

ELHG

EAST LONDON HISTORY GROUP

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THE EAST LONDON HISTORY GROUP

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BULLETIN No. 10.EDITORIAL

Work has now begun on the £90,000 wine centre at Shed 15 B, West India Docks. This new bulk wine terminal will take the place of the wine vaults which operated for a century and a half at the London Docks.

The Methodist Central Hall at East Ham has now closed after 64 years. At one time there were over 2,000 worshippers but of recent years this dwindled to 200 and the financial burden for its maintenance became too great. It is sad to see these great buildings running to neglect. Have you seen Limehouse Church recently? It is in a deplorable state.

After a century of service to seamen, the Mercantile Marine Office at 133, East India Dock Road, has closed and transferred its business to Dock Street, E.1. It is hoped that an account of this interesting building built as a Sailors Home by the Green family will appear in a later Bulletin.

The new road now taking shape in East Smithfield near the Tower, recalls the 1850's when, as Hugill points out, it was a "labyrinth of countless small lanes and alleys into which many a sailor was lured by the harlots, slugged, robbed and sometimes murdered". The toughest section of the inhabitants were the timber lumpers who usually got their employment from the publican and therefore had to take a certain part of their earnings in liquor with the result that they were rarely sober. They were considered the greatest drunkards in the port of London. Undoubtedly, one of these hostelrys was the famous "Brown Bear" which, since our last Bulletin, has been demolished. The Brewers (Charringtons) are building a new pub on an adjacent site. This is worth a visit as it is being decorated with blow-ups of old engravings of the Thames.

Early in January, the south face of the large clock in the tower of the 12th Century All Saints Church, Stratford, stopped at 12 o'clock. This is the first time that the clock, built in 1857, has failed to record the time on both faces. Charles Dickens is said to have corrected his watch by the clock when he passed the Church on a stage-coach from London.

There has recently been great criticism in Newham of the G.L.C.'s intention to instal at Thamesmead on the south bank of the Thames, the old H.M.S. "Warrior", built at the Thames Iron Works, Canning Town, early last century. The "Warrior", Britain's first ironclad battleship, is lying at Pembroke, and a campaign is being fought to bring her back to Canning Town. Incidentally, there are not many people who know that the West Ham Football Team got their nickname "The Hammers" from their early recruitment among the riveters of the Thames Iron Works and not from the name of the area.

Note in your diaries that the meetings on the 14th May and 11th June have been transposed. That on the 14th May will be "Hackney in slides" by Mr.S.C.Tongue, and that on Wednesday, 11th June 1969, will be Mr.Gordon Barnes' lecture on "Poplar Churches". Both meetings are at Queen Mary College, at 7 p.m.

WEST HAM PARISH WORKHOUSE.

In January, 1725, a vestry meeting decided to build a workhouse for the parish of West Ham - until then all poor relief had been 'Outdoor' relief. The poor had been given pensions, clothing, or other assistance, and children had been boarded out with families.

On the 18th September, 1725, a set of detailed regulations were approved by the vestry for the conduct of the workhouse and its inmates. They were required to rise early, 6 a.m. in summer and 7 in winter, and to work hard, till 7 p.m. in summer, and 6 in winter, apart from meal breaks. The regulations even specify the week's food :-

Bill of fare

	<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Supper</u>
Sunday	Broth	Boiled Beef & roots	Bread & butter
Monday	"	Fruментy	Bread & cheese
Tuesday	Bread & cheese	Boiled mutton & roots	Bread & butter
Wednesday	Broth	Milk porridge	Bread & cheese
Thursday	Bread & cheese	Boiled beef & roots	Bread & butter
Friday	Broth	Pease porridge	Bread & cheese
Saturday	Bread & cheese	Boiled mutton & roots	Bread & butter

This may be plain fare, but it was not scanty, if the quantities specified were adhered to. "Each person to be allowed one pound of bread, three quarters of a pound of meat, one ounce of butter, two ounces of cheese, and one quart of beer a day, and a pint of spoon meat on spoon meat days". Presumably spoon meat was porridge.

The first workhouse was probably a pretty small affair - it stood, as we know from later evidence, in the churchyard, and seems to have cost some £130 to build. There is mention in the vestry minutes of oakum, so some of the work at least must have consisted of oakum picking.

A committee of the parish officers and senior parishioners was chosen to run the workhouse, and detailed records appear in its minute book, which has survived for the years 1755 to 1775. Besides records of the workhouse itself, it includes apprenticing poor children, pensions and clothing provided for the poor not in the workhouse and so on.

When the workhouse was first built, there was an attempt to stop giving outdoor relief, but this does not seem to have been enforced for very long, and evidently there were quite a lot of people in receipt of regular pensions - the usual amount was about 1s a week for a single person, but it varied. A woman with three children got 3s, and a man with a wife and 5 children also got only 3s - this seems very little, but perhaps he had some other means of support. In some cases, the rent only of the poor was paid, or they might be given a lump sum to pay off a debt, or enable them to make a start in some kind of work.

Poor children were apprenticed, usually outside the parish

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- several were apprenticed to silk weavers in Bethnal Green in the 1750's and 60's. An unusual agreement entered in the book with Sebastian Weyermann, a tambour manufacturer of West Ham, provided that he should employ four children for two years, and during that time pay 2s a week for each child to the workhouse master. The children had to work a 12 hour day, from 7 to 7 in summer, and 8 to 8 in winter - the agreement does not state how old they were.

There was an increase in the amount of poverty in the later 18th century, and in 1760 the workhouse was enlarged by two extra rooms. The poor rate rose gradually from an average of 8d per half year, to 1s or 1s 3d.

During the Napoleonic wars things became much worse, and especially just after the war ended, when there was a general depression. Things became so bad that the workhouse committee was asked to prepare a special report, which is entered at great length in the general vestry minute book (18th February 1819). This showed that the amount spent in poor relief had risen from £5040 in 1812 to £12110 in 1818.

They threw the blame for the increase in poverty on various causes. The building of new docks and factories within reach of West Ham had caused houses to be built for the poorer classes who were too poor to pay anything for poor rate - if they did not require any relief themselves! There were over 700 houses exempted from poor rate. They also thought that people were no longer ashamed to ask for parish relief, but demanded it as of right. Above all, they blamed it on the influx of Irish labourers, who travelled about the country harvesting and so on in summer, and in the autumn moved to West Ham to help with the potato lifting. When this was finished, they could get no more work, and so went on parish relief until the spring.

A fresh set of regulations was drawn up, more detailed but little more liberal than the 1725 ones - but they did allow for special meals on Christmas, Easter and Whit Sunday! Tea was now allowed for breakfast if required. Inmates were also allowed to smoke, but not in bed - this was a sensible idea. But it could still have been little better than a prison. They were not allowed to go out without permission, and anyone who misbehaved by refusing to work, swearing, going out, getting drunk, etc. could be punished by being put on bread and water.

The work done was now quite varied. There were 244 people in the workhouse, 29 being too old and 22 too young for work. The remainder were employed in weaving, spinning, carding, needle-work, stripping feathers from quills, beating flax and hemp, and in cooking, cleaning etc. and teaching the children. There were also four or five employed in tailoring and shoemaking, so they must have been almost self-sufficient.

Before this date (probably some time before), the workhouse had been moved to a site in Abbey Road. When the West Ham Poor Law Union was formed, and a new workhouse was built in Leytonstone for a wider area, this was taken over by the Leather Cloth Works, and probably a portion of the workhouse building remained standing until recently, when this was pulled down.

EARLY PLACE-NAMES IN HACKNEY AND TOWER HAMLETS

The derivation of the principal place-names in East London appear in the volume on Middlesex place-names issued by the English Place-Name Society (EPNS) but owing to the form in which the material is organised coherencies which exist between place-names in these boroughs are not readily apparent. Some of these coherencies are examined in this note.

1. Early settlement names.

There is no record of any of the pre-Saxon names of places in this area. Apart from medieval or modern names, all the settlement names appear to be of Saxon origin. The settlements to which they pertained were situated on the gravel terraces, as one would expect and none was on the alluvial plain. One place-name Stepney, was apparently transferred from its original location to a place nearby.

Bethnal Green	Blida's corner (EPNS. <u>Mdx.83</u>).
Bromley	'a clearing overgrown with brambles' (which indicates previous use of the site) (EPNS <u>Mdx.135</u>)
Cambridgeheath	Centbeorht's open land or pasture (EPNS. <u>Mdx. 85</u>)
Clapton	the farm on the hill (EPNS <u>Mdx. 105</u>)
Dalston	Deorlaf's farm (" " 106)
Hackney	"Haca's well-watered land or marsh" (there was plenty of well-watered land in the district which was not marshland and there is no reason therefore why the second meaning should be preferred to the first). (EPNS. <u>Mdx.105</u>)
Homerton	Hunburh's farm (EPNS. <u>Mdx. 106</u>)
Stepney	Stybba's landing-place (this name clearly referred originally to a site on the riverside) (EPNS. <u>Mdx.150</u>).
Wapping	Wæppa's people('s place). (EPNS <u>Mdx.152</u>)
Wick	a farm (later a dairy farm) (" " 106)

2. Anglo-French place-names.

These names suggest a medieval origin for the places they indicate, on the grounds that before then they were so obscure that their Saxon name was forgotten or else that before then they were not there at all.

Limehouse	<u>le lymhostes</u> , the lime-oasts (kilns); this is evidence of the localisation of a particular craft (EPNS. <u>Mdx.150</u>).
Pomfret	'broken bridge', on the west side of the Isle of Dogs (EPNS. <u>Mdx.136</u>)
Poplar	<u>le popler</u> , le popeler, the poplar tree (the native poplar flourishes on the alluvial soil on which Poplar stands). (EPNS. <u>Mdx.133-4</u>)

There are many other examples.

3. Names ending in -well or denoting a well.

A feature of gravel terraces overlying London clay is the

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abundance of springs and wells issuing from them. These names, and the existence of other wells too, indicate that this feature was not uncommon.

Bushawkswell and Hawkswell, Hackney, (derivation from personal names?) B.M. Add.MSS.15632,15639, 15638, 15639.)

Copatswell, Hackney, (a well with a roof) (St.Paul's MS, A Box 25A, 1708)

Shacklewell, Hackney, (a well with a hook or coupling ?) (EPNS. Mdx.107)

Shadwell (a district), shallow well (EPNS. Mdx. 151)

Shecockswell, Hackney, (derivation unknown) (St.Paul's MS.A: Box 25A 1708).

Rogueswell, Stepney, (derivation unknown) (EPNS. Mdx.157).

Churchfieldwell, Hackney, (EPNS. Mdx.108)

(There was also a well on the north side of Whitechapel Church. G.H.Birch, 'Stray Notes', Trans,Lond.Mdx.Arch.Soc. n.s. V.514)

Readers of the Bulletin may know of other medieval wells which would be worth recording in these pages.

K.G.T.McD. 13/11/6A.

"WIV ME BARRER AND ME MOKE"

Victorian king of the streets was without doubt the Costermonger. A census taken in 1860 estimated that there were nearly 30,000 (including 12,000 women costers) in the East End of London.

Itinerant vendors there were in plenty, but the true Costermongers were an elite apart. A coster's status in his own kingdom depended much on the type of conveyance he used to carry his wares. He was a proud street-trader who had his own donkey-barrow, nicknamed a "Whitechapel" or "Westminster Brougham". Most coster donkeys were well cared for. Feeding cost 4d to 5d a day; a peck of Chaff - 1d, a quart of Oats - 1½d, a quart of Beans 1½d, and Hay - 1d. Carrots were a luxury to the donkey, for at times they were too dear. Only one meal a day was given.

Donkey carts were usually of oblong shape, about 5' x 3', with a rail behind and a shelf laid on top. Surplus goods were kept in the bed of the cart. Some home-made vehicles were mere platforms on wheels, whilst a common method for a fellow just starting up was to lash two poles to the handles of a barrow, to form shafts.

Donkey harness varied a good deal. Some of the strapping would be well blacked and greased, and glittering with brass. Some neglected, would be as grey with dust as the donkey himself. Old carriage harness would sometimes be used, far too big for the donkey. At the worst, rope was used for traces and belly-bands, with old cotton handkerchiefs for pads. It was in cases like these that the donkey sometimes suffered from chafing. Second-hand harness often sported plated silver ornaments, pink with copper where the plating had worn off.

A Coster dealt mainly with food produce from fruit and veg to fish, although your real Coster wouldn't sell 'sprats' which were considered beneath his dignity. A common sight was the Salt & Mustard vendor's cart, usually with a small tilt (canvas cover) to protect his goods from the weather. A square piece of tin bearing the legend "Salt - 3 lbs a penny" would be stuck in a large block of salt. Mustard was "a penny an ounce". Another distinctive vehicle was the Poultry cart, from whose cross-stick supported on two uprights, hung wild ducks, rabbits and poultry.

A joy to the children was the Pineapple Rock barrow with its small brightly coloured flags fluttering in the wind. Not usually a coster business. Displayed on trays was a delectable highly flavoured and coloured sweet rock, from pineapple to peppermint (plus the dust of the streets).

Some Costers employed shrill-voiced lads from 10 to 16 years of age to push or pull the barrows; sometimes cheaper than a donkey. These 'nippers' were paid 2d to 3d per day (depending on trade), as much fruit as they could eat, and very often they lived with the 'Master and Mistress', sleeping in the same room.

Street-trading was a highly competitive business in the Victorian era, and the Coster lads were sharp-witted business men in their small way. They were a close fraternity; jealous of their rights, and resentful of the "Rotten herrings" and "Spuddies" (itinerant vendors of inferior produce, usually poor Irish hawkers who sold tainted fish and stale potatoes to other poor Irish, in the dusk of the evening).

When bad trade or illness hit the Coster then it meant the donkey and barrow "up the spout for 30/-", and a loan from a friend to redeem it eventually from pawn. But when times were good there was never a more jovial fellow, when in 'kicksey togs', his Dinah on his arm, he strutted to the Music Hall or 'tuppenny hop'.

If unencumbered with a 'gal', he joined his mates in the Pub for cards, dominos, shovehappy, three-up or skittles. It was said that the Costers were the finest skittle players in London.

(Principal reference - Mayhew).

S.A.A. 2/68.

OF SHAKESPEARE AND EAST LONDON

Doubtless some members of the E.L.H.G. will have followed the letters in "The Times" newspaper when a number of correspondents throughout the week (15-20 Feb) strove to establish the identity of 'Mr.W.H.' the gentleman supposed to be the inspirer of the famous 'Sonnets' of William Shakespeare.

Conspicuous amongst these combatants were Dr.A.L.Rowse and Professor Trevor-Roper, who have been entertainingly impolite, over a number of years, in destroying each other's guesses over this matter.

Their knockabout performance proves nothing, and indeed we should have taken no further note of the controversy but for the B.B.C. Television programme "Twentyfour Hours" on Thursday, 20th February, when the remarks of Mr.Brooke-Little introduced a new

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claimant to the title, namely Mr. Nicholas Dethick, Windsor Herald at the College of Arms, whom he reputes to be "the only true begetter of the afore-mentioned Sonnets"!

This new contestant for the honoured rights intrigues us immediately, for the Dethick family lived in Poplar, and for some two centuries served the community in Church and in parochial affairs.

Sir William Dethick, the First, was created Garter-King of Arms - that is Head of the College of Heralds - and was granted the Manor House, and an acre of land, in Poplar, by King Henry VIII in 1543.

W.H.Frere, in "Two centuries of Stepney History", portrays him as a man of queer temper, quarrelsome and unpopular; it was complained of him that he had struck his father, stabbed his brother, and reviled, beaten, and wronged many members of the College of Arms. Nicholas, bosom friend of the poet, according to Mr. Brooke-Little, seems to have inherited the family imbalance.

Interest in this topic is enlarged for us by the claim of a Shakespeare family connection with Ratcliff. According to Charles McNaught ("East London Observer" 7 May 1910) The Shakespeares of Stepney claimed descent from a brother of the immortal playwright. They appear first on the Register of St. Dunstan's Church under date of 17 May, 1642. "John Shakespeare, of the parish of Stepney, and Margaret Jude, of the same parish, widow, married by license from the registry of the Lord Bishop of London". On the 11th September 1652, Margaret, wife of John Shakespeare of Ratcliff Highway, Ropemaker, was buried, and on 4th June 1654, John Shakespeare, of Ratcliff Highway, Ropemaker, aged 35, and Martha Cooley of Wapping Wall, 'mayde', 19 years, were married before John Waterson Esq. Charles Matthew, Robert Conoley etc. Witnesses."

The death of two infant daughters of this J.S. is also recorded. There is much more in the records than just these quotations to show the family connection with the great Bard. This calls for volunteers from among our readers for renewed research and I should be only too glad to offer further information to those wishing to pursue their enquiries.

C.S.T.

QUARTERLY SPOTLIGHT - Mininotes on people and places in Tower Hamlets

When you are next around the Canning Town Bridge area go and gaze upon what is probably the only few yards of tramline remaining in East London. It lays still in its original position on open land situated in front of the premises now occupied by Messrs. Coubro & Scrutton on the south side of East India Dock Road immediately opposite the junction with Abbott Road. When the old iron bridge over the River Lea at this point was replaced by the present bridge during the early 1930's, a re-alignment of the approach roads resulted in these small areas of land, inclusive of tramlines, remaining undisturbed.

Mention of the well-known local firm, Coubro & Scrutton, reminds me to refer to the premises at No. 11 West India Dock Road, formerly occupied by them for nearly a century. Here they made

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sails for many famous vessels, including the "Cutty Sark" during the halcyon days of sailing ships. The building (mid-19th C.) has the appearance to me of a primitive Methodist Chapel but the "text" being proclaimed by the lettering cut in the string course announces "SAILMAKERS and SHIP'S CHANDLERS". Look closer at the boundary railings - the design of this cast-iron work includes ropes and anchors - what attention to detail so lacking today! The association of this firm's business with the riverside for over a century must be recorded sometime. What a story to tell! Any member ready and willing?

Wander to the junction of Redman's Road and Stepney Green and look around. Although an improvement in the visual amenity of the area is being achieved by redevelopment it is a pity that the public clock in the Atkinson Memorial presents a dilapidated face to the passer-by. This memorial which originally stood in Burdett Road commemorates the public services of S.B. ATKINSON, Stepney Borough Councillor, Guardian of the Poor, Justice of the Peace, M.A., LL.M., M.B., B.Sc. 1873-1910. See his bust by local sculptor, Harris & Sons of Mile End, in the Central Library, Bancroft Road. I applaud the enthusiasm and interest of the former Stepney Borough Council when in 1934 they undertook the resiting of this monument. Can such an interest be sufficiently rekindled by Tower Hamlets members in order to achieve the renovation or replacement of the clock mechanism and thereby give this monument the kiss of life? ~~For a detailed story of this removal (which will appear in Bulletin No.11)~~ I am indebted to Mr. P. Palmer, a former Deputy Borough Engineer & Surveyor with Stepney Borough Council, who is now enjoying a well-earned retirement.

The demolition of the residential properties situated on the south side of Wellclose Square in the interest of so-called progressive development has now been achieved by the Greater London Council. This terrace of four 18th Century dwellings, all listed buildings and mentioned in the London East Volume of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments contained some interesting panelling and staircases. A telephone call to the Greater London Council revealed that the fine pine staircase in No.33 (The Court House) has been salvaged and some parts of the staircases/panelling of Nos. 35 and 36 have been saved. It appears, however, that little could be saved as vandals entered the buildings as soon as they became vacant. The G.L.C. hope to save panelling from some of the properties situated on the East side of the Square. The moral of all this seems to be that it behoves us all as guardians of local history to be particularly vigilant in the future where buildings of historic interest are concerned.

The mid-18th Century buildings at 57/59 Mansell Street included in the List of Buildings of Architectural or Historical interest have been upgraded from Grade III to Grade II, and we hope to see some renovation of the exteriors in the fullness of time (?). A final happy note until next quarter - the residential terrace, early 18th Century, adjoining "The Grapes" public house in Narrow Street is undergoing renovation. Go and see for yourself and then enjoy a drink in "The Grapes" of a beverage of local history while you are about it!!