by day and spending nights in air raid shelters. The ammonia gas affected Janette's larynx to such an extent that she could not speak clearly for weeks. Throughout the Blitz most air raid deaths were caused by horrific physical injuries. Those unfortunate souls became an immediate statistic to be associated with a particular incident and their names added to

died from its effects in the ensuing weeks or months. Some like Emma Page. were taken to hospitals outside London where they ended their days and were not regarded as a Wenlock Brewery death. A poignant tale concerns the Oakley family:

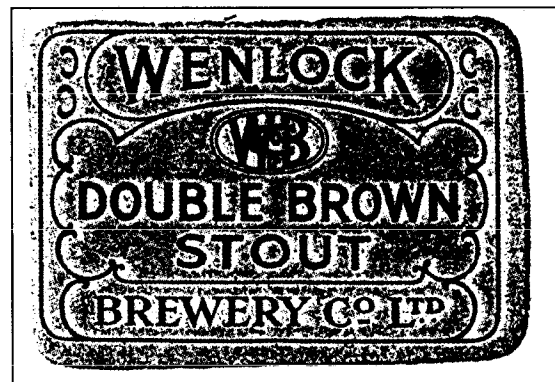
a permanently disabled Alfred jnr could not get out of the brewery basement so Alfred snr stayed to help his only son. All to no purpose, the heroic father died with his son in a local hospital a few days later.

Emma Page had been blessed with a partial loss of memory. For her that disaster at the brewery never happened. But as the ammonia gas affected her heart Emma was encouraged to believe that she suffered a heart attack. In October, during another savage night of bombing, half of Windsor Terrace got destroyed, including the Page home. In that air raid some of the Terrace fraternity died but the Pages were all safe. Fortunately they had been sheltering elsewhere. Relations, friends, even hospital staff were in a conspiracy of silence that kept the awful truth concerning the loss of her home from Emma Page. This Dear Old Lady - a victim of the Blitz - spent the rest of her days at Clare Hall Hospital where she died in May 1941.

What remained of the Dickensian Windsor Terrace fell under the demolition hammer

in the 1950's. Those Georgian houses were replaced by flats. Wenlock Brewery went the same way some years later. The building constructed on the brewery site is an annexe to the British Library. This story, a small part of civilian WWII history, was written some years ago from notes made by the author during conversations with Ted Simmonds, Grace Goudge and her daughter Janette.

**Stephen Sadler**



#### BOOK REVIEWS

"HACKNEY, HOMERTON & DALSTON" David Mander (Hackney Archives Dept.) 1996  
Sutton Publishing Ltd. £9.99

This is another excellent addition to the series, "Britain in Old Photographs". The areas of Hackney, Homerton and Dalston, from 1720-1948, are explored through a selection of photographs, paintings and prints, most of which are in the Hackney Archives collection. David Mander provides a knowledgeable and detailed text outlining the diverse and changing history and adding many fascinating facts relating to the various buildings, streets and events illustrated.

## DRINKING IN MILE END IN 1750

In 1750 a dusty traveller arriving from Harwich or Colchester down the Great Essex Road or a thirsty labourer emerging from one of the sugar refineries in Whitechapel had no shortage of places in which to find a drink.

There were over 120 licensed premises in Whitechapel and about 40 in Mile End Old Town and many of the pub names have persisted to the present day such as The Grave Maurice, which can be traced back to 1723 <sup>(1)</sup> and the Three Cranes that can be traced back to 1719.

Distinguished visitors to Mile End in the eighteenth century included Clive of India, Dr. Johnson and James Boswell and the latter records that in January 1763, they "went half a mile beyond the turnpike at Whitechapel ... and went into a little public house and drank some warm, white wine with aromatic spices, pepper and cinnamon. We were well pleased with the neat houses upon the road". <sup>(2)</sup>

The language of brewing and of places in which to drink is large and complex and definitions have changed with time and place; so for this article I use "beer" to cover all forms of malt liquors <sup>(3)</sup> and "pubs" to cover taverns, hostleries, inns and public houses. <sup>(4)</sup> Brewing was not confined to the main breweries as there was a well established tradition of brewing in domestic houses <sup>(5)</sup> and indeed John Nixon in Redman's Row, MEOT, had a set of brewing utensils in his cellar "which were very old and almost worn out not having been used for seventeen years". <sup>(6)</sup>

The main brews at this time were porter, beer and ale. Indian Pale Ale was developed under the auspices of the East India Company because of the need for a beer that could be safely shipped to India without going off and it is said that a Stepney publican, Benjamin Kenton, made his fortune by solving this problem. <sup>(7)</sup>

In passing it may be worth recalling that a sailor in the Royal Navy at this time had a

ration of one gallon of beer per day and probably hoped that he would have the ability and the cash to carry on drinking at the same rate on land!

At the height of society a famous gossip Thomas Creevey wrote in 1805 of the Duke of York, that "he used to drink a great quantity of wine at dinner and was very fond of making any newcomer drunk by drinking wine with him very frequently, always recommending his strongest wines". <sup>(8)</sup>

Although the population of MEOT doubled between 1740 and 1780 the number of licensed premises remained constant as the magistrates tried to curb the Englishman's propensity to like a drink or three. Probably as a result of this policy there were many more unlicensed premises, particularly in the alley ways off the main street. It was very easy in those simpler times for anyone to put a trestle table and some chairs in their basement, get a barrel or two of porter or ale on credit from one of local breweries and open up a small bar.

We now know that one in ten buildings in MEOT in 1750 was a pub and along the north side of the Mile End Road from the Trinity Almshouses to the current site of Queen Mary and Westfield College were :-

White Hart, Three Cranes, Britannia, George (Dog Row), Black Boy, the Globe, Anchor & Crown, White Swan, Rose & Crown, Three Crowns, White Horse, Old Three Mackrell and the Why Not Beat Dragon.

We can identify the larger pubs by their assessment for land tax <sup>(9)</sup> and thus know that the White Horse and the Why Not Beat Dragon were the largest with rack rents in 1780 of £ 200 and £ 75 respectively for buildings and land. I would love someone to re-name a pub the "Why Not Beat Dragon" an old name for a pub close to the present site of the New Globe Inn, whose popularity in the 1820's is recorded by a plaque on the outside.

Some idea of the contents of the taverns can be gained from the probate inventories at the Public Records Office for when someone died and there was a dispute over the will a detailed inventory would be made down to the last bent spoon and broken glass.

Typical features of the contents were games such as draughts and backgammon but although singing was a popular pastime, I have yet to see any mention of a piano or other musical instrument in the period upto 1780, as probably they were too expensive for publicans.

cellars were "25 bottles of Cyder, 16 Bottles of ale and 16 Barrels of beer". Finally, for entertainment there were "One skittle, stone bowls and skittles" and, amongst his animals, were "one horse with harness, one sow, twelve piggs, 7 fowls and 2 ducks".<sup>(10)</sup>

For many East End families brewing, milling and inn-keeping became their main occupations. Thus George and Samuel Newell in 1740 were followed in the next generation by yet more George and Samuels and one Samuel Newell was taking apprentices in the trade of Coopers in 1784<sup>(11)</sup>. John Eagle was a Brewer and



This view of Mile End Road (East of Globe Road) about 1910 shows The Blue Anchor, The White Swan and The Three Crowns

A complete inventory exists for Joseph Prick, who was the innkeeper at the Why Not Beat Dragon from 1747 until his death in 1750. In the "closets" were found "One Gallon of brandy, Five gallon of rum, One gallon of Shrub, Five gallon of gin, 48 glass bottles and 9 pairs of small glasses". In the

Publican and called his pub the Golden Eagle.

For a few men we can see their career developing and waning as they moved from one pub to another. Thus John Jackson was the licensee for the Horse & Groom, the



Rising Sun, the Auricular and King Harry's Head between 1769 and 1778 and it would be interesting to know why he was moving so quickly. Perhaps he was not a very popular or efficient publican ?

In several cases after the death of the licensee the widow would struggle on for a year or so but then moved to a small house nearby or back to their home village, however some of the widows were made of more robust material.

It is well known that when the famous John Wilkes was embroiled in the Middlesex elections in the 1760's that there were frequent large and noisy meetings at the Assembly Rooms in Mile End. Far less well known is that it was a woman, Judith Mawson, who held the license for the Assembly Rooms. She had moved there from the Wine Vault in 1766 and later moved to a small house on the north side of the Mile End road. Does anybody know where she came from or who she was related to?

Another female publican was Sarah Brady, wife of George, at the White Horse on the south side of the Mile End Road from 1775 to 1777.

Stepney was well equipped with Breweries and in Mile End Old Town alone in addition to the great Charrington's brewery there were the breweries of William Green and earlier in the century William Burr, a Stepney Brewer, was assessed as being worth £ 100,000. <sup>(12)</sup>

One danger of visiting one of the great coaching inns on the main roads into London was mentioned by Daniel Defoe, that master of observation, when describing one of Moll Flander's areas of expertise. Dressed in her best finery she had gone to Whitechapel "just by the corner of Petticoat Lane, where the coaches stand that go out to Stratford and Bow, and that side of the country". So when a lady descended from her coach and needed help with her parcels it was Moll that was ever alert. He did not record her pickings in Whitechapel but on another such venture she acquired a "very

good suit of Indian damask, a gown and a petticoat, a laced-head and ruffles of very good Flanders lace and some other things, such as I very knew well the value of". <sup>(13)</sup>

From the highest in the land to the lowest the English were great drinkers in the eighteenth century and the Glovers Company in the City of London ordered for their celebration of Lords Mayor's day 16 Dozen of Red Port, 6 Dozen of "Lisbon", 1 Dozen of "mountain" wine and 1 dozen of Rhenish. <sup>(14)</sup>

When Steven Martin Leake, a long time Mile End resident and a Herald at Arms for many years, went to the "Tavern" in 1765 to discuss the possibility of his 12 year old son Tommy joining an East Indiaman going to India and China, he together with Captain Mainwaring and a retired sea dog Captain Hunt consumed between them £ 0-14-00

"on ale and porter" in a single evening. <sup>(15)</sup>

Another feature of the larger pubs of Mile End, and in common with those elsewhere, was the association with the pub of large land areas in the neighbourhood. It appears that the larger inns were providing land on which travellers could keep their horses so that they could be refreshed before their return journeys; their owner going into London on a Hackney coach, for which the charge in 1755 was eighteen pence from Mile End to the Royal Exchange.

The high usage of horses at this time often led to them escaping and for this reason the Mile End Pound was established, placed at the junction of the Mile End Road with the Dog Row, now called the Cambridge Heath Road. The Pound Keeper would pay a reward of one shilling for "each Horse or Mare, Ox or Cow" captured and brought in and would charge the owner for the privilege of returning his property. This was only done after a delay of forty eight hours, presumably to resolve the claims of several "owners" who might appear. <sup>(16)</sup>

Finally, it was well established that in addition to drinking in inns there were many "pot boys", who would bring drink to workshops and to those houses which did

not have their own breweries. Benjamin Franklin was most disapproving of the capacity of his fellow printers near St. Bartholomews to drink five or six pints of

beer a day and tried to persuade them to drink water instead !

**Derek Morris**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

EVERY STONE TELLS A STORY by Rosemary Taylor, illustrated by Bernard Canavan.  
Available from the author at 5 Pusey House, Saracen Street, London E14 6HG,

The 33 acre Tower Hamlets Cemetery holds a fascination to researchers and nature lovers. It was opened in 1841 and closed in 1966. The book explains the history and layout of the cemetery through a walk showing where the memorials of thirty local personalities can be located and in this way encourages people to explore different parts of the cemetery. Published privately, by the author, the A4 book with 24 pages has line drawings on each page outlining the churches, people and memorials in the cemetery with a detailed history of people who have left their mark on East End history. Hopefully, this book will lead to more research by others to add to a larger book in the future.

Doreen Kendall

## TUNNEL VISION – BLACKWALL TUNNEL 1897 - 1997

One hundred years ago the Blackwall Tunnel opened its doors to the public. The original plan was to have two separate tunnels, one for pedestrians and one for wheeled traffic. This was later altered to a single tunnel, large enough for two lines of traffic and two pedestrian footpaths.

The tunnel had electric lighting which meant it had to have its own power station, situated at Northumberland Wharf. This was necessary because the rest of Poplar had only gas lamps in the streets and gas light in the houses. To clear the land for the northern approach road to the tunnel a large number of houses were demolished. Most of the area cleared was from the junction of East India Dock Road and Robin Hood Lane down to Naval Row. This was a notorious slum area where the death rate for children under the age of five was the highest in Poplar. Between five and six hundred people would now have to be rehoused.

The problem was solved by the Metropolitan Board of Works (later to become the L.C.C.) which bought land in Cotton street and Yabsely street and built blocks of flats which were named Montreal House and Toronto House. The idea was to build these flats as cheaply and as quickly as possible.

and they remained an eyesore until the day they were demolished.

The Thames had always been a barrier between the East End and the open spaces of South London and Kent. In those days if you wanted to travel south of the river there were only two crossings, the Woolwich Free Ferry, and Tower Bridge. Hop pickers on their way to the Kent hopfields from the East End had to get their luggage onto wheel barrow or horse and cart and then make their way to London Bridge Station where they were running "hop pickers special trains. A number of small ferry services, very often a one man, one boat, were also in operation.

Besides having to pay for the crossing, there were other problems. The London fogs of those days would shut down all ferry traffic on the river, on average forty days a year could be lost. The situation became so bad that most industries in Millwall and Poplar would not employ any worker living south of the river.

All that changed when the Blackwall Tunnel opened. In its first year four million pedestrians used it, plus three hundred thousand vehicles. In 1902 that figure had doubled, but in the same year the Millwall to



Greenwich Foot Tunnel had opened and the daily average of pedestrians using that tunnel was twenty thousand a day. The Blackwall Tunnel has been described as one of the engineering wonders of the world, but that was the world of the 1890's when all the wheeled traffic was horse drawn including a horse bus service through the tunnel linking Poplar to Deptford Broadway, an army of small boys were employed to keep the roadway inside the tunnel clear of horse dung.

As the new century arrived steam replaced sail at sea, and on land the internal combustion engine began to replace the horse. By 1914 the number of petrol driven vehicles using the tunnel had doubled, and in the 1920's two thousand vehicles were using the tunnel daily, very few of which were horse drawn.

The Tunnel was now subject to daily traffic jams and in 1937 it was decided that the tunnel should be duplicated and in 1938 test borings were carried out at the southern end of tunnel gardens, in 1939 the war stopped all work. As the amount of petrol driven vehicles increased, the number of pedestrians using the tunnel decreased, a survey taken in 1937 showed the number of pedestrians using the tunnel in a 24 hour period was 130.

There was a reason for the decline in pedestrian traffic. A bus service ran through the tunnel and the fare was tuppence (old money). Walking through was very risky, the pavement was just wide enough for one person, the speed and noise of the traffic, the petrol and exhaust fumes that filled the tunnel like a fog because the original ventilation plant still in use and could not cope with modern day traffic.

This situation was not rectified until the new tunnel was built which meant that the old tunnel could now be temporarily closed for structural alterations which included more powerful ventilation plant.

War came in 1939 and armed soldiers guarded both ends of the tunnel. They were later replaced by armed police. On the 22nd

September the northern approach road was hit by bombs, damaging the walls and closing the tunnel to all traffic until they were repaired.

During the build up to the D Day landings civilian traffic was banned while military convoys went through on their way to the south coast and in August 1944 a V1 flying bomb struck the southern end of tunnel gardens but did not damage the tunnel. The southern end of the tunnel was also damaged by bombing, the damage to the approach road walls could still be seen until the 1960's.

After the war there was no money available for the building of the second tunnel and this work was not carried out until the 1960's. The layout of both tunnels today is exactly what was planned in 1937, including taking part of tunnel gardens, the roundabout, the northern approach road and the subway under the East India Dock Road.

**John Harris**

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**Information supplied by Chris Lloyd**

## BOOK REVIEWS

"MORE LIGHT MORE POWER. AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF SHOREDITCH" by David Mander from local bookshops price £9.99, or Hackney Archives postage £2.00. Sutton Publishers ISBN 0-7509-1217-0

The title of this book has been taken from the motto of Shoreditch Metropolitan Borough, formed in 1900. They used this catch phrase to show how proud they were of their commitment to electricity production. David Mander in this 128 page book of text and photographic material from the Hackney Archives Department, successfully turns back three centuries of Shoreditch history. How green fields grew from 1576 with entertainment in a theatre built by Richard Burbage and William Shakespeare plays, Pleasure Gardens, then Music Halls to the Film Companies who starred Ivor Novello, The Crazy Gang, Will Hay, and Arthur Askey. Shoreditch in the 1600s welcomed immigrants fleeing tyranny and persecution Huguenots, Germans, Polish Russian and Irish families all settled in the area. Bringing with them their different foods, customs and manufacturing skills in silk weaving silver jewellery and boot and shoe making. The terrible overcrowding and grinding poverty, that developed in the last century made tenements into rat infested housing with poor sanitation led to a cholera outbreak in Haggston in 1866 and smallpox in 1870. The Shoreditch Vestry and volunteer Anglican, Catholic and non-Conformists all tried to assist and educate the neighbourhood building Missions and the Ragged School Union. The last history of Shoreditch was written 200 years ago it has been a long wait for David Mander's book and well worth it every page is full of researched facts and illustrations.

Doreen Kendall

"ITS NOT BETTER TO GO BACK" by Richard Pelham Local bookshops Price £4.99 Pub: The Hen Eagle Press. ISBN 0-9526226-0-2

A story of enterprise, corruption, intrigue and incompetence in an Inner London borough. Fifty five pages of tongue in cheek spoof on how local government is run. Very funny and well written showing how bureaucrats are never responsible for their actions. Line drawings by a competent artist, Plum, illustrate the text.

Doreen Kendall

"THE KILLER WHO NEVER WAS" by Peter Turnbull.

Published by: Clark, Lawrence I 9000540002

I just don't know how these publishers do it. Every year new books on James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and Jack the Ripper. Will it ever end? Ripperologists over the years have blamed a wide variety of people for the serial killings in Whitechapel in 1888 - pick a name out of the hat and write a book.

Peter Turnbull has decided to approach the murders by a different route. His "solution" is that all the murders were perpetrated by different men. He even names one of the murderers as the victim's male companion and that the last two were most definitely copycat killings. Turnbull lays the blame for all the hysteria and the erroneous search for one killer at the door of the Magistrate Wynne Baxter and the mass circulation newspapers of the time. These newspapers were of the most lurid kind and went into great details of how the murders were committed - hence the copycats. He states that throughout the East End there were hundreds of brightly coloured gory posters advertising the weekly news magazines showing murders - so people were virtually shown what to do.

From the medical evidence given at the coroner's courts he deduces that the murders - although all committed with a sharp implement all differed. That most murders are committed by some one known to the victim - hence the reason that there were no signs of struggles when the

bodies were discovered. An intriguing argument that questions a lot of our presuppositions. However - the typing mistakes, the bad proof reading and the insistence on using the 24 hour clock had me hurling the book across the room on more than one occasion. What time is: 06.60?

He had me very confused over the mother and son who sold meat which was described as both cat's meat and cats meat. He even calls the final victim Marie Antoin-ette Kelly!  
An interesting book - but be warned, all those errors make it hard going.  
Raymond Port

LODDIGES OF HACKNEY by David Solman

A Hackney Society publication. 1995. 96pp. 198x210mm. ISBN 0 9506558 9 9

£4.50 from Hackney bookshops or £6 including p&p from the Hackney Society: Jack Youngmark,

21 Sanford Terrace, London N16 7LH.

Most people familiar with the crowded streets of Hackney would be surprised to learn that it was for 100 years the home of the most famous plant nursery in London, supplying plants to Royal Parks, Kew Gardens and local places such as Abney Park Cemetery. This links directly with the book because the author is also a Director of the Abney Park Cemetery Trust. The demand for housing forced its closure by the middle of the nineteenth century and until the publication of this book all we were left was the name of a street. Beautifully illustrated often in colour and a bargain at the published price.

J.F.S., THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS' FREE SCHOOL, LONDON SINCE 1732 by

Dr Gerry Black. 1997, Tynsder Publishing, PO Box 16039, London NW 6WL. 280pages, 59 photographs. £16 hardback, £8 paperback.

The Jews' Free School, founded in London's East End in 1732, was one of London and Anglo-Jewry's oldest and most outstanding institutions. In 1900, with more than 4,000 pupils, it was the largest school in Europe (and most probably in the world). Between 1890 and 1900, one third of all London's Jewish children passed through its doors. Many arrived unable to speak English. The School, the best equipped elementary school in England, gave them a refuge and a means of escape from poverty. It educated them in both secular and religious studies, anglicised them, and sent them out into the world fitted to contribute to every section of society, professional, commercial, and artistic - from Barney Barnato to Bud Flanagan, from Israel Zangwill and Selig Brodetsky to 'Two-Gun' General Cohen. (Publisher)

'GATTLING GUN GEORGE' HILSDON by Colm Kerrigan with an introduction by Tony Banks MP

1997, Football Lives Publication, Durning Hall Business Centre, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, London E7 9AB. 94 pages, paperback, £5.75.

The book had its launch at the Houses of Parliament, by Tony Banks MP. Very impressive for what is a very impressive book. George Hilsdon first played for West Ham United, then for Chelsea, scoring five goals on his debut in 1906. In 1907 he made his England debut. George was local East End lad; the book does have a bit of local history, but is predominately about football in the early 1900's. A very readable book, well worth looking for and ideal for a present for the young and old football supporter alike.

Bradley Snooks.



A PLAN OF HACKNEY CHURCH & CHURCHYARD, 1741 by Roger Root  
The Hackney Society, 21 Sanford Terrace, London N16 7LH. 1997 A2 poster, full colour with explanatory notes. £4.50 or £5.50 including p&p.

This fascinating document is one of the earliest surveys of Hackney's buildings. Published by The Hackney Society as an A2 poster (420 x 594mm) in full colour, it will be of interest to historians, local residents, topographers, ecclesiologists and many others. The Hackney map is highly unusual in style and is quite different from other maps of London of this period. The combination of elevations with a plan is extremely attractive, whilst the measurements and the drawings are meticulously done and the details sharp. The drawings show the old church as rebuilt at the beginning of the 16th Century, plus the buildings round the churchyard. The plan gives a flavour of village Hackney in the 18th century, together with important contextual information. St. Augustine's Tower, seen in the centre of the plan, is the only building which survives to the present day. (Publisher)

THE CHANGING EAST END. STEPNEY, BETHNAL GREEN & POPLAR 1860-1960 by Rosemary Taylor and Chris Lloyd. 1997, Sutton Publishing Ltd, 160 pages, paperback £9.99.

This fresh selection of outstanding historic photographs from the Tower Hamlets Local History Library follows the successful formula established by *Stepney, Bethnal Green & Poplar in old Photographs*. The new book provides a graphic record of the generations of people who lived and worked in the East End, and contributed to its special character, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The pictures show the rapid and lasting developments that took place in the area at that time. Bad housing, poor health, sweated labour and poverty were common, but a strong sense of family and community survived in the often harsh conditions. Social customs and working practices evolved over the decades, and local industry and business prospered then fell into a period of sharp decline. New types of transport were introduced, and the roads became increasingly clogged with traffic. Fashions changed, and the park and the pub, the music hall, theatre and cinema competed for popular attention before the advent of television. The impression of the East End that emerges from this memorable book is of an age very different from our own. The photographs recall every side of life in this distinctive part of London and give a vivid insight into its recent history and people.

A CORNER OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD (AN ACCOUNT OF SOME PERSONS AND THINGS IN ST. MARK'S WHITECHAPEL, 1861-1863 by Revd. Charles Voysey. First published 1905, reprinted 1998 by Tower Hamlets Local history Library. 48pages hardbound.

Charles Voysey (1828-1912) was a "trendy vicar" long before the term came into existence. The Bishop of Durham's dismissal of Christ's resurrection as a trick with old bones would have met with a nod of agreement over a hundred years ago in the parish of St. Mark's, Whitechapel. A direct descendant of John Wesley's sister, Charles Voysey rejected the concept of damnation, all miracles, even the divinity of Christ, in favour of a generalised belief in the progress of mankind towards moral perfection.

Having graduated in 1851 and been ordained, Voysey was appointed curate at St. Mark's in 1861. The conditions that he found in this quarter of Whitechapel obviously shocked him profoundly. A few years after he was dismissed because of his unorthodox religious beliefs, he gave a talk on his experiences. It took the form of a walk around part of the parish, through the streets and courtyards that once lay between Leman Street and Back Church Lane, and gave a vivid description of the "poorest of the poor"; the struggling individuals and the stench, filth, and disease among which they struggled to survive. Forty years later, when he was "confident that no one [had] survived to be wounded by any word herein", Voysey published his talk as a small pamphlet.

The Local History Library has held a copy of the pamphlet for many years. We have now decided to reprint it and, in this small book, you will hear the authentic voice of a witness to the poverty that once existed in parts of Tower Hamlets. (Publisher)

THE RIVER BEAT by Geoffrey Budworth  
Historical Publications Ltd, ISBN 0 948667 41 9 £14.95

This book is published to coincide with the 200th anniversary of London's river police. In 1798 the River Police Force was founded by two men, Patrick Colquhoun and John Harriott, to deal with the rampant pilfering and wilful damage that occurred in the corrupt and chaotic Port of London. The author was a Metropolitan Police officer who completed 25 years service, with the rank of Inspector. Throughout the 1960s as a constable and sergeant, he did duty afloat in Thames Division, and his personal experiences of tideway policing puts into true perspective this original, fascinating and authentic account of the first modern police force. (Publisher)

THE TOWER HAMLETS CONNECTION by Harold Finch  
1996, A5, 176 pages. ISBN 0 902385 25 9 Tower Hamlets Library Service and Stepney Books  
£7.99

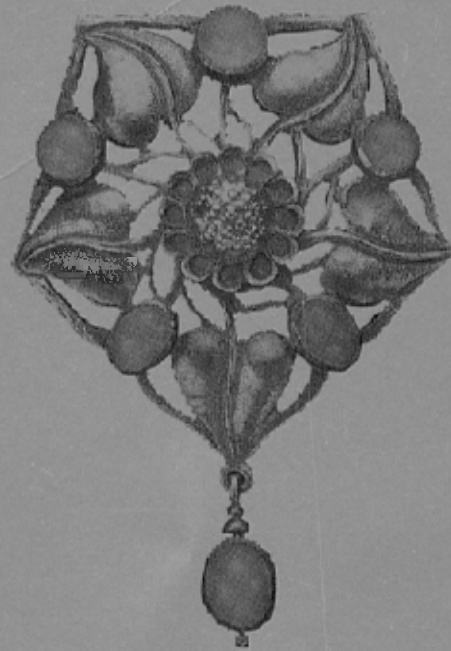
This is a mine of information on anyone connected with the area. Harold Finch had been promising this for so long that one wondered if it would ever appear. Not only do we get biographical details of nearly 400 people from A(dams) to Z(angwill) with many illustrations, but also lists of Bishops, Mayors, MPs, LCC and GLC representatives for Tower Hamlets. The only thing to say is – indispensable!

GUIDE TO A DOCKLANDS OF CHANGE by James Page-Roberts  
1997, 121 pages, Mudlark Press. ISBN 0 95305 17 0 6

The author describes his book as “a present day, historical, anecdotal and (1946-1969) photographic guide to the riverside, docks and wharves between the Tower of London and Limehouse.” We are fortunate that he found a quantity of photographs he had taken years ago and decided to use them as the basis of a walk. The photographs were taken on simple cameras such as Box Brownies but are very evocative because they show the kinds of scenes that we all took for granted until the riverside way of life changed so completely in the 1970s and 80s. The book is worth having just for the photographs but try the easy to follow route describing where they were taken and giving lots more snippets of information.

THE EAST END THEN AND NOW edited by Winston G. Ramsey  
1997, 525 pages. Published by Battle of Britain Prints Ltd. ISBN 0 900913 99 1.  
Hardbound £39.95

This book follows the format of the publisher's earlier publication, Epping Forest Then and Now: large both in coverage and physical dimensions. The map depicted on the dust jacket indicates the coverage of the book, Tower Hamlets and eastward to Stratford and Leytonstone. The first 100 pages (approximately) are made up with the “The recollections of a Poplar Boy by Cyril Demarne and then the work takes on a thematic style, both locations (such as The River, The Docks, Parks) and social history (including categories such as Anarchists and Suffragettes). Although there are some 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century illustrations, the great majority are from this century with many then and now comparisons (as might be expected from the title). Topics are covered in considerable detail and there is a whole page of credits and acknowledgements. The quality of printing (Plaistow Press Ltd) is very good with clear photographs on good quality paper. This is the kind of book you could work your way through or just pick a topic at random. You won't be disappointed by either. The price may seem high but you get a lot for your money.



The East London History Society (founded 1952) exists to further interest in the history of East London, namely the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham. Besides the East London Record we publish two newsletters a year and organise a programme of talks. We also arrange local walks and two coach outings a year. All talks are held at Latimer Congregational Church Hall, Ernest Street, E1. Ernest Street is between Harford Street and White Horse Lane, off Mile End Road (opposite Queen Mary and Westfield College). The nearest underground stations are Mile End and Stepney Green.

Details of membership are available from John Harris (Membership Secretary), 13 Three Crowns Road, Colchester, Essex CO4 5AD.

£2.75

ISBN 0 950 6258 2 5