

EAST LONDON

HISTORY

GROUP

Bulletin

number

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DECEMBER

1967

EDITORIAL

Since the last Bulletin, decasualisation of labour has been introduced into the docks. It is hoped that this will inaugurate a new era of progress for the dock worker. A little more than a century ago, the domes of the great treadmills with interior drums which men worked with their feet to provide the power for loading and discharging ships, could be seen over the walls of the London Docks. These were heart-breaking mechanical devices used before cranes and derricks came into use. Mr. Stan Hugill has just published a book "Sailortown" which provides some interesting information on this subject.

Dr. K. G. T. McDonnell refers to our last Bulletin and rightly points out that although there seems to be a general opinion that the ancient road north to south in the Isle of Dogs was a pilgrim route, no one has actually found proof of this, nor that the Chapel of St. Mary was "of Graces". He hopes to be able to produce further evidence on this subject shortly.

East London lost a great friend in the death of Earl Attlee in October. He was always very interested in the activities of the Group. His first visits to East London were concerned with assisting at Haileybury House in Ben Jonson Road, Stepney, where there was a youth club and social centre run by his old school. He became greatly concerned with the unemployment and slum conditions and activity in this field resulted in his entry into political life. George Lansbury's resignation from leadership of the Labour Party in 1935 brought the leadership to Clem Attlee and then during the War he became deputy to Churchill in the War Cabinet. Though his official connections ended in 1950 he remained closely linked with the East End to which he paid periodic visits. East Londoners paid tribute to their greatest statesman and first Labour Mayor with the highest honour they could give when he became Stepney's first Freeman.

I am pleased to record that the Abbey Lane toll-gate post mentioned in Bulletin No. 3 was rescued by Mr. Denis Smith of West Ham College of Technology and have suggested that perhaps the Passmore-Edwards Museum might find a home for it.

The re-paving of High Street North, East Ham, is now well under way. The first kerbstone was placed in the High Street (formerly White Post Lane) in 1882 prior to which it was lined with trees and fences. Mr. Gingell's Wood House was one of a number of well-known houses at the time. Made of wood, it was painted white and surrounded by trees.

Also since the last Bulletin, the "breathalyser" is with us. It is interesting to note that in Mayhew's London of 1850, the habitual drunkards included one button-maker in 7.2, one musician in 22, one laundress in 63.8, one medical man in 68, one weaver in 99.3, while clergymen (one drunkard in 417) and servants (only one in 585.7) were the most sober.

A Merry Christmas to you all (with or without the pig's 'Jimmy', porter and mutton-pies of the East Londoner's past), and a very Happy New Year.

A.H.F.

THE GOUGE FAMILY

Thomazin Gouge, of West Ham, spinster, who died in 1754, left considerable amounts to the charity school and almshouse in West Ham, and a tablet recording her gifts used to be fixed to the side of the school. We had an enquiry about her, and on investigation, found that she had belonged to an interesting family.

Two of her ancestors are important enough to be mentioned in the Dictionary of National Biography :-

William Gouge, D.D. (1578-1653) and his son, Thomas, (1609-1681) were both eminent nonconformists.

William Gouge was born at Stratford-le-Bow, and was the son of Thomas Gouge. He became lecturer at St. Anne's, Blackfriars. During the Commonwealth period he played a very prominent part in presbyterian assemblies. His son, Thomas, became Vicar of St. Sepulchre's, Holborn, but he was ejected from his living after the Act of Uniformity in 1662. He lived quietly for some time, but in 1672 he decided to try to preach in Wales. He financed the printing of the New Testament and other books in Welsh, and in 1674 founded a trust for evangelism in Wales. He also set up numerous schools in Wales.

Thomas Gouge's eldest son was William, whose only child was Meliora, who married William Prestley of Wild Hill, Hertfordshire.

The exact relationship of Thomazin Gouge to William and Thomas Gouge remains uncertain. Clearly there was one - Meliora Prestley is one of the four people mentioned in her will - probably her nearest relatives. She could have been a daughter, grand-daughter, or cousin of Thomas Gouge.

Three other members of the Gouge family appear in local deeds : Nicholas Gouge of Stratford-le-Bow, who rented some land in East Ham, and Thomas and William Gouge (or Gowge) of West Ham (early 18th Century) who were father and son.

Thomazin Gouge made her will on the 8th July 1754, and left her copyhold estate in Mile End to four people equally : the Rev. Dr. Gouge, Rector of Gilling in Yorkshire, Mr. Edward Gouge, of London, gentleman, Mrs. Prestley, Hertfordshire, and Mrs. Wyners of Herefordshire.

She also left large sums of money to charity - her freehold and copyhold estate at Cambridge was to go to the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy, and she left 3500 South Seas Annuities to the Almshouses in West Ham, and about £2000 to the Charity Schools there.

Anne J. C. Sansom.

HOLIDAY REFLECTIONS ON LOCAL HISTORY.

It all happened in August. A long stay in hospital necessitated quiet, and rest; a faithful friend provided a cottage on a hillside, with a wonderful view, three/four miles from Stroud, in Gloucestershire. This arrangement, and the weather - for a period of three weeks - was just what the Doctor had ordered! What completed the cure was the close contacts we made with the local people, and the astonishing connection of the local history with that of our own in East London.

For example, there was the widow of the village schoolmaster, from whom I learnt that her husband had received his training in London, and had taught for some years at the very school in Berkshire Road, Hackney, where I myself spent a spell of five months in the nineteen-twenties.

There was her cousin, also living close by, whose father was a very popular physician at the London Hospital, and had been called in to assist at the inquest on one of the victims of "Jack the Ripper". (That was coming near home to one who had started life in Whitechapel, and just missed the "Ripper" incidents by a mere four years!)

Then there was Mrs. J-----, a war-refugee from London, whose father, and grandfather before him, was the Beadle of a City Ward - and the proud showing of photographs of Ward junketings, with "Pop" in his civic attire, and staff in hand, attending his Alderman, who was receiving the Lord Mayor in the local Church of St. Mary Abchurch, or at a Ward feasting, elsewhere in the Ward.

Occasional visits to Gloucester were packed with thrills of excitement, likened to the unravelling of a detective tale. Imagine the excitement of viewing the ornate, intensely decorated tomb of Edward II, holding the prime place in the Cathedral exhibits, and recalling the fortnight of revelry on Mild End Green, in 1307, when his wedding feast was celebrated at the house of his father's (Edward I) close friend, Henry le Waleys!

Again, walking in the north aisle of the Cathedral, and seeing two neighbouring memorial stones, let into the ground, in memory of Albert Mansbridge, and his wife Frances. Mansbridge was founder of the Workers Educational Association, amongst other interests. He lived at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel, and earned his living as a clerk in the employ of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, in Leman Street.

On another visit, one stands nearby the Cathedral and views the Bishop Hooper Memorial.

John Hooper, Bishop of Worcester and Gloucester, was one of the Protestant Martyrs in the reign of Philip and Mary; he was burned at the stake outside Gloucester Cathedral, 9th February 1555. and the man responsible was Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London - and Lord of the Manor of Stebonheath (Stepney).

A grisly record, a portion of the "Hooper" stake, is preserved in the local "Bishop Hooper Lodging Museum". (Here he was brought from Newgate to rest before his execution).

And the Custodian to whom I spoke on the day of my visit, had associations with the Isle of Dogs, and was delighted to exchange memories of Bow Creek!

It was at this Museum too, that I learnt about James Wood, one of the great local characters of the nineteenth century. Jimmy Wood was proprietor of the Gloucester Old Bank which had been founded by his grandfather in 1716. His life was devoted to the acquisition of wealth, and in addition to running the Bank, carried on other business pursuits, including a draper's and haberdashers, and the undertaking of funerals. He amassed a huge personal fortune, and after his death in 1836 there was a prolonged and unsuccessful lawsuit on behalf of the Gloucester Corporation who claimed that Wood, in a codicil to his will, left £200,000 to the City he had once served as an Alderman. Amongst the beneficiaries was one Samuel Wood, of Cleveland Street, Mile End, to whom, and his family, was left the sum of £20,000. With this bequest, dated 1835, we are right back home again after a most illuminating and enjoyable holiday.

C. S. Truman.

THE BAYNES STREET MYSTERY.

Further light is shed on "The Baynes Street Mystery" (see E.L.H.G. Bulletin No.2) by the discovery of a Deed in the possession of the Tower Hamlets Local History Collection (Mile End Library).

This document carries a rough plan of the area examined in the article quoted above, and is headed "A Plan of a Parcel of Ground belonging to the Revd. Mr. Edward Baynes, situated in the Parish of St. Mary, White-Chapel, in the Manor of Stepney, and County of Middlesex --

Containing 7 acres, 0 roods, 11 perches.

Measured, 8th December, 1729. "

Readers of the above-quoted article will recall that it concluded on a note of speculation, which in the light of this new information proves to have been quite well-founded.

(Note:- The document was discovered by a student from the North Western Polytechnic, one of three who were performing a month's practical work in the Local History Library, and have been indexing some of the numerous deeds and documents).

C. S. Truman.

17TH CENTURY BUILDING IN EAST LONDON.

Building a house in 17th Century London was not a simple matter of buying a plot of land and engaging a builder to erect the building. House building was forbidden on any new site (i.e. one which had never had a building upon it before) within three miles of the City of London. A proclamation of 1580 commanded "all persons of what quality soever they be to desist and for-bear from any new buildings of any new house or tenement within three miles of any of the gates of the said city, to serve for habitation or lodging for any person, where no former house hath been known to have been in memory of such as are now living." (Strype's edition of J. Stow, Survey of London, 1720).

The authorities had the power to imprison the builders of new houses and pull down their tenements, and there were frequent cases when the Justices of the Peace for Middlesex used this power. But even a vigilant watch for illegal building could not stop men hurriedly and secretly assembling homes for themselves. An interesting case occurred in 1636. Because it was a bad plague year, the King's Council and the Justices of the Peace had vacated London to get away from the contagion. There was nobody checking upon new building during the summer. The men of Wapping made good use of their opportunity. They built about 200 new buildings in the eastern part of the hamlet, known then as Pease field. Building must have been a hurried business. The houses were probably not very well constructed, some of them being built at night. By the end of the year this small part of Wapping had grown by some 200 houses.

The Council were horrified when they came back to London and found the mushrooming of building. They sent a strict command to the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex to demolish the buildings immediately. Whether all of them were in fact pulled down we do not know. But Pease field was once again packed with buildings by 1652. Its 5 acres, now called King Street, held 135 tenements and 80 cottages in 1652. The attempt of the Government to stop building spreading was doomed to failure. (See the 1636 case in the Calendar of State Papers, 1636-37, p.542. A full account of the attempt of the Government to stop building is given by N. G. Brett-James, "The Growth of Stuart London", 1935).

Michael J. Power.

BULLETIN

We welcome your contributions (whether you are or are not a Member of the Group), your suggestions and criticisms. Don't hesitate to write about the Bulletin or the activities of the Group, to Mr. A.H.French, 36 Parkland Road, Woodford Green, Essex. (Tel: 504 2737).

Subscriptions are now overdue. Please forward your 5/- to the Treasurer or to Mr. French.

EAST LONDON'S WATERWAYS.

When the Regents Canal was built (1812-20), it ran just outside the northern limit of a built-up area, passing only through Hackney, Mile End and Stepney villages, thence under the Pentonville Estate in the Islington Tunnel. By 1835, the rural setting had been greatly altered by the rapid growth of industrial premises and housing estates and only at Victoria Park (1842-5) did it emerge from the metropolis by which for the most part it had been engulfed.

The areas of poor housing near the Canal have been reduced by redevelopment, particularly since the last War, and planning involves the continuance of this process. But the Canalside environment as a whole remains poor, the decline of water traffic making the Canal a neglected backwater. The Canal was built for commercial carrying and with the decline of the use of coal, it is now used mainly for carrying timber over short distances. It is running at a loss, but as a supplier of water and as an integral part of the drainage system of North London it remains valuable. Recreational use of the Canal is growing, although very little of the East London section is suitable for this purpose. There is a feeling that the Canal could pay its way by income from proposed marinas and from general recreational use.

The Pitfield Youth Centre keeps canoes in a hut near New North Road, Shoreditch, and uses them mainly for week-end training and on summer evenings. The use of the Canal by private and hire pleasure craft is being encouraged particularly in the Kingsland and Haggerston Basins and in the Victoria Park area. New moorings are recommended by the Regents Canal Group for the Victoria Park area in view of its proximity to the Thames estuary for sailing purposes. The Park is bounded by canals on two sides, but is separated from them by iron railings. The London Borough of Hackney intends that it be joined to the Lea Valley parks by an 'open space link' and the Park will also join a series of open spaces that is being developed to the east of the Regent's Canal below its junction with the Hertford Union. With the towpath opened it would also give access to parks to the west. (See "Regents Canal - A policy for its future" published by the Regents Canal Group, 1967).

Limehouse Cut is of course, not part of the Regents Canal but is a connection to the River Lea, having been cut through fields to make a commercial waterway which has not proved very successful.

The Lea Cut at Bromley which has served for many years to supply coal to Hackney Power Station looks like being closed. The cargo has been switched over to road transport despite efforts by the Tugmen's & Lightermen's Unions and the T.U.C. The Minister of Transport has asked British Railways, the Waterways Board and the Central Electricity Generating Board to think again, but the speed and economy of road transport seems sure to win.

A.H.F.

SIR ROBERT GEFFRYE, 1613-1704.

Following the evening meeting at the Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road, Shoreditch, in July last, members may care to have some note of the life of Sir Robert Geffrye.

A London merchant and a Lord Mayor of the City, he was the son of Robert Geffrye of Tredennock, Cornwall. Baptized on 24 May 1613, it is possible that he left home at an early age and became a merchant in the East India, or Turkey, trade from his house in Lime Street, City. He was a large importer of tobacco and suffered severe losses in the Fire of London. He was an influential member of the Ironmongers' Company of which he was Master in 1667 and 1685 when James II replaced the charter which had been seized by Charles II and appointed Geffrye as first Master under the new charter. He was Sheriff of London in 1673 and when he was appointed Lord Mayor of the City of London in 1685 and knighted, he was the first member of the Ironmongers' Company to receive that honour for 50 years. Geffrye was Colonel of one of the Regiments of Trained Bands in 1681 and President of Bridewell and Bethlehem hospitals from 1692-3.

In his will he bequeathed money for a service to be said for him in St. Dionis Backchurch, Lime Street, where he was buried in Feb. 1704. He left £520 for a school to be maintained at Landrake, Cornwall, where he had been baptized and for the relief of the poor of St. Erney and Landrake. The Ironmongers' Company were bequeathed £200 and a pair of silver flagons, and the residue of his estate (amounting to £1534) was to provide a piece of ground for almshouses in, or near, London. The Company accordingly purchased a piece of ground in Kingsland Road on which they built 14 almshouses and a chapel, each house with a basement and two storeys, sheltering in all 42 inmates, a matron and a chaplain. Pensioners were to receive £6 yearly and 15/- in addition for a gown.

At the time of building in 1714/15, the Drapers' (Harwar's) Almshouses stood to the south of the site - i.e. nearer the City - and the Framework Knitters' Almshouses were erected subsequently to the North. When St. Dionis Backchurch was demolished in 1878, Sir Robert Geffrye's remains were re-interred in the small burial ground attached to the Almshouses in Kingsland Road. When the Ironmongers' Company decided to build new almshouses in the country, at Mottingham, Kent, in 1908, application was made to the Charity Commissioners for leave to accept a price for the site from the Peabody Donation Fund who wished to erect model dwellings thereon. This proposal was strongly opposed by Shoreditch Borough Council, who were concerned for the preservation of one of the few open spaces in the Borough, and by various bodies who were concerned to preserve the historic buildings. The Charity Commissioners would not sanction the proposed sale but the Ironmongers' Company went to the Chancery Court who, in due course, made an order permitting the property to be sold.

(Cont.)-

Sir Robert Geffrye (Cont.)

Accordingly, the London County Council were moved to action and in December 1910, made an offer to purchase from the Peabody Trust which was accepted. The purchase price was above £34,000 of which £6000 was provided by Shoreditch Borough Council and £2000 by voluntary subscription. The garden was opened to the public in July 1912, and after much debate in Council and much gratuitous advice from the local press, the London County Council decided to adapt the almshouses for use as a furniture museum, the district being predominately a furniture and cabinet making area. The museum was opened to the public in April 1914, and the work which was inaugurated by those wise gentlemen of the County Council has gone from strength to strength.

S. C. Tongue.

THE MANOR HOUSE.

Working very near Leman Street, I pay periodic calls to view the progress being made on No.66 - sometime called the Manor House. This is the early 18th Century House (near the public house called "The David Garrick") now undergoing repairs. In my previous slide-shows to the Group, I showed two aspects of the building. First, the front, the exceptional height of the house and the doorway with its round wooden columns; secondly, the interior, the Ionic columns and handsome cornice work in the hall, the carved wooden staircase and the timber remains of what might have been a domed ceiling to a drawing-room.

The L.C.C. in 1945 listed this House, in a Register of Buildings & Monuments of Architectural & Historic Interest in Stepney, as follows:-

Leman Street,
No. 66 - Mid 18th Century, Stone Modillion Cornice &
Ionic Doorcase, Good Panelling and Staircase.

An early call soon after work began, revealed the top floor and attics completely shorn off. On a subsequent visit, I asked permission to look through the building to discover for myself how restorations were progressing.

I was astonished! A neat clinical operation had been performed. The cornice work and Ionic columns that gave the hallway that pleasing finish, had disappeared. All the wooden panelling had gone (the walls are now covered with plaster-board from floor to ceiling, new floors have been laid throughout. One must admit it all looks clean, orderly and efficient), A very decorative circular window on one of the landings has given way to a small square window. To crown all these 'improvements' I was assured by one of the carpenters that the carved stair-rails were to be boarded up. He said it would cost too much to restore.

Every vestige of its original character and charm had vanished - no, not quite. There is still the front doorcase, but it is not beyond the ingenuity of the 'restorers' to have that demolished. What would we have left? A neat, modern office building, easy to let. Certainly not one that East Londoners would be particularly proud of, nor could it be pointed out with pride to visitors to the area, as a fine example of restoration work carried out in our rapidly diminishing 18th Century Stepney. Let us hope that this is not a foretaste of what is to be the fate of Elder Street and Fournier Street.

David Granick.

January and February meetings

1968

TUESDAY

16

J.H. BOYES on "London's Canals".

Shoreditch Library, 7 p.m.

JANUARY

TUESDAY

20

Members' evening :

Queen Mary College, 7 p.m.

"Some East London People"

FEBRUARY

and

Exhibition of Members' photographs.

This will be an informal evening and it is hoped that members will contribute to its success by bringing photographs of our East End, old and new, for the pleasure and interest of others. It is hoped that adequate facilities for display will be available.

Equally, will as many members as possible please be prepared to say a few words - it need be only a short reminiscence - about East London people of past and present, famous or infamous.

Please note also an additional to printed programme :

SATURDAY

9

POPLAR WALK led by our Chairman, Mr. French

MARCH

We shall meet outside Poplar Methodist Church,
East India Dock Road at 2.30 p.m.

Finally, I must apologise for the cover of our Bulletin. I undertook to provide a new design but there have been printing and design hold-ups and, rather than delay publication still further, I have gone to press in a temporary disguise. The new cover will be ready for issue No. 6.

SCT