



EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY
BULLETIN

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Editorial

It is with pleasure and some pride in our own local history that Hackney "takes over" this issue of the East London History Society Bulletin.

When I first came to London I was surprised to find that the conurbation known as London consisted, in fact, of a series of villages which had, over a period of years, lost their boundaries but not necessarily their identity. I found this to be particularly so in Hackney, and in many ways residents in Homerton, Dalston, Hoxton, Stoke Newington and other areas still retain a pride in belonging to these areas rather than to the London Borough of Hackney or London as a whole.

It is, I think, this local pride which makes the "selling" of any activity connected with local history so easy and which has probably enabled the East London History Society to continue its successful activities.

In the context of East London with its immense housing problems and the necessity of re-developing large areas there is some danger that the character and personality of areas will change completely and many locally important buildings disappear. There is little that we, as local historians, can do to prevent such social changes. We can, however, ensure that an adequate record of the present day is preserved for future generations and to this end we should be making sound recordings, films, photographs and possibly commissioning paintings of local scenes. As "local historians" we should in fact be as active in creating the historical records of the future as in preserving and exploiting the record of the past. Perhaps members of the East London Historical Society could do more to provide a lead and the necessary expertise in this direction.

C.J. Long,
Borough Librarian.

A Shoreditch Wedding

"Sir" Jeffery Dunstan, known as "The Mayor of Garret", and by other soubriquets also, was one of those extraordinary East End characters who flourished in eighteenth century London by their outrageous eccentricities and whose appearance was usually the signal for a mob to gather in anticipation of mild diversion at the least and, who knows, perhaps a riot at the end of it.

Such an occasion was the marriage of Miss Nancy Dunstan and this was reported in a contemporary newspaper as follows:

3 Oct 1787

"This humorous event which was on Monday morning performed at St. Leonard, Shoreditch, was announced in Spitalfields about half after eight, when in a very

short time the streets were so filled with people of all descriptions, that it was difficult for carriages to pass. The first that made his appearance in this cavalcade (for a cavalcade it was, the attendants clubbing their halfpence to hire all the coaches on the stand) was the bridegroom (sic. i.e. Thompson) in a hackney-coach, who is a jack-ass driver, about 16 years of age; he coming by the way of Spitalfields, was attended by the weavers, jack-ass drivers, &c. in a long train, holding by the cloths of each other, whilst his select friends paraded with sticks on each side of the coach. Soon after Sir Jeffery arrived by a different route; the lane was then made by a party of select friends, by beating the toes of the crowd with sticks, whilst Sir Jeffery came out of his coach to address the populace, when he informed them, that as the marriage of the Lady Anne had called them together, he hoped their good behaviour would merit his thanks. He then exhorted the bridegroom to retain his spirits, as the Lady Anne would soon arrive, which she did a few minutes after in another hackney vehicle, attended by Lady Dunstan (her mother) and some other friends. All the coaches, however, were loaded on the tops, behind, &c. By this time the church doors not being open, Sir Jeffery ascended the steps of the Clerk's door to address the populace again, when his hat was snatched off, and given to the person who drove the first coach. The gates of the church-yard being at length opened for the bridegroom and his friends, the populace detained them some time by a proposal for carrying Sir Jeffery upon their shoulders. This being overruled, the walls were soon scaled, even the women for this purpose tying their petticoats round their legs. Here the crowd and confusion became so great, that the Minister was forced to perform the ceremony in the vestry. The bridegroom was dressed in a white jacket, a short blue apron, and as well as Sir Jeffery, carried a short stick in his hand. A dinner was provided at the Red Lion, opposite the London Infirmary, Whitechapel, where they afterwards adjourned, attended by fresh parties of spectators from all quarters. The attendance of a number of constables, it is thought, prevented a great deal of disorder.

S.C.T.

Mapping London's Subterrains by Ellis S. Hillman

" -- A spirit rais'd from depth of underground
That shall make answer to such questions -- "

William Shakespeare, King Henry VI, Part II, Act I, Scene 2,
Verses 79 - 80 (inclusive)

It is difficult to assess the value or usefulness of "mapping" underground London in easy round terms. In the first place, Under Ground London, or London below Street Level, is a dimension in its own right, a world with its own labyrinth of laws and traditions. It is a world that is largely unexplored and yet London above street level, visible London, has no entity, and certainly no independent existence from the terra firma which sustains and supports it. If it were possible to slice off London at street/pavement level with some gigantic carving knife, severing it from its physical moorings the metropolis would come to an abrupt and frightening halt. Without heat, light, electricity; without the water and sewerage systems; without underground transports, and access to

tunnels, tubes or post office rail - London would become a dead city.

London below street level is a dominion governed by a host of statutory and local authorities each jostling for a share in the precious subterranean space through which the service pipes and ducts pass and for whose operation and maintenance these authorities are ultimately responsible. Disentangling this extensive condominium of gas, water, electricity and transport authorities is no mean task, and any start on such a daunting operation would have to take into account the two main features of London's subterranean, (a) natural and (b) man-made, each requiring different treatment.

London's natural subterranean features include not only the obviously geological, i.e. the Chalk Basin overlain by the ubiquitous London clay, with gravel terraces scattered over its surface and the Bagshot Sands capping the Northern Heights (Hampstead and Highgate Heaths); the complex of tributary systems feeding the London River (the Thames) flowing in from north and south are just as much part of London's natural sub-scenery.

Although by no means all of London's rivers have been culverted, and buried as part of Sir Joseph Bazalgette's plan to create a main drainage-sewerage network for the metropolis - certainly a wonder of the underworld dwarfing in concept and power of execution any of the more familiar engineering achievements of the Victorian era - most of the rivers north of the Thames have been pressed into London's under-service. Such historically famous rivers as the Fleet, the Walbrook, the Tyburn, the Westbourne and, east of the City, the Black Ditch (in Shoreditch), Hackney Brook and the above-surface River Lee (described, perhaps not too gallantly, these days as the River Loo).

London's Geology is more complex than is sometimes imagined but appears relatively simple compared with man's own complex of creations below the surface. Man's contribution to the subterranean furniture ranges from the buildings, streets and pavements of Roman times, through medieval to more recent periods of London architectural and building history. The London Celt, Roman, Saxon and Norman, have each added a different London to the London beneath leaving the modern archaeologist or developer with the vexations of deciphering the layers.

More serious obstacles to mapping or exploiting London's sub-space are the network of underground communications, from the shallow cut and cover railways such as the Inner Circle, begun in 1863, to the deeper level tubes of 1890 onwards. It is perhaps pertinent here to point out that when the New Road - now Marylebone Road - was being excavated to allow the railbed for the Metropolitan line to be laid in 1862 - the engineer encountered a cat's cradle of gas and water mains, and sewerage. Electric cables were only later to become part of the underground service network, and it is noteworthy here that the Metropolitan Board of Works had yet to complete its main drainage system for London. Even so, immense difficulties faced the engineers when they required to pinpoint such obstructions to their progress and this progress came almost to an end in June 1882 when the ancient Fleet Sewer burst into the workings near Kings Cross (once known as Battle Bridge), flooding then to a depth of up to ten feet between Kings Cross and Farringdon Street. And this was over a

hundred years ago! It is hardly surprising to discover that more than a century later the problem of evaluating our underground capital investment, and locating it has become more and not less baffling to mapper and planner alike.

The mesh of gas, water, electricity, hydraulic power and Post Office services, cables, ducts and conduits which snakes its way under our streets in evermore confusing patterns represents perhaps the most perplexing of all our underground deciphering problems.

The London Subterranean Survey Association was born in October 1968 and has as its objects the fostering of interest in and discussion about the natural and man-made features below ground in London; to promote the surveying and collection of such information on a scientific and practical basis; to find and exploit the best method of storing and retrieving this information and to encourage individuals and organisations to participate in the process. It has now been associated with no less than four Conferences and is currently preparing its fifth on "MAPPING LONDON'S LOST RIVERS", to be held at the Building Centre on Friday, April 15.

Ellis S. Hillman is a G.L.C. Member for Hackney. He is Senior Lecturer in Environmental Geology at the North East London Polytechnic and Chairman of the London Subterranean Survey Association. We welcome his first appearance in these pages, particularly on so urgent a theme.

Books

Members who were present at the January meeting to hear Bob Gildings lively and informative talk will be interested to know that

THE JOURNEYMEN COOPERS of EAST LONDON;
Workers' control in an old London Trade.

is available at 75p (plus 10p postage*) from

History Workshop,
Ruskin College,
Oxford.

Another volume, just to hand in the same series is by Stan Shipley:

CLUB LIFE and SOCIALISM in MID-VICTORIAN LONDON
Price: 60p (plus 10p postage*)

This pamphlet describes the political attitudes of the working class intelligentsia of the 1870's. It re-examines many traditional assumptions about the Victorian working man and is based on the area of Soho and S. Giles. Nevertheless there are many references to the East End; to the new railway town of Stratford and the Stratford Dialectical and Radical Club; to the East London

Secular Society and the Hackney Secular Association meeting in Perseverance Hall, Goldsmith's Row.

There is an interesting quote from Fredk. Rogers book, Labour, Life and Literature (1913). "The first lecture I listened to at a club was at the Borough of Hackney, and the lecturer was an eminent physician whose name I have forgotten, but it was on a much worked subject in those days (the 1870s) - 'Physiology in every-day life'. It was my first experience of popular scientific lecturing, and the lecturer had to the full the popular gift of putting his statements in clear and simple language. In those days science and religion - the clergy and the scientific teachers - were deadly foes, and it was full of sly drives at the clergy, chiefly those of the Church of England, which were highly appreciated by the audience. Speaking of the effect of overcrowded rooms and bad atmosphere, he referred to the habit of sleeping in church. 'If you want to alter that,' said the lecturer, 'my advice is, shorten the sermon and ventilate the church.' Not many, probably, of those listening to him ever ran any risk of the ills that might come from badly ventilated churches, but the atmosphere of that lecture hall, with every second man smoking cheap tobacco, was simply murderous."

Raphael Samuels, a Spitalfields resident, well known as tutor in social history at Ruskin is to be congratulated on this very fine and relevant series at a helpful price.

* Available also at certain bookshops in London as under:

Bloomsbury: S. John Thomas Bookshop, Woburn Pl.
Dillons University Bookshop, Malet Street.

Limehouse: "Star of the East" Commercial Road

Clerkenwell: Central Books, Gray's Inn Road

Bethnal Grn: Agitprop, 248 Bethnal Green Road

S.C.T.

Fri. 20 Aug 1886 p.3.

The Mad Dog Cases

"Sir Charles Warren, the Chief of the Metropolitan Police, having informed the Secretary to the German Hospital that the large black retriever dog (which had bitten Emma Smith, aged 11 years of 27 Templar Road, Homerton, on Friday last, and who had in consequence been attended to as an out-patient of that excellent institution) had been killed subjected to a post-mortem examination by Mr. A.Z. Sewell, M.R.C.V.S., and found to be suffering from rabies the Medical Officers immediately sent for and admitted the child as an in-patient. The Committee on hearing of this distressing case, and having been advised that the best mode to adopt would be to place her under the treatment of Dr. Pasteur at Paris, unhesitatingly decided that this should be done without loss of time (they having been informed that Dr. Pasteur objects to receiving patients after the lapse of seven days from the time they have been bitten). They accordingly

instructed Dr. Reihlen, the resident medical officer, under whose treatment the poor child had been since her admission, to proceed with her at the expense of the hospital on the afternoon of Wednesday last to Paris, the sanction of the mother, a poor widow, having been previously obtained."

"We are glad to be able to state that Thos. Pepper, the man who was severely bitten by a mad dog at 117 High Street, Kingsland, a fortnight since, and who is at present under treatment by M. Pasteur, at Paris, is progressing very favourably, and in all probability will return home on Tuesday next."

Wed. Aug 25 p.3

"Mr. Feldman, secretary to the German Hospital, has received a letter from Dr. Reihlen, who has charge of the little girl Emma Smith, who was bitten by a mad dog in High Street, Homerton, on Friday week, stating that under the care of M. Pasteur, at Paris, she is proceeding very satisfactorily.

Thomas Pepper, the man who was so severely bitten by a mad dog at 117 High Street, Kingsland, arrived home from Paris yesterday in good health."

B.L.H.

The Foyles of Shoreditch

The recent death of Gilbert Foyle, at 85, co-founder of the well known firm of booksellers in the Charing Cross Road reminds one that the enterprise started in Shoreditch when Foyle senior, father of seven, weighing up the rice, flour, etc., in his grocery shop decided that this was not going to be the life for his boys; he would put them into the Civil Service. Alas for that, both Gilbert and William failed the requisite exam and instead as an unkind critic said, the boys had to work for their living.

William went as an office boy to the great criminal advocate Edward Marshall Hall, K.C. at 7/6d. weekly whilst Gilbert crossed the road from their Charles Square home to add up the ticket sales in the Shoreditch Baths and Wash-houses next to the library in Pitfield Street. Somewhere along the line his addition probably became less than satisfactory and Gilbert got the sack, shortly to be joined by his brother who seems to have displeased the King's Counsel, never the most equable of men.

Disconsolate, and no doubt broke as well, it is said that they decided to "raise the wind" by selling the by now superfluous text books for the Civil Service examination of ill memory. And thus, in a phrase, "a star was born" - two stars in fact who became W & G Foyle Limited.

Their early activities soon filled the kitchen and part of the shop and complaints of rice in the books and books in the rice no doubt expedited their

move in 1903 to Islington and thence to premises in Charing Cross Road a year later. The first year's turnover at Islington was ridiculously small and their handwritten catalogues were sent to customers with the somewhat pathetic request for their return when finished with. It was unfortunate also that the first assistant they engaged should have absconded early with the takings but, no doubt, their younger days in Hoxton had inured them to the harsher realities of life. It must remain one of those fascinating speculations as the visitor of today walks past the site of the former Pitfield Street Baths (now a National Car Park) that, had Dad kept the boys in the grocery trade or had Gilbert, the realist, stayed with the Baths Department, Charing Cross Road today would have been about thirty miles of books the poorer.

S.C.T.

S.O.S. from C.S.T.!

The Committee was recently invited to recommend the siting of Memorial Plaques throughout the area of Tower Hamlets in commemoration of the outstanding persons and events associated with the history of the Borough. Also, in view of the present period of stringent public economy, we were warned to limit our recommendations strictly to the name and date of the individual or incident selected!

An alternative proposal put to the meeting suggested that a larger plaque, commemorative of several such eminent persons or events, might be erected in a central position, throughout the Borough; as, for example, in the near neighbourhood of St. Dunstan's Church - an area overflowing with memories of historic personages, and outstanding events.

Here is an occasion when your personal suggestion would be considerably helpful to the Committee.

PLEASE Write immediately to - C.S. Truman,
7 Kennington Palace Court,
Sancroft Street, SE11 5UL

The Sturts and Shoreditch

An East Londoner travelling along New North Road through the heart of what came to be known after the building developments of the 1820s and 1830s as Hoxton New Town would find himself in an area where Dorsetshire street names abounded - Shaftesbury, Weymouth, Dorchester, Wimbourne, Bridport and Mintern. He would recognise most of them instantly but he would almost certainly be surprised to discover that Sturt, Poole, Grange, Evelyn, Murray and Napier derived from the same source - the Sturt family and their connections and, in particular, Charles Napier Sturt, (1795-1869), known in his time as a legendary figure, "Sturt of the Murray".

Born in Bengal, he was one of thirteen children, his father being a judge in the service of the East India Company. The Sturts and Napiers were old land owning families from the West Country, and of Dorset in particular, and two eighteenth century marriages in particular - of Humphry Sturt to Diana Napier and of his son Humphry to the immensely wealthy Mary Pitfield - forged indissoluble links between the Dorset and Shoreditch estates of the three families.

Charles Sturt is often regarded as the father of Australian exploration. He discovered the Murray and Darling Rivers and his journeys led to the foundation of the state of South Australia. He was the first man to penetrate deeply into the interior of central Australia and for sheer heroism the annals of the expedition to the interior, in search of the mythical inland sea can know few parallels.

The story of Charles Sturt was written first by his daughter-in-law, Beatrix, in 1899. In commemoration of the centenary of his death, the young writer, Michael Langley has produced an absorbing account of this quiet and modest hero that represents an outstanding tribute to the spirit of the age.

(LANGLEY, Michael. Sturt of the Murray. Robert Hale, 1969. £2.25)

THE EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY

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