

PROGRAMME 1983/84

<b>1983</b>			
29 Sept. Thurs.	The Rise of Petticoat Lane Adam Joseph	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
26 Oct. Wed.	Annual General Meeting followed by Members' Evening	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
24 Nov. Thurs.	Tower Hamlets Joint Annual Lecture "Attlee - Limb of Limehouse" Wm. Golant, MA (Calif.), M.Litt. (Oxon) Lecturer in History, University of Exeter	Central Library, Bancroft Road	7.30 pm
13 Dec. Tues.	The Isle of Dogs Community History Project Eve Hostettler	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
<b>1984</b>			
19 Jan. Thurs.	Some little known aspects of the Anti-Fascist Movement in the 1930's John Archer	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
15 Feb. Wed.	Sir John Leman Mrs. Rosemary Weinstein (Museum of London)	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
22 Mar. Thurs.	London's Waterways Philip Daniell	Queen Mary College	7.30 pm
19 Apr. Thurs.	East London Sailors' Homes Tony Fincham	Nelson Room Sailors' Palace, W.I. Dk. Road	7.30 pm
23 May Wed.	Hackney Walk led by Miss A. J. Wait	Meet Hackney Old Church Tower	6.30 pm
14 June Thurs.	The Politics of Housing in Hackney 1880 - 1914 Sue Laurence	Rose Lipman Library De Beauvoir Road, Hackney	7.30 pm

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.

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# EAST LONDON RECORD

No. 6

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## EAST LONDON RECORD

Editor: Colm Kerrigan

The East London History Society publishes the *East London Record* once a year. We welcome articles on any aspect of the history of Hackney, Newham or Tower Hamlets. Articles, which need not be in their final form, 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 Ridgdale Street, London E3 2TW.

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Cover illustration: Sarah Anne Glover, who influenced her husband to go into the mineral water trade, and her son Horace William.

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## MEMORIES OF BETHNAL GREEN 1935-1945

Joyce Ayres (née Poole)

MY grandparents, Michael Lowe and Caroline Rebecca Lowe are both now deceased, and when my grandmother was buried in 1982 I thought back to my childhood and the impact they both had on my life. To me they have given a wealth of childhood memories which from time to time I pass on to my two sons.

Grandad to me was always a kindly old man; when he and Nan married, he moved next door from his childhood home into a 1st floor flat in Ducal Street, Bethnal Green. I don't suppose they called it a flat. It was rooms with a yard and outside toilet but had its own street door on ground level. There were four rooms and a scullery. Two rooms were used as bedrooms and one room was the kitchen/living room with sink, cooker, big fire range, tables and chairs, and although very short of space, one room was the 'front room' and kept for best. We grandchildren were very rarely allowed in there and I've never known it used for 'best' as Nan never had company outside her own children and then we would all sit in the kitchen. Only once was it used as far as I can remember and that was when Uncle Jim got married to someone rather posh. Nan always thought everyone 'posh' if they lived outside a radius of two miles of Ducal Street. She had two sons who married outside the area and she always said no good would come of it and she was right.

I well remember after the war when Ducal Street was pulled down under slum clearance. Nan and Grandad were moved to Poplar, and Nan thought she was living in the country because she could see some grass and trees from her flat. It was in fact a children's play area.

My Nan was born in Spitalfields. She was one of six children, she being the eldest. Apparently her mother was a gin drinker who smoked a pipe, was regularly drunk and ran off when Nan was quite young, leaving her to cope with the children. Her father spent most of his time drinking and he would, when he remembered, give her a couple of pennies to feed the children. She'd go to the market in Brick Lane at night picking up the 'specs' from the kerbs and buying pieces of scrag to put in the pot for a stew which would have to last them all week. Her brother once said they could have died if they hadn't had her. None of them ever had shoes or socks on their feet. When she married I suppose life was somewhat better. She brought up seven children in her four rooms: Mickie, Carrie, Nellie, Jimmy, Rosie, Arthur and Georgie.

My earliest memories of Nan was of her lovely long hair in two long plaits which were coiled round the nape of her neck. She always wore long skirts with a piece of sacking tied round like an apron. Besides looking after the family and at times the grandchildren, she worked in a laundry, scrubbing the floors and delivering bag wash to the Jewish people. She would carry heavy sacks of bag wash on her shoulders or head and she was always covered in cottons and fluff. Nan was always busy but kept herself to herself. She wasn't one to gossip to the neighbours, she didn't believe in it. I can remember Nan lifting the window up when we were playing in the street and screaming out to my sister and myself 'Joycee, Renee, tea's ready'. Up we'd run and Nan would be holding a lovely crusty loaf to her bosom and cutting the bread with



*Brick Lane in 1932 (Tower Hamlets Libraries)*

a large knife. She always cut bread this way and I used to think one day the knife would slip and go right through her. We'd always want the topper, but usually Georgie would get that — he was Nan's youngest, but only a couple of years older than myself. The bread would be spread with thick butter and condensed milk and then sprinkled with sugar and we'd have a mug of hot sweet tea. When she wasn't looking we'd all dip our fingers in the tin of milk but if we were found out she'd hit us across our fingers with the knife.

Nan's place was just across the street to the saw-mills, I can remember the screeching of the saws and the smell of the sawdust even now, but the noise never seemed to get her down.

When Grandad came home from work — he was a French polisher — we used to hear him coming up the stairs and we'd have to get out of his armchair and almost stand to attention. Then he'd sit down and untie the laces on his big brown boots and then it was the job of my sister and myself to try and pull the boots off. We always fell on the floor laughing. He would open his wooden case and perhaps have a comic or a boiled sweet for us. Grandad always made us laugh because he always went down the Lane on Sunday mornings and used to buy up all the old spectacles. He had a big tin of them and kept them at home and would wear all different sorts and try to read the paper. We all knew he couldn't read but he'd blame it on his specs. He would buy special salts to soak his feet in. He always had his feet in a bowl of water and then he would rub them in with 'Vick' a vapour rub for chests.

My sister would hate it if we met Grandad down the lane, because he always insisted we had a hot 'Sarsaparilla' drink, as it was good for us. Poor Rene detested it and as soon as she'd finished drinking it she would be promptly sick down the drain. Off he would go to the 'Duke of York' in Brick Lane, where he would meet the Uncles. We liked to see the Uncles on Sunday mornings because they used to give us 6d to spend and we'd queue for fritters or go to the animal market. One day we bought a little day-old chick. We didn't know what to do with it or how to keep it warm, so we put it in the oven on a low gas and were quite shocked when the poor thing died. Our Georgie however, bought one and kept it in a bird cage. It became very tame and would sit on our heads and shoulders, but when it got a bit meaty, Grandad killed it and when Nan put it on the table for dinner we all ran away crying.

After our walk down the Lane, we would go back to the 'Duke of York' and keep calling Dad or Grandad. To keep us quiet they would buy us a 1d arrowroot biscuit, or a dog's biscuit, as we called them. We spent a lot of time at Nan's, especially during the war when my mother worked in a parachute factory. We lived just round the corner to Nan at 9 Queens Buildings, Chambord Street. We only had two rooms and an outside wash house and toilet which was in a communal yard. In the bedroom we had two double beds, a piano, one wardrobe, one tallboy and a dressing table. There wasn't any floor space to walk on and I used to bang on the piano with my feet from the bed. We slept in a bed settee under the window and if the old women in the street wanted a penny for the meter they used to lift up the window and yell out, 'Carrie, have you got a penny for the meter?' Nobody ever locked doors or windows in those days. Our front door was always open.

Our street was a narrow, cobbled stoned street in the midst of the French Polishing shops. The street seemed to be divided into two halves. On one side lived the Gentiles and the other side, in the bigger houses, lived the Jews. We used to run errands for the Jews and get a penny or a sweet and if there was a Jewish wedding, the bride would sit on cushions in a big chair and all the kids in the street were allowed to file past. We gazed in wonderment at all the fruit and sweets set out in silver dishes.

I can remember playing endlessly in the streets while the neighbours sat on their chairs nattering. We would play such games as 'Tin Can Copper', 'Knocking Down Ginger' and 'Top and Whip'. Sometimes the mums would turn a big rope while we kids queued to skip through it.

We had an old crazy Jewish lady opposite us; 'Fakie' we called her. I think we tormented her dreadfully. We didn't realise it then, but she was well looked after in the street: if anyone was making a stew or broth, some would be put in a basin and taken to her — not like today, when people would want her put in a Home. During the war she came into our flat when the air raid warnings sounded. A lot of people came to us as we had a ground floor flat and not everyone liked the Shelters. We always knew when there was going to be a Raid because it would come through on the Relay wireless and Jessie Manning, who lived in the top flat, would lift her window and shout loudly, 'Warning, Warning'. A bald headed man came in during the raids. He called my sister and myself 'Buttercup' and 'Daisy'. He would give us chalks and we were allowed to draw on his head.

I can also remember Bank Holidays. We used to have a new dress or shoes, then all the girls in the street would link arms and we'd all stride out together saying, 'left, right' so everyone would notice our shoes. Every Easter Bank Holiday Monday, all the family, with Grandad in charge, would go to Lea Bridge Fair. What a lovely day we'd have! We'd go on all the rides, and at the end of the day Grandad would take us all to the Pub opposite to have a plate of cockles and he would have a pint of beer.

Another special treat was to be given 4d on a Saturday morning to spend at the pie shop. Sometimes we would cheat and just have a bowl of mash and liquor which would cost 2d, then we could spend the rest of the money on crackling from the fish shop and a glass of Tizer measured out in a fish paste jar. Or we could get a pennorth of red cabbage, which would be served in newspaper and all the vinegar would run through. Oh, the taste of those delicacies! The smell of some of the small shops I can remember now. I especially loved the smell of Rustins the oil shop, which sold bundles of firewood and candles and had sawdust over the floor.

The job we used to dread most was in the winter, when we had to hire a barrow for 6d and push it to the Gas Light and Coke Co. There you were allowed one sack of Coke per person. My sister and I had to go as it meant two more sacks. It was bitterly cold and we'd queue for hours. We had to fill the sacks ourselves and that was no mean feat as we were very young at the time. I can also remember the long queue for oranges and bananas as they were on ration. The woman who worked in the greengrocers lived in our street, and she would tip us off when the oranges were due. Oh, the excitement in the street in those days!

After the war, in 1946, we were moved from our tenement buildings into a prefab in Bishops Way, Cambridge Heath, and life was never really the same. I remember when we first moved in, the prefabs were fitted with a fridge. This was a miracle. We had never had an inside toilet before or even a kitchen, but now we had a fridge. My sister and I would invite all our old friends from the street and make them line up. Then we would let them peer through the window to look at the fridge. We couldn't let them in because we had new lino on the floor. Overnight we had become 'posh'!

All these lovely recollections came back because now, sadly, my grandparents have departed. But what vivid and happy memories they are of a wonderful childhood spent in the East End of London.

# THE BRITISH XYLONITE COMPANY LTD OF HOMERTON

A. J. Wait

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Hackney saw the birth of the plastics industry in Britain, with the Parkesine works at Hackney Wick followed by the British Xylonite Company at Homerton. Many of the records of the latter company are held at the Hackney Archives Department.<sup>1</sup>

The first plastic material ever made was invented in 1862 by Alexander Parkes, who named his discovery 'Parkesine'.<sup>2</sup> It was based on cellulose nitrate, or gun-cotton, which had been invented about twenty years before. Cellulose nitrate was made by dissolving woodfibre, paper or rags in nitric acid, and its principal use was as an explosive. In a solution of ether/alcohol it was called collodion, which could be applied as a liquid film which then dried. This was used for dressing wounds, and also as a photographic film base, on a glass support.

Parkes first became interested in collodion in this connection; he hoped to make a film sufficiently thick not to need the glass backing. Very soon after, in 1855, he patented a process for waterproofing fabrics by coating them with collodion.

In 1862 Parkes patented his new discovery of Parkesine, and exhibited objects he had made from it at the International Exhibition; he announced that it could be used for 'Medallions, salvers, hollow ware, tubes, buttons, combs, knife handles . . . etc.'

In a lecture given in 1865 Parkes described how Parkesine was made. The cellulose nitrate had to be a less heavily nitrated compound than ordinary gun-cotton. Since Parkes was concerned to keep his costs down, he used cotton waste, which was dissolved in a mixture of nitric and sulphuric acid. The excess acid was drained and then pressed out of the nitro cellulose. This remained as a solid block, which was broken or torn up by a machine 'made expressly for the purpose', and more acid was washed out with water; when the water was extracted a solid lump of material was left, which was again disintegrated in the 'tearing machine'.

The next stage was to apply the solvent. In collodion, ether/alcohol was used, but this was too expensive for the commercial process which Parkes had in mind. He therefore used nitro benzole, aniline or glacial acetic acid, and rendered them more easy to use by mixing in camphor. What he did not realise was that camphor was, in fact, an essential ingredient.

The nitrated cellulose was dissolved in enough of the solvent to make a soft plastic mass, which was then strained through sieves. Colour could be added at this stage, and other ingredients to affect the ultimate hardness or flexibility of the product. It was then rolled into sheets, or moulded into whatever final form was required.

Again, Parkes did not realise that a considerable 'seasoning' period was required, to let all the solvent evaporate from the product. If goods were made from unseasoned material, they were likely to warp or shrink.<sup>2</sup>

In 1866 Parkes founded The Parkesine Company and set up a factory at Wallis Road, Hackney Wick, next to the works of George Spill & Co. The

*Daniel Spill, founder of  
the Xylonite Company  
(Suffolk Record Office)*



latter company made waterproof cloth, previously coated with rubber, but now intended to be coated with Parkesine. Articles such as combs and buttons were also made at the Parkesine Works. However, the Parkesine Company failed in 1868, probably because not enough camphor had been used and the products had not been seasoned, and were therefore liable to shrink or distort. Another reason may have been that Parkes, determined to produce as cheaply as possible, used dirty cotton waste which left impurities in the Parkesine.

After the failure of the Parkesine Company, Alexander Parkes, who was primarily a metallurgist, seems to have taken no further interest in plastics. However, his former works manager was evidently determined to continue. This man was Daniel Spill, brother of the owner of the waterproof factory. In 1869 Spill (who lived at 12 Hackney Terrace, Cassland Road) registered the Xylonite Company Ltd., still at the works at Hackney Wick. He had chosen the name of Xylonite for his improved version of Parkesine; it was derived from Xylon, the Greek word for wood. It is not known what improvements Spill made on Parkes's process, but he managed to produce a great deal more of the plastic; in the 1871 census he stated that he employed 20 men. However, the business was not a commercial success, and failed in 1874.

Undeterred, Spill took a lease of Nos. 122 and 124 Homerton High Street, and set up a smaller business there. These two properties (now Nos. 180 and 182) lay on the south side of the High Street, east of Macintosh Lane. Spill called them the Ivoride Works, since he had adopted the name of Ivoride for lighter colours of Xylonite. Imitation ivory knife handles were the company's main product, but such items as brooches were also made, and Xylonite tubes were sold as insulating material for electric cables.<sup>3</sup>

In 1876 Spill entered into partnership with A. D. Mackay and Herbert Bennett, trading as Daniel Spill and Company. Mackay was to remain a director of the company until his death in 1939.

Meanwhile, similar attempts to produce a plastic material had also been made in America. Inspired by a competition to find a substitute for ivory in the manufacture of billiard balls, one John Wesley Hyatt successfully experimented with a coating of collodion. (As this was slightly explosive, the

collision of two billiard balls would sometimes produce a loud report, whereupon, as Colorado saloon keepers complained, every man present would instantly pull a gun.) Hyatt and his brother continued to experiment, and in 1870 they achieved the breakthrough which had eluded Parkes and Spill. Hyatt patented a new mixture which specified that camphor should be the principal solvent. In 1872 the Hyatts named their product 'Celluloid'. In theory, therefore 'Celluloid' was the name of the American product and 'Xylonite' that of the British; however, 'celluloid' soon came to be regarded as the name of the substance rather than a trade name; the same thing happened to the word 'aspirin'.

The Celluloid Manufacturing Company had a great success, particularly in the production of dentures. (It is interesting to note that a similar use for Parkesine had been proposed by a Hoxton dentist, a Mr Cartwright, in 1863.) In 1875 the American company sent a representative to Europe to try to extend their activities. This man, Amasa Mason, turned for help to his friend Levi Parsons Merriam, a fellow American living in Britain. At one time they were attempting to set up the British Celluloid Company, but the deal was never completed, and meanwhile Merriam had learned of Spill's company. In 1876 he took a lease from Daniel Spill and Co. of No. 122 Homerton High Street, and began to manufacture, out of Spill's Xylonite, imitation coral jewellery. Unfortunately, the fashion for this jewellery, which had been such a success in America, died out just at that time. L. P. Merriam and his son, Charles Pearce Merriam, with their five employees, turned to making combs, in a shed built in the garden of No. 122.

At this time, and for many years afterwards, Xylonite was regarded principally as a substitute for luxury materials such as ivory and tortoiseshell. It was for this reason that the trademark for Xylonite showed an elephant and a tortoise, with a motto from Pope:

'The tortoise here and elephant unite,  
Transform'd to combs, the speckled and the white.'

No one seems to have considered using Xylonite to replace wood or pottery. This may have been because it was relatively expensive to produce, or because it had the disadvantage of being inflammable. Unlike collodion it was not actually explosive, and could therefore be used for billiard balls without causing alarm in the saloons of the Wild West. But from time to time the company had to contest allegations that their product was explosive, or else that it was so highly inflammable that if a woman wearing a Xylonite comb sat near the fire, the comb would ignite.

Despite these allegations the Merriams managed to sell their combs, but their company was in difficulties, as was Daniel Spill's company next door. In 1877 additional capital was raised and both companies were reconstructed. Merriam's business was taken over by the Homerton Manufacturing Company, with Merriam as managing director and his son as secretary. C. P. Merriam was just twenty-one at the time, and was to remain with the company until his death fifty-six years later. At the same time the new British Xylonite Company was formed to take over Daniel Spill and Company's business. Spill took little further interest in the company after this time, and appears to have moved further away from Hackney. E. L. Bennett, a cousin of Herbert Bennett, raised much of the new capital needed for both

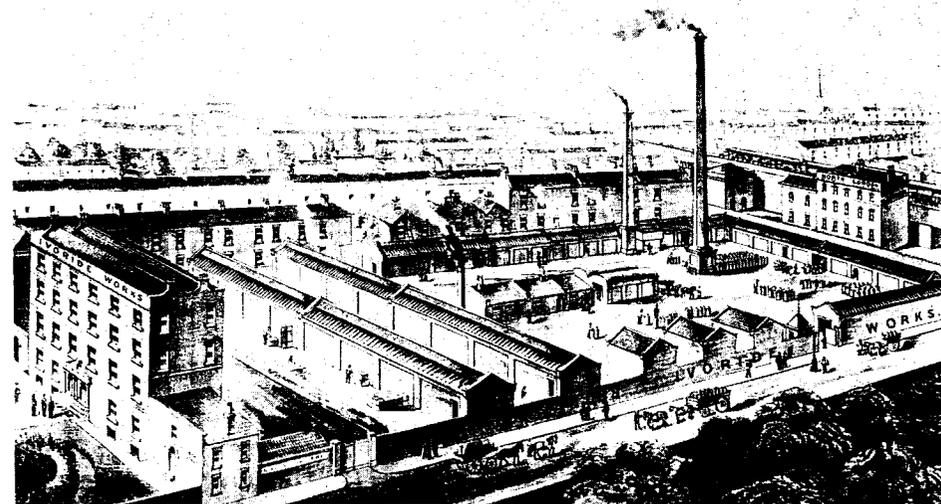
companies, and became Managing Director of the British Xylonite Company. Links between the two companies remained strong, and they were formally amalgamated in 1879, with Merriam and Bennett as joint managing directors.

Nevertheless, the financial situation was still desperate. One employee, who joined the Company in 1878 remembered being sent out to try to collect money on outstanding accounts, in order to pay the workpeople's wages. A group of workmen would congregate outside the gate in Macintosh Lane and wait for him and his colleague to come back; if they had been successful they would hold the bag up and their workmates would cheer.<sup>4</sup>

C. P. Merriam also recalled those anxious days. He wrote that he would go to his father's house in Colvestone Crescent to spend the evening, and return at bedtime to Homerton (where he lived above the office), 'always looking anxiously in the letterbox on my arrival, hoping there might be an order, but very, very rarely finding one'. He worked from 7 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. and until 1879 was paid 35s a week.<sup>5</sup>

In 1879 C. P. Merriam went to the USA to see a customer who had complained that the Xylonite he had received was not adequate for his purposes. Merriam found that flaws in the material which were tolerated in Britain were not acceptable in America; but he also noticed that the customer had very good comb-making machines, and arranged to purchase some.<sup>4</sup> At about this time the Company decided to cut down on the ranges of fancy goods produced, and to concentrate on steady lines, in particular combs and

*Daniel Spill's Ivoride Works at Homerton. The artist has exaggerated the size and importance of the factory, a not uncommon practice. Macintosh Lane is shown in the foreground, with Homerton High Street at the extreme left, and the North London Railway, far right (BXL Plastics Ltd)*



knife handles. Knife handles made of Xylonite were becoming increasingly popular, particularly after 1884 when imitation grained ivory was produced. This material was also used to make piano keys.

However, between 1879 and 1884 the Company's financial position remained very insecure. In 1883 Nos. 122 and 124 Homerton High Street were declared unsafe by the Metropolitan Board of Works, and the directors had to raise amongst themselves the £2,500 needed for repairs. Later that year E. L. Bennett resigned as joint Managing Director, leaving L. P. Merriam as the sole occupier of the post. Herbert Bennett had already resigned as a director in 1882, and there had been other resignations from the board. However, L. P. Merriam never lost faith in the company. He invested in it all the money he had, and maintained the confidence of his friend B. F. Stevens, the company's major creditor. Stevens and other creditors agreed in July 1884 to wait for repayment, thus enabling the company to continue in business.

In 1885 the tide turned at last, when an agreement was signed with the Impermeable Collar and Cuff Company (of Bower Road, Hackney Wick) for the supply of cotton laminated with Xylonite. This agreement is still preserved in the Company's archives, labelled 'The Seed of Success'. Within three months, the British Xylonite Company had set up a subsidiary company in Holloway (partly financed by B. F. Stevens) to make its own collars. The main products were the wipe-clean collars and cuffs for office workers, so popular in those grimy days, but clerical collars and stiffened shirt-fronts were also made.

Just when things seemed to be going well, however, there was another setback — a serious fire at the factory in June 1885. It was witnessed by the young Harry Greenstock, whose father was the clerk who had to go out collecting money to pay the wages. Harry himself spent all his working life with the company. He was born in 1881 at No. 22 Sedgwick Street, Homerton, and one of his earliest memories was of looking out of his bedroom window and seeing a sheet of flame. The factory's acid shop was on fire. The young Harry, who was suffering from measles at the time, was wrapped in blankets and carried to the top of Sedgwick Street, in case the fire should spread beyond the factory.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately it did not, but the damage was severe as the fire took place on a Sunday afternoon in June, and the water pressure in the hoses was inadequate. All the employees living locally turned out to fight the fire, but damage to buildings, plant and stock was estimated at more than £1,500, and production was held up for three weeks.

This disaster brought home to the directors that they needed another site for manufacturing the raw material — particularly as they had difficulty in renewing the insurance on the buildings. Because of the inflammable nature of Xylonite, they needed a considerable space between the different buildings. They also needed room for increased production now that business was at last picking up. Enquiries were made about possible country sites, and eventually in April 1887 they purchased an estate at Brantham, on the border of Suffolk and Essex. The purchase price was £4,000; the company obtained a mortgage for £3,000 at 4% and the remainder, as well as £13,000 needed for buildings and plant, came from a new issue of debentures. Evidently the improved sales had encouraged confidence in the company, even though the earlier loans had not yet been paid off.

The new estate lay on the Suffolk bank of the river Stour, and raw materials were brought up the river by barge from Harwich. The Great Eastern Railway ran through the property, so there was no difficulty in transporting the crude Xylonite back to London. Road communications were also good, as the land bordered on the Ipswich to Colchester road, but goods were not transported by road at this time. The experiment was tried, but did not prove cost-effective.<sup>4</sup>

The parish of Brantham had only a few hundred inhabitants, mostly employed on the land. The Company had therefore to 'import' its workers, and to build houses for them. The factory was built on the low land next to the river, and the houses on the healthier higher ground. Fifty-six in number, they were called Brantham New Village. A number of Homerton employees (including Harry Greenstock's father) moved to the new works, which were laid out with large spaces between the different buildings.<sup>4</sup> There were a number of fires at the factory over the years but no loss of life.

From now on, unmoulded Xylonite made at Brantham was sent back to Homerton to be made up there into the various products. Xylonite was also sold to other companies in Britain and abroad. Finished goods from Homerton were also exported; special combs were made, 'Levant combs' for the Middle East, and crescent-shaped 'Indian combs' for India and the Far East. The company had agents in all the major European capitals, and in Constantinople.

At home, one of the earliest and most important customers was Boots Cash Chemists, who bought such products as combs, hair pins and slides, and hair, tooth and shaving brushes. Other products included toys, watch-glasses and 'fancy goods', such as inkstands and mirrors. Collars and cuffs continued to be made at Holloway. In fact, L. P. Merriam had seen his company well on the way to success when he died in 1889 at the age of fifty-nine.

At first the output at Brantham, though substantial, was less than had been expected. The first works manager seems to have regarded himself as the local squire, and to have visited the works rather than spending his working day there. In 1894 he was persuaded to resign, and Charles Pearce Merriam, who had taken his father's place in the company, appointed his brother-in-law C. B. Brookes as works manager. Production began to increase from that time.

One problem remained, however: that of obtaining supplies of camphor. This resinous substance, distilled from the wood of the camphor-tree, could only be imported from Japan and Formosa (Taiwan). In 1895 Japan conquered Formosa, and was therefore in a position to impose a monopoly. Experiments in making a synthetic substitute for camphor were being carried out, but a commercially viable product was not obtained until 1919. In 1897 the British Xylonite Company were sufficiently worried to engage the services of an agent to visit Japan and Formosa and report on the present state and probable future of the camphor industry there.

The man they chose was C. A. Mitchell, a shareholder in the company who evidently had a knowledge of chemistry, since he had sometimes given technical advice concerning production problems and new processes. He was also a globe-trotter — he was in Italy when the company wrote and asked him to go to the Far East. He agreed to make the journey for a fee of 150 guineas

and his expenses, remarking that he was 'glad to know that the savages in Formosa only hunt heads with *long hair*'.

While Mitchell was away, a momentous change had taken place. It had been apparent for some time that the Homerton premises were not really suitable for the manufacture of inflammable Xylonite products, for the different buildings were packed close together, as well as being surrounded by houses. The LCC was beginning to tighten regulations on factory buildings in its area. Moreover, in August 1894 there was a serious fire in which one girl was killed and others were badly burned. In 1895 another small fire added to the feeling that a move to more open premises was desirable. The company had, therefore, bought a farm at Hale End, Walthamstow, in 1896, and new buildings were erected with the wide spaces between them which had successfully contained any fires at Brantham.

So the British Xylonite Company left Homerton in 1897, and the premises were sold the following year. The company, which is now incorporated into BXL Plastics Ltd, remained at Hale End until recently (producing Halex toothbrushes among other things). Xylonite is still produced at Brantham. It is made into spectacle frames and piano keys, and is also the best possible material for both gambling dice and table tennis balls.

By the end of the last century other plastics were being developed, rivals to Xylonite and Celluloid, but during the time when the British Xylonite Company Ltd was at Homerton, it was the only significant manufacturer of plastics in this country.

#### NOTES

1. The deposit of these records (reference D/B/XYL) by BXL Plastics Ltd was arranged through the good offices of the Business Archives Council
2. M. Kaufman, *The first century of plastics*. (London 1963), pp. 23-26.
3. In writing this article I have been greatly indebted to the work of Mr. Peter C. Ashlee, whose thesis 'Fusks and Tortoiseshell: the early development of the British plastics industry' was submitted at the University of Nottingham in 1982.
4. *Go on and prosper: reminiscences of the early days of the plastics industry* by Harry Greenstock, edited by Percy Reboul (BXL Plastics Ltd, 1981) *passim*.
5. Extracts from C. P. Merriam's private journal, printed in *Seventy five years*, which forms part of a deposit at Vestry House Museum, London Borough of Waltham Forest.

## H. J. GLOVER: HIGH CLASS LEMONADE: CELEBRATED GINGER BEER

Mike Sandow

IN 1877, the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, Horace Jennings Glover founded his mineral water manufacturing business in the Shadwell area of East London. The four-storey building at 26 Cannon Street Road was of ample proportions, enabling him to use it as both factory and home.

Horace had come to London from Walsall in the 1870's and married Sarah Anne Jones in 1875. They lived and worked in the Shadwell area, he as a coachbuilder and she with a mineral water manufacturer at 43 Middlesex Street. It is apparent that Sarah's insights into the fast-growing mineral water trade were a contributing factor to the change in direction of the family business. The Golden Age of the independent, family-run mineral water manufacturer was under way, for between 1885 and 1910 there were 180 recorded in East London alone (see Note). However, of the handful that survived beyond the First World War, Glover's was the only one to continue through to the 1970's.

It is not too difficult to imagine Cannon Street Road in the late 1880s. The buildings were mainly terraces, the ground floors occupied by a variety of trades. For example, number 2 was a stick manufacturer, number 6 a baby linen warehouse, number 36 a pork butchers, number 40 had coffee rooms, number 46 was a cigar manufacturer and number 58 a dairy; a tin plate worker was at number 50, a pawnbroker at 58, a wardrobe dealer at 21, a farrier at 31 and number 35 had a tobacco pipe manufacturer. There were many others, too numerous to mention. The upper floors were the homes of these tradesmen. By day it was undoubtedly a busy place, noisy with the rattle of horse and cart traffic on the cobbled road and the constant coming and going of an endless stream of housewife shoppers. By night it was aglow with the light of gas lamps, and in the background, both day and night, was the regular sound of steam trains hissing and hooting across the viaduct.

Adding to the daytime rattle was Horace Glover, as he made deliveries by handcart to local houses, shops and pubs, the cart loaded with crates of Codd bottles bearing his registered trademark, a spray. One such bottle, despite the enclosed name and address, the easily recognisable trademark and the inevitable farthing deposit, was never returned. It was thrown away with someone's other household rubbish during 1888. It went by horse-drawn refuse cart to the local refuse depot and from there it was transported by rail wagon, along with several hundred tons of other general ash-based refuse purchased by a railway building contractor, to a remote corner of the Essex countryside, to lay for ninety years beneath the track-bed of a now defunct railway line. I unearthed this bottle in a dig in 1979, its condition as clean and bright as the day Horace Glover last saw it. Deliveries by handcart obviously limited Glover's travelling distance, which restricted the area for sales to the immediate locality. Yet, despite later horse-drawn cart and eventually motorised deliveries, Glover's never attempted serious penetration beyond 'their area'. Their products and service, always maintained to high self-imposed standards, secured them a captive, virtually unassailable market.

Horace Glover's drinks were made to his own secret recipes by making cordials from grapefruit, cherry and other fruits. Later they were based on condensed fruit slabs and syrups bought from Barrett and Foster. In later years his son Horace William and grandson Stephen would produce drinks from the same secret recipes. Glovers were proud of making brewed ginger beer throughout three generations and continued to do so even when most other firms had moved over to producing aerated ginger beer, an inferior concoction.

Glover's ginger beer was sold in the familiar stoneware bottles. The one pictured here is an early example, as it bears the name, simply, 'H. J. Glover,' the words 'and Son' not yet added. Horace's son, Horace William, was aged eleven in 1887, and would not have been brought into the business until at least leaving school at the age of fourteen. Ruth Taylor (née Glover) sister of the last owner of the firm, Stephen Glover, has childhood memories of the stone ginger beer bottles, recalling the time just before the First World War when, filled with hot water, she used them as bed-warmers. Ruth also remembers the manpower shortage of the First World War, when, as a young girl, her help was needed in the factory for a variety of jobs, particularly corking the filled ginger beer bottles and securing the corks by tying them with string.

Soda water was also manufactured and supplied to local pubs in Glover's own syphons, some of which are pictured here. A few beautifully

*From left to right: blue syphon, pink syphon, pink syphon, Codd, green syphon, ginger beer, clear syphon*



coloured ones have survived: emerald green, coral pink and deep blue, all with pewter tops and made by the British Syphon Company, London. Many more of these syphons would have been retained by Stephen Glover but for an unfortunate occurrence a few years ago. He was aware that his old coloured syphons had become collectable and accordingly had stored them away in an apparently safe place in the factory, separated from the day-to-day stock. However, unknown to him, a member of his family handling orders supplied 'some of those coloured syphons' to publicans, unaware of Stephen's plans for their safekeeping. Despite the normal three shillings deposit charged, they were never returned by the shrewd publicans.

For a time Glover's syphon graced the bars of their own pub, when at the end of the First World War Horace William became landlord of the 'Crown and Dolphin' situated at the corner of Cannon Street Road and Cable Street, just a few yards from the factory. He held the licence until 1928. The success of the Glover business is illustrated by Horace William. For many years he was the East London representative of the London Mineral Water Exchange. His activities were not only concerned with the trade, however, for he was also a life governor of the London Hospital, a Warden of St. George's-in-the-East, and at the time of his death in 1938, vice-chairman of the East London Licensed Victuallers Benevolent Institutions Association.

During the Second World War, Glover's bottles became unidentifiable, for security purposes, as it was part of the general programme in force, which aimed at the confusion of spies, that no name nor address could be shown on bottle labels — a number was used instead. It seems amusing now to imagine how such a ploy could confuse a German spy arriving in the Cannon Street Road area, for a short distance away were located Tower Bridge and the Tower of London itself, landmarks identifiable even to German schoolchildren.

A trade list from the late 1840's makes interesting reading. Pint bottles of lemonade were four shillings and sixpence (22½p) per dozen. Syphons of soda water were eight shillings for the same number. Split-size bottles of genuine tonic water were three shillings (15p) per dozen, while ginger beer, in half-pint bottles, cost 3d (1p) more. Glover's Portade, in split size bottles, cost three shillings per dozen, the latter being the last secret recipe drink in production.

In 1952 Glover's suffered a severe blow that almost closed them down. This was the aggressive entry of Canada Dry into the soft drinks market. Backed by Charringtons the brewers, who ordered their publicans to stock their products, Canada Dry's success caused Glover's sales to fall by fifty per cent within the short space of seven days. However, years of dealing with the Glover family could not be discarded lightly, and most publicans did not actually cancel their orders with them outright, but maintained a small order. As time passed these orders increased, until eventually the firm recovered. The firm carried on successfully until its closure in 1977 (coincidentally another Royal Jubilee year) when, after nearly a century of producing 'high class lemonade' and 'celebrated ginger beer' from the same address, Stephen and Mary Glover's retirement brought the firm to an end — undoubtedly the last of the older established mineral water manufacturers in East London, if not the whole of London.

#### NOTE

The following mineral water manufacturers were in business during the period 1885 to 1910 and all were within a short distance of Glover's premises:

Cohen, I.	22 Langdale Street, Cannon Street Road.
Diamond, P.	159 Cannon Street Road.
Diamond & Caplan.	167 Cannon Street Road.
Druce, J.	35 Cable Street.
Drummond, M.	72 Watney Street.
Hostler, T.	1 James Street, Cannon Street Road.
Julier, G.	13 St. George's Street.
Lyons, H.	8 Langdale Street, Cannon Street Road.
Pomeransky, S.	81 Cannon Street Road.
Robinson, F.	17 Cable Street, Shadwell.
Roland, A.	23 High Street, Shadwell.
Smith, F.	37-38 St. George's Street.
Thompson, J.	325 Cable Street.
Star Mineral Water Co.	125-127 High Street, Shadwell.

Only two of the above concerns remained in business beyond the First World War, S. Pomeransky and F. Smith, the latter moving to 74 Sidney Street.

#### POSTSCRIPT

In the summer of 1980, shortly after acquiring a Glover ginger beer bottle for my collection of East London Mineral Waters, I was checking the East London edition of *Yellow Pages* when under the listing of Soft Drink Manufacturers I found, to my astonishment, 'H. Glover and Son, 26 Cannon Street Road, London, E.' At the earliest opportunity I visited the factory, only to discover the business had closed down in 1977. I had consulted an out-of-date issue of *Yellow Pages*. My disappointment was not to last because the new occupation was a distribution depot for soft drinks, using the Glover name. The proprietors gave me assistance in locating the Glover family.

Following my subsequent meetings with Stephen Glover, with his assistance I obtained permission from the new owners to search the building for Glover relics, even though I was assured that nothing remained. A number of assorted labels, trade cards, order books, printed bottles and syphon crates, together with several clear glass syphons were found, among the latter, one for 'Glover's High Class Table Water.' The syphons were found in a large accumulation of crates wedged between the factory wall and the boundary wall of the rear adjoining property. Sadly, in 1982, the building was badly damaged by fire, and many crates bearing the names of old mineral water manufacturers were destroyed. The building was seriously damaged and its present condition renders it uninhabitable.

Other recorded Glover relics are:

- Five gallon stoneware container with carrying handle, tap and internal screw stopper. 'H. Glover and Sons, London, E.1.' printed on shoulder.
- Twenty-five gallon stoneware ginger beer brewing vat made by Doulton, Lambeth.
- Cast iron hand operated crown-capping machine, age unknown, probably pre 1920.
- Bottle of Glover's ginger wine, labelled, sealed with contents.
- 'Glovers Table Waters' pub menu holder, brass frame.
- Syphon, blue glass, fluted internally, pewter tap: 'Glover's Table Waters'.
- Syphon, pink glass, fluted internally, pewter tap: 'Glover's Table Waters'.
- Syphon, green glass, pewter tap: 'Glover's Table Waters'; also, the rear of this syphon is etched 'The glass-lined syphon. This syphon renders metallic poisoning of the water impossible. Nicoles Patent.'

*My grateful thanks to Stephen and Mary Glover and Ruth Taylor (née Glover) for their enthusiastic assistance and encouragement, and for the use of photographs.*

A version of this article appeared in the August issue of *Treasure Hunting Magazine*.

## THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION IN THE COMPANY OF THAMES WATERMEN, 1641-2

Christopher O'Riordan

DURING the English Revolution of 1640-1660 there was a widespread attempt to democratise the guilds of London.<sup>1</sup> 'It is highly probable that few of the companies containing a rank and file of craftsmen escaped the contagion of the democratic movement'.<sup>2</sup> It would appear from the usual accounts that this movement won only trifling concessions. In the case of the Thames watermen however, it achieved real success, as will be seen.

The watermen carried passengers along and across the Thames in tilt-boats, wherries and sculls. Theirs was an important job in an age of bad roads and poor land transport, and when London Bridge was the only bridge. They numbered at least 4,000 in 1641 (a figure including those retired),<sup>3</sup> and claimed to be the most numerous company in London.

The watermen were not one of the livery companies, i.e. they did not have a political elite or livery who were privileged to sit in Common Hall, one of the organs of the London government. They were not counted among the ranks of the handicraftsmen of the 'middle sort' of people, and could not really be called skilled workers (although apprentices were required to serve seven years before being made free).

An act of Parliament of 1555 imposed a government on all the watermen plying between Windsor and Gravesend, in an attempt to end the state of anarchy in the trade. Further measures were taken in 1603. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London were given the power to appoint ('elect') eight rulers or overseers over the watermen. The rulers were to be chosen anew each year, at the first Court of Aldermen to be held after 1 March.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the rulers were changed every year. To maintain the continuity of the ruling group, it was provided that former rulers (and only these) could become 'assistants' to the current ones, or could become company officers. In an apparent self-description, the oligarchy consisted of '40 ancient men, 14 of them being his Majesty's servants, 2 of them being Esquires, and the most of them subsidy-men [well-to-do payers of a property tax]'.<sup>5</sup> They thus formed an elite social group within the company.

The material condition of the rank and file, or 'generality', of watermen was deteriorating. They were used as a naval reserve, and in Queen Elizabeth's reign their numbers were kept artificially high for that purpose. With the decline of England's international position under the Stuarts, the requirements for naval strength fell, and with it the number of watermen. Their numbers perhaps halved between early and mid 17th century. Inflation since the 16th century was reducing the real value of the watermen's fares, which also perhaps dropped by half from the 16th to mid 17th century. A particular misfortune struck them in 1612, when the theatres moved from the south bank of the Thames to the north and there was a consequent great loss of income from passengers.

From time to time the watermen made complaints about the 'unfitness and corruption' of the rulers (which they blamed for their poverty), and in 1621-3 and again in 1631-2 revolts broke out in the company. The watermen requested a form of democratisation of the company, which they appeared to

see as a solution for their grievances. Hundreds of watermen then 'broke' with the rulers' government. Orders were issued by the Privy Council for the suppression of these offenders, and steps taken to redress grievances (as dissent recurred, these were evidently ineffective or unsatisfactory). The pattern of these revolts foreshadows that of the revolution of the 1640s.<sup>6</sup>

### Revolution at the Grassroots, 1641

On 10 March 1641 a petition from the generality of the watermen was read in the House of Lords, and referred to the committee of petitions.<sup>7</sup> It complained of the oppression of the generality by the rulers, and asked that the rulers might be chosen by general election in future:

... the election of the said Rulers and Assistants for the ensuing year is already past, which the petitioners did well hope to have prevented, and now leave to your Lordships' considerations . . . they most humbly pray that their said Rulers and Assistants hereafter to be nominated and chosen, may be by a free [full?]<sup>8</sup> election of the Generality of watermen, and by them presented yearly to the Lord Mayor of London to be sworn . . .<sup>9</sup>

The petition of the generality is expanded in a 'statement of grievances' annexed to a later petition of the rulers to the Lords. This document requested that the generality, or the greatest part of able and sufficient watermen, be permitted to meet between 14 and 20 February, yearly hereafter, to elect the rulers. It also requested that the most able of the generality be empowered to meet with the rulers at six-monthly intervals to make laws for the government of the company. The generality saw the solution to their alleged problems of misgovernment in democratic self-government. Another of the grievances was competition with other boatmen, and the watermen probably saw self-organisation as a means of promoting their material interests.<sup>10</sup>

From the petition of 10 March it appears that the watermen had already unsuccessfully attempted to get the government of the company democratised. There is, however, no reference to such an application to the Court of Aldermen in the Mayoral records.<sup>11</sup>

The watermen, or a radical faction within their ranks, began to resort to militancy and direct action. On 3 May the rulers presented two petitions, one to the Lord High Admiral, the other to the Lords. These petitions illustrated how the generality were defying the rulers' authority, even to the threat of the lives of some of the rulers. The second petition showed

that diverse refractory watermen boasting that they may do what they list (because now it is Parliament time) have taken such lawless liberty upon themselves as to go to all the places where watermen ply, from Gravesend to Kingston, encouraging thousands of them not to obey the petitioners' government, nor to come to their Hall [which was the place of company government] when they are complained on or warned thither for any misdemeanours; and also some of the rude apprentices have come to the Hall in troops to offer [i.e. threaten] violence to the petitioners . . . for all their abuses and vilifying the petitioners, they will not appear at our Hall, or if they appear they break from our officers; the chief leader of this faction being one Joshua Church, who being told that he ought to be obedient to law,

order and the Lord Mayor, replied that it was Parliament time now, and that the Lord Mayor had nothing to do with them, and that the Lord Mayor was but their slave.

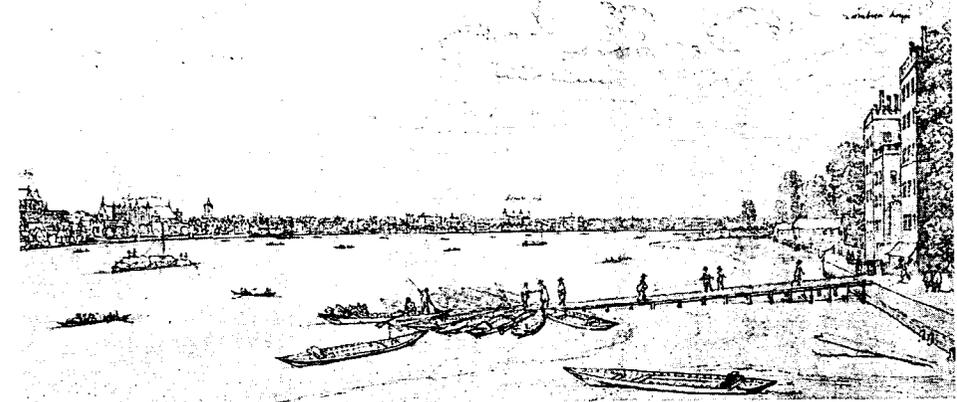
The petitioners asked that a messenger be sent to every pair of stairs or a proclamation made 'to quiet this growing mischiefs [*sic*]'.<sup>12</sup>

On 9 March a bill concerning an addition to the statutes of 1555 and 1603 had been read in the House of Commons.<sup>13</sup> A petition of the generality was exhibited to the Commons on 16 April,<sup>14</sup> and on 21 May it was referred to the committee on the watermen's bill, which had been committed the same day.<sup>15</sup>

A petition of the rulers to the House of Commons was printed in 1642. Presumably it is based on an earlier manuscript. Its content and context suggest that it portrays a closely following development of events indicated in the petition of 3 May. It states

that whereas divers months past the petitioners presented to the Honourable Assembly a Bill to be passed as an Act of Parliament, for the better government of the generality of watermen, which Bill being twice read was committed: that the said watermen exhibited a scandalous petition against the petitioners, thereby most unjustly charging them with divers grievances, which petition was likewise committed to the same committee: that some of the watermen (though the Bill was preferred by the consent of such who are trusted by the generality, and contained nothing but that which tended to the good of the company,) were so far enraged and incensed against petitioners, that they threatened to raise many thousand watermen to be present at the committee, to oppose the petitioners' proceedings, and that they would cut some of the petitioners in pieces, and destroy some of them . . . and they so affronted and threatened petitioners'

Wenceslaus Hollar's drawing, showing 17th century watermen on the Thames (British Museum)



counsel, that (at one time) they durst not appear for petitioners at the committee, and some of them, namely, Joshua Church, boasted that now during this Parliament time they were free from all government, and needed not in anything to obey petitioners, their rulers, insomuch as by means whereof, divers great disorders and outrages have lately been committed by some of them, even in the view of some of the petitioners, who for fear of being murdered by them, did not dare to enterpose their authority. Now forasmuch as by reason of your far more weighty and important affairs, you have been pleased for a time to surcease any further proceedings in the petitioners' cause . . . [we fear that] there will be . . . many other outrages committed by the rude multitude, who (in all their courses,) are much guided and persuaded by the said Joshua Church.

The petition asked the House of Commons 'to convent before you the said Joshua Church, and the rest above named [whose names have been omitted from the printed version]' and to enjoin them to cease their activity and obey the rules of government.<sup>16</sup>

Further details of the watermen's movement to February 1642 are to be found in a tract by John Taylor, the water poet.<sup>17</sup> Taylor gives interesting information about himself in this pamphlet: he is a member of the watermen's oligarchy, and was clerk of the company at the time of writing. The tract gives a scurrilous description of Joshua Church, his lowly origins and alleged bad character; it also portrays him as the chief instigator of the movement. This document is worthy of extended quotation:

. . . you [Church] have (for many years) practised to overthrow all order, rule and government [in the watermen's company], you did eleven years past raise many hundreds of Watermen in a combination for that wicked intent; yet all your knavery was covered with a cloak of Reformation . . . you taxed [the rulers] with bribery, corruption, and many vile abuses . . . [but a committee of the Court of Aldermen cleared us of those scandals] . . . by which means we were free from your malice, till within these two years. In which time you have . . . made a strong combination with many thousands of watermen, persuading them not to obey the Rulers . . .

You [on one occasion] pointed with your finger to our Hall, and called it a Rooks' Nest and [said] that you had one hand in the Nest already, and that shortly you would pluck all the Rooks out: and we have since that time been three several times assaulted in our Hall, so that we have at every one of those times been forced to call the Constables to protect us from violence . . .

You (Mr. Church) came lately into our Hall, and in a pilfering manner you took close up out of an Outward Room a Table of Orders that hung there by the Lord Mayor's command, that watermen might read and hear how they should be governed: for the which fact I had you with a warrant before a Justice, who would not bind you over to the Assizes, because you Bawled and lied to him, that our grievances were to be heard by a Committee in Parliament within fourteen days after. I am sure you lied then: for it was much about Alholowtide and we have no hearing yet . . . [The *Journal of the*

*House of Commons* (vol. 2, p. 274) shows that the committee on the watermen's bill was to meet on 10 November; it does not mention the generality's grievances on this occasion, but the quantity of information which the *Journals* give is very inconsistent: Church may well have been reporting fact.]

You framed fifty Articles against us in Parliament . . .

By your doings and rebellious courses you have made the Thames a wilderness: for there is neither command nor obedience . . . you have brought the River to that pass, that watermen ply how and where they list, that they abuse Fares and exact upon them, that they fight

. . . you now seek and strive to be a Ruler or Governor of the Watermen's Company, for you would have 8 honest men to be sworn (I doubt not but you mean yourself to be one) . . .

. . . [members of Parliament] sitting late about the great affairs of the Church and Kingdom, their coaches that waited on them, have had their Axletree pins stolen by Watermen, on purpose to make the Gentlemen go by water . . . such Villany was never used till you overthrew our Government. [Perhaps this was an unorthodox method of obtaining the ear of M.P.s for the watermen's grievances.]

To add an interesting note on the political scene at large, on 6 February 1642 Joshua Church jibed that if the King stayed but a little longer at Windsor, they would make him mayor of the town.<sup>18</sup> Charles I had fled from London on 10 January 1642, an event which was to lead to the Civil War.

The rulers' tracts provide a hostile and negative description of the watermen's revolution. In particular, they portray it as merely anarchistic, and avoid all reference to its democratic ideals. Why was this? It was no doubt disgraceful enough, in the 17th century, for an established oligarchy to have to admit to the overthrow of its authority by the 'common multitude', without adding the (still more revolutionary) implication of democratic government as well. (In a similar way it was more comforting to attribute responsibility for it to certain radical leaders like Church, rather than admit to any collective initiative of the rank and file.)

There is no concrete evidence that the rank and file were actually attempting to run their own government. But are we to suppose that these vehement democrats had exerted such efforts to overthrow their rulers' authority — merely to do nothing? The generality saw the answer to their alleged problems of misgovernment, and poverty (which was brought about by the rulers' corruption), in direct democracy, and they would have seen it as being in their own interests to organise themselves for protection from the competition of other river workers — and from their rulers — and not let their movement merely be an anarchic every-man-for-himself. The watermen's tracts offer fairly strong circumstantial evidence of an attempt at self-government by the rank and file.

It should also be noted that the repressive forces of the state had partially broken down in 1641, and it would consequently have been easier to carry out such democracy. The convening of the Long Parliament in November 1640 led to the taking up of 'law' and 'constitution' as revolutionary banners for fighting the 'injustices' of the *ancien regime*. The

militant autarchy of the watermen was evidently pursued through just such a 'legal' framework, their charges against the rulers. 'Parliament time' was more than a mere catch phrase.

### The Overthrow of Oligarchy in 1642

On 1 February 1642 a petition from the generality was read in the Court of Aldermen. It asked for the benefit of the 1555 act for a general election of the rulers.<sup>19</sup> The Court referred the matter to a committee on 3 February.<sup>20</sup> John Taylor describes how, as clerk of the company, he was to represent it on that day:

... the Rulers of our Company were warned that day to appear before the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen (upon your [Joshua Church's] complaint) ... Then ... you went or sent for a Deputy to a Sergeant at Arms, to attach me and bring me before an Honourable Committee of the House of Commons [for alleged 'bad speeches'] ... But ... I had that favour to stay and do my service [at Guildhall], and afterward I went before the Committee [of the House] ...<sup>21</sup>

Taylor continues his account:

... you [Church] with some others did on Wednesday last [9 February] (before a right Worshipful Committee) at the Guildhall ... abuse and accuse myself and all others who have ever been Rulers ... you with some others made haste to the Thames side, and at divers places you did brag, that you had cast the Masters [rulers] and old Assistants out from all manner of further government: and so saying, you showed yourself a boasting, lying, Rogue.<sup>22</sup>

But Church was not lying.

On 15 February the committee delivered its judgement to the Court. It stated that the 1555 act gave the choice of rulers to the Court, but recommended that fifty-five of the most honest and sufficient watermen should yearly nominate twenty of the most able and best sort, out of which the Court could choose eight. It specified, however, that the Court could reject any of the names and select others as it thought fit. The committee's recommendations were agreed by the Court.<sup>23</sup>

The fifty-five electors appear to have been chosen by the 'towns and stairs' between Windsor and Gravesend, i.e. by the body of the Thames watermen (a practice which continued for many years).<sup>24</sup> The electors appear to have constituted themselves as a court of assistants — a powerful body in 17th century gilds — and at later times it is known that they participated in the government of the company, and controlled its finances.<sup>25</sup> The electors were thus a long term democratic gain of the English Revolution.

The rulers record that the radicals had preferred their charges against them in bill to the House of Commons. Such a bill must surely also have contained provision for company democratisation.<sup>26</sup>

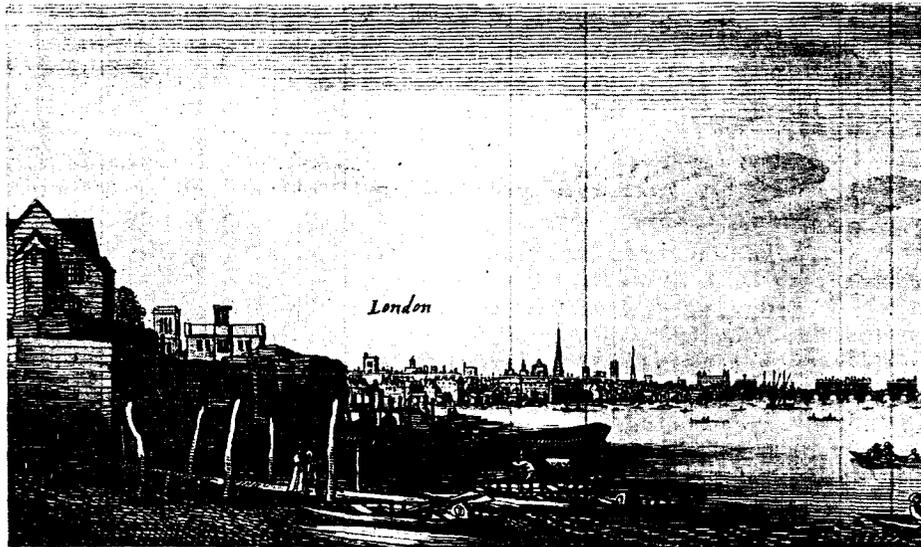
And on the 3 of March last [the day the new rulers were sworn at the Court of Aldermen<sup>27</sup>], they most falsly and maliciously affirmed before the Right Honourable, the Lord Mayor, and Court of Aldermen, that the Rulers were twice voted against in Parliament, which is so far from truth, that it is certain, the cause was never yet

heard in Parliament; and that Honourable Court will never Vote against men before a hearing. Thus by slanders, clamours, threatenings, multitudes, noises, voices, most odious and shameless lies carried it against us; some of them have not been sparing to abuse his Majesty,<sup>28</sup> to wrong the High Court of Parliament, to vilify the Lord Mayor, and Court of Aldermen, using all bad means (to the furthering of their Projects) against us ...<sup>29</sup>

The old ruling group was completely and permanently expelled from power in 1642.<sup>30</sup> Of those who had served more than twice as rulers up to 1641, not one returns after this date. Examples of leading oligarchs removed are Robert Clarke (served as ruler eight times, 1625-41), Thomas Consett (six times, 1628-38), and John Taylor (six times 1623-39). There were many rulers who had served just once or twice; of these, only two or three bridged the gap. Robert Meredith, who had served in 1639 and 1640, served six times in the period 1647-61; he was the most frequent ruler in what seems to have been a fledgling new oligarchy. Robert Coomes served 1641, 53, 60, 61. Thomas Blackman, whom the oligarchy alleged to have been a previous ruler, served in 1643. Blackman had been an oppositionist — see later.<sup>31</sup>

It had been a regular practice for rulers to serve two consecutive years. From 1620 to 1640, between one and four of those who had served one year, returned the following year (with one exception, 1631-2, when none returned). After 1641 this practice ceased for a few years, returning in the mid-1640s. Here is an indication of the short term breakdown of oligarchy.

Who were the new rulers? I have not been able to assign any other connexion to the large majority of them; out of the few names I have otherwise identified, all (except perhaps one) were former opponents of the oligarchy, or democrats. Richard Perkins (1644) had signed the democracy petition of March 1641. The name of Robert Browne (1648) also appears on the petition (as 'Robbert Broune'); both the first and last names are very common, so one shouldn't jump to conclusions. However, one Robert Browne is cited as an oppositionist in 1640; in that year he brought the company before the Master Recorder over the issue of quarterage. The three references may well apply to the same man. The Robert Browne of 1640 paid only half the normal quarterage, implying that he was a poor man, even by watermen's standards. This, then, may be one instance of a profound social shift in the government. The generality alleged that the oligarchy had extorted money from Christopher Parker (ruler 1644, 45, 59, 60). It is not clear whether Mathewe Price (1643) had had money extorted from him or had submitted a bribe to the rulers, and consequently which side he might have been on. Thomas Blackman (1643) had previously been 'dismissed from any more being Ruler or Assistant' by the Court of Aldermen after having brought various charges against the rulers, although it is not stated when this happened. Blackman's name does not appear in the Aldermanic repertories at the usual times for the swearing of rulers before 1643. Thomas Rowe (1645) had been petitioned against by the rulers in May 1641 for defying the press. I suspect, in view of the time and context, that the rulers may have had rather more 'political' reasons for suing Rowe; perhaps he was an oppositionist.



Hollar's print of 'London by Milford Staires' (British Museum)

William Goodale (1648, 49) was possibly the oppositionist Goodale who in 1641, according to John Taylor, 'swore he would have my heart in his hand'.<sup>32</sup>

Joshua Church does not appear among the rulers. Neither was he a signatory to the generality's petitions of 1641. Although he was a leader of the 1631-2 revolt, the old rulers may have been mistaken in believing him the 'chief leader' in 1641. Perhaps by this time Church was only a respected senior revolutionist who helped to organise the rebellion. The old rulers may have been living in the past.

### What Happened to the Democracy

An element of the popular force continued to oppose the new rulers. A petition of the latter to the House of Lords complains of divers obstinate and refractory watermen, who despise government, oppose themselves against the petitioners, . . . and in contempt of them . . . abuse the petitioners' officers, the Lord Mayor of London's officers, and passengers they carry . . .; which the petitioners endeavouring to redress [i.e. correct], the said watermen combine themselves to gather to suppress the petitioners' government and live under no law or government but their perverse and wicked humours, and to that end raise tumults and mutinies upon the River, to the utter destruction of government and disheartening of the petitioners and other well affected watermen.

The petitioners note that in 1631 the then rulers obtained a warrant to suppress similar disorders; and as this warrant was 'of no force now', they ask that similar means be granted them to apprehend all such offenders and convent them before the Lord Mayor or other justice of the peace. The petition is undated but perhaps originates in early 1643.<sup>33</sup>

I venture to say that the tone of this petition is more confident than that of those of the old rulers in 1641. The residual opposition seems to have lost its justification in law (a part of the petition not quoted here may indicate this) and to rely solely on mob force to survive.<sup>34</sup>

Several petitions were made by 'the watermen' to the Court of Aldermen against the rulers in the 1640s. On the rulers' side, measures were taken to increase control and order in the company in the same period. In 1648-9 there was a dispute between the rulers and the 'well affected' watermen over company finances and the election of the rulers. The 'well affected' watermen may have been the descendants of some of the radicals of 1640-2; but I think it significant that they describe themselves as householders, emphasising their social respectability. After this, evidence of conflict in the company fades out.

What was the subsequent history of the watermen's democracy? By 1692 the assistants had ceased to be elected and had become a self-perpetuating clique. In that year the Court of Aldermen ordered that a modified form of democracy be restored. No mention was made of the assistants' nomination of candidates for rulers, and the rulers were empowered to remove assistants for 'misdemeanours'. An act of Parliament of 1700 combined the watermen with the Thames lightermen, who carried goods. By this act the rulers and assistants were annually to appoint the watermen of the principal places of plying, 'or the major part of them', and such watermen were to choose forty to sixty assistants. The lightermen were to choose nine of their number each year to be assistants as well.

It appears from the act of 1700 that inspection of company accounts was part of the democracy. The act specified that the rulers and assistants were to nominate five watermen and two lightermen every year to audit the accounts of the rulers 'and others of the Company', and to place the results 'in some public place of the Company's Hall, to be inspected by any person concerned'.<sup>35</sup> Open financial accountability had been one of the aims of the revolutionaries in 1641.<sup>36</sup>

A new act of Parliament in 1827 nullified the remaining democracy. Assistants were not mentioned. New rulers were to be selected out of three candidates presented by the existing rulers (the old assistants in any case seem to have lost their ability to choose candidates at least as far back as 1692). In the later 19th century the company was run by a self-selecting group consisting of a master, four wardens and nineteen assistants.

In the early 20th century the day to day duties of the watermen's company were taken over by the Port of London Authority.

### NOTES

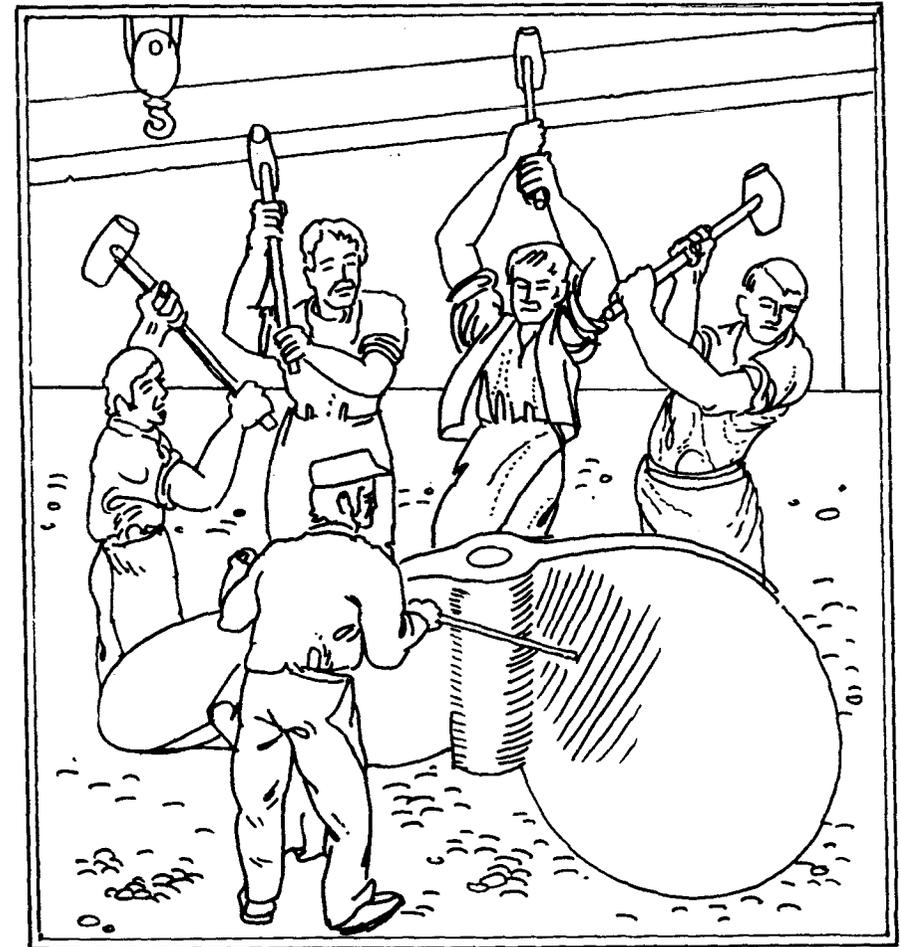
- In the 17th century the year was reckoned as beginning on 25 March and not 1 January.
1. George Unwin, *Industrial Organisation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1904), pp. 204-10; George Unwin, *The Guilds and Companies of London* (1908), pp. 335-6, 339-43, 353;

Margaret James, *Social Problems and Policy During the Puritan Revolution 1640-1660* (1930, reissued 1966), chapter 5, part 1.

James' account, which portrays the democracy movement as an unmitigated failure, is too pessimistic. On the other hand Unwin's statement that the lower ranks of the guilds met with 'some degree of temporary success' (*Gilds and Companies*, p. 339) may be too optimistic on the basis of the evidence he supplies to justify it.

2. Unwin, *Industrial Organisation*, p. 207.
3. *John Taylor's Manifestation* (1642) (see note 17).
4. Henry Humpherus, *The History of the . . . Company of Watermen and Lightermen . . .* (3 vols. 1874-86), vol. 1, pp. 101-2.
5. John Taylor, *Commons Petition* (1642) (see note 16), appendix; quoted in Humpherus, 1, pp. 241-2.
6. Humpherus, 1, pp. 201-6, 221; Privy Council Registers; Repertories of the Court of Aldermen.
7. *Journal of the House of Lords*, 4, p. 180.
8. The writing is ambiguous.
9. Manuscripts of the House of Lords, Main Papers series, 10 March 1640/1.
10. Lords MSS, 3 May 1641.
11. One was made a year later — see later. Vol. 55 of the repertories (the records of the Court of Aldermen) covers November 1640 to August 1642. Corporation of London Records Office, Guildhall.
12. Lords MSS, 3 May 1641.
13. Wallace Notestein (ed.), *The Journal of Sir Simonds D'Ewes* (1923), p. 457; *Journal of the House of Commons*, 2, p. 100. This bill, and subsequent ones, are probably not extant, as the manuscripts of the House of Commons were destroyed in the fire of 1834. (I may as well add here that the records of the watermen's company were almost entirely destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666.)
14. *Commons Journal*, 2, p. 122. C.f. *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, 1640-1, pp. 583-4; according to this petition the bill, which had been introduced by the rulers, would have given unprecedented power to them — and therefore allowed unprecedented scope for their corrupt practices.
15. *Commons Journal*, 2, p. 152.
16. *To the House of Commons. The Humble Petition of the Ancient Overseers, Rulers and Assistants of the Company of Watermen*. A statement of some of the generality's grievances with the rulers' answers thereto, is appendix. The petition itself is quoted *in extenso* in Humpherus, 1, pp. 239-42.  
The bill (or one similar to it) was revived on 16 August, and committed on the 28th. It does not seem to have been enacted. *Commons Journal*, 2, pp. 258, 274.
17. *John Taylors Manifestation and Ivst Vindication Against Iosva Chvrch His Exclamation* (1642). The *Manifestation* was evidently written in early February 1641/2. A biographical sketch of Taylor can be found in Wallace Notestein, *Four Worthies* (1956), pp. 169-208.
18. Taylor, *Manifestation*.
19. Repertory 55, ff. 355, 373b.-374.
20. *Ibid.*, f. 368.
21. Taylor, *Manifestation*.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Repertory 55, ff. 373b.-374. Taylor's *Manifestation* seems to have been written before 15 February, as it does not mention the Court's ruling.
24. Humpherus, 1, pp. 372-3, 376; c.f. Humpherus, 2, p. 10.
25. Humpherus, 1, pp. 285, 344, 372-3; c.f. Humpherus, 2, pp. 10-11.
26. Taylor, *Commons Petition*, appendix. About this time the Commons made an order concerning the watermen's government (c.f. *Commons Journal*, 2, p. 946). It would obviously be of great interest to know what it was, but I haven't been able to trace its contents.
27. Repertory 55, f. 383 b.
28. In 1630 the King had issued warrants to the rulers for a press of watermen to serve in the Thirty Years' War in Germany. This press was a primary grievance of the watermen, and no doubt there was ill-feeling against the King. Humpherus, 1, p. 221.
29. Taylor, *Commons Petition*, appendix.
30. For the remainder of this section, see the Aldermanic repertories, except where otherwise stated.

31. Taylor, *Commons Petition*, appendix.
32. Taylor, *Manifestation*. For the other oppositionists' names (except Perkins), see Taylor, *Commons Petition*, appendix.
33. Lords MSS. The petition was found with the papers of 1642. The Privy Council ceased to be effective after 1642 (modern calendar style) (Pennington and Thomas (ed.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries* (1978), p. 206). The petition may therefore have been issued between 1 January and 24 March 1642/3 — perhaps by the newly chosen rulers of 1643 in March 1642/3.
34. I have not traced any further complaints by the rulers about opposition by direct action.
35. Humpherus, 2, p. 10.
36. Taylor, *Manifestation*.



*In the shipyard: one of many interesting illustrations by Bernard Canavan for Eve Hostettler's text, aimed at young people, in A Child's History of the Isle of Dogs (Island History Project, 1983, £1.00). Another book of interest to those teaching local studies is The War Poets by Christopher Martin. (1983, £4.50) which includes a very readable account of the short and tragic life of Isaac Rosenberg*

## HARD UP AND HAPPY

Jim Stuart

'Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat  
Please put a penny in the old man's hat.'

THAT old rhyme seems to have gone out of fashion, like a lot of other things over the years. The media sings the jingles these days. In spite of the high powered advertising, months in advance, Christmas comes to us at its own pace, filling us with expectancy and hope, especially the kids. To the older folks it brings its memories, of the days when we were young; sometimes known as 'the good old days'.

If you'd let me, I'd like to take you back in memory, about fifty years ago, a few days before Christmas, in the East End of London. Let me set the scene. Picture a typical pub in Poplar; not a stone's throw from the entrance to Blackwall Tunnel. The regulars, all merry and bright on the strong ale they supped in those days, have just collected their Christmas Club money, paid in coppers and tanners throughout the year to the man who always sat at a card table, just inside the door of the public bar. The bar is packed. Three of us: my friends, Dickie and Charlie and me with one foot in the doorway, gazing in.

Inside, the smokey warm beery smells, the hubbub of cheery voices, and the off key singing of a fat lady, tell us, 'There's an old mill by the stream, Nellie Dene.'

I remember Dickie's Mum always used to sit behind the door and out of the draught, so Dickie always knew where to find her. I always knew where to find my Mum and Dad too, they'd be at home, because Dad was unemployed, as were thousands more. They weren't the kind to sit in pubs anyway, which was just as well, with three children to feed and the dole money scarcely stretching to an occasional packet of five Woodbines for my Dad.

We three East End harum scarums, just turned eleven years old, were out to cadge a few coppers from Dickie's Mum, always a soft touch when she had a few. Tonight was like striking gold; she coughed up sixpence for each of us.

Sixpence! it was a fortune. My whole week's pocket money never amounted to more than three ha'pence, if I was lucky! We were in high spirits, with our tanners burning a hole in our pockets. I tied mine in my hanky, for safety.

Now we were all set for that one bright light burning in the December night: Chrisp Street, the favourite market place for East Enders.

Chrisp Street market at Christmas time was like a fairy-land to the poor kids of Poplar. It drew us like a magnet; its smells, its lights, its jolly crowds. Stepping it out lively and chattering like monkeys, eager for the good things to come, we cut across the grounds of St. Michael's Church. Back on the road and kicking a tin can along in front of us, we ran slap bang into a policeman. The can hit him on the shin. He beckoned us towards him, simply by crooking his finger. We gathered in front of him, quaking, while he gave us a lecture, while we expected at any second to get a whack from his rolled up cape. We were quite close to Hay Currie School and he asked if we went there.



*The author, aged about 12, at Southend accompanied by a school pal's mother*

We were glad to tell him we'd moved up to Culloden Street School and into the Seniors. When he let us go, we walked off with our arms round each others' shoulders, whispering, not daring to look back.

We soon forgot our brush with the law, as we were caught up in the steady stream of late night shoppers making their way over the railway bridge, up the steps and down again, into the throng of Chrisp Street Market.

We briefly glanced into Old 'Inky's' little shop at the foot of the bridge, where trays of home-made Toffee Flats, twists of Paragoric, Barley Sugar and Acid Drops, all laid out on tin trays and finely dusted with a powdery sugar, tempted us to spend our fortune. But we were not tempted, and moved on.

From all sides came the cries of the stall-holders, shouting their wares under the glare of naked electric light bulbs, strung out on wires above the wooden stalls, standing in the gutter, along the length of Chrisp Street.

We watched spellbound at the eels being gutted and chopped up, seconds after trying to slither off the block. The man was too quick for them, but we stood and watched, hoping they would get away, but they never did: and he sang out 'All alive-o.'

Rabbits divested of their furry coats, dead of course. But not too long ago, judging by the blood on the woman's bare arms as she jointed, then chopped through the backs of their pink little bodies.

Goods were weighed, wrapped in newspaper and passed over to outstretched hands, with a 'Ta luv, g'night dear.'

Everywhere, a good-humoured banter between shopper and stallholder, a feeling of belonging, safe in that surging crowd.

A dark Indian man poured something on a pile of orange rinds, on a plate, then set a light to it. We three coughed and spluttered when we got a whiff of it, much to his annoyance, for the stuff in the bottles was supposed to cure coughs and colds, all for sixpence a bottle.

Fred Stubbs, the kindly man who made and sold oil cloth shopping bags, had already been for his pint, otherwise we might have looked after his pitch for ten minutes, as we had done on other occasions for a penny each. We all said, 'Goodnight Fred' and hoped for better luck next time.

Familiar smells guiding the shopper to sickly sweet honey-combs and rock, sugar bubbling in a pan ready for the flavouring to be added. Hot chestnuts: we stood toasting our cheeks at the wide smiling face of the vendor's fire.

Sarsaparilla and other hot drinks, from the Italian man, serving from a colourful little cart; his horse, tied to a lamp-post round the corner, ate damp cabbage leaves.

From a side street came the tinkling notes of a barrel-organ, beating out a tune, accompanied by the clackety-clack of the tap dancers, as they tapped and strutted away on their mat of slatted wood, laid out on the road. One man kept the handle turning while another passed round the hat.

Music and cries were all around us: 'Aypers — all aypers!' a lady called, meaning that the cards of buttons, hooks and eyes, lengths of ribbon and every other handy thing on her stall cost one half-penny.

'Salt Ma — don't forget your salt!' The man sawed through the great icebergs of salt with a hand saw, cutting pieces to your requirements.

'Your Army Greys at nine — a tanner a pair your Coloureds!' Army grey thick socks were threepence dearer than the thin coloured ones.

'Cheap Jacks' selling off crockery, crashing the plates together, making jokes to the ring of upturned faces. 'Now then, ladies — who'll make a bid for this gozunder?' which everyone knows goes under the bed.

The Pie and Eel shop smelled lovely. The cheery ladies behind the counter ladled out rich green gravy, sloshing it over the mountain of potato set beside the tasty steaming pies, on the thick china plates of the fortunate customers. Either side of the marble top tables, set in pews down the wall of the shop, people were eating their supper, while the milling crowds passed by outside.

We followed Prince Monolulu, the black tipster; he towered above the crowd, calling, 'I gotta horse — I gotta horse!' We ran behind him, to touch his hand; he smiled down at us and ruffled our hair, with a cheery, throaty, 'Hullo boys.' The three of us stayed until the shoppers began to wend their way home and the stall-holders to pack away for the night. Then, scavenging beneath the stalls, I found some speckled spuds and crushed cabbages, a few almost good apples and some oranges with soft patches on them. I rescued them all before the sweepers brushed them all into a big heap, to cart the rubbish away. I put them all into a cardboard box and took them home to my Mum.

That night, we were sitting round a cheerful fire, my two young sisters fresh and pink from the bath, Mum with a clean white pinnie on. She reached out her arms, gathering the three of us to her breast.

My heart felt full, when I heard Dad say, 'Are you happy Lou?' and she smiled her apple-checked smile and nodded. I remember Dad as he laughed and said, 'That's us, hard up, but always happy!'

I unknotted my hanky, and in a moment of pure generosity, I gave my Mum my sixpence.

Funny how memories bring a lump to your throat, isn't it?

*Chrip Street Market in the 'thirties (Fox Photos Ltd)*



## JOSEPH PRIESTLEY IN CLAPTON 1791-1794

Michael Gray

JOSEPH Priestley, one of England's greatest scientists, was born 250 years ago in Yorkshire, in the village of Birstall six miles from Leeds. Most people associate him with the discovery of oxygen but he also was the first to isolate many other gases which make up our atmosphere or are produced by chemical reaction. Before Priestley's time it was not appreciated that the air we breathe is a mixture of different gases and that it is just one, oxygen, that is essential for respiration. He also recognised the important relationship between carbon dioxide and plant life in the process now called photosynthesis, and was the first to artificially dissolve carbon dioxide in water, a process which led to the growth of the huge soft drinks industry. In a book published this year he is described as 'one of the most interesting figures in the history of science' a man who 'belongs to all times and all places — one of history's immortals'.<sup>1</sup> The volumes that have been written about him during the past two centuries testify to the truth of that opinion.

His significance to us today, however, does not rest solely on his scientific work. As a radical philosopher and theologian his writings made him internationally famous, much vilified by the conservative British establishment but greatly respected by the leaders of the American and French Revolutions. As a Dissenter, Priestley's political approach was motivated originally by the various restrictions on civil liberty in 18th century Britain, which disadvantaged many religious minorities. With the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 Priestley, along with Tom Paine, became the focus of attack in a campaign to whip up anti-republican patriotism. Priestley became the butt of political caricaturists like Gillray who dubbed him 'Gunpowder Joe' and he and Paine were several times burnt in effigy. This campaign reached its peak at the time of the second anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1791. Priestley at that time lived in Birmingham and a mob, aroused by malicious propaganda and stolen alcohol, destroyed his home, library and laboratory in a frenzy of violence against leading Dissenters. Priestley himself escaped with his wife only hours before the looters arrived, having been warned by friends of the impending danger. This traumatic event led to their settlement in Hackney, then a country village on the outskirts of London, where they had many friends and could feel relatively safe.

Despite the uncertainty of the times Priestley, in his autobiography, was able to describe with some warmth the period he lived in Hackney:

On the whole, I spent my time even more happily at Hackney than ever I had done before; having every advantage for my philosophical and theological studies, in some respect superior to what I had enjoyed at Birmingham, especially from my easy access to Mr. Lindsey, and my frequent intercourse with Mr. Belsham, professor of divinity in the New College, near which I lived. Never, on this side the grave, do I expect to enjoy myself so much as I did by the fire-side of Mr. Lindsey, conversing with him and Mrs. Lindsey on theological

and other subjects, or in my frequent walks with Mr. Belsham, whose views of most important subjects were, like Mr. Lindsey's, the same with my own.<sup>2</sup>

Theophilus Lindsey had been a close friend of Priestley for over twenty years. Together they are considered founding fathers of Unitarianism, the creed which rejects the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity, claiming instead "the simple humanity of Jesus Christ". Lindsey, in a letter dated 15th October 1791 to their mutual friend William Tayleur of Shrewsbury, describes Priestley's early days in Hackney.

Though I have not yet named him Dr. Priestley has never been out of my thoughts since I began my letter. He was very well yesterday, and I expect him to-day, and also to preach for me tomorrow, which he also did the Sunday before, but the day was so exceeding rainy we had a very thin audience. He has had a return of his bilious complaint, which has reduced him a little; otherwise he is very well and cheerful, but very busy in fitting up his laboratory in the house he has taken at Lower Clapton, which is a continuation of Hackney and not far from the college. Mrs. Priestley is also with him, and doing her part towards the house and its furniture.<sup>3</sup>

Priestley, himself, said

Having fixed myself at Clapton, unhinged as I had been, and having lost the labour of several years, yet flattering myself that I should end my days here, I took a long lease of my house, and expended a considerable sum in improving it. I also determined, with the assistance of my friends, to resume my philosophical and other pursuits; and after an interruption amounting to about two years. it was with a pleasure that I cannot describe, that I entered my new laboratory, and began the most common preparatory processes, with a view to some original inquiries.

Until recently it was not known precisely where Priestley and his wife Mary made their home in Clapton. However, the evidence provided by rates-books and contemporary maps, preserved in the Hackney Archives, now enables us to pin-point, with some confidence the location as the large house which formerly stood at the southern corner of Lower Clapton Road and Clapton Passage. A terrace of shops now occupies the site opposite the Round Chapel.<sup>4</sup> A photograph of this house as it appeared in about 1870 may also be found in the archives and is reproduced here.

Only one structural remnant survives in the area of the house (which was demolished in about 1883). In an alleyway running south from Clapton Passage is an old red-brick wall which probably marked the boundary between Priestley's garden and that of the neighbouring house.

Priestley's autobiographical account continues with a brief description of his activities in Hackney and the problems he experienced:

I found, however, my society much restricted with respect to my philosophical acquaintance; most of the members of the Royal Society, shunning me on account of my religious or political opinions, so that I at length withdrew myself from them, and gave my reasons for so doing in the preface to my "Observations and



*Priestley's house as it appeared in about 1870, when a school occupied the premises. The lamp-post marks the entrance to Clapton Passage (Hackney Library Services)*

Experiments on the Generation of Air from Water," which I published at Hackney.

Living in the neighbourhood of the New College, I voluntarily undertook to deliver the lectures to the pupils on the subject of "History and General Policy", which I had composed at Warrington, and also on "Experimental Philosophy and Chemistry," the "Heads" of which I drew up for this purpose, and afterwards published. In being useful to this institution, I found a source of considerable satisfaction to myself. Indeed, I have always had a high degree of enjoyment in lecturing to young persons, though more on the theological subjects than on any other.<sup>2</sup>

Priestley had been associated with the 'New College' almost from its inception in 1786. In the 18th century Oxford and Cambridge were the only universities in England and they only accepted students who were prepared to subscribe to the full 39 articles of the Church of England. As a consequence non-conformists were obliged to establish their own academies of higher education, principally to train their ministers of religion. New College Hackney had a broader objective than most with a curriculum to attract more than just prospective non-conformist ministers. Its intake was also untypically non-denominational. During its brief existence it could boast some of the most brilliant academics of the age on its staff. However, its radical reputation ensured equally distinguished detractors — Edmund Burke, who was to become known as the 'father of modern conservatism', described it as 'a nursery of riot' and 'a volcano of sedition'.

The college was established in a large mansion in Lower Clapton which had formerly been the home of a rich merchant, Mr. Stamp Brooksbank, a Member of Parliament and at one time Governor of the Bank of England. This stood approximately where Dunlace Road meets Median Road today and was surrounded by an 18 acre estate enclosed by a high brick wall. A thirty yard stretch of this wall still survives in Conistone Walk on the west side of the new Homerton Hospital site.

The college survived for only ten years despite high promise and expectation. The times were not right for it. The staff and students were thought, with some justification, to be 'tainted' with republicanism and, at a time of chauvinistic reaction to the French Revolution, some of the college's more cautious supporters withdrew their financial backing. The college was forced to close in 1796 and the buildings were demolished soon after.<sup>7</sup>

One of Priestley's most noteworthy students in Hackney was William Hazlitt who was to become a very famous essayist and critic. In later life he remembered his teacher vividly:

In his face there was a strange mixture of acuteness and obtuseness; his nose was sharp and turned up yet rounded at the end, a keen glance, a quivering lip, yet the aspect placid and indifferent. . . . He stammered, spoke thick, and huddled his words ungracefully together. To him the whole business of life consisted in reading and writing; and the ordinary concerns of this life were considered as a frivolous or mechanical interruption to the more important interests of science and of a future state.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after arriving in Hackney Priestley was invited to become Pastor at the local Unitarian Chapel, a post that had become vacant with the death in April of his valued friend Richard Price. He was elected to the position by a majority of 51 to 19, which says something for the courage of the Hackney congregation.

The Gravel Pit Meeting, as it was called, stood in Ram Place by Morning Lane in Homerton. The building is a remarkable survivor. First built in 1715 it was vacated by the Unitarians in 1809 because it was considered too small and in a dangerous condition. A Congregationalist group took over the building and it remained in religious use right up to this century. For some years now it has been a factory but the original brickwork and buttresses can still be made out despite various modern extensions and alterations.<sup>9</sup>

There clearly was some degree of unease in the district when it became known that Priestley had moved there. Priestley writes:

When it was known that I was settled where I now am, several of my friends, who lived near me, were seriously advised to remove their papers, and other most valuable effects, to some place of greater safety in London. On the 14th of July, 1792, it was taken for granted by many of the neighbours, that my house was to come down, just as at Birmingham the year before. When the Hackney association was formed, several servants in the neighbourhood actually removed their goods; and when there was some political meeting at the house of Mr. Breillat, though about two miles from my house, a woman whose daughter was servant in the house contiguous to mine, came to

her mistress, to entreat that she might be out of the way; and it was not without much difficulty that she was pacified, and prevailed upon to let her continue in the house, her mistress saying that she was as safe as herself.

On several other occasions the neighbourhood has been greatly alarmed on account of my being so near them. Nor was this without apparent reason. I could name a person, and to appearance a reputable tradesman, who, in the company of his friends, and in the hearing of one of, my late congregation at Birmingham, but without knowing him to be such, declared that, in case of any disturbance, they would immediately come to Hackney, evidently, for the purpose of mischief. In this state of things, it is not to be wondered at, that of many servants who were recommended to me, and some that were actually hired, very few could, for a long time, be prevailed upon to live with me.<sup>4</sup>

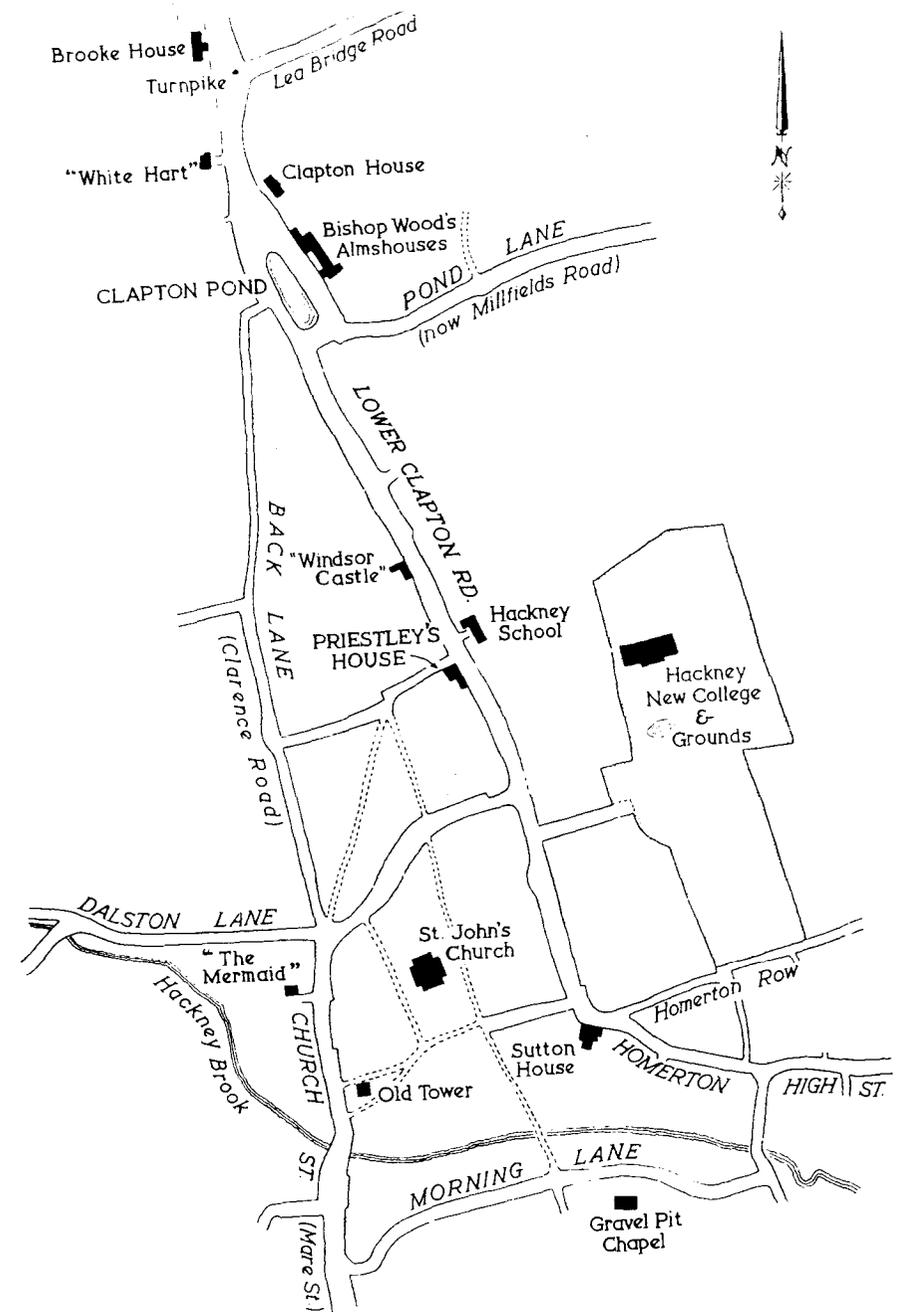
The Hackney Association, or to give it its full name the 'Hackney Association for the preservation of Peace, Liberty, and Property' was established to encourage patriotism at a time of fear of French invasion. A pamphlet published by the group in 1792 takes the form of a dialogue between a master-manufacturer and one of his workmen. The latter asks leave to attend a political meeting of 'the friends of liberty', the master explains patiently but condescendingly that his best interest is served by staying at work. The workman finally concedes the argument; '... I thank you for explaining all this to me; and instead of going to the liberty-club, I will begin my work, for I should not like to see a Frenchman lie with my wife, or take the bread out of my childrens mouths: and now I see, if I go on as you do, and mind my business, I may in time be as rich and as happy as you.'

No direct mention is made of Priestley in the pamphlet but he must have been in the minds of the authors as it was common knowledge by then that Priestley was living in the area.

On the 26th of August 1792 Priestley was declared an honorary French citizen by the Legislative Assembly in Paris, along with other sympathetic foreigners such as Jeremy Bentham and George Washington. Of course this development further enraged official opinion. Burke, in characteristically colourful language, wrote to Lord Fitzwilliam on October 5th:

Your Lordship sees with what audacity Priestley comes out, avows himself a Citizen of that Republick of Robbers and assassins, calls his election into the Gang an honour to him, expresses neither shame nor regret at the proceedings, which hitherto have been carried on, or the further that are threatned—publicly wishes them all success—<sup>11</sup>

Some of Priestley's more relaxed moments during his Hackney days are recorded in the diaries of his friend the poet Samuel Rogers who lived at the time on Newington Green.<sup>12</sup> Priestley joined a dining club in Hackney where he and Rogers enjoyed the company of other like-minded radicals. Other social gatherings brought him into contact with prominent progressive political figures such as statesman Charles James Fox,<sup>13</sup> the playwright Sheridan and Horne Tooke, later to be tried for high treason along with other leaders of the London Corresponding Society.



A sketch map of Hackney in about 1790, showing key buildings associated with Priestley

Despite the pleasures of convivial company, Priestley had, by February 1794, decided to leave Britain and settle in America. His three sons had already left for that country, finding that their prospects for secure employment in this country were threatened by the 'notoriety' of their father.

On March 24th Lindsey wrote:

You will be glad to hear that Dr. Priestley keeps up his spirits and enjoys (—) health in the midst of his great fatigue and harassings, attending the preparations for leaving the country. These however are now finished. They have evacuated their house. All his things and Mrs. Priestleys, no less than 19 large bales are packed, and ready to be carried to the ship. They are in lodgings at Clapton, as they have (sent) away some of their beds, while everything is sent off.<sup>14</sup>

On March 30th Priestley preached a farewell sermon to a packed congregation at the Gravel Pit Meeting House. Nine days later he and Mary went aboard their ship at Gravesend, never to set foot again in the country which had effectively sent them into exile.

*I should like to thank the staff of the following libraries for their help and encouragement: Hackney Borough Archives, Dr. Williams Library, University College London Library, London University Library and the John Rylands Library, Manchester; also, Mr. Colin Stuart of University College London who drew the map.*

#### NOTES

1. J. McLachlan, *Joseph Priestley – an Iconography of a great Yorkshireman* (1983), pp. 14, 15.
2. J. Priestley, *Memoirs of the Rev. Dr. Priestley* (1809), pp. 107-109.
3. Ms. in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.
4. Preface to 'A sermon preached at the Gravel Pit Meeting in Hackney Feb. 28th 1794' by Joseph Priestley (reprinted in his *Memoirs*, pp. 130 & 127).
5. For more details see M. Gray 'Joseph Priestley in Hackney', *Enlightenment and Dissent* No. 2 1983.
6. A sundial belonging to Priestley, originally standing in his garden at Clapton, has recently been found in Wales. It was given to a friend (Richard Knight the metallurgist, who lived in Clapton Passage) when Priestley emigrated to America (private communication Dr. L. B. Hunt).
7. For a fuller account of the New College see M. Gray 'The Road with a Radical Past' *East End News* Sept. 4th 1981.
8. Hazlitt *Collected Works* (1934), Vol. 20, p. 236.
9. For a fuller account of the Gravel Pit Meeting see A. Ruston *Unitarianism and early Presbyterianism in Hackney* (1980).
10. *Equality as consistent with the British Constitution, in a dialogue between a Master – Manufacturer and one of his Workmen* (1792), p. 14. (A copy in the London University Library, Senate House, London.)
11. *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke* (1968), Vol. VII, p. 229.
12. P. W. Clayden, *The Early Life of Samuel Rogers* (1887), pp. 239-287.
13. Fox had a deaf son who was sent to a school in Mare St. Hackney run by Thomas Braidwood who probably established the first special school for the deaf and dumb. See Clayden and *Dict. of Nat. Biography* (Braidwood entry).
14. Lindsey to William Turner. Ms in Dr. Williams Library, London.

Two books which give a good general introduction to Priestley's life and work are A. D. Orange *Joseph Priestley* (1974) and F. W. Gibbs *Joseph Priestley – Adventurer in Science and Champion of Truth* (1965). For a full account of Priestley's visits to London see W. Griffith 'Priestley in London' in *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* 1983, No. 2.

## STANLEY TONGUE

Stanley Tongue, Archivist to Hackney Library Services, died on 26 July after a long illness. He was 59. He had been Archivist since 1965, having come to Shoreditch as Reference Librarian in 1962. In his seventeen years as Archivist he had founded and built up one of the best archive services in the London Boroughs. He was a helpful guide to students and enquirers, and a warm friend to his colleagues.

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Stanley Tongue was a local man. His parents were born in Shoreditch, where his paternal grandfather was a member of the Vestry (the predecessor of the Borough Council) and also President of the Borough of Hackney Working Men's Club, Haggerston Road. When Stanley was born in 1923 his parents were living in Linscott Road, Lower Clapton, and the first school Stanley attended was the Ram's Parochial Infant School in Homerton. Later the family moved to Chingford.

Between school and his army service Stanley worked in insurance, but after the war he took up librarianship as a career, working for Essex County Library. In 1952 he moved to Leamington Spa, but in 1957 he returned to Essex as a schools' librarian.

In 1962 he came back to work in Shoreditch as Reference Librarian, and when the London Borough of Hackney was formed in 1965 he was appointed Archivist. He set about learning the principles and practices of his new profession, and used his new knowledge to set up the Archives Department. He took in records belonging to the Council and also the other bodies, in order to safeguard this portion of the community's heritage, and in 1976 he had the satisfaction of moving the collections into their new purpose-built premises beneath the Rose Lipman Library. The extra space gave greater scope for acquiring large collections of records, and three major deposits of business archives were received in his last four years.

At the same time he did not neglect the local history library, which was also part of his responsibility; he acquired and catalogued books, ephemera and illustrations by the thousand. His encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of Hackney was used in the many talks he gave to local people, as well as in the advice and help which he cheerfully gave to anyone who called at the Archives Department, whether author, student or casual enquirer.

He was for many years the Hackney Representative on the Committee of the East London History Society, and for a number of years gave great assistance in presenting its Quarterly Bulletin. He was instrumental in establishing an annual lecture for that Society which is still held at the Rose Lipman Library. He also had links with the Hackney Society and the Victoria Park Society, and never lost hope of seeing the foundation of a Hackney Local History Museum which the Authorities so often discussed but which never got off the ground. He was also Honorary Archivist to the Palestine Exploration Fund, a body set up a century ago to conduct surveys and excavations in the Holy Land.

Stanley Tongue was a warm friend to all who worked with him. His kindness and helpful, though unobtrusive, concern was freely given to all, and he is sadly missed by all his colleagues.

Outside his work he took part in local politics and in the work of his local church. He was involved in the work of the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, for whom he both reared puppies and collected foil; he also collected for the Spastics Society.

He leaves a widow, six children and six grandchildren.

Jean Wait and A. H. French.

## LONG GONE

Patricia Craven

Memories cluster of bright, childhood days,  
Pre-war in London's East End;  
Ha'penny Snofrutes, while street organs played  
And Helen next door, my best friend.

The dark blue-cool dairy, the chonk of its churns,  
Twisted cough candy, a red apple sharp;  
Pattern for hopscotch, a skipping rope burn,  
The nightlight glowed gold in the dark.

Practising scales while my Mother made tea,  
Bread thick with Virol or jam;  
The occasional Saturday trip to the sea,  
My favourite doll and tin pram.

Carrying shopping in woven straw bags,  
The overhead cash-loop in Wickhams;  
Riding my trike over sun-glintoned flags,  
Whitechapel Waste and boiled chickens.

Pushchairs, fawn gaiters and A.B.C. Teas,  
Open-topped trams made me queasy;  
Liberty bodices — double-grazed knees,  
Adverts. for Brighton so breezy.

Blessed to be born when my world lay at ease,  
A foundation to cope with life's pains;  
All people friendly and easily pleased,  
How I'd love to see them again!

## BOOK REVIEWS

L. E. Ellsworth. *Charles Lowder and the Ritualist Movement*. Dart, Longman and Todd, 1982. £17.95.

THIS year is the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Oxford Movement. As the original (mainly academic) movement spread from Oxford, it became increasingly involved with ritual and ceremonial issues, and, later, with social and political ones. Both Stewart Headlam (of Bethnal Green) and Charles Marson (who had been a curate at St. Jude's Whitechapel), when they gave evidence of ritual offences to the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline, made the connection between ritual and social disorders. 'The real disorders of the Church,' argued Headlam, 'are social and industrial, and not ritual, and they are terrible.' By the late 1870s a significant section of the ritualist clergy in the East End were socialists, and this tradition was continued by John Groser and the Catholic socialist tradition at Christ Church Watney Street in the 1930s and 40s.

None of this emerges from Lida Ellsworth's study. When I read it first as a PhD thesis I felt (as I still do) that it was a thorough and competent study. But now, in published form and, presumably, on the 150th anniversary of the Oxford Movement, aimed at a wider audience, its impact is dull and lacking in excitement. Undoubtedly it will be for many years to come a major resource for people working on the history of Anglo-Catholicism. But at the end of the book one feels a sense of disappointment.

First, the atmosphere is too hagiographical. Lowder is studied in isolation from any context of his influences, the shape of his theology, his opinions, his relationship with other East End churches, or with the wider community. We are told very little. He emerges as a dedicated pastor with no views about anything! There is no attempt to portray Lowder in personal terms.

Secondly, St. Peter's London docks, also is treated in isolation. This is curious, for patterns of church going in the East End, and in the ritualist strongholds further north in Hoxton and Haggerston, were studied by Booth, Mudie-Smith, and many others. There is no shortage of material. It would have been very useful to have had some comparison of what was happening in Wapping with the activity in other churches affected by ritualism. But we are told nothing. The title of the book is therefore misleading since Lowder is not related to the wider phenomenon of ritualism. Nor do we know much about St. Peter's and the structure of its congregation. Work has been done on the mythology of the ritualist slum priest and parish, and much of the evidence suggests that churches attracted middle-class Anglo-Catholics from miles away. Was this true of Wapping? If so, what was the effect on the local community?

Thirdly, no one who has studied the religious life of the East End since the 1930s and 40s can have any doubt that the heirs of the ritualists somehow "got stuck" and came to inhabit a world which was increasingly disconnected with the world of the changing East End. Wapping is a rather spectacular example. It would have been immensely valuable if Dr. Ellsworth had

indicated whether this disconnectedness had any roots in the “golden years” of the movement.

Finally, as I suggested earlier, there is no attempt to look at the shades and conflicting trends within ritualism itself. In 1877, the very year that the *East London Observer* (June 16th) was attacking Lowder over sacramental confession, Stewart Headlam (two weeks later) founded the Guild of St. Matthew in nearby Bethnal Green. But these two events are not related, nor is there any hint of the presence in the East End of a tendency within ritualism which was aware of social and political dimensions. By the time of Lowder’s successor, Wainwright, this tradition was well established in John Groser’s little church in Watney Street, not many minutes walk from St. Peter’s. But clearly here were not only two different church traditions: the theological basis was also very different.

Today both traditions of ritualism, the one which looks back to the baroque French-inspired triumphalism of Vatican 1, the other which traces its pedigree through Noel, Groser and Headlam, to F. D. Maurice, exist in the East End. Dr. Ellsworth’s study tells us a good deal about the genesis of one segment of ritualism in one district, but leaves us uninformed about the wider and fascinatingly difficult issues in the ritualist movement in the East End.

Kenneth Leech

*The London Journal of Flora Tristan*. Virago, 1982. £3.95, paperback.

THIS account of a French woman’s visit to London in 1839 is far from the conventional tourist account you might expect from the title. Flora Tristan was not a conventional tourist. She was a socialist and feminist, and she describes mainly London’s underworld — prisons, hospitals, slums, factories, and even brothels. She was passionately indignant at the contrasts of wealth and poverty, of hypocrisy and vice, which existed in what was then the largest and richest city in the world.

To get into the Houses of Parliament, even as a visitor, she had to disguise herself as a man (in Turkish costume!), as women were not then admitted, but she does not seem to have had much difficulty in being shown round prisons or exploring slums (leaving her watch and purse behind!). The prisons she saw had been cleaned up by the efforts of reformers, but though prisoners were given adequate food and clothing (much better than the very poor slum dwellers), they made a chilling impression. Worst of all was the condemned pew in Newgate prison chapel:

At three o’clock on the eve of the day fixed for the execution, the condemned man is taken to the chapel where he must undergo the ritual of the pew . . . It is draped in black for the ceremony and the condemned man too is enveloped in a black shroud . . . The chapel is dark, lit only by one sepulchral lamp; all the prisoners are present and follow the chaplain in low tones as he recites the prayers for the dead.

The pew resembles a half-open tomb from which emerges only the head of the condemned man framed in black and looking as if it was already separated from the body. . . . The mournful solemnity of the infernal ritual affects the congregation so strongly that many are unable to bear it. . . .

In the 1830s perhaps the worst slums in London were not in the East End, but St. Giles, off Tottenham Court Road. Here the poor Irish lived in tumbled-down hovels. Whitechapel was already a Jewish quarter, and Petticoat Lane known for its Jewish old clothes dealers. Flora was less depressed by the poor Jews than the poor Irish. They had not lost hope, were able to save, and might be able to get out of the ghetto.

She does not appear herself to have visited Bethnal Green or Shoreditch, but she quotes another French traveller’s account of visits to the homes (if such they can be called) of poor silk weavers and dyers, large families living in one roomed hovels, sleeping on straw and clothed in rags.

She does, of course, exaggerate sometimes, and presents an account of English society which is almost entirely black — except for those who were trying to change it, like Robert Owen and the Chartists.

The translation, editing and introduction are by Jean Hawkes. The translation reads well, and the introduction and notes give much extra information about the author. There are also some well-chosen illustrations.

Ann Sansom

David Owen. *The Government of Victorian London 1855-1889: the Metropolitan Board of Works, the Vestries and the City Corporation*. Harvard University Press, 1982. £20.

THE author of this book died fifteen years ago when it was still in draft form, but such was the value of his research that four other scholars completed the work, and prepared for publication what has become a collection of essays.

Only two levels of government in London are covered, leaving out the Boards of Guardians and Boards of Works for example. Most space is devoted to the predecessor of the London County Council, the Metropolitan Board of Works, which was established after the cholera epidemic of 1854 to build adequate sewers for the metropolis. London was fortunate that the Board chose the thoroughly competent Joseph Bazalgette as engineer; and his achievement is still the basis for the present day sewage system. The largest single contract (costing £625,000) was the 5½ miles of the northern outfall sewer from Old Ford to Barking Creek and his ‘crowning glory’ — the Abbey Mills Pumping Station finished in 1868.

Owen, however, was more concerned with the politics than the engineering, and describes how Parliament was only persuaded to give the Board the powers it needed because of the hot summer of 1858 when ‘Hon. Gentlemen sitting in the Committee Rooms and in the Library were utterly unable to remain there in consequence of the stench which arose from the river’.

At a more local level several of the new civil vestries, established at the same time as the Metropolitan Board of Works, are analysed in detail and a critical account of the Corporation of London is also given; but of greatest interest to East London is the study of the vestry of St. Leonard Shoreditch in the second half of the last century.

This chapter was written by Francis Sheppard, who describes how the Shoreditch vestry showed itself to be especially active for the first 10 years (1855-65) and the last 10 years (1890-1900) of its existence. It was the first

parish in London apparently to have a constant supply of water and the death rate fell as a result of early sanitary improvements. The problem of overcrowding however could hardly be touched with the limited powers and funds at the disposal of the Victorian vestries; even if the Nile Street Dwellings (1899) were the first dwellings built by a vestry the rents were beyond the means of those displaced by slum clearance. By the 1890s, Dr. Sheppard claims, the vestry had transformed itself once more into an enlightened, active and efficient body with considerably wider concern than before. The Pitfield Street Scheme, which provided a library, baths and wash houses, electricity generating station and refuse destructor on the same site, proved a very successful example of the vestry's activity.

The conclusion, written by David Reeder, puts Owen's work into the context of more recent urban studies; the older civic centred tradition has given way to a wider interest in urban growth and development. Owen was old fashioned in concentrating on London's municipal affairs, but in tackling the subject critically and using the local newspapers as a major source, he has added human interest and social comment to what could have been a very dull subject. Owen and his fellow authors have made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of Victorian London.

E. B. Nurse

Anthony S. Wohl. *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*. J. M. Dent and Sons, 1983. £17.50.

THE documentation of Britain's efforts to establish a system of public health provision in the aftermath of the industrial revolution is a formidable task; to evaluate them even more daunting. Mr. Wohl brings two admirable qualities to the task: he is obviously a tireless researcher — his every page teems with facts and figures, supplemented by 70 pages of notes, and his listed sources range from Parliamentary Papers to unpublished student theses; secondly, he is circumspect in drawing conclusions, and has a healthy mistrust of statistics.

His comprehensiveness can be adduced by a summary of any of his twelve chapters. I take at random that on infant mortality, in which he manages to cover within thirty pages such matters, any one of which would itself make a book, as the following: the low nutritional standards of women and its causes, including, for example, the social priority whereby the men got the meat and the wives and daughters the scraps; the failure to apply to childbirth the sanitary principles of Pasteur and Lister, long after these were well understood; the horrors of midwifery; the omission of ante-natal care in the training of doctors; the high rate of premature births; the problem — in most households the impossibility — of isolating sick children, and the spread of infection following the increase in school provision; the survival of ancient superstitions (a fried mouse as a cure for whooping cough); the twin menaces of condensed milk and opium; local disparities in child mortality rates, with a map showing those of London, with Bethnal Green (145 per thousand) and Shoreditch (131) at the top, against Hampstead's 71.5, as late as 1907; and such highly-charged socio-political issues as the working mother, child-murder for insurance money — real enough, though much exaggerated by middle-class prejudice — and the almost universal acceptance of child deaths

as natural and inevitable, perhaps devised by a Darwinian God to ensure the survival of the fittest.

Thoroughness, like most virtues, has its penalties; readability suffers from an unavoidably congested text; nor is this helped by what seems to me an error in the shaping of the book. Today's historians are shy of narrative, and particularly reluctant to ascribe events to the intervention of 'great men'. Such names as Chadwick, Farr, Kay, Arnott and Southwood Smith, the Benthamites, dot the pages of Wohl's early chapters, but they are not effectively introduced to the reader, even then cursorily, until halfway through the book. The dominating personality of Chadwick himself (who, I would argue, did as much harm as good) is never fully discussed. Indeed the whole political battle for sanitation, necessary for the orientation of the detailed social history which the author deals with so compendiously, is largely neglected. Such criticisms, however, dwindle into quibbles in the face of the scholarship and thoughtful conclusions which distinguish a book which, I venture to surmise, will stand the test of time.

Stanley Reed

A. F. J. Brown. *Chartism in Essex and Suffolk*. Essex Record Office and Suffolk Record Office, 1982. £3.75 (plus 70p postage and packing), paperback.

THIS book acts as a microscope to the impact of a national movement — Chartism — within one English region. The author considers that Chartism will not really be understood unless examined in such regional settings. Despite the fact that the Chartists' efforts in these counties contributed no more than a hundredth part of the movement's national strength, and lacked any strong support from the region's largest occupation, the farmworkers, the development of working class movements in the counties has nevertheless continued. As Brown says (p. 110) 'Essex and Suffolk Chartism contributed directly and indirectly to the campaign for the 1867 Reform Act and to a smaller extent to that for the 1844 Act.'

Beginning with the local economic and political background, the book goes into considerable detail on the origin of the movement in the area. The central chapter describes leaders, meetings, speeches and reactions from opponents — these included most local newspapers and the established church: many dissenters were supportive. The sheer quantity of facts compressed into fifty-line pages does not make easy reading, but the persevering will be rewarded with vivid descriptions and a distinctly local flavour. One senses the grievances of a number of ordinary people seeking to gain *some* control over affairs, but unable to achieve a breakthrough. But they were gaining experience, and this would bear fruit, after the failure of Chartism, within the co-operative and trade union movements later in the century.

Local Chartist activities included the provision of reading rooms and discussions, a form of adult education preferable to the Mechanics Institutes, where freedom of discussion was rare. At the same time, popular discontent was being met by considerable charitable and religious effort, often resulting in a 'subordination of the poor' which was outside the power of the Chartists

to counteract. The book has several indexes, particularly useful for those wishing to trace the main centres of local Chartism and its leaders. Finally, in this widely researched book, packed with solid information, one cannot help noticing that, though dealing with events nearly a century and a half ago, the strong agricultural character of these two counties remains the same, and that, in many ways, the 'political' outlook has not changed profoundly even today!

Henry C. Wilks

David Goodway. *London Chartism 1838-1848*. Cambridge University Press, 1982. £22.50.

THE last of several riots that took place in London in 1848 — the year of European revolutions — was in Bethnal Green on 4th June, when a party of Metropolitan Police, attempting to disrupt a Chartist meeting, were themselves attacked by the demonstrators. The disturbances spread to Bonner's Fields, an area used for public meetings, on the opposite side of the Regent's Canal from Victoria Park. The police were again attacked while trying to disperse the crowd, and on this occasion the police retaliated with a degree of violence that brought protests not only from the Chartists but from neutral observers and local people. Two of the Chartist speakers in Bonner's Fields on that day were arrested shortly afterwards for sedition. Enraged at this and at the Prime Minister's suggestion that the English people did not want the Charter, the Chartists called for nationwide demonstrations to be held the following week, and eventually agreed on Bonner's Fields as the venue for the London gathering. Banned by the Government, the demonstration took place, but, thanks to an enormous police and military presence, a fall of rain, and the decision of the Chartist leader M'Douall to avoid a confrontation, the demonstration was dispersed peacefully.

Besides the incidents at Bethnal Green and Bonner's Fields, East London, as may be imagined, figures prominently in the decade of Chartist struggle in London that forms the subject of David Goodway's book. The background to the period, the tumultuous events and their consequences are described in some detail, plotting the important position of London Chartism in a national context. The role of the Metropolitan Police in containing the agitation is examined, and, making maximum use of the Records of the Metropolitan Police Offices, his account is probably the most detailed and accurate to date. His account of Irish nationalists in London and their relationship to the Chartists is also of interest. Finally, his treatment of the London trades and their degree of organisation in the face of economic difficulties at the time, while not always easy to read or to relate to the Chartist cause, does provide a wealth of information on many local industries, which, for the local historian, could be followed up further by reference to the author's copious notes (66 pages) and bibliography (22 pages).

Colm Kerrigan

Edward Harvey. *A Postman's Round 1858-61*. University of Warwick Library, 1982. £1.50, including postage.

THIS is an interesting assortment of extracts from the diary of an East London postman in the mid-Victorian era. All the hardships of those early days of postal delivery are brought out — the long delivery rounds, the unsocial hours, the meticulous control over the numbers of letters per delivery, the poor wages, the harsh discipline, etc. Most of these things were part and parcel of the age, but Harvey's cheerfulness and determination to make the best of the fleeting opportunities for relaxation and enjoyment, is so characteristic of the East Londoner.

The diary shows great attention to detail (the ritual cleaning of his blucher boots, the timing of his going to bed and getting up, the names of people he met on his rounds, the particulars of the weather, etc.) and one suspects that he recorded this in order to deal with any complaint at a later stage when his memory might not serve the occasion.

An East Londoner myself, I greatly enjoyed these extracts, especially his frank exposure of those family problems which were so much of an East Londoner's dreary existence. Even in the early part of this century, boot-cleaning was a ritual (the boss had better not see you with dirty boots!) and the canary-cage cleaning was another regular chore — a clean cage was as important as a clean room. One wonders how Harvey found time to practise his violin!

I was a little distracted by the insertion of extracts from the diary of Richard Dimes' voyage to New York in the middle of this booklet and felt it should more appropriately have appeared at the end. However, the work, though essentially repetitive and frustratingly fragmentary in parts, gives a very good insight into the life of the working class in the 1850s and is highly recommended to the student of that period.

A. H. French

Fraser Cleminson. *Beyond Recall: the making of Mile End Hospital*. Tower Hamlets Arts Project, 1983. £1.65.

MILE End Hospital's origins were the workhouse. It is fifty years since the end of the country's remaining workhouses, built for and feared by the poor. Cleminson's book opens up the historical connection of the two public institutions with an objective narrative. The hospital today is independent of the Board of Guardians' ethos and it serves the whole community. The first infirmary was built in 1858/59, but the proper origins began in 1883 with the opening of the new infirmary, which more than quadrupled the size of the old building. This centenary souvenir book of the hospital (the term 'infirmary' was dropped as 'unfashionable' in 1918) is written by one of its own nurses. It is the first chronological and environmental assessment of the changes.

The sixty-page book is presented in a very readable style which nevertheless has a remarkable amount of descriptive and factual detail previously existing in scattered and rare archival sources. It is now available in a compact form at a very reasonable price. The author enhances the

research with five of his excellent building sketches. Maps, photographs, statistics and a bibliography are included. There are several unfortunate errors and incomplete sources citations, however, which I hope will be corrected in a revised edition.

C. J. Lloyd

Rose Lowe. *Liz*. Rose Lowe Publications, 1982. 75p.

*LIZ* is Rose Lowe's second book about life in Hoxton between the Wars; it is a sequel to the autobiographical *Daddy Birt's for Dinner* and continues its theme of growing up to womanhood through the lives of its two protagonists, Liz and Peggy.

It is at its least convincing as straight history; the section on the various buildings and institutions tells us nothing new; so too, I felt that some of the recollections, like the attacks on German baker shops in World War One, or going to the Workhouse to collect out-relief remained bald statements of episodes that must, at the time, have aroused much more complex feelings; the reader is left unenlightened.

However, when Rose Lowe is being neither 'historical' nor nostalgic — as in her prefatory poem — then the book is compelling. There is a powerful authenticity about her recollections: the description of head inspections at school and the sense of shame at being sent to the Cleansing Station, putting make-up on with the aid of a piece of cracked mirror in the back yard, making sure not to sit on the wrong side at the Britannia because of the stink from the toilets; all have clearly been lived through.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the book is the insight it gives into women's lives. Working class autobiography and Oral History has always tended to describe experiences from a male viewpoint; *Liz* covers the other half of that life: courtship and marriage, pregnancy and the hazards of abortion, widowhood and the need to work. A very full description of the social and sexual mores influencing women at that time.

Jon Newman

Stephen 'Johnny' Hicks. *Sparring for Luck*. THAP, 1982. £1.95.

AMONG the increasing influx of books relating to East London many seek merely to exploit the gullible, so it is refreshing to recommend the true picture of 'Stepney Life' as presented in this boxer-poet's autobiography. Here is depicted the Cockney of previous decades from cradle to grave, the trials, tribulations, struggles and distresses, involving economic privations far more drastic than the present. Yet even horrors like the Blitz and aerial warfare were borne by the renowned East End spirit.

The boxing described here is a far cry from modern day socialite boxing tournaments. To the ardent boxing enthusiast this portion of the book will provide a vivid and formidable presentation of the professional boxing structure during the inter-war period. Both in and out of the ring, then, the book stands beside the best that has been written on local life, a sincere and moving survey that will serve the purpose of establishing the correct perspective to twentieth century Stepney and the East End.

Louis Behr

Alice Linton. *Not Expecting Miracles*. Centerprise, 1982. £1.95.

ALICE Linton's account of her life in Hoxton from her birth in 1908 will bring back many memories to East Londoners acquainted with this period. It is a woman's autobiography reflecting working class conditions during periods of considerable unemployment and depression.

She clearly never intended these notes to be published, yet they give an admirable picture of how East Londoners 'made do' around the First World War period; their frugality, their ingenuity in making the most of very limited resources, their petty ambitions, their resourcefulness and irrepressible cheerfulness.

A number of East London publications based on reminiscences of this period have been published during the past few years but this excels in giving so much detail of the East Londoner's everyday life (the inadequacies of accommodation, food and clothing, the reactions of the child's mind to births, weddings and funerals, the lasting impressions of poor school, work and hospital conditions, etc.) making it an invaluable acquisition for all who find interest in the people and the period.

A. H. French

## NOTES AND NEWS

WE have had several responses to last year's cover illustration showing the clock tower being set up on Stepney Green. A lady thinks she recognised a relative among the children. One man recognised the engine, but escaped before we could write down the details. Tony Watson, however, has been able to recall the Sunday that the tower was transported by E. W. Rudd of Bow Common Lane. The man at the rear wearing a cloth cap is George Lenson, the foreman, and the man beside him in the bowler hat is Tom Watson, our informant's father.

The photograph on the poster publicising last November's annual history lecture, organised by Tower Hamlets Library and the East London History Society, also stirred some memories, and several of the faces have been identified and their names entered on the back of the original photograph in the Local History Library in Bancroft Road. The text of Raphael Samuel's lecture will not be appearing in this magazine, but an extended version of his views on history and myth in East London will be published in a future issue of *History Workshop*, the journal of socialist and feminist historians. This year's annual lecture, on 24 November, will be 'Attlee — Limb of Limehouse' by William Golant of Exeter University. As usual, it will be accompanied by an exhibition at the Central Library, Bancroft Road. As a further tribute to Attlee's memory on the centenary of his birth, Tower Hamlets Library is publishing *Attlee as I knew him* edited by Geoffrey Dellar. The book consists of 'personal recollections from his colleagues and contemporaries' (many of them still active in politics) as well as some of Attlee's own writings. Priced at £2, it will be reviewed in *East London Record* number 7 (1984).

In response to Carolyn Merion's review article in last year's issue, Arthur Rumble, active in many West Essex historical societies, has written to say that Arthur Morrison lived at Arabin House, High Beach (the house is still standing, near the parish church of the Holy Innocents). From here Morrison gave telephone warning of the first Zeppelin raid on London in the First World War.

Stepney Books have reprinted John Blake's *Memories of Old Poplar* (90p) which was out of print for more than a year. A reprint, in six volumes, of Henry Mayhew's *The Morning Chronicle Survey of Labour and the Poor* is now in the Tower Hamlets Local History Collection.

'250 years of the JFS' by Edward Conway appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 2 July 1982 in tribute to that renowned East London school.

Recent additions to the illustrations collection at Hackney Archives include 18 watercolours of T. H. and F. N. Shepherd, showing Stoke Newington in the eighteen forties, and some 1840 drawings along the river Lea and Hackney Brook, Hackney, Clapton and Old Ford, by R. Williams.

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Joyce Ayres was born in Bethnal Green and now lives in Basildon; A. J. Wait is assistant archivist at Hackney Library Archives; Mike Sandow has been investigating East London mineral water manufacturers for the last seven years and will be pleased to hear from anyone who has information on the subject. Christopher O'Riordan is researching working class movements in the English Civil War period. Jim Stuart was born in Poplar in 1919 and after the war moved to Cambridge as an executive with the Post Office. Michael Gray has lived in Clapton since 1972 and for five years was chairman of the Chats Palace Community Project in Homerton. Patricia Craven was born and bred in Stepney and now lives in Canvey Island; Rev. Kenneth Leech is Race Relations Field Officer at the Board for Social Responsibility and Ann Sansom was for many years secretary of the East London History Society. E. B. Nurse, formerly archivist at Tower Hamlets Library, is now Local Studies Librarian at Southwark. Stanley Reed was formerly Director of the British Film Institute and Henry Wilks was for many years a teacher at George Green School, the history of which he has written. A. H. French, M.B.E., is a founder member of the East London History Society and is at present the Society's programme organiser. C. J. Lloyd is the archivist at Tower Hamlets Local History Library; Jon Newman is archivist assistant at Hackney Library Archives and Louis Behr, a retired postman, is a life long resident of Stepney.

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

##### Books

- Adams, Elizabeth, and Redstone, David *Bow Porcelain*. Faber and Faber, 1981.
- Bellamy, Joyce and Saville, John *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. VI*. Macmillan, 1982 (includes entry on John Groser).
- Blore, Charles *Dr. Thomas: his family and the background of his times*. The author, 1982.
- Dellar, Geoffrey (Ed.) *Attlee as I knew him*. Tower Hamlets Library, 1983.
- Devereux, William *Adult Education in Inner London, 1870-1980*. Shephard Walwyn, with ILEA, 1982.
- Fairfield, S. *The Streets of London*. Papermac, 1983.
- Franchini, Sylvia *Sylvia Pankhurst 1912-1924. Dal suffragismo alla rivoluzione sociale*. ETS, Pisa, 1980.
- Harris, Kenneth *Attlee*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982.
- McCann, Phillip, and Young, Francis *Samuel Wilderspin and the Infant School Movement*. Croom Helm, 1982.
- Parr, Joy *Labouring Children. British immigrant apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924*. Croom Helm, 1980.
- Peacock, Helen *Hackney Houses: A guide to improvement, conservation and maintenance*. Hackney Society, 1981.
- Schneer, Jonathan *Ben Tillet*. Groom Helm, 1982.
- Wagner, Gillian *Children of the Empire*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982.
- ##### Unpublished studies
- Ashlee, Peter C. *Tusks and Tortoiseshell: the early development of the British plastics industry, with special reference to the British Xylonite Company Ltd., 1877-1920*. (Nottingham University, 1982)
- Bennett, J. J. *East End Newspaper Opinion and Jewish Immigration, 1855-1905*. (Sheffield University, 1979)
- Field, Clive D. *Methodism in Metropolitan London, 1850-1920*. (Oxford University, 1974)
- Metcalfe, Sarah *A place to live, a place to work: a study of urban growth in a North London parish, i.e. Haggerston*. (Cambridge University, 1980)
- ##### Articles, papers, pamphlets, etc.
- Aspinall, R. R. 'PLA Art Collection' in *Port of London*, vol. 58, no. 625 (1983).
- Challans, Timothy *Poplar Town Hall 1938* (1982).

Coleman, David and Hostettler, Eve	<i>The Anglican Church in the Isle of Dogs</i> . Island History Project, 1981.
East of London Family History Society	Articles of local interest in recent issues of <i>Cockney Ancestor</i> include 'A Ragged School' (Autumn 1982) and 'Seventeenth Century Cockney Cowkeepers and Brickmakers' (Winter 1982-3 and Spring, 1983).
Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society	GLIAS <i>Newsletter</i> ; nos. 84, 85 and 86 (all 1983) have short but informative pieces on the Mouth of Bow Creek — Blackwall area.
Jewish Historical Society of England and Jewish East End Project	Papers at March, 1983, conference included 'Health and Medicine in the Jewish East End' (Jerry Black), 'The East London Child Guidance Clinic — the First Five Years' (Derek Reid) and 'The Alice Model Nursery' (Jennifer Abrahams).
Jubilee Group	Recent pamphlets include <i>Politics and the Kingdom: the Legacy of the Anglican Left</i> by John Orens, and Kenneth Leech's short paper <i>The English Risings: 1381 and 1981</i> .
Mills, Peter	'The Cistercians and their London House' in <i>The London Archaeologist</i> vol. 4, no. 8 (1982).
Redstone, David	<i>Bow Porcelain</i> . Catalogue of Exhibition. Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, 1981.

#### SOME RECENT MANUSCRIPT DEPOSITS

##### In Hackney Library Archives Department

- Arlington (Sturt) Estate, Hoxton; estate records, 19th and 20th centuries.
- Amherst family of Hackney and Norfolk; estate and family papers, 19th and 20th centuries.
- Clapton, History of; original notes, in 18 vols., by Florence Bagust.
- C. F. Casella & Co. Ltd. business records, 19th and 20th centuries.
- Homerton Community Centre, Chats Palace: minutes, annual reports and programmes, 1975-1981.
- Plan of Pigwell Brook, Hackney, 1724.
- Shoreditch and Finsbury Labour Party: minutes, 1948-63.

##### In Tower Hamlets Local History Library

- Brady Club Minute Books.
- East London Schools Athletic Association: minutes 1950-54, 1956-77.
- London Hydraulic Power Company: files relating to the conversion of Wapping Pumping Station to electric drive.
- Parmiters School Records.
- Pilgrim House Settlement: minute books, 1943-80.
- Stepney and Poplar drain and sewer plans, c.1858-c.1900 (on microfilm).

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