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The East London History Society

(founded 1952)

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The annual programme includes lectures, which range over the whole panorama of East London past and present, and visits in the summer months.

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THE COAL-HEAVERS OF EAST LONDON

Colm Kerrigan

The year 1768 was one of discontent. There was trouble in America, where growing unrest among the colonies would lead, within a few years, to the demand for independence. At home, several bad harvests had caused food prices to increase. In London, a severe winter, when the Thames was frozen over, helped add to the number of destitute. Veterans of the Seven Years War and Irish immigrants added to the congestion of the overcrowded lanes and alleys of the metropolis. William Pitt, now no longer the Great Commoner, but the Earl of Chatham, plagued with illness, retained power more through the disunity of his opponents than the success of his policies. The general election brought no significant change in the balance of power. It did, however, bring back John Wilkes, who was elected for Middlesex, but was prevented from taking his seat. Instead, he was sentenced to twenty-one months imprisonment for allegedly offending the King in an article in the *North Briton* in 1763.

Many people took to the streets in support of Wilkes, including several killed in what became known as the Massacre of St. George's Fields in May 1768. During the course of the year many other groups in London took part in protests, demonstrations and riots. These included tailors, Thames watermen, sailors, silk weavers from Spitalfields and Bethnal Green and coalheavers from Shadwell and Wapping. Some of these protests can be seen as part of the 'Mob' support that Wilkes attracted – the coal-heavers on one occasion adapted the Radical slogan 'Wilkes and Liberty' to 'Wilkes and Liberty and coal-heavers for ever'. Yet the coal-heavers had been engaged in their dispute before the election of Wilkes as the member for Middlesex. Their support for him may have been no more than an afterthought to their main objectives, which included better wages and a more just system of contracting for work on the colliers. It is in this light that the details of the coal-heavers dispute will be examined.

In the 18th century coal for London from Newcastle was brought by colliers that anchored in the Pool and had their cargo unloaded onto lighters and barges. The men who did the unloading were called coal-heavers. The job was done by shovelling the coal up a series of platforms, one above the other, till it reached the top, where it was again shovelled into awaiting lighters or barges. Around the middle of the century a manually operated machine was introduced for 'whipping' the coal up from the hold. This engaged four men using a pulley to haul up a basket which had been filled below by four more. A ninth member of the gang, called the basket-man, emptied the basket into the lighter alongside. Eventually all the work came to be done in this manner and coal-heavers came to be known as coal-whippers. But at the time of the events dealt with here – 1768 – only a small proportion of the work was done by 'whipping'.

The men who emptied the lighters either onto the wharves, or sometimes directly on to waiting carts, were known as coal-porters. They were all

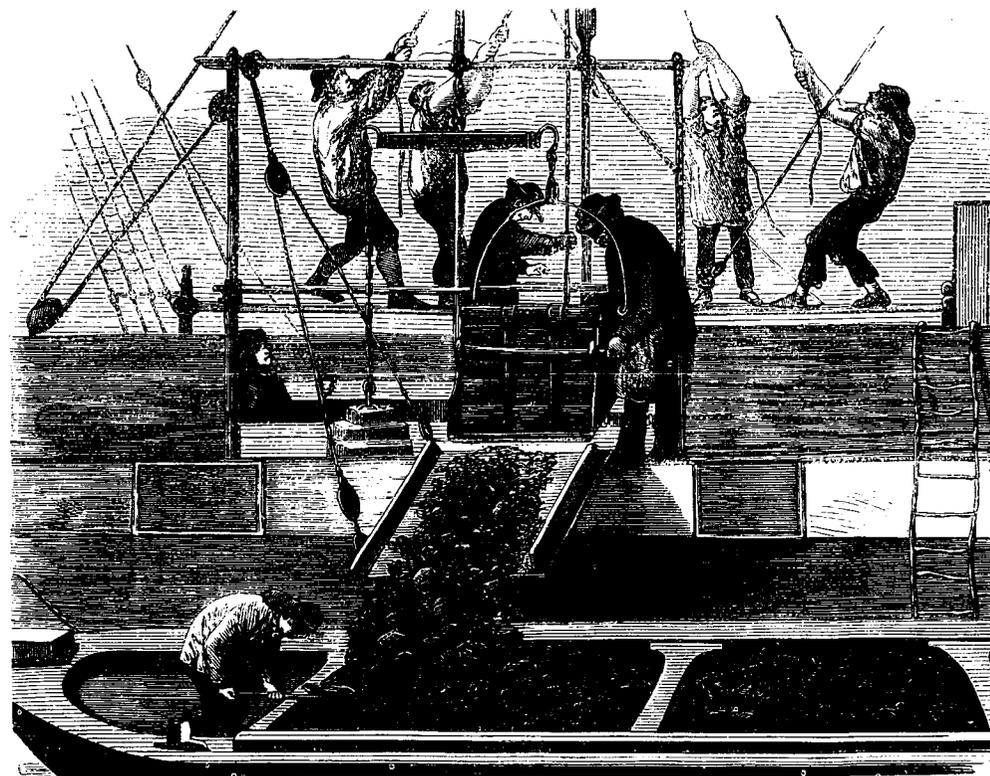
members of the Fellowship of Billingsgate Porters, and as such enjoyed the protection of the City. The coal-heavers, doing a job very like that of coal-porters, wanted a similar protection, and had submitted many petitions to Parliament for the establishment of a fellowship. Such a fellowship, they argued, would benefit the coal trade as a whole, and specifically from the point of view of the coal-labourers

would prevent those great oppressions which the labourers suffer by the Masters and Crimps who refuse them a tolerable price for their labour, when there are but few ships in the River. (1)

Their repeated petitions came to nothing. The reason for the refusal was partly that the City was reluctant to grant the incorporation of labourers, especially those with the reputation for disorderliness that the coal-heavers had. More important, the coal-trading interest in the City saw the advantage of a large labour force, and incorporation would entail a restriction of numbers. For when, in favourable weather, the Thames was crowded with colliers, a large labour force meant a quick turn-around for the ships. But in slack times, the same labour force, being disorganized and unprotected by the City, could safely be ignored and left to starve.

In the absence of a fellowship to protect his interest, the coal-heaver was at the mercy of his employer and the middleman, both of whom took advantage of the fact. While wages at peak times were well above what could be earned

Gang of coal-whippers at work below bridge. From Henry Mayhew: *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1861



in other manual jobs — at peak periods it could go as high as 10 shillings a day — the irregularity of the employment tended to cancel this out. His average earnings were around 15/- a week. (2) A bricklayer in the same period could hope to earn 18/- a week, and a bricklayer's labourer about 12/-. (3) Also, for the coal-heaver, the severe physical strain of the work led to a shorter working life, as one of them is quoted as saying in a House of Commons report: "few of them continue in their prime more than six or seven years". (4)

The middleman who was responsible for the employment of men to unload ships was known as an 'undertaker'. They were usually publicans in East London, and being influential people with the local justices of the peace they had a free hand as to how they operated. If a coal-heaver complained about the way he was being treated, no-one would listen to him and he would merely lose his job. Workers were taken on by the publican in his own tavern, and so, to quote Mayhew, writing nearly a hundred years later, "the more intemperate they were the more readily they found work". (5)

Alexander Martin, giving evidence to a committee set up to examine the background to a coal-heavers' petition to Parliament, sums up well the operations of the undertaker:

where a publican is a coal undertaker, he obliges the men for whom he procures employment, to spend 6d a day in his house, and pay him a halfpenny per score for the use of a shovel, which they are compelled to hire of him, though they have shovels of their own; and that the beer, which he obliges them to pay 4d a quart for, is not worth a penny; the gin and tobacco not worth anything. (6)

In 1800, Patrick Colquhoun, founder of the River Police at Wapping, estimated that as much as £30 of a coal-heaver's annual earnings went to the undertaker, at a time when, as we have seen, his own share was no more than 15/- per week.

Following complaints about undertakers robbing and plundering the men, the *Act of Relief of the Coalheavers* was passed in 1758. This provided a scheme whereby a person appointed by the Alderman of Billingsgate was to register all coal-heavers who wished to be protected, and negotiated with the masters and owners of the colliers regarding the labour required for unloading the coal. Two shillings in the pound were to be deducted from wages for the expenses of operating the scheme, with the remainder to go to a fund for sickness, injury, old age and burial expenses, and a fund for widows and children of deceased coal-heavers.

An attorney named Reynolds was appointed to implement the scheme. He proceeded to cheat those who registered out of more than £500. By the time he was prosecuted he had gone bankrupt and so the men had lost their money. Besides, as no successor to Reynolds was appointed (and one would hardly imagine the coal-heavers being anxious for one), the men were back again in the hands of the undertakers. Such was the position in the last days of the year 1767.

Many of the coal-heavers were Irish and occupied overcrowded tenements in an area known as Knock Fergus, now part of Cable Street. Some of the more

recent immigrants were thought to have been involved in the Whiteboy movement in Ireland in the early sixties, which, operating at night, terrorised landlords throughout Munster. It is a matter of speculation as to how much this may have influenced their English neighbours' attitudes towards the coal-heavers. The fact that most of them were Catholics is also of interest, though again information is lacking on how this influenced their standing locally and nationally. What we do know, however, is that the Gordon Riots, twelve years later, were particularly harsh locally. While the Rector of St. George's-in-the-East, Dr. Herbert Mayo, was to refuse to sign the petition of the Protestant Association, the havoc created locally, including the destruction of two Catholic chapels in Wapping, suggests that the Rector was ahead of his parishioners in tolerance.

The discontent of the coal-heavers came to a head early in 1768 not from any problems arising from race or religion, but from a sharp rise in the price of provisions. Wheat in London reached the high price of £2.5s a quarter in January 1768. (8) Bread was soon to cost 2d per pound. (9) The rise in prices was attributed to bad crops, but there were other causes. A writer at the time noted that "the great profit that the miller makes is evident from the fortunes they soon acquire". (10) The extent of the increase in price to the consumer can be imagined when it is realised that a family of four would need to spend up to 5/- per week on bread (11) — about one third of the average weekly earnings of a coal-heaver.

The coal-heavers submitted a claim for an increase and gave as their reason the increased price of provisions. The claim was for 20d per 20 chaldrons worked — a chaldron was a measure of coal equivalent to 36 bushels — as opposed to the 16d each man received at the time. The claim was not supported by all the men, but those who had stopped work "prevented those others, who were willing to work, and were content with their wages, from working". (12)

As all work on the colliers ground to a halt William Beckford, then Alderman of Billingsgate and a former Lord Mayor of London, was asked by the coal-heavers to intercede in the dispute. He did so, but did not concern himself with the rate of pay, but rather with how it was paid. He appointed Mr. Russell to set up an office in Billingsgate, and Russell in turn appointed John Green, of Gravel Lane, Wapping, "as an agent under him to do the more laborious part of the business". (13) This roughly amounted to the implementation of the 1758 Act which had lapsed after the Reynolds swindle already referred to.

During February one Ralph Hodgson of Shadwell, a Justice of the Peace for Middlesex, suggested to the Irish coal-heavers' around Knock Fergus that they should register with his clerk Dunster, pointing out that the Act of 1758 did not compel them to register with the Alderman's Office — registration was in fact voluntary. The advantage Hodgson's scheme offered was that the men would save 2/- in the pound by not registering with the Alderman. (14) The attractiveness of the scheme to the Irishmen was confirmed when, on St. Patrick's Day, 17th March, Hodgson walked at the head of the Irish

people through Shadwell, an event which a later petition to the Lord Chancellor referred to as “a shameful prostitution of the office and character of a magistrate”. (15)

In any event, most of the Irish coal-heavers signed with Dunster, Hodgson’s clerk. They refused to work for less than 20d and prevented others from doing so insofar as they could. By the beginning of April the slack period in the Pool was coming to an end. (During the winter months some colliers, fearing storms on the East Coast, did not operate at all.) The owners and masters were in a quandary. Either they would have to pay the new rate or have their ships lie idle in the river. Pressure from the coal trade in the City, as well as increasing militancy among the coal-heavers, forced Russell into action. He put an advertisement in the papers saying that if coal-heavers did not register with his office by the 13th April “new gangs will immediately be raised, appointed and registered” (16) and that anyone interfering with the work of the new gangs would be prosecuted. Hodgson’s men still refused to register with Russell. Russell went ahead with his threat to register new gangs and on 16th April announced this in the newspapers.

On the same day the servant girl of a neighbour of Green’s pulled down one of the coal-heavers’ bills that according to Green “was a libel on Mr. Alderman Beckford”. (17)

The coal-heavers, incensed at this and at the fact that Russell had gone ahead with his register regardless of their opposition, assembled outside Green’s house in Gravel Lane and threatened him that they would have his life. They returned later in the evening armed with cutlasses and bludgeons, throwing stones at the windows and trying to force open a door. Green drove them away by firing his musket at them. Several were wounded, among them Dunster, Hodgson’s clerk.

On the Monday Green sought help from the local justice of the peace, who was none other than Ralph Hodgson. Hodgson was unwilling to make any arrests unless Green could give him the names of the men that threw the stones. This Green could not do and the matter was let rest. Next day there was a big parade of the coal-heavers around Shadwell, Wapping and Rotherhithe with the marchers “threatening and terrifying the inhabitants”. (18) The Treasury Solicitor does not specify what the nature of the threats was, but one assumes they were against anyone who registered with Russell or Green.

Later the same evening Green’s house was surrounded again, this time the coal-heavers claiming that Green had shot and killed a cobbler, Thomas Smith, in the street for no reason. They threw stones and bricks at the house, and Green threatened to fire at them if they attempted to break in. In reply, they “threatened to hang him over his signpost if they got hold of him”. (19)

William Wake, a coal-heaver, having “a glass of gin and bitters” with a girl in the nearby ‘Swan and Lamb’ alehouse, heard a report of the cobbler’s death, and went to help the attackers, thinking Green “must be a vile man for shooting people going along the street”. (20) On arriving he went round the back of the house into a narrow alleyway, and was supposedly taking a crow-

Wapping in 1769. From Rocque’s *Survey of London*



bar to force open the door when he was shot dead by Green. The rest of the coal-heavers then went away to find arms. These were said to have been provided by Thomas Kelly, a Shadwell publican. (21) The coal-heavers fired at the house for most of the night but hit no-one. They occupied two nearby houses to get better firing positions. Towards dawn, attacks on Green’s door were renewed, but several coal-heavers were wounded, so they retreated. At this time there remained in the house, besides Green himself, his wife’s mother, Eleanor Mather, a sailor named Thomas Gilberthorpe and a lodger named Davis. His servant Eleanor Garret had left during the night, as had two

other of his lodgers. James Carr, a constable sent by Hodgson to arrest Green for the murder of William Wake, had also left the house during the night, no doubt finding the proceedings both confusing and dangerous.

Around dawn Green managed to escape over a wall and hid in a hole in a saw-pit in a neighbour's yard, his pursuers being told that he had escaped by means of a boat on the river. No harm came to the other occupants of the house. Soon Guards from the Tower arrived, having been sent for by Green's neighbours. Green came out of hiding on their arrival, and he and the sailor Gilberthorpe were taken to Newgate to await trial for the murders of the cobbler Thomas Smith and the coal-heaver William Wake.

Earlier the same evening a group of coal-heavers had broken up a public-house called 'The Ship and Shears' in Ratcliff because the owner, James Marsden, had tried to arrest a coal-heaver that became involved in a fight.

On the same day as the attack on Green's house, Wednesday 20th April, a large fleet of colliers arrived at the Pool. The coal-heavers refused to go to work unless paid 24d per 20 chaldrons. The employers paid it as they had too much to lose by refusing. Disturbances continued, however, and the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported the coal-heavers' complaints "that the undertakers get fortunes while the poor men's families, who do the work, are starving". (22)

Three days later the *Annual Register* recorded that

A great number of the foremen of the coal-heavers attended Alderman Beckford, and other justices of the peace, and heard the Act of Parliament for their regulations read and explained, and had the price of their labour settled; when they all agreed to register their gangs, and go to work. (23)

There are no details of what the settlement was: whether it was at the old rate of 16d or the 20d claimed at the beginning of the present dispute, or the 24d that appears to have been paid to all the men for the few weeks following the arrival of the large fleet on the 20th April. In any case, the matter was far from settled, for two weeks later a delegation went to Sir John Fielding, the Bow Street Magistrate, who "prevailed upon them to meet some of their masters at his office in the afternoon". (24) Fielding, incidentally, was a committed opponent to the payment of workers' wages in alehouses (25) but was no advocate of higher wages for workers, seeing them as a cause of the drunkenness and degradation of the working class. (26)

The visit to Fielding followed a day of parades (with drums and fiddles) around Stepney. Another outcome of the parade was a march to the coal-wharves along the north side of the Thames, where they presented a paper confirming the new rate to be signed by the masters. Many did sign it, either from fear for their property or from a desire to end the dispute. The coal-heavers took the signatures to the Mansion House to get the Mayor to approve the new rate "but his Lordship very prudently declined intermeddling with their affairs". (27) From the above it appears that while the rate of 24d was paid for a week or so, in order to turn-around the large fleet of the 20th April, it was not honoured as soon as the rush was over.

On the 20th May 1768 Green was tried, together with the sailor Gilberthorpe, for the murder of Thomas Smith and William Wake. Thomas Overstaff, a key witness for the defence, claimed that "the flash of powder was very low" (28) for the shot that killed Smith, implying that it was more likely to have come from the coal-heavers on the street than from Green inside the house.

In the case of Wake, Owen Harrington, a coal-heaver, and John Matthews, a ballast-heaver, testified that they saw Green shoot Wake, who had nothing in his hand at the time. Thomas Maplan, a publican and part-time coal-heaver, and Mary McKenzie confirmed this, as well as the fact that there was only a handful of people in the street at the time Wake was shot – the implication here being that there was no need for Green to resort to musket-fire.

Witnesses for the defence included John Dunderdale, one of Green's lodgers and his servant Eleanor Garret, both of whom emphasised the large crowd on the street at the time of the shooting. Green himself said "I know nothing of shooting William Wake nor no body else". (29) Green and Gilberthorpe were acquitted.

Meanwhile, trouble by the river continued. On the 23rd May the master of a collier anchored off Wapping, unable to get coal-heavers to unload the ship at the old rates of pay, got his sailors to do the job. The sailors being anxious to sail – they got no wages while the ships lay idle in port – began the work. Coal-heavers working nearby (presumably at the rate of either 20d or 24d) stopped work as soon as they heard this. They joined with other coal-heavers and demanded that the work be done by coal-heavers and no-one else, and that the rate of pay be 24d. Rioting began when the sailors attempted to carry on.

On the same day the coal-heavers held a meeting in Shadwell and decided to prevent sailors coming ashore for provisions and thus stop them doing the coal-heavers' work. They organized a rota to watch all landing places round the clock.

Next day (it was Whitsun Tuesday, 24th May) at Shadwell Dock Stairs, two boats with a dozen men on board approached the riverside from colliers lying offshore. The men on duty warned of their arrival and coal-heavers, armed with cutlasses, bludgeons and sticks, prevented the ships' crews from landing, as had been agreed at their meeting on the day before. A fight took place in which four of the boats' occupants were wounded. One of the wounded, John Beatty (30) died from his injuries six weeks later at St. Thomas' Hospital.

The coal-heavers continued to prevent ships' crews coming ashore, and a week later at five o'clock in the morning

two captains of colliers came ashore at King James' Stairs, Wapping, in order to procure boiled beef & c. for their ships' crews; but, as soon as they landed, they were attacked by forty or fifty coal-heavers, who beat them so cruelly that their lives are despaired of. These fellows have a guard at every landing place on the river, to prevent the coal-ship from having any supplies or provisions, swearing they will starve those on board, and if they offer to come on shore, will murder every man of them they can catch. (31)

There followed several scuffles between sailors and coal-heavers around

Stepney. The Treasury Solicitor said that in the course of these disputes the coal-heavers were terrifying the inhabitants, but no details are given of whom they terrified. Nor does there appear to be any evidence that anyone not directly involved in the dispute was interfered with. However, after a fight between some sailors and coal-heavers in Stepney Fields on the 6th June, pressure was put on the Government to send in troops. Although Alderman Beckford was against this,(32) troops were in fact sent in on the 12th June. They made 20 arrests straightaway and others in the course of the following weeks. The streets of Wapping and Shadwell were reported quiet for the next few weeks while the many charges against the coal-heavers were being prepared. On 17th June, Lord Barrington at the Home Office was informed that “the Party which is sent up to Wapping duty may be reduced to 50 men, and in a day or two to 25”, (33) and a couple of days later Fielding was satisfied that “the disturbance among them is subsiding”. (34)

Early in July the first of the two major trials in connection with the dispute took place. This was for the murder of the sailor John Beatty. The two defendants were identified mostly by watermen, and it was the evidence of watermen that made up the bulk of the case for the prosecution. James Murphy – who had left Shadwell when the military were sent in, but was caught later in Staffordshire – and James Dogan (or Duggan) were said by witness after witness to have been active in the affray. John Becket, a waterman, said how he saw both Murphy and Dogan strike Beatty with a weapon and this was confirmed by other witnesses.

For the defence a man named James McDaniel said he saw Murphy elsewhere at the time Beatty was struck, and John Magoury, a lumper, said he saw the man that hit Beatty and it was not any of the men in the dock. Several witnesses testified to the good character of the accused. Murphy himself claimed that the witnesses against him had been bribed, and Dogan said that he was elsewhere at the time of the incident.

Dogan and Murphy were found guilty and the rest acquitted. The case against them does not seem to have been a very strong one, and one gets the impression that the crucial evidence against them was that they had been prominent figures in the disturbances in the area in the course of the campaign to raise the price of labour.

A few days later the sentences were carried out:

James Murphy and James Dogan, two coal-heavers, for murder, were executed at Tybourn, and their bodies delivered to the surgeons to be anatomized. On this occasion, a number of Irish women assembled before Surgeon's Hall, in the Old Bailey, and in the howl of their country prayed their dear countrymen to LIVE again. (35)

That evening some coal-heavers came on to the streets in Shadwell and Wapping, but the presence of the military, small in number though they were by now, prevented any rioting.

A few days before this the other major trial had begun (there were several smaller trials, where sentences varied from short terms of imprisonment to transportation). Several coal-heavers were charged with “wilfully and

maliciously shooting at John Green in his dwelling house which is a capital offence”. (36)

For the prosecution, witnesses were produced to identify the prisoners, and the part they took in the attack on Green's house was related.

In defence, the coal-heavers claimed that they were keeping Green covered, “to deter him from killing more people till a guard came from the Tower”. (37) In view of the fact that Hodgson, the justice of the peace, (38) had actually asked the coal-heavers to do just that when he himself visited the scene on the evening of the attack, this was a reasonable defence. Added to this was the fact that no-one inside the house was even slightly injured, not to mention killed, while at least two men were killed outside. But despite all this, and the protestations of innocence by all the defendants, and the 26 witnesses who gave evidence of their good character, seven were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Their names were John Grainger, Daniel Clark (alias Clarie), Richard Cornwall, Patrick Lynch, Thomas Murray, Peter Flaherty and Nicholas McCabe.

On 26th July the prisoners were taken from Newgate Prison. The executions took place in Sun Tavern Fields in Shadwell, off the Ratcliff Highway, near where the 20-storey Gordon House now stands. A crowd of 50,000 is said to have attended. Guards were posted in readiness but there was no disturbance.

The harsh sentences seem to have had the desired effect, as there is no record of any further militant act by the coal-heavers. It is more than likely their leaders were among the hanged, or imprisoned. Nor did their working conditions or rates of pay improve. Acts of 1770 and 1807 appeared to offer the coal-heaver protection against the undertaker, but nothing was done in the way of enforcement and the Acts were easily evaded. From Henry Mayhew's conversations with them it appears that up till 1843 their lot remained as bad as it was in 1768. The 1843 Act established an office where the men could assemble and the owners and captains of colliers could apply to the office for men to unload. This at last ended the undertakers' exploitation of the coal-heavers, as only ¼d in the shilling was now deducted for the expenses of running the office.

With the introduction of the hydraulic crane, the job of coal-whipping as such had become obsolete, although of course men were still needed to fill the bucket in the hold. By the time of Booth's survey the men that did so were referred to as coal-porters and the rates of pay were those of the Coal Porters Union.(39)

Footnotes

- 1 *Reasons for making the coal-labourers on the River Thames a Fellowship humbly offered to Parliament/1705/Alchin MS/Guildhall Library.*
- 2 D.M. George: *London Life in the 18th Century*, 1965 ed., p.286.
- 3 L.D. Schwarz: 'Occupations and Incomes in late 18th century East London'. *East London Papers*, Vol. 14 No.2.Dec. 1972, p.95.
- 4 *Journal of the House of Commons* 28.4.1757.

- 5 H. Mayhew: *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1861 Vol.III, p.235.
 6 *Journal of the House of Commons* 27.3.1770.
 7 M. Rose: *The East End of London*, 1951, p.102.
 8 F. Eden: *The State of the Poor*, 1797, Vol. III, Appendix 1, p.LXXI.
 9 G. Rudé: *Hanoverian London 1714-1808*, 1971, p.90.
 10 J. Lind: 'On the Price of Provisions', in *Essays on Several Subjects*, 1769, p.145.
 11 G. Rudé: p.89.
 12 Treasury Solicitors Papers TS/11/443/1408. These, held in the Public Record Office, give the Government's view of the matter. There appears to be no written record of the coal-heavers' case, except of course the evidence they gave at the various trials.
 13 T.S.P.
 14 What commission Hodgson and his Clerk were going to deduct was not referred to.
 15 *Middlesex Sessions Papers*, Sept. 1768, 47b.
 16 Quoted in T.S.P.
 17 *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*, 6-13 July 1768.
 18 T.S.P.
 19 T.S.P.
 20 *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*, Dec. 1767 - Oct. 1768.
 21 *Middlesex Sessions Papers*, Oct. 28, 1768.
 22 *Gentleman's Magazine*, 22.4.1768.
 23 *Annual Register* 25.4.1768.
 24 *Gentleman's Magazine*, 10.5.1768.
 25 D.M. George, p.287.
 26 Francis Place, quoted in D.M. George, p.264.
 27 *Gentleman's Magazine*, 11.5.1768.
 28 *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*.
 29 *O.B.S.P.*
 30 Beatty's ship, by coincidence, was the 'Free Love', the same collier on which Captain Cook had served as an apprentice 22 years previously, see 'Captain Cook; Londoner' by A.W. Smith, *East London Papers*, vol. 11. No. 2. Winter 1968 p.94.
 31 *Annual Register* 2.6.1768.
 32 Home Office Papers 1766-69, Entry 916, 10.6.1768.
 33 H.O.P. entry 922, 17.6.1768.
 34 H.O.P. entry 924, 19.6.1768.
 35 *Gentleman's Magazine*, 11.7.1768.
 36 T.S.P.
 37 *O.B.S.P.*
 38 Although it must be admitted that, as we have seen, Hodgson also had another role in the dispute besides that of justice of the peace.
 39 J. Argyle in Part V of Vol. VII of *Life and Labour of the People of London*, ed. C. Booth, 1896.

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- George, D.M. 'The London Coal Heavers' *Economic History*, Vol. 1, 1926-29.
 Rudé, G. *Wilkes and Liberty*, 1962, Chapter 6.

THE PARISH OF ST. MARY WHITECHAPEL 1908-1916

The Revd. George Hanks



The Revd. George Hanks was Rector of Whitechapel from 1908 to 1916. During this period he made extensive lecture tours appealing for funds and a series of lantern slides was compiled to show conditions in his parish and the work of his clergy. After the Second World War, he wrote some notes on his experiences in Whitechapel which passed, with sixty-six lantern slides, into the possession of his daughter. These were deposited in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library in 1975 by Prebendary Arthur Royall. The following account is taken from the notes with illustrations from the lantern slides.

A "drawing room" in a Whitechapel lodging house on a Sunday evening

At the early age (36 years) for such a responsible post I became Rector of Whitechapel, a parish of some 25,000 of London's poorest, with its long history and absorbing Jewish problem.

For the Jewish work two Curates, one a Hebrew Christian, a Scripture Reader and a Bible Woman were specially set apart. They could speak

Yiddish. On the Jewish Festivals we could command a considerable congregation both in the church and at the open-air pulpit. Actual baptisms were few, which perhaps is not surprising in that such a step was followed by loss of home and family. Rabbinic Divorce could be obtained for this and complete ostracism. Quite a number became convinced Christians. Personally, I came to know and admire the pious Jew. He is a trustworthy man and a loving father inclined to spoil his children.

During my time the poverty was intense such as, Please God, may never be seen again. It is difficult for those living in these days of Welfare State and high wages to imagine the straits to which multitudes were reduced when there were two million on the dole. At one time I supplied queues of poverty-stricken and hungry people with a quart of soup for one penny. The soup was made from bags of powder given to me by Lord Rothschild. My Rectory was redolent with the scent of garlic from 200 bags of soup powder waiting to be made drinkable. Another notable evidence of this prevailing poverty was the existence of Doss Houses. They ranged from the very comfortable Rowton Houses at 6d a night, Alexandra Homes at 5d, two in my Parish at 4d, the Salvation Army 'Darkest England' scheme at 2d, down to Medland Hall, Commercial Street, at nothing a night until 'House Full' was put up.

In my parish there was a block of dwellings called 'Plough Street Buildings'. Despite many efforts I never could discover who owned them and the solicitor who administered the property was forbidden to disclose the name. For some unknown reason it was called 'The Rector's Shame'. The provision of water consisted of a tap in the yard supplying four floors of single rooms most containing a family. The sanitary provisions were disgracefully inadequate. Added to all this, vagrants off the street slept on the staircase. With the aid of a small expert committee we investigated the health, police and other records, and found, as would be expected, a lamentable story of death rate and crime. We found a clause in the Town Planning Act compelling an owner, if he objected, to enter a protest against a Closing Order within three weeks. On this we persuaded the Medical Officer of Health to put up a Closing Order on one staircase. The owner defeated us by gutting the interior, rebuilding and charging more rent, and we never discovered his name. We came to the conclusion that the only way was to take a room ourselves and get a Church Army Sister to live among them. This we did with the kind help of two generous ladies, by which we rented and cleansed a room, and by Mr. Wilson Carlile who sent us a dear Sister from Hull. The story of what she wrought there in the next six years will ever constitute for me one of the modern 'Miracles of Grace'.

Our work in the Doss Houses brought us into close touch with the underworld which General Booth called the 'Submerged Tenth'. The 'Down and Outs' of London were then a large company. I myself counted over 40 sleeping under newspapers beneath a railway arch at Christmastide with the

Dustmen in
Old Montague
Street c.1895



snow thick outside. These, when they had funds, found shelter in the Doss Houses.

In two of these, side by side, we were allowed to hold a little service in the communal kitchen after church on Sunday nights. I remember many such held while some cooked fish and chips over the open fire. Some occasionally fought in drunken quarrels while over our heads bugs walked. Upstairs in the common dormitory (and very common) the men slept with the bed castor in their boots and their clothes stored beneath their bedding lest they be stolen. I am tempted to find room for stories of these services and the congregations, their pathos and their humour but I must forbear. The last stage of their story could be seen at the Whitechapel Infirmary, of which I was the appointed chaplain.



The Relief side of our work was only made possible by our being accepted as a sub-committee of the Charity Organisation Society on whose central Committee at Dennison House I sat. Upon the principles this Society taught we acted, otherwise nothing would have saved us from the Scylla of making 'Rice Christians' or the Charybdis of being hopelessly bankrupt. As it was we were able to affirm that we never lacked what was needed for very radical treatment of cases undertaken by us. At our Monday morning staff meeting, of 12 members, at which cases were fully considered, we never asked 'can we afford to do this?' but we only asked 'Ought we to do this?' I will be content with one perhaps striking example. A man who attended our Church and was found to be absolutely famished for want of food. When his condition was enquired into, it transpired that he had been an R.A.M.C. Nurse in the War, being discharged from ill-health.

Whitechapel
High Street
c.1905

Whitechapel
Clergy House
c.1900, now
used as a
Post Office



His teeth were decayed and black and his whole physical condition extremely poor through ill nourishment and poor health. We accepted his case for thorough treatment. We sent him to the Army & Navy Nursing Association who asked me on the phone if I would employ him if I were sick. I replied 'Certainly not'. Then said they 'Why do you expect us to do so?' I asked 'Would you if he were made fit?'. On receiving assurance that they would, we went ahead. During the next six months we convalesced him, had all his teeth removed and new dentures supplied, and fitted him out

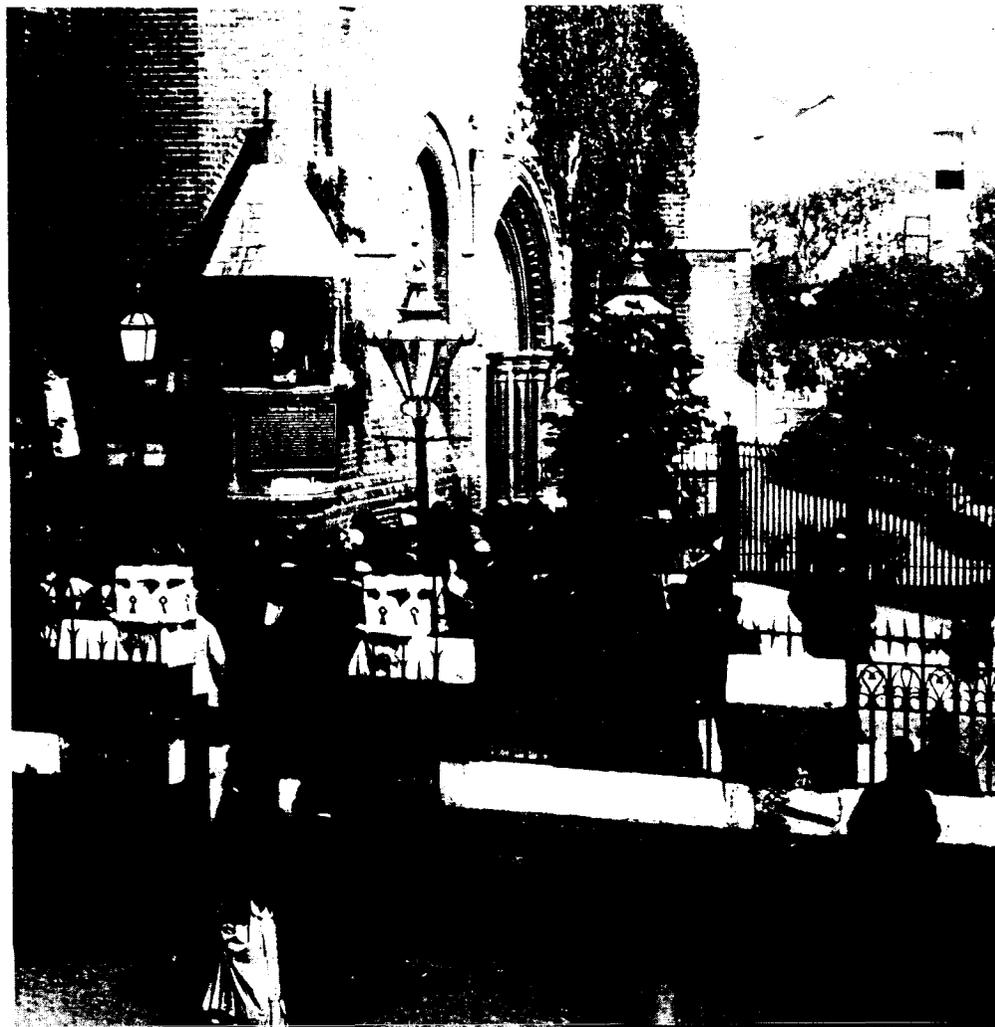
with clothing and then sent him back to the Society. The Secretary rang me up to ask 'Do you do miracles in Whitechapel?' and they at once employed him and he began repaying the money spent on his behalf.

Exceptional as this case may seem to be, it illustrates one of the important C.O.S. principles which guided us, namely to set before our efforts a goal of permanent benefit, whatever the cost, and not to dissipate our limited resources in pitiful doles for a 'bed for the night' etc. that continually came to us, and had no hope of real benefit. All Jewish cases were, by agreement, passed on to the Jewish Board of Guardians who claimed to provide for their own poor. The only exceptions to this were those whom we regarded as 'Enquirers' and they called 'Conquettors with Christianity'. These they rejected whereas we claimed that they should not be persecuted because they were enquiring into the truth.

I did not require from my colleagues any formal record of their work but I did ask them to keep an 'Incident Book' into which should be entered an account of any interesting touch in their visiting. These supplied me with instructive, amusing and sometimes tragic stories which proved a mine of illustrations for me on my many journeys of money-raising. When the war broke out in 1914 the Church of England launched the 'National Mission of Repentance and Faith' believing that if we as a nation would return to God we would receive Divine blessing in answer to our prayers.

In our preparation, we attempted the colossal task of personal contact with every family in this huge and crowded parish. We started on the 'Blackwall Buildings' housing some hundreds in five-storied blocks, giving a staircase to each member of my staff, myself leading with No.1. We met first for prayer together in our St. Barnabas Mission Church in the Buildings' Compound, and then started out agreeing to meet again after two hours for further prayer, this time with special intention according to experience we had had. Notice of our coming was sent to each family, and a kindly reception solicited. The results of this plan were simply amazing. Human problems of every kind were presented to us from illicit unions to ordinary financial needs. The results as we proceeded from block to block were carefully collated and followed up.

The news of the success of our method spread and I was asked to address the Junior Clergy at the Chapter House, St. Paul's, together with two others with different experiments. At this meeting Mr. Bathurst, from Eastbourne, was present who asked me during tea following if, should a living at Eastbourne which was shortly becoming vacant were offered me, would I be willing to accept it. The result was that six months later when this happened I was offered and accepted All Saints, Eastbourne. Here again I realised the wonderful guidance of God in answer to prayer. My children were not flourishing in the East End, and the doctor had been urging my departure. My eldest daughter had contracted a germ at the Ladies' College, Cheltenham, where she was a boarder which damaged her heart seriously and laid her aside for a year. On her account I was ordered to find my family another home during this time.



Before taking departure I would like to mention one or two happenings of interest. In 1913, taking tea with my wife in a restaurant in the Domplatz of Cologne I saw a Zeppelin sail over the Square amid the excited shouts of the Germans. My next acquaintance with it was when it sailed over my Church and Rectory at Whitechapel dropping five incendiary bombs upon us, one of which I bought from the firemen who had put out the fire. They were feeble things and if anything like those we came to know in the next war had been our portion then it is unlikely this record would have been written, for in the next war both church and house were completely destroyed. Thousands of people came to see our damage and the Bishop of Stepney gathered my family in the Chancel of the church for a little thanksgiving service for God's mercy.

Preaching
outside
St. Mary's
Whitechapel
c.1910

THE NOTEBOOK OF RICHARD NEWMAN OF MILE END NEW TOWN

Bernard Nurse

Oct. 22nd, 1787 my wife got drunk with Thomas Clayton
Oct. 23rd, 1787 the same with Armson

Richard Newman carefully noted the occasions down in a personal memorandum and account book, also the fact that he was married on October 21st. The notes were written into the first twenty or so pages of his copy of the *New Daily Journal: or, complete account book, for 1780*. The book was purchased from a bookseller by Tower Hamlets Libraries in 1976. Two hundred years later the accounts, recipes and jottings offer a fascinating glimpse into the life of an individual about whom virtually nothing else is known.

Newman wrote that he had married Elizabeth Mason on July 19th 1765; she died on September 4th 1784 and was buried in the churchyard of St. Giles Cripplegate. The only other reference to her is: 'September 12th 1781, on a Wednesday my wife broke her right arm'. One child, William, is mentioned. 'September 4th 1780 - Billy went to Mr. Worship's School; Thursday 7th June 1782 - Billy went to School in John Street Spitalfields at 9 shillings a quarter'. Some time before 1787 and by then described as William Newman, he worked for Mr. Nights, hosier, of Stanbury Court Piccadilly; and finally on Sunday night May 3rd 1789 'Wm. Newman went to Mr. Stephenson Engraver No.14 Featherstone Buildings Holbourn'.

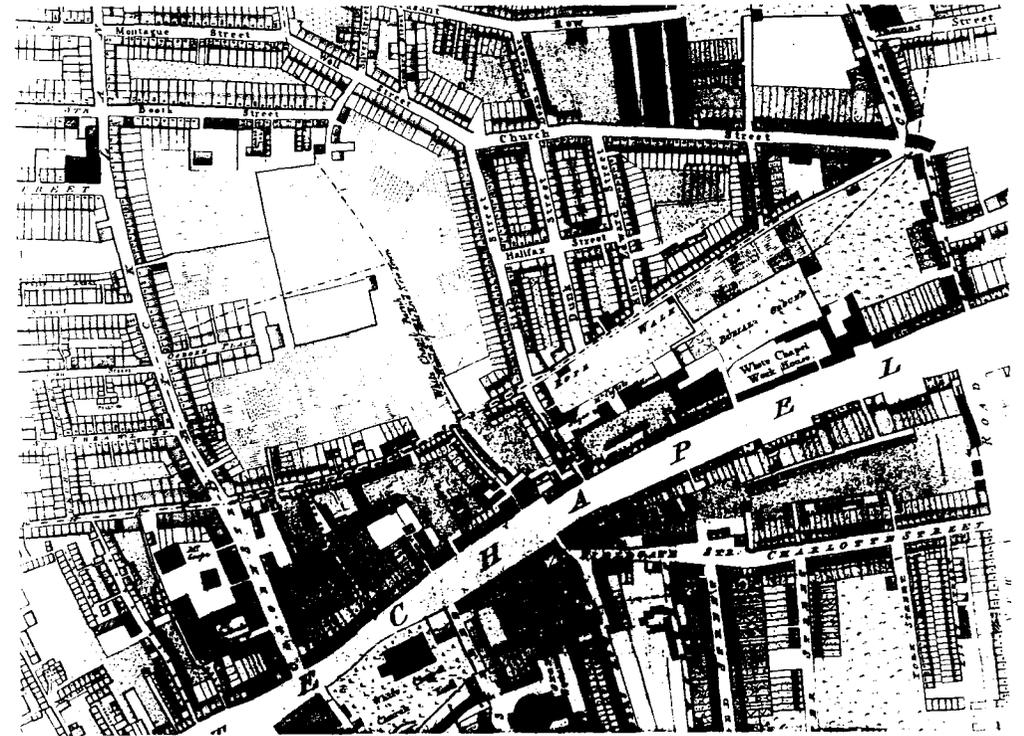
Richard Newman's next wife, Elizabeth Reynolds 'came to me on August 1st 1787'; they were married at St. Bride's Fleet Street on October 21st, and she died on May 18th 1792, the last date referred to in the notes. Their troubles are noted meticulously, and many instances are given similar to the above. 'Thursday 12th February 1789, my wife went away from me and took 4 guineas and stayed away 2 nights; November 12th 1790, my wife came home at 1 o'clock in the morn drunk with a man; Saturday 13th, Drunk again'.

The husband may have preferred to drink at home. His recipe for the Queen of Hungary's Cordial was :

1 pennyworth of Oil of Nutmeg
1 pennyworth of Oil of Cloves
1 pennyworth of Oil of Cinnamon
mixt with 2 ozs of Castor Sugar then put q.v. into some best rum

His cure for a cold was :

1 pint of Tent (i.e. Red wine)
1 pint of rum
1 pound of Turkey figgs chopped very small
½ pint of sweet oyle
Simmer them all up together to the consistence of an Electuary.
Take a teaspoonful 3 times a day



The family moved frequently, occupying at least seven addresses between 1776 and 1788. The first three were in Mile End New Town - King Edward Street west side, 7 Long Row and Church Street south side.(1) In 1783 however they found accommodation in the City for the notebook records that on Friday October 10th 1783 they moved from Talbot Court Gracechurch Street to the Blue Anchor Yard Coleman Street and 'rent'd a room of Mr. Campion at the Blue Anchor livery stables at £5.10s a year which is 2s.2d. a week'. At the time of the second marriage, both partners were described as of the parish of St. Bride's, but on the evening of Thursday September 25th 1788, they returned to Mile End New Town and settled in 16 King Street.

Whilst in Mile End New Town from 1779 to 1783, the Newmans took in lodgers, and in the last three months of 1780 had four staying at the same time. Mr. Knight's two girls paid 7 shillings a week for board and lodging. Mr. Sparkwell paid 2 shillings for a room, and Mr. John Dawson who had the 'two pair of stairs room' paid 2.10d. a week. Mr. Dawson was continually in arrears with his rent and was replaced by Mr. Gill at 3s.6d. a week; this may have been too expensive because soon afterwards Mr. Edwards took the same rooms for 2s.6d. per week.

Part of
Whitechapel
and Mile End
New Town in
1799. From
Horwood's
Plan of
London

Apart from the rent Richard Newman's sole source of income referred to was from teaching and playing music, and this is not mentioned after 1781. 'January 1780 Received of the Concert £1.13s; for removing the Musick Books 2s.6d; February 7th 1781 Mrs. Askins agreed to give me one guinea per quarter for teaching her son the Germain flute'. Elsewhere he notes 'paid for mending my Clarinett and flute 4s; Cane for Clarinett Reeds etc. to be had at the Reed Makers for Weavers in Smock Alley Spittlefields'. Stringed instruments interested him as well. He noted the dimensions of a guitar and the size of the back of a violin recording that 'Hammerly, Wickser, Wilds and Bunnegar from Switzerland, deals in various sorts of woods for Musical Instruments at the Fountain in Round Court in the Strand'.

For a time Newman appears to have played for various drinking clubs or friendly society celebrations. 'The Europa Bucks owes me for the feast at Hounslow in the year 1778 5s.0d...Beall owes me for attendance at the Hanoverian Grand Lodge March 29th 1780.' The Agriculturalian and Babylonian Bucks are also mentioned, and once he attended the latter on a visit to the Macedons.

After his wife's death in 1784 and until November 1788, detailed accounts are included for the 'necessaries' bought for himself and his son. About £17 was spent mostly on clothes: 'Paid for making Bill's mourning and mine £1.1s; paid for a hatt and band for Bill 4s.6d; bought Bill a green great coat with double breasted buttons in Houndsditch £1.4s; Bought a tin boiler in Coleman St. 3s.

The notebook ends as abruptly as it begins; and what happened to Richard and his son William afterwards is not known.

Note:

- (1) Long Row was probably Long Street, otherwise Princes' Row - the continuation eastwards of Old Montague Street. These were new houses built in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. (Survey of London, Vol.27 - Spitalfields and Mile End New Town, 1957).

A FRIEND IN MY RETREAT

Family Life in Bromley St. Leonard Between the Wars

Kingsley Royden

I am writing these notes sitting on a log on the edge of the Forest and within view of a corrugated-iron shed being demolished - probably the last of the several Retreats which once existed within the purviews of Epping Forest during the inter-war years. Since I first rediscovered this 'tin-hut', known as Rigg's Retreat, it has always acted as a catalyst for memories of my schoolboy days way back in the Twenties. We would arrive in the area of Epping Forest by a bus hired for the day, although sometimes we travelled by train, and then we would be let loose in the forest. Fun and games would pass away the time until we were assembled to enter one of these Retreats for refreshments. Therein we would gorge ourselves with lashings of bread and marge and jam, washed down with mugs of tea, and, whether we felt blown out or not, we grabbed our just share of buns and apples to scoff on our journey home.

Just prior to leaving the forest we would all go absolutely mad in order to collect a bunch of wild flowers as quickly as possible to take home to the mums who would be waiting on our return back in Bromley-by-Bow. The bunch of flowers for mum was the done thing although by the time she had received them they had undergone a great change from their pristine condition when picked! During the whole of the return journey the bunch of flowers would be gripped tightly in one hand - the other being free for fighting or pinching someone's apple or sweets. If we had a real rough-house the flowers would go scattering all around the upper deck of the bus where they would remain until we had all exhausted our energy and settled down to collect them and redistribute them among the gang just in time to clamber down from the upper deck of the bus to present them to mum accompanied by kisses all round and choirboy innocence regained. 'Sorry they're in a bit of a state mum'...'That's alright sonny-boy, it's the thought that counts'.

Mum was the patriarchal figure in those days. She was responsible for the children in every respect. Father would only emphasise and support her discipline when necessary. His task was to work and support the family and make decisions upon family matters whenever he felt it necessary, otherwise he would like nothing better than to be left in peace after a hard day at the workshop to enjoy a glass of tippie and settle down in his easy chair. The children were primarily mum's responsibility from birth until they handed over their first wage packet. It was not the custom for married women to work in those days unless they were widows and obviously had to take on a job to support their children; and for many an unfortunate widow it was indeed a struggle to maintain their families upon the somewhat meagre weekly pittance received from the Relieving Officer.

Fifty years later with affluence visible everywhere, despite inflation, it is difficult for people to understand, or, might I add, want to understand, the problems of family maintenance overcome by the mums of the Twenties and Thirties. When you realise that in the 'well-off' working-class families dad brought home a weekly wage of but £2/10/- to £3/-/- and that the labourer, many of whom were employed on a temporary basis, would be lucky to receive £1/10/- for his week's graft, most families were barely existing and for many life was hard going. Of course you will comment that everything was cheaper in those days - a suite of furniture but a few pounds, rents varying from 7/6 to 12/- per week, etc. That may be so but don't run away with the idea that life was a 'bed of roses'. Every single family had to watch expenditure very carefully whether the family earner was a labourer, artisan, ganger or foreman. The eking out of the family income was mum's responsibility and she struggled through her weekly task often to her own detriment, in many cases by starving herself to feed the youngsters.

How did she cope with her job of family provisioner? How did she learn the 'know-how' remembering that the majority had only acquired a sparse education as young girls from a Board School for which they paid 1d a week, often attending infrequently. As they grew older and married they acquired knowledge of learning to live simply by gossiping to others, especially their elders, and learning from their experience and ideas, for example upon such a practical matter as making money 'go as far as possible' especially with regard to food which I shall mention in more detail later on. But first let me emphasise the real need for additional income to enlarge the family budget. The day when young Alice, Edie, or Bill would be leaving school at fourteen to start out at work and contribute to the family unit was eagerly awaited. This great financial need by all families I can now more fully appreciate than when but 12 years old. I can now understand why many of my young contemporaries who were intellectually brilliant for their age were deprived of attendance at grammar school or technical school beyond the age of 14 years, because of the dire need for family incomes to be supplemented.

I was extremely fortunate with my family circle. I was born 25 April 1915 into a family of an elder brother and two sisters ... but fifteen years later. We resided in Priory Street, situated within the parish of Bromley St. Leonard. My mother used to quip that I was an afterthought. Whatever she intended to mean by such a remark I have never quite worked out. However, when the opportunity arose for me to attend the School of Engineering and Navigation, situated in Poplar High Street, my mum was most enthusiastic but my father was dubious as to whether he should agree to my being at school for a few years longer than the norm.

A chance remark by dad to his works manager about the proposal tipped the scales in my favour and a new phase in my life began. My sisters and brother, all being married by now, our family became a one-child family and, with three mouths to feed, mum's problem of maintenance was made much easier, but the money still had to be stretched even though supplemented by



Bromley High Street c.1926

a small L.C.C. education grant. My dad, bless him, a dour Liverpudlian, was still concerned about the expenditure on school uniform, drawing instruments and books I needed. 'Is all this really necessary?' he asked. Once again a word with his works manager changed his attitude towards my obtaining the necessary equipment I required.

I've digressed slightly to comment upon my family unit in order to stress that while we were better off than many, remembering that my dad was in permanent employment whereas many wage earners were constantly in and out of work, there were still occasions when it became a struggle to make ends meet; I became very conscious of that fact that I should be contributing to the family income and mentioned the fact to my mother. Her reply was most emphatic - I was to keep going and not even consider the idea of doing an odd job on Saturdays. She obviously mentioned her feelings to dad and stressed them very strongly as when he and I next went to watch West Ham play at Upton Park he mentioned the need for me to stick at school as he would manage somehow.

Now to mum's ability as a housekeeper. Her system was not unique. Her technique of shopping and making the food go down the week was similar in most families. I would accompany her shopping on Saturday evenings along the Roman Road market - we would walk the distance to the market



St. Leonard's
Street looking
towards Bow
Bridge, 1937

and think nothing of it. In those days the shops and the stalls were operating until nigh on midnight. The brightly lit shops and the well-lit stalls with their sizzling paraffin or carbide lamps coupled with the back-chat salesmanship of the stall-owners and the crowds of shoppers milling everywhere - the whole scene was characteristic of a carnival atmosphere.

To the young mind it was an adventure to worm one's way in and out of the crowded scene. As soon as we arrived at Roman Road I would go into the pudding and pie shop and buy a slice of plum pudding to munch whilst mum would say that she would not be a minute as she had to see someone. This used to puzzle me at first until my inquisitiveness got the better of me on one occasion and I followed her to discover that she popped into a nearby pub for a glass and was sitting talking to other shoppers likewise engaged. When after a few minutes she came out and discovered that I was waiting outside instead of outside the plum-duff shop she nearly had a fit. 'Don't you dare mention this to dad, if you do I'll kill you' she said, and thereupon bought me another slice of plum-duff - no doubt to seal my lips. I kept my word but often laughed to myself about the incident that evening.

We would then progress to her favourite butcher's shop. She would buy a joint of meat of a size suitable to last us down the week. Of course, we had the additions according to season: cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, peas, beans and potatoes. Nevertheless meat was the staple diet and the joint was the

item of greatest expenditure.

Mother would rise early on a Sunday morning to prepare the food for dinner - which in East London was the main meal of the day, served during the week at about 12.30 to 1 p.m. and on Sundays anytime between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. sometimes a little earlier depending on family arrangements. Dad would rise a little later on Sunday, wash, then attire himself in his Sunday-best (a navy blue serge suit and bowler hat). Watch and chain displayed across waistcoat, he would sally forth to meet his workmates either at a pub in the Roman Road or in Mile End near the fairground (behind the present Mile End Station). They must have drunk little and talked a lot as never once did he come home drunk. At Xmas he would bring home small presents from the various licensees, such as a tobacco tin or pouch or an ash-tray, all suitably engraved. This was a custom in those days. Such was dad's weekly habit. He would never go out throughout the whole week except for this jaunt on a Sunday morning. He would always have an half-pint with his midday meal throughout the working week - mum used to pop round the corner to the Priory Tavern with the jug - during the winter months she would warm it by placing a red-hot poker in it. Dad would never drink in the evening but reserved that period to enjoy smoking a cigar which he would buy every other day and cut in half. He detested cigarettes - called them paper-pipes. His liking for cigars seemingly stemmed from the fact that my grandmother in Liverpool used to hand-roll them for sale. When a member of the family arrived back from America and brought him a present of a box of cigars he was most moved and made them last for ages.

With the preparation of Sunday dinner complete we would be obliged to await the return of dad before it was served - never a moment before. He was always on time .. 2 p.m. How regular were the habits of families in those days! Dinner served - we would settle down to stuff ourselves with meat, potatoes, carrots and greens; to be followed by what was then called 'afters' which would be either rhubarb/apple and custard or the occasional treacle or syrup pudding. Absolutely blown out we would rest awhile and then dad would retire to have a laydown, not before checking that I would be going off to Sunday-school. My absence during the afternoon would give mum an opportunity for a quiet rest - leaving the washing up until I returned to help, although if I was ever late she would do it herself not forgetting to emphatically remind me of the fact when I did arrive home.

Sunday afternoon was the customary time for the 'shrimp and winkle' man to call around the streets, either with a pony and cart, or hand-barrow, or in some cases carrying a large wicker basket, to display his shell-fish. Our Sunday tea more often than not comprised shrimps or winkles, sometimes cockles if mum felt like spending time thoroughly washing the grit away. Such shell fish was quite fresh and would have come from the suppliers at Leigh-on-Sea. After tea and the washing up complete I would go off to evening service at Kingsley Hall, sometimes accompanied by mum; dad would settle down in his favourite chair and oscillate between dozing and looking at the *News of the World*. Sometimes he would go out for a walk

and a drink but never to church. As a child he had attended church in Liverpool but drifted away as he grew older. Like many of his own age group he was confused by the church's blessing of guns in the First World War and whilst not in any way holding pacifist convictions he could not relate the church's glorification of war to the gospel message he had been taught. Within our little community in Bromley, church attendance was greater within the non-conformist churches; even so men were in a minority within such congregations.

My mother used to attend the Bruce Road Congregational Church and it was there that she met Muriel and Doris Lester who occasionally visited the mid-week Women's Meeting to present a musical programme, Doris singing and Muriel accompanying on the piano. Ultimately they arranged and led the weekly meeting. This was one of the contacts with Bow and Bromley made by the Lesters which eventually led to the establishment of the Kingsley Hall Social Settlement, in memory of their brother Kingsley who died at the early age of 26 years during 1914. The sisters and their brother moved to live in No.60 Bruce Road during 1912 and subsequently, in 1914 the adjoining property No.58 was acquired and adult social activities arranged. Later, in 1915, they acquired an old Baptists 'Zion' Chapel situated in Botolph Road which was adapted as the first Kingsley Hall and opened in February. Ultimately further sites were acquired for the building of the Children's House in Eagling Road (1923) and the new Kingsley Hall in Powis Road (1928).

My mother was one of a small bunch of local people who participated in the early days - in fact I was the first baby born to the membership after the first Kingsley Hall was opened and my christian name was taken from Kingsley Lester whom my mother knew and admired very much and not from the 'Hall' which many locals thought. Kingsley Hall was to continue for fifty years clothed in 'bricks and mortar', but continued thereafter, not only in the hearts and minds of its members, but put into practice by their actions and service to their fellows in many varying ways. The story of Kingsley Hall would take a book or two to record and is not for this account but it has to be mentioned because it played such a large part in my mother's life and in my own upbringing virtually from the cradle and therefore continuously in one way or another.

The 'Lesters' breathed fresh air into the somewhat drab surroundings of my neighbourhood and their advanced social ideas at the time surprised the local churches and occasionally the local authorities too. Kingsley Lester was to become a Baptist minister had not the illness which led to his early death, prevented such aspirations. Muriel and Doris resolved to set up the settlement to implement and improve upon some of his ideas for community service as a practical form of memorial. It was initially financed by their father, H.E. Lester, a shipwright whose business operated within the Royal Albert Docks. He had started work at the early age of 12 years, being apprenticed to George Russell at the Shipyard in Millwall. He worked as a young draughtsman on the plans of Brunel's 'Great Eastern' which was laid down at this yard. I can see him now, in my mind's eye ... a pleasant

and kindly patriarchal figure with his long flowing white beard. I spent many a happy time at his Loughton home 'The Grange'. He died at the age of 91 years in 1927.

Of course, life is such, that at the age of 12 years I was not to know that almost five decades later I was to become an enthusiastic industrial archaeologist. He would have told me much. Alas, few written records remain of his business activities except that I have gleaned from an early copy of the *Stratford Express* that he designed one of the earliest electrically driven yachts. According to Muriel, he was much associated with the design and/or the construction of the cylinder which encased 'Cleopatra's Needle' when it was towed from Egypt to the Embankment in London; but, so far, I have not discovered any written record relating to his connection with this matter.

At Kingsley Hall I received an informal 'cultural education' second to none. My somewhat natural interest in both music and art was really activated and extended by the patient attention given me by various members of staff who were professional in these fields and gave a year or two to assisting the Settlement in various 'arts and craft' subjects. Apart from the arts my mind was stretched to think in a disciplined manner from an early age by the graded Sunday-school programmes initiated by Doris Lester who was a pioneer in this field, and I, with my mates, took part in many a demonstration school held on Saturdays at the Children's House in the presence of a large crowd of visiting teachers.

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Committee
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 DORIS LESTER
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 HERBERT J. ELVIN
 ABE LAMES
 GORDON PATERPOOL

Advertisement from
 the *Poplar
 Official
 Guide*, 1927

Appeal leaflet
 1944. The
 building has
 been left
 derelict since
 1970

In later years came the very popular Workers Educational Association classes. There was also the small group led by the Marquis of Tavistock relating to his interpretation of the New Testament. 'Tavvy' as we used to call him would arrive via Bow Road station and walk to Kingsley Hall - tweed suit and cap - for his class and serious discussion. Another of Kingsley Hall's dearest friends was Sybil Thorndike, a close friend of the Lesters and a prominent supporter throughout the years. Her recitations from *St. Joan* and poems also I can vividly recall ... she held us all spellbound! Praise God for the Lesters' service to the neighbourhood—a cry that will find an echo in the hearts of many generations of members and friends now scattered throughout the world.

I appear to be straying from my brief. Not really. A typical week in the life of the family cannot help but lead me into sidelight comments relating to associated places and people.

Monday was, as now, a dull day - back to school for me and the return to work for dad. Mum's task was to face the week until Friday pay-day and make the cash spin out. First she would get down to the task of picking up the 'coconut-mats' in the passage and bash the dust out of them - carpets would be hung over the clothes-line in the yard and similarly bashed. The area around the front door would be scrubbed and the step whitened with hearth-stone. The big iron-basin set in a brick-surround in the scullery (known as the 'copper') would be filled with water and heated by lighting the fire set underneath. By the time she had completed cleaning the mats and the doorstep the water in the copper would be boiling hot and ready to receive the family wash. There was no soap powder in those days - slabs of washing soap were used on the old scrubbing-board once the clothes had been given a good soak in hot water. Plenty of elbow-grease was used up in the process which induced much perspiration on the brow of the washer, what with the physical effort involved and the steam rising from the hot water in the copper. Many a mother although poorly in health, still carried out this weekly washing routine because she felt that it was incumbent on her to maintain clean underclothes for the family. It is not surprising that the health of many a mother suffered as a consequence, especially those who took in washing to earn just a few extra pennies a week - rheumatism and arthritis took its toll and expressed itself later in life in swollen fingers and knuckle-joints.

Our main meal on Mondays was slices of cold meat from the Sunday joint together with bubble-and-squeak and pickles. The remaining meat was minced and put into a pie for Tuesday's meal. The resultant bone with a little meat attached was put into the stock-pot, sometimes with the addition of scrag, with vegetables such as carrots, turnips, etc. thrown in. This would be kept simmering until Wednesday and became with the addition of 'Bisto' and potatoes, our main meal. To manage four days from the one joint necessitated the ability to get the size right in the first place. Another provision from this weekly joint would be a substantial amount of 'dripping' which went down well on toasted bread and a dash of salt - I could work my

Bromley St.
Leonard,
1935



way through a loaf in no time. You do not seem to be able to obtain such good dripping in these days, otherwise I would suggest you try it with a slice of toast and salt. In the time I am referring to we had to slice the bread from a cottage loaf and toast the slices on a toasting-fork, made of heavy-gauged wire with three prongs; and even though the fork was nearly two feet long the back of your hand holding it to the fire got really hot and you were glad of the break to eat the slice. On Thursdays the main meal would be liver and bacon, or boiled pig's-trotter, or tripe boiled in milk. Fridays we had fish. Saturday was a snack-day in our family circle. Dad would be working up to 1 p.m. and would either come with me to the Hammers when they had a home game or go shop-window gazing either at Stratford or to Crisp Street market - thinking little of walking to these places.

It is strange for me to recall now that the only break my father had from work was Saturday afternoon and Sunday - sometimes not that if overtime working was necessary. Even a summer break of one week's unpaid holiday had not reached his firm let alone a paid week's holiday. Yet he appeared content with his lot - probably because it was a routine he grew into and had adapted himself to it.

Yet social reforms embodied in proposals were developing and spreading throughout the neighbourhood by public meetings organised by the local Labour Party where, more often than not, the main speaker would be George Lansbury, and the one-time Liberal stronghold of Bow and Bromley was capitulating to the newcomer's ideas of social reform. It was unusual for dad to give up his evening armchair period but he certainly did in order to attend these meetings and listen to the speakers, especially George Lansbury.

I remember most vividly the serious and responsible manner in which he approached the recording of his vote at elections. After arriving home from his day's work he would have his tea, then have another wash and change into his Sunday-best, then walk from home to the Old Palace School Polling Station, a short distance of but 100 yards, record his vote, come straight home again, and as he would never sit around the house in his best suit, change back into other clothes and settle back in his easy chair. It always seemed quite a performance just to record an X in a matter of minutes. He was not alone in the desire to appear clean and tidy within public buildings. An old saying in the East End related to soap and water costing little and even if poor and shoddily clothed it was still possible to make an effort to present an appearance of cleanliness and tidiness.

My dad and his contemporaries had grasped a vision of a new life ahead, probably not for them, but certainly for their children and they put their combined weight in support of the then new party. The results of those early beginnings were never fully realised in his lifetime but certainly I and others of my generation have lived to see social improvements undreamed of when I was a child. Paid holidays of at least a fortnight enabling trips to Spain for the whole family contrasts greatly to my dad's firm's annual out-

ing day when they travelled by horse-brake, and later by charabanc, to such far away places as Theydon Bois or Epping. In later years they ventured further to Southend or Margate!! Just one day's break in a year. It makes me shudder!!

Back again to mum. Among her duties to the family she acted as 'doctor' for slight ailments, unless your condition deteriorated then the local doctor was called in. You have to remember that a visit to the doctor cost money and became a further drain on the weekly expenditure. Indications of a slight cold would mean bed for me - juice of lemon in hot water and a day or two remaining there consuming soups or bread and milk. Usually after a couple of days you were able to get up and about again. If, however, you remained hot and clammy after a night's sleep she would call in the doctor to have a look at you in order to be on the safe side. The regular functioning of the bowels would be assisted by various concoctions obtainable from the chemist. For my part I especially remember sennapods and Scotts emulsion. The latter I could smell when the spoon was a yard away and my poor old stomach would roll over and over. Cod-liver oil was another favourite of the mums, not forgetting sticks of liquorice. In their gossipings they would swap the success or failure of such administrations to their offspring. Another 'cure' administered by them was to take a child recovering from whooping-cough on a bus ride to the Green Man; the fresh air treatment seated on the open upper deck was considered to be beneficial. An alternative to this was to take the child to the local gasworks to get a whiff of the tarpots. A great spring- tonic was a mixture of brimstone and treacle! A few more for you to reflect upon ... the wearing of camphor-blocks to prevent colds and a concoction of saffron to bring out a rash!!

For far too many families the problem of money was a major one. Many were helped through the period from Monday until payday on Friday by the technique of intelligent use of the services offered by the tally-man and the pawnbroker. The services of the tally-man, now referred to as a credit draper, enabled people to purchase various domestic items and clothes on the 'never-never' (hire purchase). Repayment plus interest were payable weekly to the collector when he called. Such items would be obtainable from the tally-man on a Saturday with the benefit of Friday's weekly wage. The clothes obtained for the children would be worn on the Sunday and much admired by friends and relations.

Then on Monday morning all the various items which had been obtained on tick would be transported along to the pawnbroker's to be 'popped' in and a sub obtained on them. Such a small amount, usually, would help them down the week until payday, when the money would help them to meet the weekly commitment to the tally-man and on the Saturday to return the loan plus interest to the pawnbroker, so as to receive the goods back in time for the children to be dressed once again in their Sunday best! Of course, these poor souls were never out of debt. By the time the clothes were suffering from wear they did not fetch as much from the pawnbroker - but if by that time they had maintained regular

weekly payments to the tally-man they were eligible to obtain further goods from him. Such a circle was constantly revolving, and many a mother was 'up to her eyes in debt' ... a common saying at that time ... but, somehow, come what may, such mothers managed to survive.

It is of interest perhaps to comment that recently I wished to illustrate a pawnbroker's shopfront in Tower Hamlets and could, with the assistance of friends, discover only one left displaying the sign of the three 'golden-balls'. This shop is situated in the Bethnal Green Road. Yet in 1926 the number of pawnbrokers recorded as operating within the area of what is now Tower Hamlets was 12 in Bethnal Green, 25 in Poplar and 21 in Stepney; a grand total of 58. Such figures speak out loud and clear as to the progress made with regard to the living and working conditions of East Londoners.

So far in this article the mums of the twenties have been depicted in many roles; even so, many additional home activities they performed come to mind. I have just enough space to mention one - that of rug making. This activity was carried out by many mums and, once again they solved any problem encountered by gossiping. Any old item of discarded clothes, jackets, skirts, etc., rather than be given to the 'old rag-man' in exchange for a few pence or a cup and saucer, would be cut up into strips, approx. 5 ins. by 1 in. The base of the rug would be secondhand sacks, washed clean, then opened out and stitched together according to the required size of the rug. Then patiently and systematically the pieces of cloth would be pushed in and out of the sacking by the use of a wooden awl. When this part of the process was completed, the protruding pieces of cloth were cut by scissors to a common level and another layer of sacking was sewn to the base as additional covering. Such rugs lasted for ages. My mother used to delight in making them for us and friends. She would hunt the market-stalls for various coloured cloths to match the cloth already collected and cut. These expeditions usually were a sign that a complicated pattern was in the 'pipe-line', perhaps circles surrounded by stars!!

All the mums of the inter-war years, not only in Bromley St. Leonard but throughout the whole of East London, deserve the highest praise for the manner in which, despite many handicaps, they managed to maintain and raise families of which they would be justly proud. They understood only too well, through personal suffering, that 'if you cry, you cry alone; if you laugh, the world laughs with you'.

God bless them, everyone!

Note:

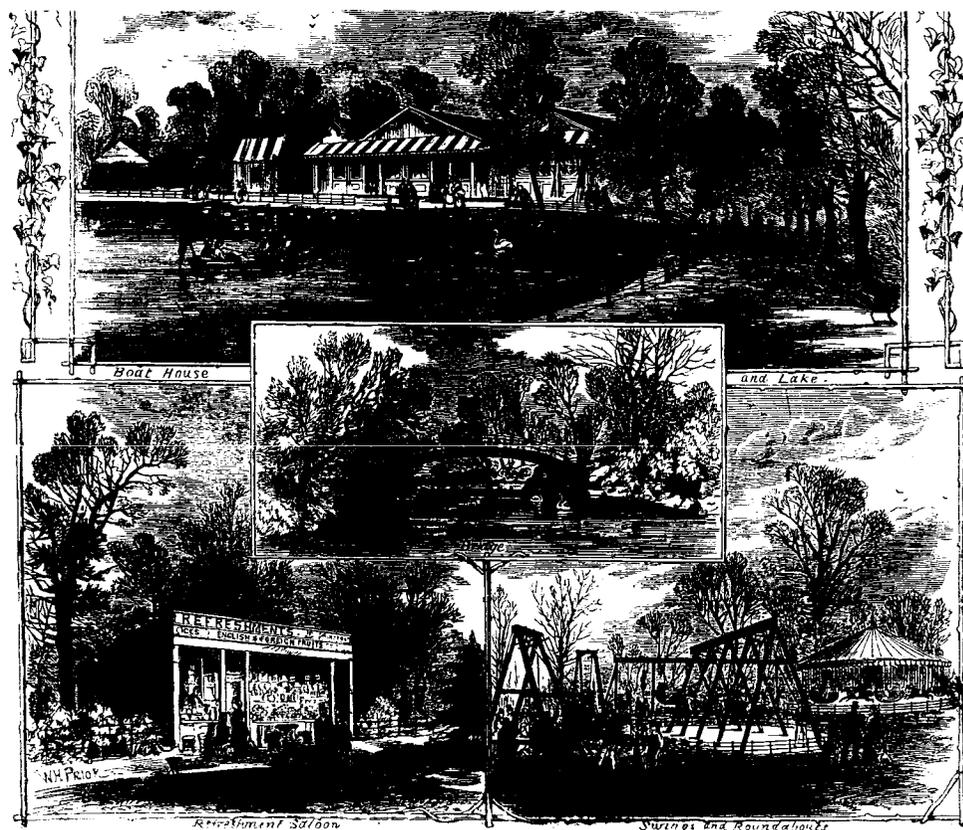
Shortly after completing this article, Kingsley Royden died suddenly. He had been a member of the East London History Society since its foundation, had frequently lectured on local history, led walks around Bromley St. Leonard and Bow, and had been preparing a history of Bromley St. Leonard, but the above is his only published piece of work. He will be remembered in particular for his efforts to establish and preserve conservation areas within Tower Hamlets and save buildings of historic and architectural interest.

BOOK REVIEW

Victoria Park by Charles Poulsen (Journeyman Press Stepney Books, 1977)

To write the story of a park is always, I think, a difficult task because in so many cases there would be little of captivating interest. This is not so with Victoria Park. To many East Londoners over the 130 years of its history it has been more than a place of physical enjoyment and mental relaxation. It has been a source of 'spiritual' uplift, a sort of home from home. How many East London mothers would say, as mine would, 'If he's not at home he's in Victoria Park'. I think Charles Poulsen has done a great deal to convey this affection held by East Londoners for 'their Park' in his interesting and exciting account of the origins and development of the Park.

One could suggest that perhaps some greater mention might have been made of the earlier history of the area. The Romans undoubtedly traversed these fields, possibly as a short cut to Old Ford during good weather. Old Ford



Road which, in itself, has a history which would fill a book, is the southern boundary of the Park. Perhaps too a little more could have been said about the Old Chapel, at one time the only building in the area, and the famous (or infamous) Bonners Fields on the western border across which a phantom coach is still said to appear frequently around midnight.

Charles Poulsen has done his homework - perhaps a little too much about Baroness Burdett-Coutts and Chartism, and I would like to have known a little more of the 'Botany Bay' or 'Water Gruel Row' settlement which has only brief mention but is shown on early maps.

As boys, we always looked upon the two sections (that to the west of Grove Road, and that to the east) as being quite separate. The smaller part to the west was for the 'elite' (we didn't go there often!) and our section was to the east where the racing tracks and sports fields were with all the attendant noise and dust! I am interested to know that this still applies and am told that even the staff regard them as two separate parks and will not willingly transfer from one to the other!

It seems a pity that the chapter on 'The Park in our own times' makes little of the current or recent activities such as the Victoria Park Harriers, Essex Ladies Athletic Club, Angling Club, Roller Skating Championships, etc. and could have spared a few lines for the interesting 'penny ticket return' to Victoria Park experiment by London Transport in 1939 during the school holidays. Mention might also have been made of the deer enclosure experiment, and of the present problems of Dutch elm and now sycamore diseases which are having a great effect on the Park, also of the important part the Park now plays with its staff of more than a hundred looking after other parks and open spaces in the vicinity.

On the whole, I found the book pleasant reading, particularly the 'Features of the Park' chapter which awakens many memories. Something had to be written sooner or later about Victoria Park and within the limitations of his resources, Charles Poulsen is to be congratulated on making the effort and doing it so well.

A.H. French

RECENT LOCAL HISTORY STUDIES IN TOWER HAMLETS AND HACKNEY

Books & Pamphlets

Barnes, Ron
Coronation Cups and Jam Jars;
a portrait of an East End family
through three generations.
Centerprise, 1976

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Black, Graham	The Archaeology of Tower Hamlets. Inner London Archaeological Unit, 1977
Geffrye Museum	Lousy but Loyal: Royal Jubilee in the East End. Geffrye Museum. 1977
Hoxton Hall	Hoxton Hall: a short history. Hoxton Hall, 1977
Huguenot Society of London	The French Protestant Hospital: extracts from the archives of 'La Providence'. The Society, 1977
Hurd, Edgar	Eighty-six Years - plus: the story of the London Graving Dock Company 1890-1976. The Company, 1976
Janzon, K. and Johnson, A.	The Changing Face of Newington Green. The Factory, 107 Matthias Road, N.16, 1977
Kerrigan, Colm	Local History in the Junior School. Mile End Teachers' Centre, 1976. (Local History work at the former George Lansbury School, Bow)
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M. Th. thesis, London, 1976.
- Ramsay, Edith Life in Stepney - World War II
1939-45. Typescript, 1976.

Selected Recent Manuscript Deposits

In Hackney Library Services - Archives

- Hackney Trades Council and various local branches of Trade Unions
1891-1975 (incomplete)
- Dalston Congregational Church (now F.R.C.) 1874-1946
- Pawnall Road Congregational Church, 1866-1963
- 2nd Br. 10 London Road, 1915-1918 - Typed transcript of war diary

In Tower Hamlets Local History Library

- Poplar Municipal Alliance, 1927-1967, and Stepney Municipal Alliance
1905-1962
- East End Maternity Hospital, 1884-1968, and London Jewish Hospital
1919-1937
- Material collected by the late D.E. Munby for the compilation of
Industry and Planning in Stepney (OUP, 1951)

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