

The East London History Society

PROGRAMME 1982/83

1982			
30 Sept	People of New Lots in the 19th Century	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
Hours:	The Parkies and the Hamlets F. Sainsbury B.F.M.		
30 Sept	Annual General Meeting	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
Wed:	followed by Members' Evening		
25 Nov	Lower Hamlets Joint Annual Dinner	Central Library, Bessieford Road	7.45 pm
Hours:	Mr Raphael Samuel "Dickens in the Hamlets" Honey & Myles on T. London		
16 Dec	East London: Participation in the Spenser Case	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
	Charles's Contribution		
1983			
20 Jan	Narratives in the Workhouse	Queen Mary College	7.40 pm
Hours:	East London Library: History Society		
17 Feb	Waltham St Giles's, Mother's Hamlets	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
Hours:	Dr K. Bennett		
24 Mar	Richard Harlow: Journal	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
Hours:	R. J. Banks		
10 Apr	Hamlets Excursion	Royal Holloway Library	7.30 pm
Hours:	Subject to be announced	The Beaumont Road, Hackney	
17 May	The Hamlets during News	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
Hours:	Colin Clark		
22 June	Members' Evening	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
Wed:	East London History Society		

The East London History Society exists to further interest in the history of East London, namely the London Boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets.

Information about the Society can be obtained from:

The Membership Secretary, 39 Haringer Road, London E.14.

75p

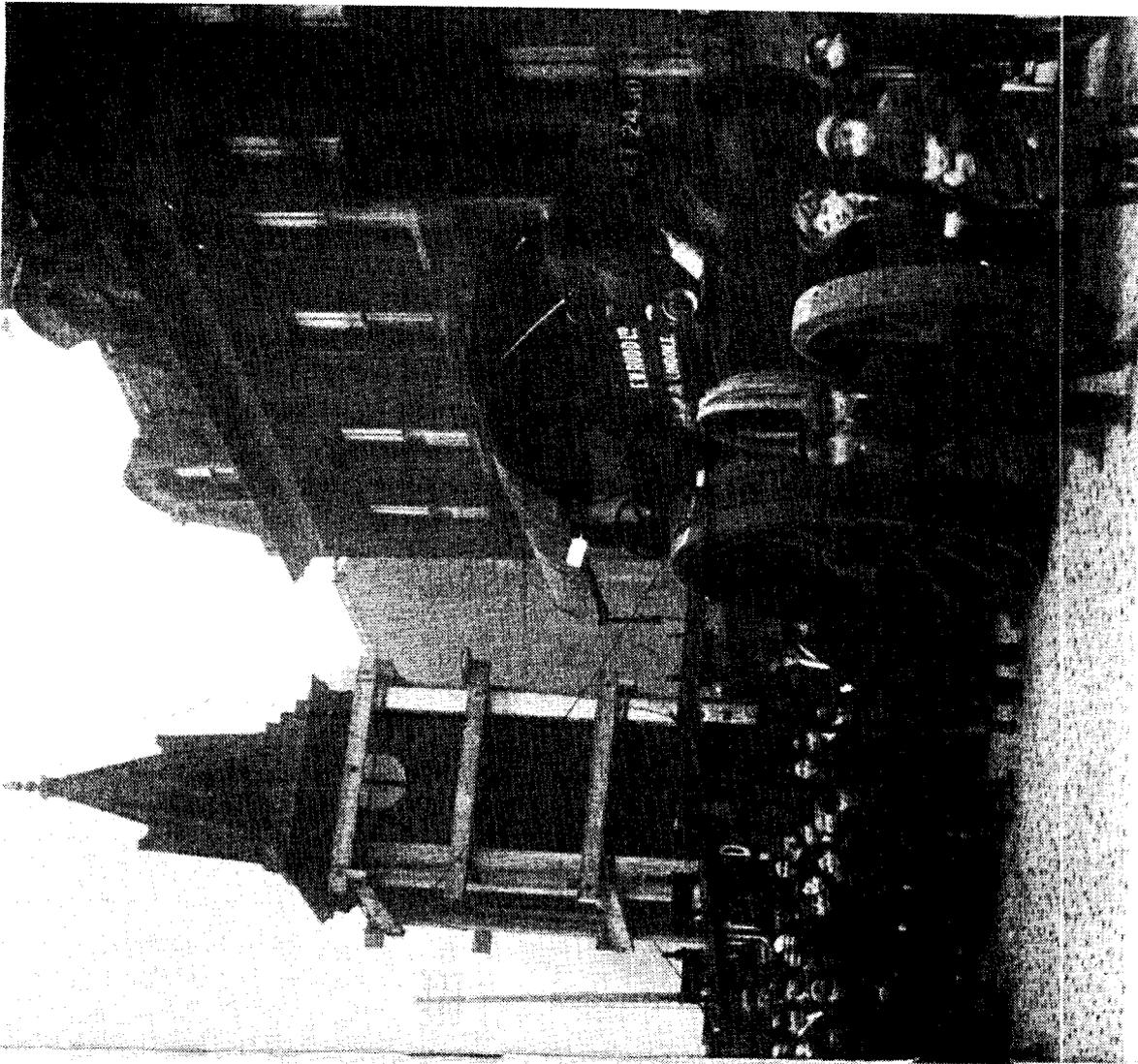
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# EAST LONDON RECORD

No. 5

1982



## EAST LONDON RECORD

Editor: Colm Kerrigan

The East London History Society publishes the *East London Record* once a year. We welcome articles, which should be between 1,000 and 4,000 words, on any aspect of the history of Hackney, Newham or Tower Hamlets. Articles may be based on personal reminiscences or on research. The editor will be happy to discuss plans for projected articles and work in progress. Articles may be handed in at the Local History Library, Tower Hamlets Central Library, Bancroft Road, London E1 4DQ, or sent by post to the editor at 38 Ridgale Street, London E3 2TW.

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Cover illustration: An authentic local view of the thirties, especially its schoolchildren, is caught in this Whiffin photograph of the setting up of the clock tower on Stepney Green.

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## WOMEN IN POLITICS

Elizabeth Vallance

WHEN women over thirty achieved the vote in 1918, it was assumed by the suffragettes and their supporters that more and more of them would come into both local and national politics and sit in the House of Commons. Yet in the General Election of 1918 no women at all were returned, although 17 of them had stood as candidates. It was a by-election a year later, brought about by the elevation to the Lords of Waldorf Astor, which gave the House its first woman member. It is nearly 63 years since Lady Astor became member for Plymouth (Sutton); yet in that time, despite enormous changes in attitudes to women, the passing of the Equal Pay Act, the anti-discrimination legislation, the setting up of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the election of a woman Prime Minister, despite all this, women are still dramatically under-represented in Parliament. Since 1979 only nineteen of the 635 members of the House of Commons have been women — less than 3% of the total. Women, on the other hand, make up rather more than half the electorate (in 1979 the figure was around 52%). And although the present number in Parliament is particularly low — the lowest for thirty years — this doesn't mean that it has ever been high. Never have more than 29 women sat together in the House — never, that is, have women made up even 5% of the Parliamentary population.

Women who lived in, worked in, or had associations with East London have, from the last decades of the 19th century, been prominent among those whose sense of outrage at unfairness or inequality took them into the political world. Such a one was Annie Besant. A secularist and radical, she was prosecuted with Charles Bradlaugh in 1877 for publishing literature on birth control. In 1888, she waged her famous campaign on behalf of the Bryant and May match-girls; and in the same year, she stood for the London School Board in Tower Hamlets. Mrs. Besant fought that election on a programme of free, compulsory elementary education, evening classes for adults and free school meals — all radical provisions at the time. She came an easy first in the poll in the Tower Hamlets Division and was instrumental in the next few years in the quite remarkable series of educational reforms which the Board instituted. By 1890, there was free elementary education within the Board area. And although the Board could not itself supply free meals, Annie Besant initiated an enquiry into the numbers of children attending school without proper nourishment. When it was found that one in eight of the Board School children was hungry, the London School Dinners Association was founded as a voluntary body, but helped and encouraged by the London School Board and Mrs. Besant.

Annie Besant's campaign here is interesting from several points of view, illustrating as it does some still common attitudes to women in politics. First of all, it is perhaps significant that her major involvement in elected office should have been in the sphere of education. Education, along with welfare (both human and animal), and later, consumerism, has always been seen as a most appropriate 'women's specialism'. It was thought acceptable even by earlier societies largely unconvinced of the value of women in public

Annie Besant, 1888

(National Museum  
of Labour History)



life, that they might have something to contribute in those areas where their domestic experience could be brought to bear. Women knew about children — and children's education and welfare — but of course they did *not* know about economics or foreign policy. To this day, of course, the belief continues. Of the six or seven women *ever* to be Cabinet Ministers four have been Secretary of State for Education. No woman has ever been Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary or Minister of Defence. It is no longer the case, if it ever was, that there are no women with a good grasp of economics or defence strategy, but there is a residual belief in the 'unsuitability' of such areas for women. Barbara Castle told me of her determination — even as a young Councillor — not to be assigned willy-nilly to the maternity and child welfare committee. She had, as she herself said — no special knowledge here, no children of her own, no personal experience any greater than the men and she stuck out for her real interests in transport and industry.

It's perhaps significant too that Mrs. Besant was, during her School Board campaign, personally maligned to a very great extent. The celebrated trial, in which she and Bradlaugh were the main accused, made her name a household word. This notoriety was, however, a double-edged sword and could easily be used by her detractors. Indeed, as a consequence of the trial, Mrs. Besant was denied the custody of her young daughter which she had had since her separation from her husband four years previously. Her opponents were quick to assert that if she was judged an unfit person to be the guardian of her own child, what possible claim could she have to attend to the education of other people's children.

Now, it is undoubtedly the case that politics is a public business and politicians must expect to have their personal lives investigated and at times perhaps painfully exposed to public interest and censure. Yet the position of women here is, and always has been, particularly vulnerable. And this is specially the case where a woman's domestic life is presented as other than unblemished. It's difficult to escape the conclusion that the basis of the rather unequal standard imposed on women and men here is largely the outcome of an assumption of the ultimate incompatibility of politics — seen as the pursuit of power in an egotist, opinionated, assertive way — and femininity — which is archetypically other-relating, caring and compassionate. Can a woman, we sceptically ask (or certainly the media do) be both truly political and truly feminine — and we look for real-life examples to back up our prejudice. A woman, who, more recently than Mrs. Besant, brought out our same apparent fascination with public life and motherhood was Helene Hayman — Member of Parliament in the 1974-79 administration. By her own account, Mrs. Hayman was positively pursued by the press, who having taken their unsolicited photographs of her infant son then suggested that these were proof of her scandalous personal publicity-seeking. Her every word on child-care was assiduously reported — while it was suggested that she was a quite unfit mother.

It's always been recognised of course that women are more vulnerable to gossip and slander than men. A man with a dubious reputation can still be seen as 'quite a lad' — while a woman with a hint of scandal about her is probably just beyond the pale. But, 'Caesar's wife must be above suspicion' not only because her disgrace would be, by extension, his, but because women cannot survive suggestions of impropriety. And 'impropriety' here needn't have the obvious sexual connotations. I recently heard Mrs. Thatcher reduced to cold fury — if not to tears — by the indelicate probings of a male Australian interviewer. He was not accusing her of any dramatic indiscretion — rather, wasn't it the case, he said, that she bossed her own family, didn't allow them to develop themselves, and generally made them the casualties of her own soaring ambition? The questions, although they might, had he been honest, have been answered in the affirmative by many a *male* politician, would never have been asked of a man — would not indeed have been thought relevant. The shock-value of this particular inquisition was the apparent revelation

that the Iron Lady who rode rough-shod — to some applause from the gallery — over her Cabinet, and reduced strong men to tears — was not a compliant and biddable mother at home. The vehemence of Mrs. Thatcher's response showed just how seriously she too took this implicit slight on her femininity — resulting in the suggestion that she was unable to be both politician and super-mum.

On a perhaps slightly more frivolous note, it's clear from the contemporary newspaper reports on Mrs. Besant, that people, or at least journalists, were as preoccupied then as now with the physical appearance and dress of political women. Mrs. Besant's campaign of 1888 was followed with great interest in the local newspaper, the *East London Observer*, and one finds there detailed descriptions not only of her meetings and speeches but of her wardrobe, 'Dressed in a fawn-coloured, woollen dress with a white lace collarette and a gold centre-piece with a red ribbon attached as her only adornments . . .'<sup>1</sup> starts one such piece. In another place she is described as 'young and attractive with dark eyes . . . and a voice full and sonorous, but musical and not unfeminine . . .'<sup>2</sup>. It is doubtful if any man would have warranted the same comment on his appearance, and the other candidates of the time certainly did not. Yet women in politics are *still* referred to as attractive, well-dressed, pretty, blonde, (not necessarily all at once) — or alternatively as dowdy, badly-groomed, unattractive. The point is that nobody would normally think a man in an ill-pressed suit with a threadbare collar and grubby cuffs worth even a comment: yet it has become almost a media game to see who can spot the latest of Shirley Williams' sagging hemlines or unfortunate hair styles.

It is not however only men who historically have been uncertain about the entry of women into political life. Women themselves have often been very chary of supporting other women. Sometimes the reasons for this were to do with the understanding of what women should be doing in society (i.e. largely looking after men-folk and children); sometimes to do with misgivings about deeper political questions. In the spring of 1889, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, the writer, drafted an anti-suffrage manifesto which she urged well-known public women to sign. It opposed the extension of the suffrage to women — the reform for which Mrs. Fawcett (Dame Millicent) was fighting at the time — on the grounds that enfranchised women would forfeit their femininity — that men would no longer feel compelled to cherish and protect the weaker sex — and that family life would be gravely imperilled by such a development. Although the arguments here are not so popular today as they were in 1889, they are not without proponents. Read the Hansard reports of any Commons debate on women's rights — up to and including the one for June 1981 — and you will find some of the same reservations being voiced. Mrs. Jill Knight for example, is one who clearly sees — in spite of her own parliamentary career — a woman's place is largely the home and she is on record voicing many of these same concerns — not only that women joining in the public forum will leave a gap at home which cannot be filled, but also the rather quaint argument that

women who do the same jobs, following the same paths as men, will relinquish their femininity and thereby their fascination for the opposite sex. Mrs. Knight — like Mrs. Humphry Ward — often emphasises, rather desperately, I feel, the importance of keeping chivalry alive as if by graciously letting men open doors for them, women can somehow convince the male that they are still obediently submissive and unchallenging.

One woman with strong East End connections who signed Mrs. Humphry Ward's petition was Beatrice Webb (Beatrice Potter). She claimed, years later, that she almost immediately regretted it, but it was some twenty years before she publicly recanted, and when she came to justify her action in her book *My Apprenticeship*, she manifested a certain boredom and indeed distaste for what she contemptuously calls 'the perpetual reiteration of the rights of women'. But the root of her opposition is I think to be found in her own experience as a middle class, intellectual. 'I have never myself suffered', she says, 'the disabilities assumed to arise from my sex.' And she believed that her own experience could be generalised. Women could perform up to the limits of their abilities.

Again, it's an argument still used. Women can do what they want to do — including getting into politics. 'Look', said Peggy Fenner M.P. in the Women's Rights debate in the House this June, 'Look at Mrs. Thatcher!' And simplistic as this argument is, it still has its supporters. Yet what it fails to acknowledge is that although privileged, affluent, educated women, able to buy help in their homes and with their children may indeed manage, like Beatrice Webb, to do what they want to do, their experience is not universalisable. Many women who would like to be politically active are never given the encouragement or the help to do so.

Another, more sophisticated, anti-feminist argument can also be traced to East London and to one of the best-loved of the middle class Socialists who, as Gareth Stedman Jones says in *Outcast London*, intermittently mapped out the East End, catering 'to an insatiable middle class demand for travellers' tales'. Eleanor Marx, Marx's youngest daughter, the delightful, committed and ultimately tragic Tussy, was one who took the line that the goal was the liberation of the *working class* and it was flippant and selfish of women to press for their own interests ahead of this. In any case, the end of the capitalist economic structure would mean the end of the exploitation of the worker, whether male or female. Eleanor thought that women should fight not against, but as Yvonne Kapp says in her brilliant biography, 'in alliance with their menfolk on a class basis; that only so could they become free and equal human beings, or indeed human beings at all in the fullest sense'.<sup>3</sup>

When Mrs. Humphry Ward's petition was published, it immediately aroused the fury of many women committed to the suffrage cause. The March 1890 issue of the journal *The 19th Century* carried a persuasive letter, countering point by point the original petition, and signed by some two



Beatrice Webb, aged 33

hundred women — including Olive Schreiner the novelist; Elizabeth Garrett Anderson the pioneer woman doctor (who was born at No. 1 Commercial Road — later to become Gardiner's Corner); and Clementina Black, the librarian of the People's Palace in the Mile End Road (now home of Queen Mary College). Clementina Black was a friend of Eleanor Marx's and as a graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge, she was appalled to think that University women should oppose the extension of the suffrage. She was also appalled when Eleanor refused to sign the counter-petition — not on the grounds that she thought politics an inappropriate activity for women (she had after all herself been deeply involved almost since her childhood) — but because she was unwilling to support the aspirations of what she took to be unrepresentative, educated, middle class women. The liberal reforms — including the extension of the suffrage — which the middle classes so

assiduously advocated, would benefit the middle classes, and leave as before the deep class cleavages which formed the basis of the oppression of both *men and women*. The pamphlet she wrote, with Edward Aveling, on *The Woman Question* makes this quite clear. The fundamental changes would have to be social and economic and even if women were able to vote and were represented in all the professions, including politics, still she says 'the actual position of women in respect to men would not be vitally touched, . . . without a larger social change, women will never be free'.

Again, it's a belief still held by some socialists, but, I think, a declining number. Fewer and fewer women are prepared to believe now that the status of women is somehow written into the nature of the world — even a capitalist world. Changes *have* been made; and they seem to have been as much a result of the strength and commitment of the opposition, as of the force of the materialist dialectic. Of course, ultimately, Eleanor Marx was right: the *full* acceptance of women in public life requires a change not just in the law, in the mechanics of democracy, but a change in attitudes. Yet changes in attitudes are long-run, and it's worth remembering that, as Keynes said, 'in the long-run, we're all dead.' Legislation for equal opportunities or anti-discrimination cannot, of course, of itself give women equality, but it can do much to make clear society's — at least official — attitude here. And over time, this erodes the respectability of the anti-feminist position. (In the same way as for example the Race Relations Act did — at least for a time — make overt racial prejudice shameful and unacceptable).

But Eleanor Marx's position is in a sense taken by all women in public life, who would agree that they are in politics not as women but as people. Women M.P.'s — of all parties — have said to me again and again that they are not women M.P.'s, but M.P.'s who happen to be women. As Susan Lawrence was wont to say — 'We don't call Churchill a *man* M.P.' It's sometimes been suggested, though, that women *should* band together and form a Women's Party, committed to women's interests and the advancement and protection of women's rights. Christabel Pankhurst, who was deeply sceptical of male motives and values, stood for Parliament in 1918 as an Independent Woman's Party Candidate. She was, of course, defeated, but the idea did not die. Lady Astor, motivated by her own idiosyncratic brand of feminism, summoned all the women of the 1929 Parliament to lunch and then lectured them on the iniquities of party politics and the over-riding importance of their duty to their sisters in the country. They must, she insisted, form what she called a 'female phalanx' to ensure that women's interests were properly accounted. The politically committed, largely Labour women of that time, were not impressed. And it's hard to see how it could be otherwise. Women, like men, go into politics by and large, for party political reasons. Their politics far outweigh their feminism — or, as Eleanor Rathbone, the formidable Independent M.P. put it 'You can't have a Woman's Party because of politics'.



*Alderman Mrs. Minnie Lansbury on her way to prison during the Poplar rates dispute in 1921*

If the East End of London has produced or nurtured many of those who have, for one reason or another, been uncertain about the claims of women in political life, it has also produced some of the staunchest and most unswerving supporters.

George Lansbury's support for the suffragettes was unqualified. He simply believed that they were morally right and the male House of Commons morally wrong. He staked his Parliamentary career on that belief, resigning his seat, Bow and Bromley, and fighting a by-election on the issue. He lost, but continued to fight for the women's cause. Perhaps it was this original commitment which brought so many of the Lansburys into politics in this area — not just the men, but the women too. It's a well-attested claim that politics — like so many other callings — runs in families. All the way from the great political dynasties like the Churchills and the Devonshires, to the M.P. whose parents were active in the local Labour Party, one finds political activity is very largely bred in the bone. Of course the political involvement of parents may give their children not only a direct help on the way to active involvement, but also a sense of the significance and acceptability of politics. In the case of women, I think this influence may be even stronger, in that a family which takes politics seriously may counteract the general belief that politics is 'not a woman's business'. Women themselves in this environment will be encouraged implicitly, either not to develop, or to overcome the belief which seems to overtake adolescent girls, that it is only *men's* judgements that are respected and listened to in the political sphere.

In the present Parliament, many of the women come from political families — Shirley Summerskill is very much her mother's daughter; Gwyneth Dunwoody is the daughter of Morgan Phillips, sometime General Secretary of the Labour Party; her mother Baroness Phillips is now in the Lords. Margaret Thatcher, Lynda Chalker, Joan Lestor, Joan Maynard, Ann Taylor — all came from families where parents were politically active in one way or another.

When Minnie Lansbury<sup>4</sup> went to prison in 1921, along with the other Poplar Councillors for refusing, as they said, to have 'the poor subsidize the poor', she knew she had the support of her husband Edgar and her father-in-law, George, who went with her. It was almost a family business! And several of the other women shared their political concern with husbands. Julia Scurr<sup>5</sup> for example, brought up to activism in the Irish Movement by her father, John O'Sullivan, was married to another Councillor, John Scurr. Nellie Cressall,<sup>6</sup> who was to remain as a Poplar Councillor until 1965, was married to George Cressall, another Councillor, who was to become Mayor of Poplar in the 1930's.

Perhaps the woman who became best-known nationally of the Poplar Councillors was Susan Lawrence, who went on to become, representing East Ham, the first Labour woman M.P. She was elected in 1923, along with Margaret Bondfield and Dorothy Jewson, but since her result was the first to be announced, she has officially the honour of being the first Labour woman. She too came from a political family, but of a rather different complexion from that of her colleagues. Her father was a well-known lawyer and a staunch Tory. She took the maths tripos at Newnham College, Cambridge and afterwards became interested in local government. In 1910, she was



*Margaret Bondfield, Susan Lawrence and Dorothy Jewson, photographed in 1924*

elected to the then L.C.C. (London County Council) as a 'moderate' (which meant Conservative). The story of her radicalisation is well-known. Put on a committee to look into the conditions of L.C.C. cleaners, she was appalled by their pay and the circumstances in which they worked. She resigned her seat on the London County Council in 1912 and joined the Labour Party. She became a Fabian, a disciple of the Webbs, and was elected again to the L.C.C. — this time as a Labour member for Poplar, where she lived. She went to prison as one of the Poplar Councillors, and, never one to waste time or opportunities, she spent her six weeks 'inside' writing a pamphlet on tax reform.

It's an enormous tribute to a woman of Susan Lawrence's background that she was genuinely loved and admired in the East End and an indication too of the perspicacity and great good sense of her constituents that they saw through the upper-middle class packaging to the honest, concerned individual beneath.

She did not have a social or educational experience in common with them — indeed Margaret Bondfield (first woman Cabinet Minister) in her autobiography recalls her advice to Susan to get rid of her monocle and try to modify her clipped, upper class tones. In time, the monocle went and the accent *may* have been toned down, but she remained true to herself — with her cropped hair and somewhat brusque manner — and her people accepted ‘our Susan’, as she was known, for what she was.

Susan Lawrence made her mark on British politics in more ways than one. When she entered Parliament, no woman had been made a Parliamentary Private Secretary — the often crucial first step on the ministerial ladder. There was uncertainty about appointing a woman here because, the argument went, women did not go into the smoking room where much of the House gossip took place and since part of a P.P.S.’s job is to keep the Minister in touch, a woman would not so adequately fulfil this function. Susan Lawrence, who smoked like a chimney, was not impressed by this argument and she did ultimately become Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of Education. Just to drive the point home, when she became a Minister, she appointed another woman, Ellen Wilkinson, as her own P.P.S.

Many other women with East London associations could have been mentioned — Margaret Harkness, the writer, for example who gives us what my friend and colleague Bill Fishman graphically describes as ‘verbal photographs of East End life’,<sup>8</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Franchise and her lieutenants Daisy and Jessie Lansbury and Melvina Walker — as well as all those who one way or another adopted the area: Octavia Hill, Henrietta Barnett, and Angela Burdett-Coutts. The tradition of the political involvement of women has, it seems, a long history here and it’s not therefore so surprising to learn that it continues into the present time, with for example, a high percentage of women Councillors in Tower Hamlets.

In the country as a whole, however, and particularly at national level, women remain lamentably absent from our political life. This loss of half our talent is wasteful: the virtual neglect of the interests and experience of half our population must be seen as arrogant and misled. But perhaps most important of all is the inevitable disenchantment of women themselves, as citizens and electors, increasingly alienated from a political system which seems set to exclude them.

#### NOTES

1. *East London Observer*, November 10, 1888, quoted in D. Rubinstein, ‘Annie Besant and Stewart Headlam: the London School Board Election of 1888’ in *East London Papers*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Summer, 1970.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Y. Kapp *Eleanor Marx* Vol. 11 (1976) p. 86.
4. N. Branson *Poplarism* (1979) pp. 234/5.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
7. P. Brookes *Women at Westminster* (1966) p. 44.
8. See also W. Fishman ‘Tower Hamlets in 1888’ in *East London Record* No. 2 (1979).

## SLICED FROM LIFE: A STEPNEY TALE

Maurice Pelter

I was eight years old, and furious. It was 1936, an early November evening shrouded by thick consumptive fog. I was arguing petulantly with my parents, demanded a whole penny to myself, was insistent. My Mum, her patience frazzled, cried out to Dad: . . . ‘And this little mumser of yours! He’s driving me doollaly! I’ll give him such a wallop if he don’t shup up! You talk to him, Harry, or I’ll have the cane on his bum! . . .’ That for me. But my Dad eyed me knowingly. I should have recognised the look: the same as when he willingly offered me to help myself from a packet of super-luxurious Egyptian cigarettes from his shop-stock in his ‘stock-room’ — my bedroom! — having discovered me there secretly sucking at a saliva-soaked Woodbine stub . . . *that* stopped any interest of mine in smoking for the next twenty years! I should have known. ‘Well, Moishela, what’ll you do if I don’t give you a penny?’ he asked of me. I thought thick club-footed words. ‘I’ll run away from home!’ I burst out. ‘*I’ll run away from home!*’

Well wrapped up, yet still wearing short trousers, and still warm from house and battle, I left my Dad’s sweetshop — ‘The Mascot Shop’, anger fighting off tears. My hand clutched the *three* whole pennies he had given me before I left. ‘It won’t take you to Africa, son’ — he knew my head was then filled with Tarzan and High Adventure — ‘so be careful how you spend it.’ And he kissed me on my way. His love was just too much.

I pressed into the fog and turned the corner of Redman’s Road skirting the edge of Paradise Buildings, directly opposite my Aunt Ray’s home, all her friendly, comforting family. For one moment I thought of knocking there and asking to stay an hour or so, but pride had me. I held off. I entered the doorway of another sweetshop, one of the many of my father’s competitors. ‘Hello, Mr. Kops’, I said, ‘I want to buy some sweets. One-farthing’s worth of peas, ham chops and bacon, a sherbert-dab, two liquorice stick-jaws and a final farthing’s worth of tiger-nuts.’ I could have had them free, all of them, from my Dad, but . . . One penny gone. I stuffed them untidily into my overcoat pockets, munching at some of the nuts. Under my coat my bare knees were feeling the damp bite of cold. I wandered down Hannibal Road making towards the Mile End Road, so far off it seemed, misted in the fog, all yellow and sticky and pressing. But this was Adventure. I was out, on my own in the night, with tuppence in my pockets all lumpy now with sweets! I had run away from home!

The fog covered everything, lending for a time a certain air of mysteriousness to the everyday drab poverty. I ambled past the cramped front-room window of Esther, the ‘pram’ lady who sold an assortment of sweets to schoolchildren outside the gates of Stepney Jewish School, where once I had attended. In one of the first blitz raids of the coming War she, and her young daughter with her, would be blown to pieces by a bomb.

I went inside her 'shop'. 'Ha'penny try, Esther, please', I requested, and she brought out from under the counter the special gambling game, a small red-coloured tray riddled with holes, each covered with tight silver-foil, with a long thin pin attached to one corner by a question-mark screw. I considered for a moment, decided for one at the nearside edge and punched the pin through. A rolled-up piece of paper fell from the bottom, for all the world looking like an unweiled mazzuza-scroll. As I unfurled it she spoke to me: 'Heh, Moishele, have you had your usual luck? Or nuffink this time? And what are you doing out so late in this fog? You at your Auntie's? What! Mazzel again! That's tuppence you won, for a ha'penny! Here, here's yer tuppence — four nice ha'pennies. You want any sweets then? I got a nice bit of coconut ice if yer like . . .' Well, it wasn't too bad. I could have won up to the one and only sixpence on the board, and in any case had I drawn a blank paper I still could have remained smiling. But my thoughts were on the idea of hot, lip-burning roast-chestnuts, of peeling the charred skins and tucking in to the mealy starch flesh inside. 'Nah', I answered. 'Nah — think I'll go. Bye. . .'

I crossed the road close to the rabbi's house. I often went there to collect his newspaper debts to my father . . . a Yiddish weekly, the 'Jewish Chronicle' and a twist or two of snuff . . . and always a tiny twinkling red-stemmed goblet of red sweet wine and an oblong brick of seedcake for me, brought in on a tray by an old shuffling felt-slippered woman — his wife maybe? I never did learn that — and then a blessing in Hebrew over my head and a gentle ruffle through the curls of my hair. I liked him. I liked the quiet serenity of the man and the warm settledness of the room. . . His curtains were drawn, the lamplight contained within. I walked on.

'Newstandard! All the latest runners! Newstandard!' — the newspaper man at the corner of Mile End Road doing late casual business. Next to him naphtha flares blazed at the coals of the roast-chestnut stand. The hole-stabbed barrel was red-hot with an aura of vibrant gas burning off and around it, pushing away the nearest drift of fog, forming there a ragged hiatus. The grill-tray above was burnished with steel-blue and dull red heat stains. Charlie, the chestnut man, was busy stirring the half-cooked nuts with a smouldering wooden stick. At the side a number of prepared paper horns rolled slightly on the top of a wad of carefully torn paper pieces. Somehow the smell was one of char and pitch and coke, with the feel of hard, scratchy cinder and crumbly ash, the burned curl of burst skins and a lift of delicious soft-yet-rich saliva ran into my mouth as I approached. Mingled with the throat thickness of fog it made a particular and time-fixed aroma for me. 'Penuff of chestnuts, Charlie, please', I petitioned. 'Aye, lad', he said, 'You're out late, ain't yer? Does your Mum know? She by yer Gran's? And ain't yer big enough for *long* trousers yet?' he teased. I took the overfilled pennyworth of hot chestnuts from him and held them against my cheek for a moment, the heat of them pouring into my flesh, gee! but they were hot! They were *burning!* I put one in each of my trouser pockets, feeling immediately the heat raising a scarlet patch of fierce warmth through my 'combinations' against my skin. I rubbed the bag then around my face, enjoying warmth, smell and anticipation. I threw a large skin-torn nut from one hand to another, palming



*Hannibal Road, looking north to Charrington's brewery, in 1961. Apart from the cars, little had changed since the 'thirties*

the rest of the paper-horn, cooling the fruit enough to quickly peel it, scoffed it down. There proved to be too many nuts for me and later I found three of them in my overcoat pocket, cold and dirty and uneatable. I crossed the road to the opposite corner: Mile End Road, Stepney Green. I stood by Amiel's, the huge sweetshop which stretched down both sides of the two roads. I looked at all his window stock, which I knew well, munching chestnuts. The three big glass barrels filled to different levels with coloured drinks, gleamed through the electric light. But nothing new in his window display. I walked on, eastward, some yards, to Angel's toyshop examining the variety of toys he had on show there. It was coming up to the Xmas 'rush' and his display was new, and I looked at incomprehensible games and arrangements of unknown devices which I knew I'd never have for myself, either for Hannuka (coming soon, soon!) or for Christmas, when my own father's shelves would be hung with half-penny, penny, thru'penny even sixpenny shoddy 'Xmas stockings', filled with knick-knacks of Hong Kong and Japanese wares, half-stale sweets and paper ribbons. The 3d stocking even contained a heavy two-piece exploding percussion-cap 'Air-Bomb' on a long string . . . very topical.

The sounds nearby of pub-singing frightened me, even though it was all most cheerful. Pubs were for Gentiles: we drank, if we drank, at home privately. It was many years later that I understood that even Jews enjoyed lifting the elbow occasionally in a pub, and more shockingly, *owned* one or two of them in that Stepney East End of 1936. I turned about and crossed the Mile End Road. Breweries. The smell of spilled beer, barley, hops, horse-manure and piss. Acrid, pungent. Unmistakable. There were still granite setts across the road. Then, and in the fogginess I could hear the horse-hoofs of heavy beer-drays urging back to 'home'. The odour of full-cask and empty-cask, quite different in quality, hung about in the fog, at the brewery entrance. Each smell seemed to carry the weight or the loss of weight of content. Tuns and barrels, and broken staves, could be seen littering the courtyard beyond the entrance. Wood and metal were the materials of those years. The word 'plastic' was maybe seen hidden among fine chemical explications in scientific journals, the first complex equations prophesying technological change, already available to the elite. But then, at the brewery entrance, the smell was one impacted from the techniques of earlier centuries: horse-dung and urine, stale-beer and beer-impregnated woods. The side streets there still evidenced faintly the final days of ostler and blacksmith. Smithy worked and stableman carried. They still existed then, just. Craftsmen still performed their magic. Oat-bag still held sway at horse-mouth, the spillage yet followed by a scatter of cautious sparrow and slate-grey cumbersome pigeon, pecking at raw cereal or seeking out choicer seed from the still-steamy ovoids of horse leavings.

A dray rumbled past me as I crossed the road, the driver, seated high and curled in cloak up to his ears, raising his pennanted whip above the horses' heads. 'Hoy, hoy! Get in there, then, get in!' and, with a curious flick of his whip caused a crack through the skined fog as he turned. The metal-rimmed wheels rumbled, the wood tailgate shuddered too close to me as it passed through. I too turned, creeping fearfully, but thrilled, along the brewery side walls, outside my accustomed territory. I moved along in a mixture of darkness and fog, houses almost hidden along the western length of the road opposite. I felt a sense of lace-curtains and aspidistras, cold, empty front-rooms and isolated plants in fretted chinaware pots, of pork-pies and jellied eels, of black speckled winkles and whelks, of the dry rustlings of prawns and pints of pink shrimp, their prickly tail-pieces alien and forbidden! Suddenly, in my mind came unbidden the affront of painted slogan that affrayed the entrance to Duckett Street, my east-march border, the Fascist slogan thrusting against me there: a double stab of Nazi lightning, S! S!, followed by the imperative initials, standing in abbreviation for a nearly 2000 year-old history of my People — P.J! P.J! P.J! *Perish Judah! Perish Judah! Perish Judah!* H.E.P! H.E.P! It was following me here through the fog like a demonic deathweight on my shoulders. Forgetting chestnuts, pocketed sweets, pennies, adventure, I whirled about me and fled back to the wideness and possibly security of the main thoroughfare. I had almost crossed a line then, a hostile threshold which named itself and separated one man from another. B.U.F., poverty and Popular Front; that voice from Nuremberg which I already knew in my nightmares, raving out of the wireless-set with

groups of Jews listening, understanding, *believing*. It was around us, in Stepney, another reality for my childhood, known, fearful, frightening. Not only for us the more comforting Guy Fawkes bonfires and straw-body burnings, but other fires, other explosions, other deaths to come. . . .

Breathlessly I ran back along the Mile End Road, the cold chill condensing my breathing instantly, and it emerged white and almost motionless as it conveyed itself into the interweaving fog. I slowed down and moved past a broken necklace of barrow and pushcart, the evening straggle of pedlar and commercial pusher, the odour of ripe fruits and greengroceries, fustiness of cloth bolts and heaped old clothes for sale, the dry, hoarse dustiness of ancient shoes and unlaced boots awaiting a depressed custom, an old phonograph hauled past me, held in a baby's creaking broken-down perambulator; the turn-table winding down to a permanent halt . . . 'South Am . . . er . . . ic . . . aan . . . Jo . . . oo . . . e . . .'. The smell of barrelled, brined



*Mile End Road in the 'thirties*

schmaltz herrings, splinter-wood boxed kippered herrings laid out in greasy rows, their artificial varnishings staining the boxes with a smelly, oily excess, these and piquant, pickled cucumbers in glass jar or small barrel, overpowered all the aromas.

I slowed down alongside the Paragon Picture-house, my favourite cinema of that time, looking at the slightly bizarre, exaggerated posters featuring the 'interval' entertainers: Izzy Bonn was one — his voice almost stilled the assembly of brown-paper bags filled with nosh for noshers, the crackling of peanut-eaters, loud disturbing rustlings of potato-crisp bags . . . the Paragon, as I remember it, was a levantine version of Joe Lyons, not genteel but most vivacious! While loud general conversation was not encouraged during filmings, a kind of undercurrent of commentary and pilpulim asserted itself with vigour.

I saw Max Miller there once: my Dad took me with him, and there was a Bulldog Drummond film showing as well — a sort of weightmake and equaliser! — all good Empire virtue and upright balance between the Good and Evil. I also listened there to the last uproaring choruses of old-time Music Hall singers . . . Any Old Iron, Bull-and-Bush, Foller-the-Van, each sung by its own owner. I was there, eight years old, at the last gaspings of a spirited era, and few would have then credited it that all was already flowing down the drain of history. But for me then, as for them too, it was a *fully* alive ghost, fleshed and bawdy and never to be changed! Walking slowly forward I passed Wickham's department store, almost an emporium, surely the one and only large store of its kind that I knew in my childhood. It had high windows on its first-floor level and the year before I had observed the Jubilee procession passing down the Mile End Road from the inside ledge of one of them. I had sat there with my Dad, he on a wooden chair, his crutches as always neatly lined up at his feet, accessible for use at any needful moment. The Wickham's management had kindly allowed him, a cripple, his war-medals up, to sit in comfort and join at a distance the lines of East-Enders and schoolkids below us on the pavements. We sat there in a kind of regal solitude. I recall the height-foreshortened view I had of *our* King, George V, in his cocked hat, in my eyes for all the world a naval admiral, the gilded, glittering, monarchical open-coach and all those plumed, glossed, high stepping sleek horses ridden by the honour-guard in front and behind . . . but I can't remember seeing the old Mary seated there alongside him, although she must have been there, upright and straight like a Polish grandmother, and dressed in a swaddle of white clothes . . . I only recall the warmth of that moment, seated by my father, with the *King* being driven past my eyes. It was indeed Jubilee Day, and we received, each one of us, a specially mass-produced 'Jubilee chinaware mug' at school, after singing patriotic songs of Empire and Motherland during Assembly time, the violin orchestra scraping away on my left-hand-side, that group of privileged children, all of them right-handed and holding no place for my cack-handed desire to join with them . . . even with a left-handed violin my father somewhere had located for me!



*Silver Jubilee procession along Mile End Road, 25 May 1935 (courtesy of Mrs. M. M. Nurse)*

Moving on from Wickham's past the old people's alms houses, I could see through the gloomy fog to the corner of Cambridge Heath Road where, like moonlight refracted through yellow glass, there glowed the lights of my port of call, a noisy bustle of a fish-and-chip shop. It was crowded. There was an untidy and impatient queue outside the door snaking along the pavement. The doorway was crushed with people trying to enter and leave. Cloth caps and white silky mufflers, kids in short-trousers, school-caps, hands fistng small change in preparation. Windows misted, steaming. Oil all a-bubble in the double vats could be seen as I shuffled slowly forward, trying not to be displaced by more sturdy, gruff customers. I was so little! The fragrance of fish frying wafted across all noses, sharpening appetites. Now I had to make up my mind, check my finances, consider my lay-out. 'High' finance could pose no longer a problem.

Having gone in and got my tupenny piece of cod and a pen'orth of chips, I crossed the road back now, into my own part of Stepney Green. Sydney Street. I'd heard all about the 'Siege' and 'Peter-the-Painter'. The glorious alliteration here had given me much pleasure and I had repeated it like a spell until it lost all meaning. My Dad had spoken of anarchists and

convocations of Bolshevik and Menshevik around here in his youth. I had already stored for future recall his assertion that not only *Lenin* had been in pseudonymous attendance, but that *Stalin* too had dropped in illegally one-time and housed up near to Jubilee Street. The fog thickened, covered everything. No dim-glowing street lights here, no naphtha flares, just sad, soot-encrusted houses, tenements dark and huddled into the evening.

I hip-hopped up and down the four steps at the frontage to Schwartz-the-sweet shop, still open for business, and moved on until I was again at the corner of Hannibal Road. Peering through the lamplight glow at the triangular confluence of streets I could just about see my stretch of Redman's Road through the fog. That ancient crone, the 'Chicken woman', who sat sentry-guard at the point of Cressy Place, was inside her home at last. The area was littered with feather-pluckings and an old wood box or two; the Church Hall opposite her house was a black gap gaping with apostasy. My eyes narrowed in fog, darkness and a known future. Turtiss-the-Shoeshop was shut: 77 Redman's Road! Harry-the-Butcher still had his lights blazing: 77A Redman's Road! Harry-the-Grocer, Bessie Baroff's that is, also was lighted up: 77B Redman's Road . . . and my house, Harry-the-Sweetshop, 77C? I couldn't quite make it out. But I knew the shop was still open, even though it was, must be by now, past seven o'clock, maybe even (!) *eight!*

I made up my mind and turned back into Hannibal Road, skirting the Off-licence of Jim Mead's pub, the Bricklayer's Arms. At number 19 I stretched upward and just managed to knock at the door-knocker of my Aunt Ray's house. It was opened swiftly, and by Auntie Ray herself. She looked down at me, all firm and comforting flesh and ironically said: 'Ha! So here's our *world traveller!* Been to Timbucktoo-and-back! You don't look too happy about it, Moishe . . . So, what you standing there for? Do I *have* to ask you in? Better you go straight to the kitchen. Ain't you a lucky one then' — as I slipped by her — '. . . always knows when I made a beetroot borsht soup, doesn't he! Come on then Maurice, sit down and I'll give you a plate.'

As I seated myself, Andy, her son of about my own age, and my close friend, sidled up and whispered to me, 'Gawd, ain't you gonner get it from yer Mum! She's in a right tis-was! Came round here looking for you. Yer Dad, too, he's out looking around the streets . . .' It spoiled the taste of the borsht a bit, but not much. My favourite aunt, my favourite soup. Her older sons teased me, 'He run away from home! He run away from home! Gor! won't he cop it when Aunt Dora gets 'old of 'im'. Unknown to me then, but learned many years later, Ray had already sent her oldest son to bring news of me to my parents . . . and so the search — there *was* one! — was called off. Mr. Kops earlier had crossed the street from his shop and told Ray that I was out on my own. What was the matter? etc, and she had checked up with my Mum and her brother Harry, my father, and had placed on her hob a pot of nearly ready borsht soup, all blood-red and simmering, to await my certain arrival at her door! I thought of my Mum, worried almost to distraction, blinded by it,

looking around everywhere; and of my father too, swinging around on his crutches in the fogged streets, crying out for me, and I was ashamed and regretful and wanting to be home whatever happened.

Aunt Ray took my plate away for the second time and stated, 'Right, wipe your mouth on this, Maurice, get your coat and scarf back on . . . you want me to sew the button on?' I shook my head stubbornly. Let 'em see what had happened to me! She was grimly amused. 'O.K.', she said, 'I'll see you across the street, then,' but took me back almost to the shop-front, leaving tactfully, for me to make my own entrance, follow my own role. Dad was in the front room, behind the shop itself, as I entered. The shop doorbell tinkled announcing my entry. Nothing I could do to stop that. My mother jumped from her chair by the front-room table preparatory to running out and berating me. Dad quietly shushed her back and she sat down fuming with frustration, fear, anger and relief. They didn't come out to me, they didn't say anything. My two brothers, younger than myself, were sleeping upstairs, one in our shared bed, one in his cot.

I stiffened muscle and jawbone and walked towards them; ducked under the shop counter, opened the glass-fronted door, entered. The coal-fire was blazing, there was a smell of new-made tea and ash-roasted potatoes. My Mother could no longer contain herself and rose. Her eyes, moist, gleaming from inner tension and reflected fireflame, burned at me. She started to shout, but my father said warningly, 'Dora, hush! We decided. Say nothing. Not a word. It's for the best. No hero, no mazik'. He swivelled towards me. 'Now Maurice, now you're home would you like a cup of tea?' I nodded a tight 'Yes'. My lips were fixed but felt a slight trembling take over my body. I tried to control it. Then I sat down between them, my Mother in tears, her small hands quivering at the edges of the table. Then she stood and went to the kitchen to pour me a cup of tea.

My father took one of my hands gently in his. 'Well, son, did you have a good adventure? Tell me, Maurice, where did you go? The fog is very thick. Did you spend all your money? What did you do?' Not a trace of mockery or accusation. I drew my hand away from his. I was breaking down inside myself. I moved back slightly, took breath, opened my lips and cried out: '*I ran away from home! I ran away from home!*' and bursting into tears I threw myself into his lap and cried myself to sleep.

## THE STORY OF LIMEHOUSE

Alfred French

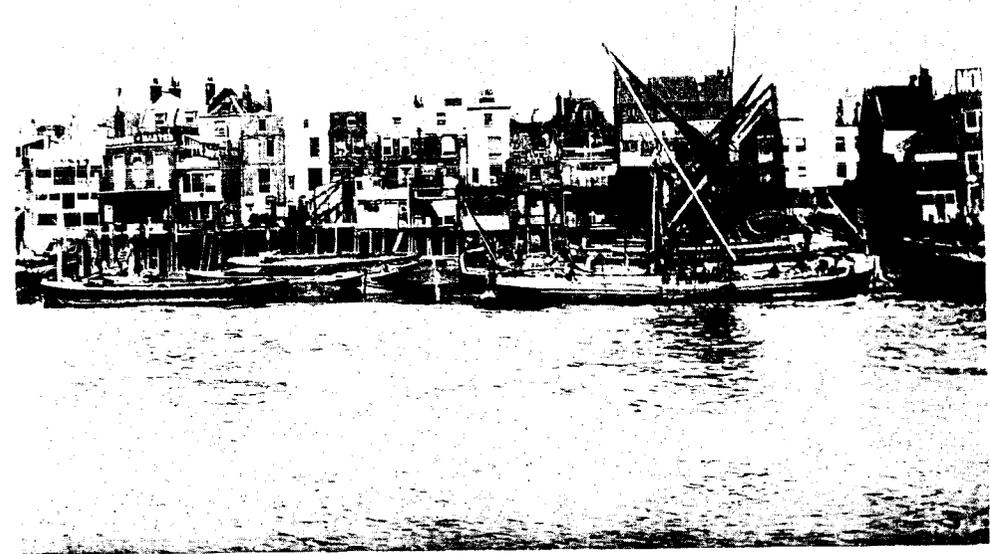
'... a large high-way, with faire Elme trees on both the sides . . .' So John Stow in 1603 described the approach to Limehouse from Ratchliffe.<sup>1</sup> Yet this attractive riverside hamlet with its fields and orchards was so soon to obtain 'a notoriety that is world-wide'. Lime burning was already in progress here in 1363<sup>2</sup> to satisfy an increasing demand for buildings in the City and its precincts and there is little doubt that the name was derived from this activity.

The carriage of chalk from Northfleet or Greenhithe in Kent by river to Limehouse, where there were a number of kilns, was one of its earliest riverside activities. These were greatly and rapidly increased by the convenient anchorage it afforded to vessels bound to and from the City whilst awaiting discharge, loading, repairing, remanning, etc. During the 15th and 16th centuries the population grew not only from these developing riverside activities, but, because its open spaces offered a very pleasant and convenient siting, houses were built for the better-off ships' captains, maritime officials and other public servants who wished to be away from the noise, bustle and smells of the City, but near enough for their employment.

One of these was Edward Underhill, the 'Hot Gospeller of Limehouse' who was Controller of the Ordnance in 1549 and a gentleman pensioner.<sup>3</sup> He became enthusiastically involved in the religious issues surrounding the brief reign of Queen Mary, and was eventually burned. Sir Humphrey Gilbert lived here from 1573 to 1578 and his famous half-brother, Sir Walter Raleigh, sailed from Limehouse in the *Watte* on October 14th 1596 to Guiana. William Burrough, Controller of the Navy, had a house in Limehouse in 1579 and became one of the members of the Stepney Vestry with Sir Henry Palmer, also a local man and his successor as Controller of the Navy, both of whom served against the Spanish Armada.

The Tudor period was one of considerable activity along the River, and in the Limehouse area shipbuilding and ship-repairing became established, along with the connecting trades of ship-provisioning, sail-making, ropemaking, tallow chandlery, etc. As can be expected in a growing maritime community and in common with the other riverside hamlets, there were indications from this period of disorderly conduct and unruly elements.

This was also an age of adventure and in 1576, William Coxo of Limehouse, formerly captain of the *Beare*, set out on a treasure hunt to the West Indies losing his ship, treasure and almost his life. John Davis, also of Limehouse, had a similar experience having made five voyages and luckily returned from the last voyage alive, but having lost his fortune. There are many accounts of the bravery and daring of seamen from Limehouse during this period of Tudor adventure and the inns and taverns along the Limehouse



*Limehouse riverside between Blyth Wharf and Duke Shore Stairs in the eighteen eighties (courtesy of National Monuments Record)*

waterfront must have echoed with the stories of the hardships and conflicts with pirates in which local seamen were involved.

The importance of Limehouse as a ship and craft building centre grew in the late 1500's. In 1586 William Pett of Limehouse built the *Makeshift*,<sup>4</sup> probably the earliest ship built and launched here. This was the first of a number of ships constructed locally by the Pett family and other notable shipwrights. With the shallow sloping bank afforded by its tidal position, considerable numbers of small craft were constructed along the waterfront where carpenters' shops and tar and glue boilers were established around Duke Shore Stairs (not necessarily a 'shore' in the riverside sense but more likely derived from 'sewer' — an outlet for storm water). A ferry operated for centuries from Duke Shore Stairs to the southern bank.

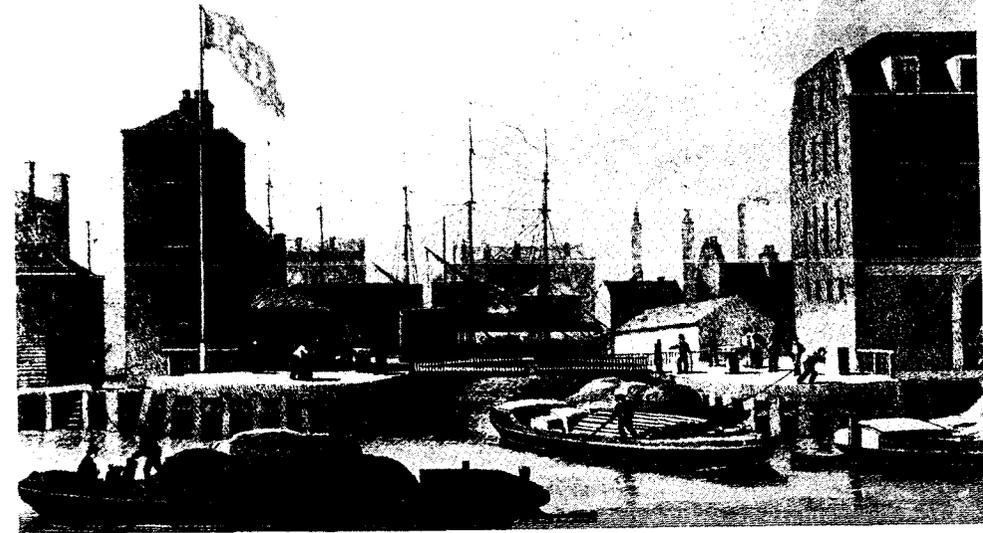
Samuel Pepys, on the 19th October 1661, went 'by coach to Captain Marshe's at Limehouse, to a home that hath been their ancestors for this 250 years, close by the limehouse which gives its name to the place. Here they have

a design to get the King to hire a dock for the herring busses for herring fishing . . .<sup>5</sup> Richard Marsh was, in 1594, an active member of the Stepney Vestry. In this connection, it is interesting to note that in 1855, Limehouse Fields (now built over) became a thriving fish-curing centre (haddocks and kippers) and became known as 'the Smoke Hole'. It appears to have been established by a Scotsman from Findon, in Kincardineshire. 'The Haddock-smoker's Daughter' was a popular song in the East End in the early 1900's.<sup>6</sup> The lime-house to which Pepys referred appears to have been rebuilt in 1710 and demolished in 1935. The road which he took led from the Tower to Limekiln Hill, via Ratcliff Highway and Narrow Street.

During the 17th century religious conflicts, the people of Limehouse showed predominantly Puritan sympathies, and of the 90 members of the old Stepney Meeting House in 1668, 29 were from Limehouse. During the Civil War, Limehouse had scant sympathy with the Royalist cause and was little involved.

The early 1700's saw a decline in shipbuilding, as the larger vessels now being demanded could no longer be constructed along the Limehouse waterfront. However, ship repair work increased as also the other maritime industries, Limehouse being used as a base from which vessels further down the River were served. The ropemaking industry was well established around Ropemakers Fields and survived until the early twentieth century. Opposite Ropemakers Fields, a pottery factory existed in 1747/50 in Narrow Street near Duke Shore Wharf in premises later occupied by Sanders Bros. Ltd., but no specimens of the pottery have been located. The population increase continued and early in the 18th century there were upwards of 500 houses concentrated mainly around Three Colt Street, Church Lane (so named before the building of Limehouse Church, because of its use as an approach to St. Dunstan's Church, Stepney) and Limehouse Street (later Fore Street, and then Narrow Street). These roads had a number of squalid alley-ways and passages leading off them serving a lively but somewhat insanitary and overcrowded community. Limehouse Hole (where Dundee Wharf now stands) was a riverside depression, the banks of which were useful for the repair of small craft and for storing materials. It was a favourite haunt of mudlarks who lived on the flotsam and jetsam which the tide threw up along the bend of Limehouse Reach.

With this growing community, the need was seen by some for the building of a church and a petition was presented for Limehouse to be treated as a separate parish with a church of its own. Hitherto, St. Dunstan's was the Parish Church. Approval was given after considerable planning and financial problems and the building was begun in 1712 and completed in 1724.<sup>7</sup> Its well-known tower has been a landmark for seamen for two and a half centuries. The only considerable buildings in Limehouse after the building of the church were the reconstructed limekilns and a Brewery set up in 1730 by Salman and Hare. Built on the Riverside, this was taken over by Mr. Taylor (later Taylor, Walker & Co. Ltd.) in 1796. Extensions to the Brewery covered the site of the



*Entrance to the Regent's Canal, Limehouse, 1828*

old Limehouse Workhouse and the former Town Hall. The present Town Hall building (no longer a Town Hall) occupied a corner of the churchyard.

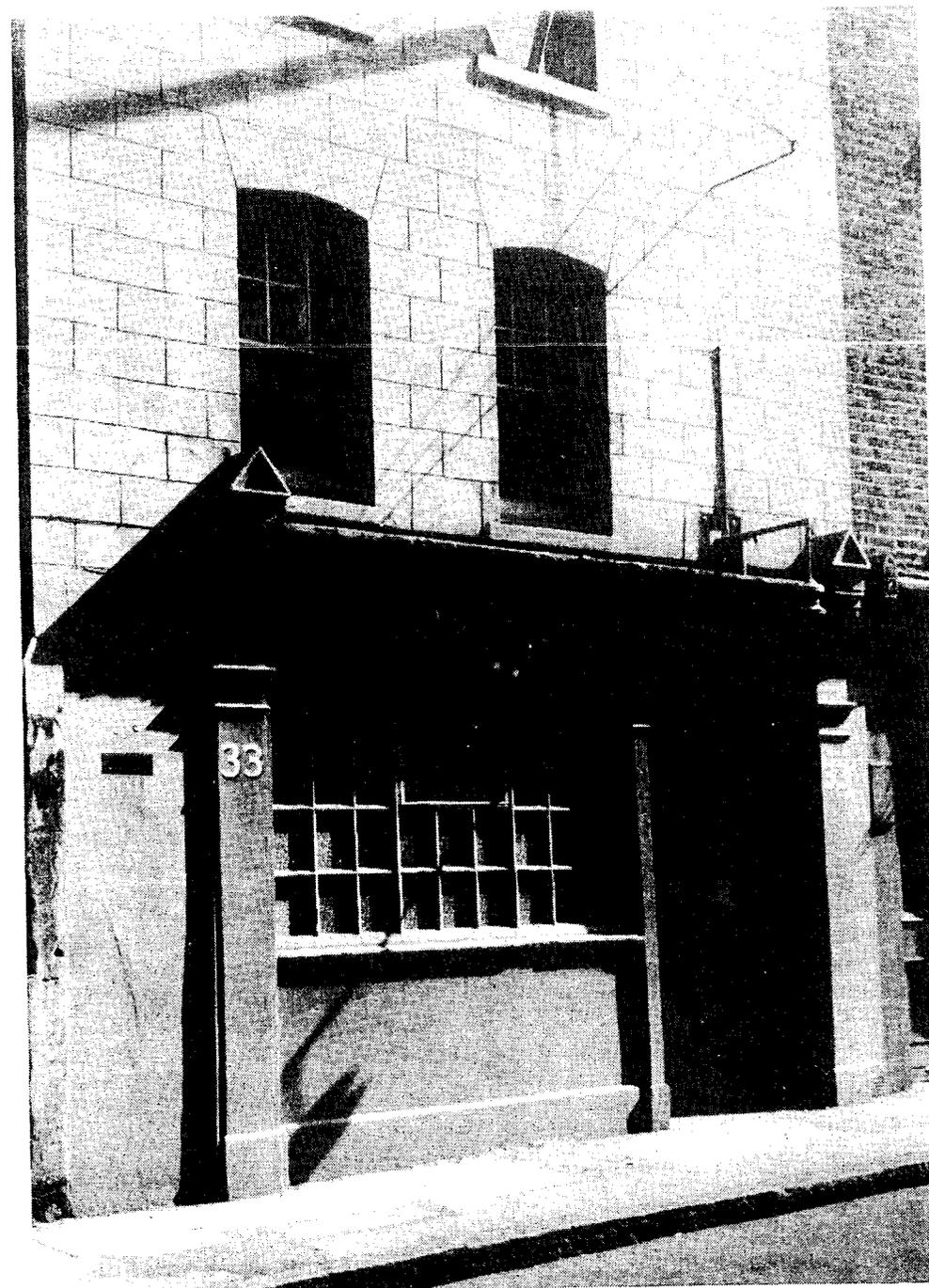
The opening of the church coincided with the growth of the area, residential properties being built in large numbers north around the Salmon Lane (formerly Sermon Lane) vicinity and to the east in the Gill Street/Grenade Street areas. The East India Company did much of their repair and refitting work off Limehouse Reach whilst their frigates were awaiting discharge at the City Wharves or into craft. These 'sugar-boats' often bunched up due to weather conditions and had to lie often six abreast off Limehouse and Ratcliff awaiting calling forward for discharge, or availability of outward cargo. These were sitting targets for smugglers and pilferers, one of the main factors which led to the opening of the Docks and the establishing of controlled wharves along the River.

The construction in 1810 of the Commercial Road from the City to the East India Docks (becoming East India Dock Road at Limehouse Church) and the West India Dock Road from Limehouse Church to the West India Docks, to facilitate the transportation of goods estimated at around 250,000 tons per annum, cut the Parish into three parts. That to the north of East India Dock Road lent itself to a considerable Irish settlement. The central triangle between East India Dock Road and West India Dock Road attracted

Oriental seamen and became the centre of 'Chinatown', and the area south of the West India Dock Road to the River was occupied by seamen and River workers and by maritime and local industries. It is remarkable how the division of the Parish produced three communities which, up to the Second World War, remained quite distinct.

The growing labour force could now only be employed when the docks were busy, but there were often periods when this was not so and although non-maritime industries were developing (chemical works, light engineering, timber yards, etc.) there were considerable periods of depression and unemployment. The Regent's Canal Dock, built in 1812 between Shadwell and Limehouse, was designed to accommodate coastal steamers which discharged into barges and served the numerous wharves along the Grand Union Canal which the Regent's Canal joined at Southall. This provided work, though sometimes spasmodic, for the dockers of Limehouse for more than a century. It was hoped that the construction of Limehouse Cut between the Lea and Limehouse Reach and/or the Regent's Canal would have brought prosperity to Limehouse, but it was too late as Canal traffic was already on the decline and the Cut served only small industry and provided storage space on its banks for timber, scrap iron, etc., as well as factories manufacturing vitriol, pitch, varnish, etc., and processing animal charcoal and manure, with consequent disagreeable odours.

Owing to the increased activity caused by the opening of the Docks in the early 19th century and the development of overseas trade, Irishmen, Lascars, Sikhs and Scandinavians were now to be seen in increasing numbers around Limehouse. It was not until the latter part of the century that the Chinese began to appear in Limehouse in numbers. A Sailors' Home for Asiatics was erected in West India Dock Road but the Chinese did not mix well with other Asiatics and preferred to settle in lodging houses in Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway. These were mainly seamen who were paid off in London owing to the sale or scrapping of their ships, sickness, disciplinary reasons, or merely the termination of their engagement. The shipowners had an obligation to repatriate them but, owing to the expense, made little effort to trace them. Also, many had married and had children, which presented further repatriation problems. The Shanghai or Ningpo (Central China) seamen tended to settle in the Pennyfields, Amoy Place, and High Street areas. Those from Canton settled mainly in the Limehouse Causeway, West India Dock Road and Gill Street areas. Before 1890, local records show most of the residents in Pennyfields with ordinary English names. 25 years later the street was almost entirely inhabited by Chinese. It became a veritable 'Chinatown' with restaurants, provision shops, clubs, a Christian mission, seamen's lodging houses and even a temple. In the early 1930's there were something like 200 half-caste children in Limehouse (few pure Chinese as there were in fact only three or four Chinese women) and they had their own Sunday Schools, Clubs and Scout troops. On the whole, the Chinese lived peaceably among themselves and never frequented the public houses. Stories of opium dens and warring (tongs) were grossly exaggerated to the detriment of Limehouse but to the benefit of those who organised visits



*Chinese Mission, Pennyfields, shortly before demolition (A. H. French)*

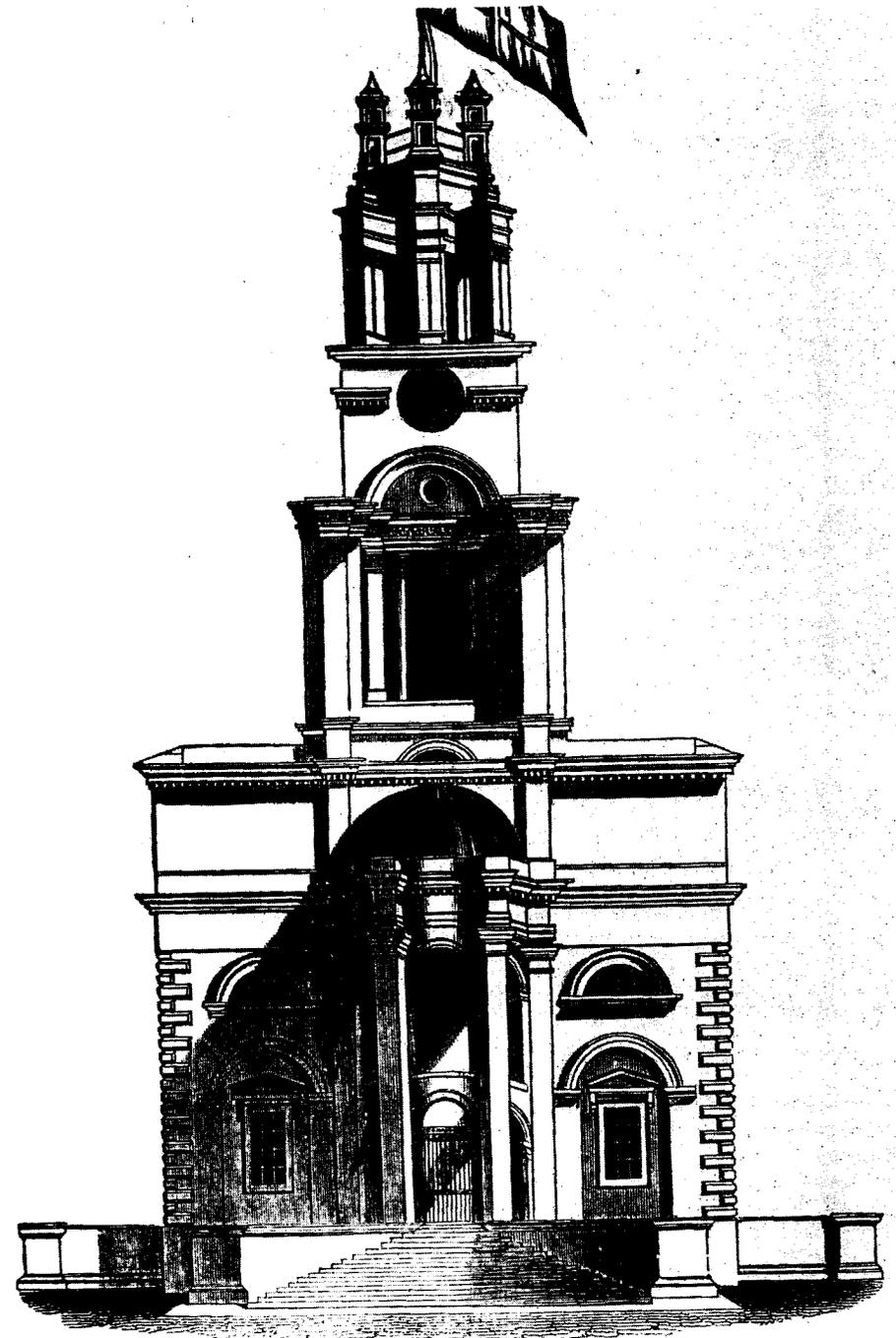
for tourists from the West End, who invariably finished up at 'The Grapes', which Dickens knew well, but which was unlikely to have been the tavern referred to as 'The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters' in *Our Mutual Friend*. This was more likely to have been 'The Two Brewers' which stood at Duke Shore Stairs.

Also towards the end of the 19th century, a considerable number of Scandinavian seamen would be seen around the West India Docks. They came from the windjammers and timber ships using the Millwall and West India Dock grain and timber facilities. A small Danish Church (demolished after the last War) was built near the Dock entrance, also a seamen's Home, later taken over by the Salvation Army. Baroness Leijonhjelm, said to be the widow of a Swedish Captain, kept a small evangelical meeting room in a converted shop in West India Dock Road and, as the Scandinavian element faded out it was frequented by down-and-outs. The imperious little old lady became a famous figure locally.

In 1939, the outbreak of the Second World War necessitated the evacuation of this dockland area and the majority of its people went to villages around Oxford. Bombing raids caused extensive damage in Limehouse and, after the war, few of its inhabitants ever returned. The Brewery had been badly damaged and was closed soon afterwards. Much of the area has been replanned and rebuilt, but with the changes in the shipping and transport industries, its maritime character has largely disappeared. New buildings, mainly residential, are rising in Limehouse and the increasing availability of dock land and wharf sites is presenting a challenge to the planning authorities. It is hoped that buildings of architectural merit will replace those whose chief merit was that they served a hard-working and hospitable cosmopolitan community. J. G. Birch (former Rector of Limehouse) states 'In spite of all the changing conditions of life, somehow or other, all who have lived or worked there bear witness to the fascination of the place.'<sup>8</sup> Many of us who have known this fascination, now diminishing, hope that, unlike the elm trees, it will not be lost for ever.

#### NOTES

1. J. Stow *The Survey of London* (1633 edition) p. 469.
2. K. G. T. McDonnell *Medieval London Suburbs* (1978) p. 109.
3. A gentleman pensioner was a gentleman at arms appointed to attend the monarch on state occasions.
4. P. Banbury *Shipbuilding on the Thames and Medway* (1971) p. 31.
5. *Diary* 19 October, 1661.
6. S. Maddocks *Limehouse Revisited* (1926) p. 6.
7. J. G. Birch *Limehouse Through Five Centuries* (1930) p. 59.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 153.



*A view of St. Anne's, Limehouse, in 1845*

## MEMORIES OF THE ISLE OF DOGS, 1912-1931

Minnie Skeat

I was born at Hendon, and my parents moved from Willesden to Cubitt Town when I was five years old. We lived at 24 Marshfield Street, which ran between Manchester Road and Glengall Road, the three roads forming a triangle.

I attended Glengall Road School from 1912 until 1921. A Mr. Turner was the school caretaker, and an extremely stern woman, Miss Bartlett, was the senior girls' headmistress. The senior girls were at the top of the three storey building, with the boys and infants below. My teacher in the infants who taught me to knit was a Miss Cameron, who seemed to me then to be very elderly. The boy who sat next to me was named Freddy Cox. Some 27 years after I left the 'Island' one of my sons, Len (he and his brother Bill Skeat are well-known jazz musicians) met a young lady (she is now his wife) whose mother said she knew me. She was Mrs. Fish, but her maiden name turned out to be Cox, sister of the same Freddy Cox who sat next to me in the infants. The photograph reproduced on the page opposite was of my class just before leaving the girls' school in 1921. It was taken on a school journey to Seasalter, near Faversham, during which I can remember being marched to Canterbury Cathedral and having tea on the lawn.

I can remember the names of many in the photograph. First on the left, back row, is Ethel Simmons, who lived next to the Library in Strattondale Street and later emigrated to Australia. Beside her is myself, Minnie Gibbs in those days. Then comes Hilda Gillard, whose father was the local coal merchant in Strattondale Street. Next to her is Lavinia Clench, whose father kept a tobacconist's shop in Glengall Road. In the second row, in front of Hilda Gillard, is Ivy Webb, whose father was Alfred Webb, a contractor in Millwall with horses and carts. In the third row, second from the right, is May Nelson, whose father was the milkman, living in East Ferry Road. In the front row, sitting on the left is Ethel or Emily Roberts of Glengall Road, whose father won the V.C. and the school was given a half day holiday as a result. On the right in the front row is Georgina Whale, of Millwall, whose father was a sweet wholesale merchant. The teacher wearing the hat is Mrs. Field, and the one wearing the white jumper is Miss Tress, whose parents kept a grocer's shop on Poplar High Street near the Queen's Theatre.

When we first moved to Cubitt Town there was no bus service linking us with Poplar and people going shopping in Chrisp Street Market had to walk. In the summer of 1914 a bus service started to run from Poplar down Stebondale Street to the terminus near the foot-tunnel to Greenwich. It would return along the main road past Christ Church and Cubitt Town Police Station. These buses were required for use during the First World War, and were replaced by lorries. The buses, service number 103, returned in 1919. In the late nineteen twenties the service became number 57. The bus fare was from  $\frac{1}{2}$ d to 2d.



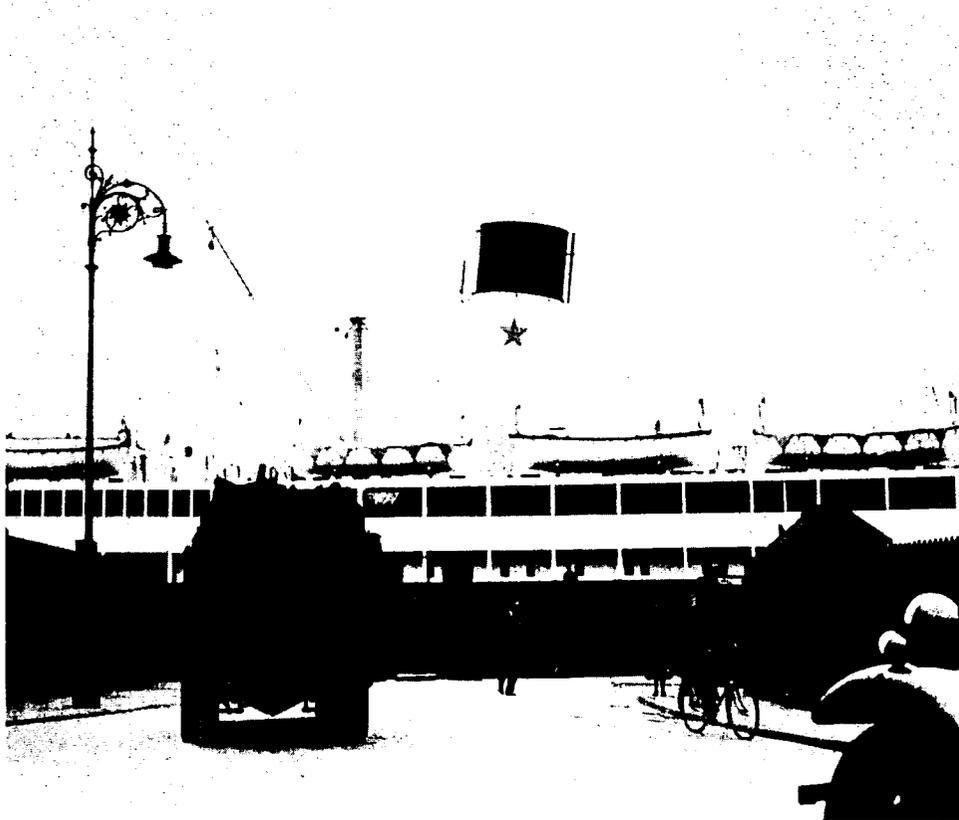
*Girls from Glengall Road School at Seasalter in 1921 (Mrs. M. Skeat)*

Coming from Poplar, there were two swing bridges, which were often swinging during high tide to allow ships to enter from the Thames to the West India and Millwall Docks. This could cause delays of up to half an hour, sometimes traffic getting away just in time to see the second bridge closing! Over the second bridge one reached the 'Island' at the junction of East Ferry Road, Manchester Road and the Queen's Public House. The East Ferry Road led to Glengall Road at the junction with Farm Road. In Glengall Road on the right was another swing bridge. Over the bridge Glengall Road continued to reach West Ferry Road. Turning left this road led to the foot-tunnel to Greenwich, in the other direction it led to Limehouse. You can see then, that it was this southern part of Cubitt Town that was really the 'Island' in the strict sense, being surrounded on all sides with water, with the Thames forming the remainder of the boundary.

At the junction of Manchester Road with Marshfield Street there were two factories, namely Sterling Mangles and the Star Pram Factory. Next was Morton's, world famous for its pickles. Farm Road was a long road that led to the foot-tunnel to Greenwich. On one side was the Mudchute and on the other

side a railway line alongside the docks. I remember the trains passed through a station opposite Chrisp Street, named Poplar Station, and called at Millwall Station, which was at the junction of Glengall Road, East Ferry Road and Farm Road. The line went on to the Greenwich Subway. It was a great pity that the train service was stopped, as it was most beneficial to the 'Islanders' owing to the delays on the buses caused by the swing bridges.

Coming down Manchester Road from the second swing bridge towards Glengall Road, the public houses were the Queen's, the Manchester Arms and the London. The latter stood on the corner of Glengall Road, opposite the school. I can remember a regular busker playing a xylophone outside. I can also recall a police officer conveying a drunk on a wicker two-wheeled cart along Glengall Road.



*Ship passing through West Ferry Lock, Millwall Docks, in the late 'twenties*

One of my memories of the First World War is of us knitting socks for the soldiers at the front. One of the girls in my class was Gladys Von Tirsh, whose father was interned during the War. (Twenty years later I had occasion to go to the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals in Wood Lane, Dagenham, and found Gladys was living there, married to one of the P.D.S.A. vets). My father had an allotment at the end of the Mudchute near the railway arches, for which he paid 2s. 6d. (12½p) rent per year. He dug a deep well for water there during the War. I remember seeing two Zeppelins on fire and the shooting down of an airplane. Our ceiling fell in on me as a result of the Silvertown explosion in 1917.

Dr. Gardale lived in a large corner house, backing on to the Mudchute, in Glengall Road. He had lost an eye during the Great War. He was also the local police doctor. There was also a Dr. Milea, who lived near the Greenwich subway. Other people of local interest included old Mrs. Farley, who kept a grocer's shop in Marshfield Street. Early in the twenties she was knocked down by a youth on bicycle and died. Mr. Morgan was a grocer in Glengall Road and Mr. Crabb and Mr. Field were drapers in Marshfield Street. Mr. Weeks, a West Indian, was a herbalist, who died around 1921. Band of Hope meetings were held in the back room of his shop and he was well thought of locally. I remember Kaddies butcher shop in Manchester Road, where my mother would send me for a leg of lamb, costing about 2s. 6d. loin attached. Perhaps the most interesting of all local characters was one who had previously lived in a turning off Burdett Road. His name was Arthur Lovell and he had moved into Stebondale Street. While trying, successfully, to save the life of a little girl at the corner of Salmon Lane and Commercial Road he himself was run over and killed by a steam wagon. I remember the Catholic procession through the streets in the evening. It stopped outside his home and his wife and children came to the door. I saw his funeral, with the coffin carried on a gun-carriage and with the Union Jack. The funeral was headed by the Police Band to where he was buried in the Old Bow Cemetery. I was recently in Bromley Town Hall and to my surprise saw his photograph in the hall at the foot of the stairs. I told the caretaker there what I knew and from behind the picture he showed me a paper relating the tragic event.

## BOXING MEMORIES

Louis Behr

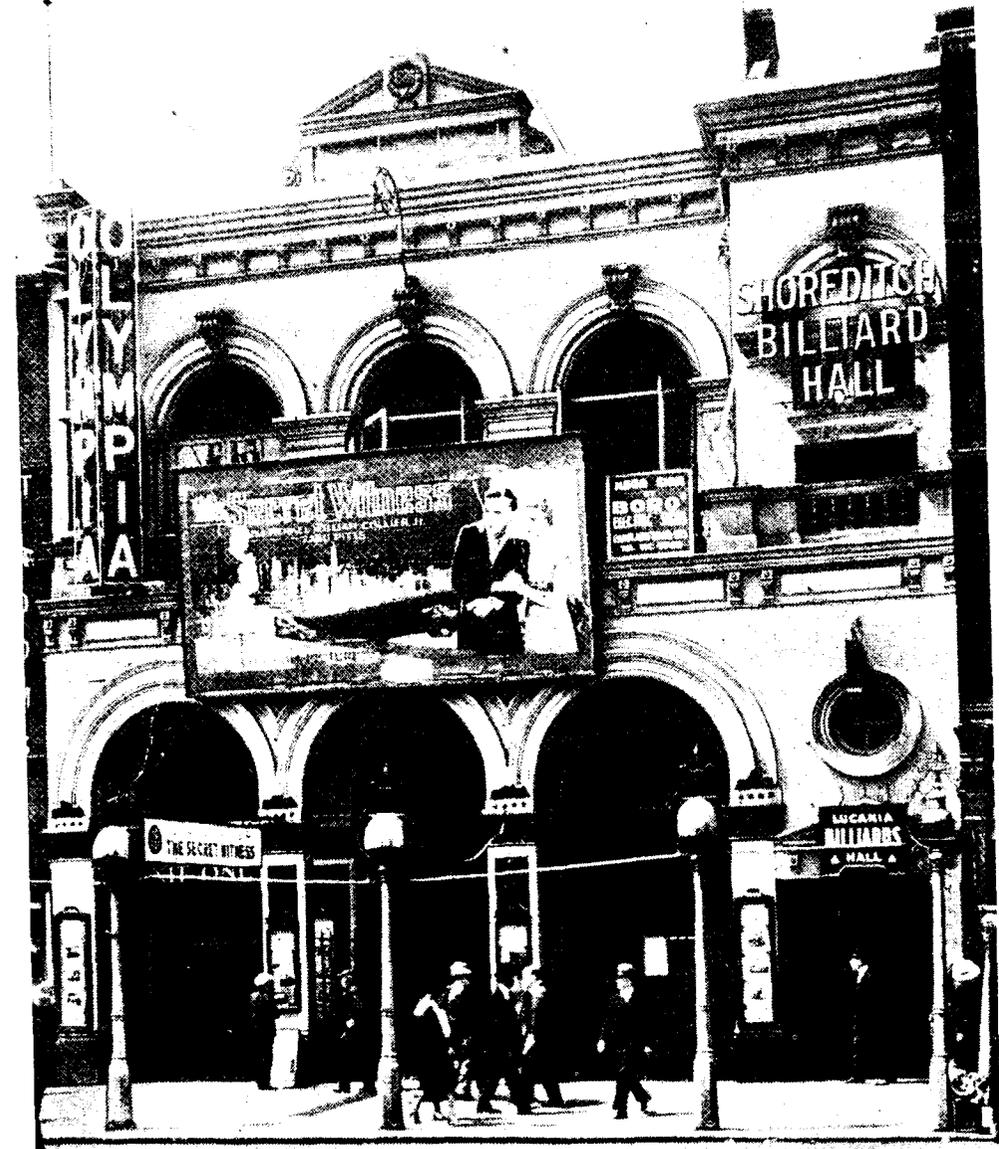
The contribution to boxing of East Londoners like Daniel Mendoza and Jem Ward are acknowledged by entries for them both in the prestigious Dictionary of National Biography. The contribution of local boxers to the sport in the present century was explored in a series of articles and letters in the *East End News* during 1981. In this article I wish to say something about a rather neglected aspect of local boxing, namely its structure, and to recall some East Londoners who, famous in the ring in their day, are now mostly but undeservedly forgotten. I must stress that I shall endeavour to provide relevant data for the period embracing the mid-nineteen twenties to the outbreak of the Second World War, thus eliminating the *Wonderland* and some other nostalgic environments of local boxing.

To many East Enders, the *Premierland*, Back Church Lane, merits pride of place as the main edifice of local boxing promotions. Participants varied from the perceptible true Cockney to the assimilated local resident. The genuine local character was in evidence on the firmly established 'Thursday nighters' with 'unlimited accommodation' at 6d (2½p). The programme consisted of bloody inter-city contests, or, more appropriately inner-city contests: against Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, etc. I can recall the coloured veteran, Sam Minto, who continued boxing well beyond his fortieth birthday, Young Clancy (St. George's), Mick Harris (Spitalfields) and Harry Jennings (Bethnal Green) who, despite the handicap of a deformed foot, possessed a resilience and courage which invariably and deservedly earned him the bonus of 'nobbins'.

Strange to relate, though, the Sunday afternoon promotions involved superior boxing grades: the spectators constituted an elite type, far removed from the 'Thursday nighters'. *Hoxton Baths*, on Monday afternoons, had a definite following, while the Sunday morning 'shows' at *Manor Hall*, Goldsmith Road, regularly featured top liners of local repute. *The Drill Hall*, Bethnal Green, assured the appearances of local, British and European champions.

Several other venues were adapted, such as *Shoreditch Olympia*, *The Pavilion*, Whitechapel Road (once the home of the Yiddish Theatre) and, strange to relate, *Beaumont Hall*, destroyed in the Blitz. None of these was commercially viable, though *Devonshire Hall*, Hackney and the *Mile End Arena*, situated near Mile End Station, were successful venues.

Besides many well-known managers and promoters (Johnny Sharpe, Jack Solomons, Harry Levene, the Jacobs brothers and, more recently Terry Lawless and Micky Duff), East London produced several referees of distinction. These included Sam Russell, Moss de Young and Jack Hart, whose promising boxing career was terminated by eyes injury. Involved in



*Shoreditch Olympia in 1932 (Hackney Library Services)*

many controversial, but fair, decisions, Hart's most disturbing incident occurred at the *Premierland*, when he awarded a points decision to Jack Garland against the local favourite Lew Pinkus in a featherweight contest. There was bedlam, with the Pinkus entourage battling with Hart, thus indicating the hazards of boxing refereeing.

The realities of economic hardship ensured that there existed a continuous source of applicants for the alleged riches of professional boxing. Many progressed from the ranks of amateurism, via the many Federation of Boys Clubs, who, to give them their due, warned aspiring youngsters of the hazards of a career in professional boxing. Once in the professional ranks, managerial control virtually enforced what is today called the 'closed shop', and woe betide any boxer who opposed the caucus. His attempted independence would have resulted in practical ostracism, by cutting off most opportunities for contests.

Training facilities were primitive; many of those in Stepney in the twenties and thirties were virtual garrets, with Heath Robinson type contrivances serving as gymnastic appliances. Here, trainers and masseurs of the calibre of Johnny Sharpe and Snowey Buckingham worked on future champions. Other training quarters were in Bancroft Road and Wentworth Mews: both could accurately be called hovels.

For the boxers, the financial returns were far from providing the just rewards, as the entourage always obtained their 'pound of flesh'. Thus, many of them were unable to attain a standard of economic security, with circumstances compelling them to fight far beyond the age when they should have retired. The impression that there were easy pickings in the ring in the twenties and thirties is a false one. More likely rewards were the endorsement of boxers shuffle, slurred speech, and the embellishments of cauliflower ears in an era when many boxers fought three fights a week, all of them over at least ten rounds, lasting three minutes each.

What did they do when they left the ring? Some, like Harry Reeves and Tom Berry, became dockers while others became market porters and many, as today, became taxi-drivers: three cabbies of note were Bert and Sid Cannons and Jack 'Froggy' Hyams. The Softleys of Poplar entered the fruit and veg business in Chrisp Street Market. Many resorted to the boxing booths, Sam Minto, mentioned earlier, among them. Some of the fighting Brooks family are expert spectacle framers, and Mick Harris was ticket collector at Whitechapel Station.

## CAPITAL CROOKS

## Review Article

Carolyn Merion

Raphael Samuel. *East End Underworld*. Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. £6.95 paperback.

Arthur Morrison. *A Child of the Jago*. Reissue, with introduction by P. J. Keating, Boydell Press, 1982. £4.95 paperback.

Donald A. Low. *Thieves' Kitchen*. The Regency Underworld. J. M. Dent and Sons, 1982. £8.95.

Who's the angelic old face on the cover of *East End Underworld*? It's Arthur Harding, ex-crook, ex-con. In 1908 the police went so far as to call him 'the terror of Brick Lane'. But in old age he wasn't terrifying. When Raphael Samuel began to interview him in 1973, and tape-record his memories, it was a good fifty years since he 'went straight'.

Arthur was a real-life 'child of the Jago', as Morrison called the notorious slum, the Nichol, in Bethnal Green. His parents' families, the Hardings and the Milligans, came from the country to London, part of the great 19th century migration to the capital. The Hardings, from Cornwall, 'down Helston way', wove baskets, bred terriers and 'were mixed up with market work'. Via Southwark and Spitalfields they moved to the Nichol.

The Milligans were agricultural labourers in Norfolk 'who could not live on the starvation wages that were paid', came to London and settled in the 'roughest' part of Hoxton, 'about the worst bloody place they could have gone to'. Mary Anne Milligan, a rag-sorter ('The wages were higher than in the factories, but it was a dirty, filthy job'), met 'Flash Harry' Harding at a pub in Bishopsgate, married him as his second wife about 1880. They set up in one room in Keeve's Buildings in Boundary Street in the Nichol.

Arthur was told that the Hardings before his day had been 'kings' in the Nichol, but the tradition was lost with his father; and his mother, disabled by a hip injury which gave 'continuous pain', had to paste together gross after gross of matchboxes, at 2½d a gross, more than a thousand boxes a day, to keep the household going, helped by whatever the children could find, improvise or pinch.

It was against this background that the fortunes of the children developed. The elder daughter Harriet, born 1882, known as 'Mighty', grew up to be a successful entrepreneur, the family stallholder in Roman Road market, organiser of Christmas Clubs, coach outings, etc. The elder son Arthur, born 1886, became a young thief, in a sort of second-string team to the older men who met at the coffee house under the railway arch in Brick Lane. 'We weren't so much a gang', Arthur says, referring to the early 1900's, 'as a loose collection of youngsters who had Clark's as their coffee house. We

were a collection of small-time thieves ripe for any mischief... we didn't go far out of our manor' — though eventually their counterfeiting, pickpocketing and gambling-club raids took them further afield, with Arthur (and others) picking up long prison sentences by the way.

Harding's recollections have been skilfully sewn together by Raphael Samuel to make a story that is hard to put down once you begin, not so much for its criminal element as for the freshness of its all-round picture of the East End — the so-called slum world which looked so different to people inside, than to outsiders 'slumming'. We have to thank Raphael for provoking Arthur to the fruitful 'battle of wills' between the two of them mentioned in the preface, details of which are promised for the next volume of *East End Underworld*.

Meanwhile you can read all about the horrors of the Nichol, as imagined by Arthur Morrison in 1895/6 — when the buildings had been swept away and the people cleared out. First published in 1896, it is now reprinted in paperback with a useful introduction by P. J. Keating.

Dicky Perrott is the name of Morrison's hero, a latter-day Oliver Twist who does *not* escape an unhappy ending. Arthur Harding's comment about Oliver Twist can also apply to Dicky Perrott: 'Dickens didn't describe him properly... a child that can move about and is a reasonable age, say eight or nine, can survive because it's got the instinct to survive... The children of the Nichol were far superior to a normal child coming of a respectable family. The poverty had sharpened their wits'.

Poverty had been sharpening the wits of London children a hundred years earlier, we see, especially in chapter 3, 'Nurseries of Crime', of Donald Low's *Thieves' Kitchen*. The book is an ideal choice for the armchair connoisseur of crime and detection, clear, readable, well-illustrated and not at all taxing. It introduces new material and captures the picturesque side of Regency London easily, though a little woolly as to social and political background. e.g. page 169, 'most people accepted the harsh penal code of early 19th century Britain as... at least approximately just'.

A necessary corrective to that assumption can be found in *Albion's Fatal Tree, Crime and Society in 18th Century England*, by Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow (Allen Lane, 1975 and Penguin 1977) which surprisingly is not included in the book list at the back of the book.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Aubrey Newman (Ed.). *The Jewish East End 1840-1939*. The Jewish Historical Society, 1981. £7.50.

IN May 1941 German bombs destroyed the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place, Aldgate. Two policemen had controlled the crowds who came to the Friday night choral services. At the final service the building was open to the sky, and the worshippers before the broken ark stood among the walls and columns that remained. An era had ended.

This publication consists of the proceedings of a conference held in October 1980, organised jointly by the Jewish Historical Society of England and the Jewish East End Project of the Association for Jewish Youth. In the project, professional and amateur historians, young and old, are working together to record the era, rightly concentrating on the story of the thousands of East European Jews who came to Stepney at the end of the last century and the beginning of this. Their religious, social and political organisations are examined, and there are interesting insights on the ways their children were anglicised by schools and youth clubs. But above all, the emphasis is on people: the achievements of the leaders and the famous are given due space, but so are the lives of the ordinary individuals, made vivid by personal memories and family histories.

The authors are as varied as the subjects covered, and include William Fishman, Jerry White, Diana Collecott, V. D. Lipman, Colin Holmes, Geoffrey Alderman, Maurice Michaels, Irving Osborne and Ann Ebner. Appropriately, the collection ends with a description of the sources held in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and a bibliography, both by Bernard Nurse. It is to be hoped, therefore, that this fascinating volume will succeed in inspiring more research and that it will in fact be the first of many on this important subject.

H. David Behr

Charles F. A. Marmoy (Ed.). *The Case Book of 'La Maison de Charité de Spittlefields' 1739-41*. Huguenot Society of London, Quarto Series LV, 1981. £2.50 to members, £10 to others.

THE Spitalfields silk trade was very vulnerable to interruptions, and many weavers were never very far away from the poverty line. The outbreak of war with Spain in 1739 brought particular hardship and led the French hospital in Spitalfields to supply outdoor relief to poor Huguenots. A typical entry in the case book includes the name and address of the adult recipients, their ages, ages of children and the amount of relief given. An unusually amusing entry reveals that an Englishman's widow was getting relief by false pretences, translating her husband's name literally into French:

Barbe (Judith Veuve *inserted*) Jean Demeure Dans Pelham Street proche de Mr. Cooper a quatre portions par samaine Agé de (*blank*)

Sa femme Judit 28 ans ont 5. Enfans de 9 a 15 Jours/II Nove Continué/Decembre le 16 augmentée de 2. portions pr. Janvier/mis a 6. portions/Le I Juin 1741 ayant Ete jnformee que Ladite Judith Barbe: Le nom de Son feu Mary Etet Englois Son nom Etet John Beard: marie avec Luy En 1727: depuis Ramariee a un nommé taler: tout Ces Enfants Son(t) jsus d'anglois Par Concaquen Na nul Droit a Cette Maison. Cet abraham jvar qui A jnforme La Compagny.

Barbe (Judith widow inserted) lives in Pelham Street, near Mr. Cooper, has four portions a week. Aged (blank). His wife Judit 28 years have 5 children from 9 (years) to 15 days/11th November continue/December the 16th increased by 2 portions for January/put up to 6 portions/the 1st of June 1741 having been informed that the said Judith Barbe: the name of her late husband was English, his name John Beard; she married him in 1727; afterwards remarried someone called taler (Taylor?): all these children are of English parentage in consequence has no right to relief from this Hospital. It was Abraham Ivar who informed the Company.

The 'portions' referred to consisted of 8 oz. dry bread, 4 oz. of bread in soup and 8 oz. of meat — better than could be expected in the way of relief from the parish authorities.

As well as the case book itself, there is an introduction and a number of useful indexes and tables. The names of recipients as well as other people mentioned are all indexed, as are streets, ale houses and taverns used in addresses. In 1732 there were as many as 144 licensees in Christ Church parish alone, a figure that was probably typical of London parishes in a period which was the heyday of the gin-shop. There is also a map showing the distribution of recipients, and a table showing the ages of those assisted and the size of families (average was small: 2.4 children). The majority of those assisted were not elderly, but young or middle aged families with children. Next came the elderly, and there were a small number of single people, childless couples and orphans.

This is only one of many publications by the Huguenot Society. Others include a previous account of the French Hospital (*Proceedings* for 1979, vol. XXIII). The present book is rather expensive for non-members of the Huguenot Society, but those interested either in the Huguenots or in Spitalfields might consider joining it. The Hon. Secretary is Miss Scouloudi, 67 Victoria Road W8 5RH, who can also supply publications.

Ann Sansom

Hugh Meller. *London Cemeteries* An Illustrated Guide and Gazetteer. Avebury Publishing Company, 1981. £7.95 paperback.

FEW of us would be greatly attracted by the idea of writing a book on cemeteries, partly because of an innate fear of involving ourselves too much in

the world of the departed and partly because of the sentimental background which for most of us makes a visit to a cemetery a sad and rare occasion. Hugh Meller overcomes these two factors by producing a guidebook which actually stimulates interest and shows how much one can learn and appreciate in a visit to a cemetery in London.

Whilst the better-known cemeteries naturally occupy the larger part of the Guide, one cannot help feeling that a little more might have been said about the smaller ones such as Edmonton and Southgate, Manor Park, Merton and Sutton, etc. which receive only a few lines. No greater attention has been paid to St. Patrick's, Leyton, which I would hardly call 'scruffy' though it may have been seen at a time of the year when all such open spaces take on a certain bleakness. I would agree with the author that in this, as in most London cemeteries, the lack of planning is evident, arising from an age when as many as possible were interred in as small a space as possible. This is obvious in Tower Hamlets Cemetery, where burials have even encroached upon pathways. Hugh Meller pays commendable attention to the monuments and it is pleasing to note that the Vigilant 'Descent from the Cross' in the City of London Cemetery is given mention. It is always a source of attraction to visitors and has not been allowed to deteriorate as so many in the Guide have been.

The author has made a bold effort in listing some of the better-known personalities in each cemetery. I am not sure I would have done this as many a 'mute, inglorious Milton' lies in these resting places, especially those serving the poorer areas where many of local fame have not even a tablet to 'implore the passing tribute of a sigh'.

What I like about Hugh Meller's book (which might have been improved by a less depressing cover) is that it does much to lift us out of the old, musty idea of a place of 'dread abode' into a sphere of brightness, of architectural interest and local historical excitement, tempered only by the appalling vandalism to which we have all become accustomed. If it will help us to find enjoyment in visiting London Cemeteries, as I think it will, I am sure Hugh Meller will feel that its purpose has been served.

A. H. French

Colm Kerrigan. *A History of Tower Hamlets*. Tower Hamlets Libraries, 1982. £2.50 paperback.

THIS book fills the real need for an introduction to the borough's history, supplying information for everyone, younger or older, wanting to know the background to the area in which he lives or works. It is no easy task to organise this in a balanced, fairly detailed, yet interesting way, but the author has succeeded in doing so here, his book combining a respect for accuracy with a freshness and enthusiasm that are quite taking.

The material for the history is enormous, but the author has contrived to survey it broadly, with each chapter concluding with a section on 'Further Reading' and another on 'Places to Visit'. For early history until the 17th

century, the order is chronological, but then it seemed better to deal with historical themes (e.g. 'Immigrants', 'Religion', 'Ship Building and Docks', 'Education', etc.). This way of dealing with the material succeeds quite well, with local events usually related to national developments.

Kerrigan, for the most part, stops around 1939 — more than 40 years ago. Someone ought to try, perhaps in another publication, to deal with events since then. Words and pictures in chapters 13 and 14 ('From Poor Law to Welfare State' and 'Trade Unions and Politics') cannot fail to remind us of hardship and struggle. It may be difficult to stay impartial over recent events, but what, for example, does one make of serious *current* environmental decline, in new, and relatively low-rise areas, like the re-built Cable Street or Poplar Market? I just mention this current aspect to the author's final paragraph, where his hope and enthusiasm for the borough are expressed.

Pictures throughout the book are intriguing, some shattering! The selection must have been difficult but the sample is excellent. Its production is 'classy', with good print, clear illustrations, and a wonderful cover (oh! how it was!). A book, then, which all residents, senior pupils, teachers and friends of Tower Hamlets must obtain, study and follow up. While not too ponderous for the beginner, it is likely to lead to an extension of interest in the subject. The Libraries Department of Tower Hamlets is to be congratulated on such a fine addition to its historical publications.

Henry C. Wilks

Bettie Knott. *The Hub of Hoxton: Hoxton Street 1851-1871*. London Borough of Hackney Library Services, 1980. £2.50.

BETTIE Knott's demographic study of Hoxton Street has been developed into a short but surprisingly comprehensive survey of Hoxton as it was in the decades between 1850 and 1870. The facts and figures are drawn from the censuses of 1851 and 1871, which recorded birthplaces for the first time, and to a lesser extent from the census of 1861. Statistics and comparative tables are clearly set out, as are the conclusions which Ms Knott draws from them. In addition to these, which constitute the original contribution to her survey, she provides an excellent introduction and linking passages drawn from the best authorities, including Sheppard, Stedman Jones and Dyos (there is a useful bibliography), illumined by well-chosen excerpts from contemporary journalists; these set the Hoxton data in the wider context of social and political developments and, since they look back to the 'thirties and, in a postscript on General Booth's findings on Hoxton, forward to the 'nineties, put the study into historical perspective. The result is a publication both scholarly — the author is scrupulous in the interpretation of her evidence — and eminently readable.

The census returns offer no startling revelations, but much valuable detail and indication of social trends. Concentration on Hoxton Street, whose atypical nature — an unduly high proportion of shopkeepers and other small tradesmen — is balanced by inclusion within the survey of the lately-genteel

Hoxton Square and the unsalubrious back alley of Barton Court, enables the author to expatiate on particular features, the workhouse, schools, almshouses and madhouses, and on notable residents, such as John Redington, printer and maker of toy theatres.

The picture which emerges is of a youngish community of comparatively small families, with rarely more than three children, probably adequately housed by contemporary standards, though with wide variations. There are pages of well-researched information on the dominant trades, furniture and footwear manufacture. The 1871 returns show little change in numbers or occupations, but make clear that Hoxton had a constantly shifting population, for reasons well analysed, as also are the social advances revealed by the census, while the author's dips into the Borough Archives show that the new Vestry, set up under the Metropolitan Management Act of 1855, tackled their task with promptitude and vigour.

Stanley Reed

Colin Rogers. *The Sidney Street Siege: its causes and consequences*. Hale, 1981. £7.95.

THE shooting of three policemen near Houndsditch in the City of London in December 1910, and the siege of two of the killers at 100 Sidney Street in January 1911, may not seem so extraordinary after the terrorist activities of recent years and the siege of the Iranian embassy. Yet for at least thirty years prior to 1910 violent revolution, riots and persecution may have been commonplace in Eastern Europe, but were virtually unknown in England.

Many of the immigrants from Eastern Europe who settled in Stepney were Jewish. The Latvian gunmen, who tried to shoot their way out of a bungled attempted burglary, were neither Jews nor did they intend to settle. They appear to have been highly mobile international criminals, committing robberies for their own benefit or possibly as 'expropriations' to finance revolutionary activities in Russia. The unnecessary visit by the Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, to Sidney Street, the arrival of the Scots Guards and later the Royal Artillery only served to heighten the drama and increase the level of violence.

Colin Rogers provides a different view of these sensational events from the fullest account available before — Donald Rumbelow's *The Houndsditch Murders and the Siege of Sidney Street* (Macmillan, 1973). He relies mostly on the exhaustive but often confused contemporary newspaper accounts, as well as official records in the Public Record Office. Precise references which would help check some of his statements are rarely given, and no new evidence is offered. He gives us instead a straightforward, common-sense approach designed to allow the general reader to draw his own conclusions — from material that the author has carefully selected.

Rogers is more critical than Rumbelow, a City of London policeman, of the inept handling of the affair by the police; and he leaves out much of the information from police files quoted in the earlier book. Rumbelow's central argument that the one who shot the three policemen was in fact Jacob Peters, later head of the notorious Soviet Cheka, is dismissed as being based on a false

identification by an unreliable witness. Gardstein, alias Morountzeff, who was accidentally shot by an accomplice, is now suggested as the leader of the gang. Rogers shares the view of the judge in the subsequent Old Bailey trial that those responsible for the attempted burglary had probably 'met their doom' and there was insufficient evidence to convict any of those arrested by the police. Two prime suspects, however, had successfully evaded capture — the best known, 'Peter the Painter' is thought not to have taken part in the attempted robbery, although he may have helped plan it; the other, Max Smoller alias Joe Levi, was probably the one who shot Gardstein by mistake.

The 'who-dunnit' aspect of previous books is played down, and speculation is restricted to the last few pages. The result is to provide a useful and reasonable account of a bizarre and confusing episode that happened to erupt in the East End to the amazement of East Enders as much as anyone else.

Bernard Nurse

Jack London. *The People of the Abyss*. 1903, reissued as paperback by The Journeyman Press. £1.50.

SEVERAL of Jack London's books are still in print, *The People of the Abyss* being the one of most interest to those concerned with the history of East London. Passing through London in 1902 for the Coronation of Edward VII, he stayed for a few months researching in the East End for a possible book. The result is the one under review, which, of all his books, is said to be the one he loved most, that had caused the most anguish to his young heart and most tears to his eyes. As a social documentary it does in fact include some very good journalistic reporting, which stands complementary to Mayhew, the two Booths, James Greenwood and others. There is a useful introduction to the present edition by Jack Lindsay.

Alan Searle

Elsbeth Veale. *Teaching the history of London*. Historical Association, 1981. £1.50.

THIS is a bibliography of current books on the history and topography of London, arranged by subject, and aimed chiefly at secondary schools. Suggested themes for school work are listed, and slides and filmstrips are also included. A map and a list of addresses complete a useful and up-to-date booklet.

David Webb

Richard Bourne. *Londoners*. Photographs by John Minihan. Dent, 1981. £9.95.

IT is difficult to know whom this book is aimed at. Richard Bourne writes a twelve page introduction on London in the form of a brief social survey. Fourteen uncaptioned photos of London and Londoners, each suggesting a story or pointing a contrast, precede the interviews. The records of the interviews are placed in ten categories — 'varieties of work', 'entertainers', 'street people', 'folk who care', 'they mind their own business', 'persons of influence', 'capital crafts', 'selling is their business', 'London lives', 'commentators'. There are photographs of most of the subjects. The book ends with a further six uncaptioned photographs. These general photographs

neither enhance the interviews nor do they provide a background to them. The photographs of the subjects interviewed are good; some, excellent.

The subjects or participants were either suggested to Richard Bourne, or were people he wanted to meet or people he came across by chance. In choosing his subjects he did not restrict himself to 'paid-up Cockneys' (his words, not mine) because, he says, a large number of Londoners are Londoners by adoption. It is apparent that some of his subjects are neither. Richard Bourne writes that in virtually every case they (the participants) love London. This goes too far; some say they do, others like their bit of it, others put up with it because they have no alternative.

Richard Bourne says that in nearly every case the participants were interviewed with a tape-recorder, and he edited their impressions. The interviewer does not intrude; there is no question and answer and little or no hint of prompting. People talk about themselves, their work, their success or their failure; many of the interviews are fascinating. One longs for the tape, rather than the printed page, to catch the inflexion of voice, the enthusiasm, the frustration and the sadness. The spread of interviews is wide; the following are examples — Andre Previn and Ian Twell (pop fan); Dame Cicely Saunders (director of St. Christopher's Hospice) and Jacqui (the prostitute); Richard Seifert (architect) and Simon Doherty (tall-cake record-breaker); Lord Justice Ackner and Ted Knight (then Leader of Lambeth Council).

There are few references to East London. David Wood, the Bow Road postman, is one of the subjects, as is Dr. James Docherty, a G.P. in Stepney, who makes some thought-provoking remarks about his work there. Reg Brady, J.P. and Fleet Street print leader, has an affection for Wapping. Les Bell's banking career was in East London.

If you buy the book — or more likely, at the price, borrow it from a library to read — you may feel that you have learned just a little about a few of the people who live and work in London. Many of the people who speak to you from the pages will command your respect or admiration; some, your sympathy.

M. V. Saville

Walter Southgate. *That's the Way it Was. A Working class autobiography 1890-1950*. New Clarion Press, 1982. £2.95.

IN the renaissance of labour history seen in the last decade autobiographical works have become increasingly important to the understanding of labour and social history. Unfortunately, many of the organisations which encourage the writings of such works often edit and interpret much of the sometimes vaguely remembered history.

This is not the case with Walter Southgate. Walter wrote the book some 32 years ago when he was 60 and it is perhaps one of the most important works to come on to the market for some time because of its clarity and richness. Born in Hackney, a decade before the death of Queen Victoria, Walter Southgate soon became involved in the politics, both locally and nationally, of the fledgling labour movement. Because of his skills with the

pen Walter soon rose in the ranks of the movement rubbing shoulders with the greats such as Ben Tillett, Robert Blatchford and Victor Grayson. Becoming a member of the Social Democratic Federation in his teens, a follower of Hyndman and a leading local member of the Clarion Movement, Walter is one of the last remaining labour movement pioneers who actually witnessed the transformation of East London both socially and politically. Walter kept a diary from his early teens. He also had a sense of history even then, and like many historians before him became a magpie, collecting many pamphlets and other memorabilia, which helped formulate the Walter Southgate Labour History Collection, which was a cornerstone in the development and opening in 1975 of the Labour History Museum, Limehouse.

The book is well written in its own right and would be thoroughly enjoyed both by the academic and non-academic as well as by the young and old.

Terry McCarthy

Doris M. Bailey. *Children of the Green. A true story of childhood in Bethnal Green 1922-1937*. Stepney Books, 1981. £2.40.

THIS book is one of a series published in recent years by various East London organisations, giving a first-hand account of local conditions in different parts of Tower Hamlets between the wars. Doris Bailey remembers her childhood in Bethnal Green 50 years ago as a place of grim suffering, a hand-to-mouth existence, and yet, viewed through the inverted telescope of nostalgia, it takes on the appearance of a half-forgotten otherworld — the world of the penny cinema, the cats' meat vendor, the dark and mysterious local shops, the collection of horse manure, the visits to Victoria Park. Mrs. Bailey's memories pour out in stream-of-consciousness fashion; she mixes the highlights with the disappointments of a young girl's early life against a background of the depression years. It is a slightly breathless technique, but Mrs. Bailey makes you want to believe that Bethnal Green really *was* as she describes it — poor, but honest, a shabby paradise for a growing child. She views it now, from the safe distance of Leytonstone, and 50 years of hindsight, through distinctly rose-coloured spectacles; but it is good to have this account of Bethnal Green of Auld Lang Syne. It is a pity that the little volume is only decorated with her son's poor line drawings, when what was needed was a few good photographs such as the one on the title-page. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that Mrs. Bailey can be persuaded to add to her memories in a further collection, on the lines of Dolly Scannell, or Grace Foakes.

David Webb

Hunter Davies. *The Grades: The First Family of British Entertainment*. Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1981. £8.95.

THE Winogradsky family might be said to be typical of East End Jews who have made good, were it not for the scale of their success: arriving in Brick Lane from Odessa in 1912 they rose to fame and riches by enterprise and unsparing work, as many others have done, but no other such family, I think, can boast three millionaire tycoons and two peerages. Olga Winogradsky,

who died last year at 94 in her suite on the private top floor of the Grosvenor House Hotel, among the Arab sheikhs, was an archetypal Jewish Momma, driving force of the family in the Whitechapel days. Her husband Isaac had preceded her to London, she travelling by the notorious Berlin route with her two sons, Louis (never Lew to his mother) aged seven and Boris (later Barnet, then Bernard) aged two. They spoke no English, a language Lew never wholly mastered, though he was the last man to be inhibited by such shortcomings. The third son, Leslie, was born in 1916.

The early chapters will most interest London historians: the material comes largely from letters written by one-time residents in the area in response to the author's published appeal for first-hand recollections of the Grades. (It occurs to me that this correspondence, reportedly voluminous and only briefly quoted from in the book, might usefully be redeemed for archiving.) Such reminiscences are notoriously unreliable, and those of the Grade family themselves sometimes self-contradictory, while the author's own credibility is somewhat shaken for me by a paragraph on early cinema — the boys' grandfather had owned two cinemas in Russia — into which he packs four clangorous mis-statements in twelve lines: but the main facts emerge clearly enough. The family did not quit Russia from poverty or persecution, though fear of the latter was a factor; the hard times came in London, where Isaac worked in the sweated tailoring industry, only later acquiring his own workshop. Such money as he had smuggled out from Russia was lost when he opened a cinema on the Mile End Road which foundered in the 1914-18 War. But the family were probably never in dire poverty and soon moved from Brick Lane to the historically interesting Boundary Estate, L.C.C. tenement blocks off the Hackney Road, its central feature, then as now, the bandstand in Arnold Circus.

The boys attended Rochelle Street School, where most of the pupils were Jewish. Lew was smarter than the headmaster, at least with figures, but Bernie was a tearaway, later transferring to the Stepney Jewish School, where his schooling came to an end by mutual consent when at the age of eleven or twelve he was caught organising a sweepstake. The family had by now moved to Grafton Street, which survives as Grantley Street, at least in part, the rest demolished to make way for the new block of Queen Mary College.

Neither Lew nor Bernie had any taste for tailoring, from which fate they were rescued by the coming of the Charleston; both were good dancers and they plunged into the sub-culture of dance-hall competitions, doing well enough to graduate from local appearances to the variety halls of London and the continent. They took new names, Bernie being dubbed, with a one-time partner, by an agent as The Delfont Boys, Lew shortening Winogradsky to Grad, adding the 'e' later when he saw it thus misspelt on a Paris playbill. Their East End days were effectively over, though by way of homage Bernie, as Lord Delfont, adopted the tag 'of Bethnal Green'. The rest, the agencies, theatre ownership, film, television, is showbiz history.

Stanley Reed

*All books reviewed here can be obtained from THAP Bookshop, 178 Whitechapel Road E1.*

### The Millwall Miracle

*Below is an extract from a poem by T. G. Dearing of Bow about Isambard Kingdom Brunel's ship The Great Eastern, built in Millwall by the firm of John Scott Russell. The poem, with others on the history of the Isle of Dogs, is published by and is available from the Community Education Project, Island Resource Centre, 151 Manchester Road E14, price 50p.*

Vast it loomed above the slips —  
Six times as big as other ships!  
Towering over river and wharf  
All else did this Leviathan dwarf.  
The massive bulk of its huge load  
Was built along West Ferry Road,  
Amid great scenes of toil and bustle  
By engineers of John Scott Russell.

Four hundred hammers crashed each day  
For twelve long hours without delay  
Reverberating through each brain  
Six days a week on shell and frame.  
Two hundred gangs, a thousand days —  
The figures stagger and amaze.

Inside the hull it had a shell  
And, cramped within this narrow hell  
A candle flickering smokey tomb  
Worked riveters, 'bash-boys', charcoal blowing  
Heating rivets white hot, glowing.

### A note on contributors

Dr. Vallance, whose article is an abridged version of her 1981 Tower Hamlets Annual Local History Lecture, is Senior Lecturer in Government and Political Studies at Queen Mary College, and author of *Women in the House*, now an Athlone Press paperback. Maurice Pelter was brought up in Stepney, spent some time in Israel and now lives in Holland; A. H. French, M.B.E., is a founder member of the East London History Society; Minnie Skeat lived in Cubitt Town until she married in 1931; Louis Behr, a retired postman, is a life-long resident of Stepney; Carolyn Merion writes regularly on local history in the *East End News*. David Behr works in local government and Ann Sansom, Reference Librarian for Brent, is Secretary of the East London History Society. Henry Wilks, a retired teacher, is author of *George Green School 1828-1978*. Stanley Reed was formerly Director of The British Film Institute; Bernard Nurse is Local Studies Librarian for Southwark and David Webb is Reference Librarian at the Bishopsgate Institute. Alan Searle is a retired bank official and distribution manager for this magazine; Mike Saville was until recently Registrar of Queen Mary College, and Terry McCarthy is Curator of the National Museum of Labour History in Limehouse.

### SOME RECENT LOCAL HISTORY STUDIES RELATING TO TOWER HAMLETS AND HACKNEY

#### Articles, essays and journals

- Barr, Jim, and others 'West India Dock Forge' in supplement to *GLIAS Newsletter*, no. 78, February, 1982.
- Curl, James S. 'Architectural grandeur in Stepney' in *Country Life*, 12 November, 1981.
- East of London Family History Society Articles in recent issues of *Cockney Ancestor* include 'Prize fighting in East London' (Autumn, 1981) and 'Limehouse Memories' (Winter, 1981-82, and Spring, 1982).
- Fleetwood, M. 'Architecture in the Docks' in *Architects Journal*, 21 April, 1982.
- Hudson, Pat, and Hunter, Lynette (Eds.) 'The Autobiography of William Hart, Cooper, 1776-1857' in *The London Journal* vol. 7, no. 2, 1981, and vol. 8, no. 1, 1982.
- Husbands, Christopher T. 'East End Racism 1900-1980' in *The London Journal* vol. 8, no. 1, 1982.
- Levenberg, Schreider 'Rebels, fighters and dreamers' in *Jewish Chronicle Colour Magazine* 26 September, 1980.
- Power, Michael J. 'The East and West in Early-Modern London' in E. W. Ives, R. J. Knecht and J. J. Scarisbrick (Eds.) *Wealth and Power in Tudor England*. Athlone Press, 1978.
- Whytehead, Robert 'Excavations at Goodman's Yard, 1978' in *London and Middlesex Archaeological Society Transactions*, vol. 31, 1980.
- #### Unpublished studies
- Grisley, A. *Grisley: a one-name study concerning the years 1550-1980*.
- Rees, O. *The Five Houses at Clapton, in the Parish of Hackney*.
- Thorne, R. *Blackwall Police Station*.