

East London History Society

Newsletter

Summer 1994

Vol.1 No. 6



50 Years Ago - The Summer of '44

1944. A year that Londoners, and in particular East Londoners would remember for a long, long time. On January 17th, a collision at Ilford Station when an express train ran into the rear of another train left 15 dead and 30 badly injured. Nightly air raids took place all through the early months of the year. In March during one raid, 304 large fires were reported in London and Greater London districts. (This period was known as the 'Little Blitz') Towards the end of the month a bomber was shot down. It crashed on a house in Ilford, killing a lady and her 2 children. Her husband was away in the army. April saw the last of the big raids on London.

Another bomber shot down by the AA guns at Chadwell Heath came down in Seven Kings Road, Ilford, killing 4 people in a nearby house. The bombers had now switched their attacks to the south coast ports, where the Allied invasion fleets were gathering. when the 'D' Day landings did take place in early June, there was a great sense of relief all over the country. People began to believe that the worst was over.

On June 13th, 4 flying bombs were fired from launching sites on the French coast, directed at London. 3 landed in different parts of Kent, the 4th landed at 4.25 am on a railway bridge in Grove Road, Bethnal Green. It killed 6 people including a 19 year old housewife and her 8 month old baby (her husband was away in the army), and injured 30 people, while 200 families were made homeless and the bridge was destroyed. Bethnal Green now had the dubious honour of being the first district in the UK to suffer fatal casualties caused by this new weapon, the V1 flying bomb, with a one ton warhead. Rumours flew around the East End: it was a bomber that crashed in flames, killing all the crew; it was a glider bomb; it was a land mine. The Government, as usual, said nothing. On Thursday 15th June the air raid warning sounded at

11.30pm and the all clear did not sound until 9.30am. During that period, 74 flying bombs landed in the London area. The Government now had to tell the public what the public had already guessed, that they were under attack with a new type of weapon. The official name for this new weapon was PAC (pilotless aircraft). The public had other names for it - 'doodlebug' and 'buzzbomb'. Whatever the name, the effect on Londoners nerves was deadly, to have to sit in a bomb shelter and hear a V1 roaring towards your particular neighbourhood, hoping and praying it would drop in the next street instead of yours, the absolute silence when the engine cut out, 15 seconds to the explosion.

In early July the Government announced that evacuation would take place for all mothers and children who wanted to go. Within 10 days, 1 1/2 million people had left London. Most of the evacuees were sent to the north and west of England, which was out of range of the flying bombs which could only target London, Kent, Sussex and parts of Essex. Newspapers were censored and were not allowed to name towns and districts that had been hit. The last flying bomb landed in the UK on 1st September. The final casualty list for the V1 raids were 4,735 killed, 6,284 badly injured, and waiting in the wings was the V2 long range rocket.

IN MEMORY

Of the people who died in the first flying bomb raid on London. June 13th 1944.

Dora Cohen, 55, 70 Grove Rd
Constance May Day, 32, 61 Grove Rd
William Rogers, 50, 74 Grove Rd
Leonard Sherman, 12, 72 Grove Rd
Helen Woodcraft, 19, 64 Grove Rd
Thomas Woodcraft, 8 mths, 64 Grove Rd
(son of Helen Woodcraft)

Letters From Near and Far....

C J Spittal, Frampton Cotterell, Bristol, wrote in with a request for information about gun-making and gunlockmaking in the East End of London during the 1840s. Due to an oversight, his letter was omitted from the previous Newsletter:

The trade (of gunmaking) seems to have been carried on in a number of local streets but the part of it that interests me most lay in the area of Gowers Row, Cannon Street Road and Gowers Walk in Whitechapel, as well as in Buxton Street and Union Street, Stepney. A list of those engaged in this trade appears in H L Blackmore A Dictionary of London Gunmakers 1350-1850, Oxford, Phaidon/Christies, 1986 and in the little area I have described there were five people by the name of Spittle involved and certainly two of them were related to my own family. That family came from Wednesbury in Staffordshire where they were in the gunlockmaking business from around 1760 onwards. For some reason however some of them came to London.

I have had an interesting correspondence with Mr H L Blackmore who has been most helpful in checking his stock of information and references. Indeed I have been able to add to what he has recorded of these Spittles but he is not (nor would claim to be) a social historian and that is why I turn to you in the hope of tracking down more.

All the more so because I did not get quite as much help as I would have liked from the Bancroft Library. They told me that there were no Spittles in Gowers Row in 1851 but it seems did not check beyond that one street. They did check trade directories for 1822 to 1845, but not seemingly beyond that date and told me that 'there are no publications on this trade written in the early 1800s in or collection'. I did not ask them that. I asked if there were any books on the trade there in the 1800s but not written then.

It is always ridiculous to suppose there must be some information in existence but I should be somewhat surprised if there is not.

Have you any reference to hand or know of anybody knowledgeable on the subject? What is almost bizarre about this business is that one of the Spittles concerned was a David Spittle (1810-1886) who was certainly my great-great uncle. When he died one of the executors to his will was a man called Freese who live in Christian Street, Whitechapel. David worked in Gowere Row and between Gowers Row and Christian Street my father was, up to 1937, headmaster of the school in Berner Street. Who knows but that some of his old pupils might be among your members in the East London Histroy Society. Anyway, that is another story and not my immediate business.

Any suggestions as to what I might, with hope of learning more, look up?

Billy Scotchmer, Enfield Town, Middx, has dredged up some memories of school holidays:

During the school holidays or week-ends, once breakfast was over we would be sent out to play. If we were lucky and had run errands for somebody we may have been in possession of twopence which was sufficient to pay for a return fare to Snaresbrook from Coborn Road Station in Bow.

There we would play on the sand hills around the Hollow ponds, mimicking our screen cowboy heroes seen at the pictures (the penny rush) the previous Saturday. Or skating stones across the wide expanse of water, seeing whose stone could bounce the most.

I recently returned to these old haunts, and was surprised how small it seemed to the vast expanse where I had spent so many happy childhood days.

Other days we may take a ride on the train from Bow Road LMS Station to Fenchurch Street and finish up on the stretch of land below Tower Pier. It could only be reached when the river was at low tide by descending some old dilapidated wooden steps. We would search in the mud for treasure we never found and get very wet from the River Thames. Up on the

road above the steps was a piece of open ground by the Tiger PH. We would stand there in awe watching the escape artists, jugglers and various vendors doing their piece accompanied by numerous political speakers on soap boxes shouting out their various beliefs.

If money was short, as it often was, we would go to Victoria Park where once again there was much to do. If you entered at the Parnell Road gate you would come to the swings, roundabouts and sand pits.

I well remember the bronze faced park keeper with the Bruce Barnsfeather (Old Bill) moustache who was in control, nothing was ever allowed to get out of hand, how we hated him and would make rude gestures behind his back. Years later on visiting the park I met him and got in to conversation and found out what a gentleman he really was.

Walking from Parnell Road gate towards the flower gardens there was a running track on the left hand side where we would watch aspiring athletes doing the long jump and running around the circuit. There were two small lakes where you could swim for free in your birthday suit and on Sunday morning crowds would watch the men with the petrol and steam model boats competing with one another. On the other lake at the far side of the park you could have a motor boat ride for a penny or hire a skiff or a sculler for sixpence an hour.

I am sure many readers will have nostalgic memories like these and on looking back to those days I agree with my cousin George Renshaw these were the best days to have lived in.

Mr F W Ballisat, Sawbridgeworth, writes:

As a boy I used to look out of Gran's window (upstairs) and watch the buses going to Old Ford 8, 8a, 8b, 60 and 106 going to Chitty Lane, Chadwell Heath. We finished up moving to within a stone's throw at Chitty Lane in the thirties on the Costain Estate. My mother, now 93, still lives in the next turning.

One of the books (ELR) mentions Leith Hill and Box Hill. When she was 15-16 during the First War, she used to deliver all post and telegraph to that area. My father and his sister Annie Harknett used to live in Sutton Buildings C or E Block. She and Dad were both on stage with Charlie Austin. My Uncle worked in a furniture factory but died in Colindale Hospital with liver trouble. He was only 22 and had a twin sister (still alive at 90 years) lives in Worthing now after spending most of the time in the Church Army.

I can remember Coborn Road Station, with the booking office in the wall. I worked at F Shadbolts in Virginia Road back of Shoreditch church opposite the Mildmay Mission before the War.

After serving in the RAF in Burma and India I got a job on Railway Bishopsgate Goods till it was burnt out. I finished up as a Guard on trains, and watched the area slowly change as I passed on my journeys.

Talking of St James the Less, I still have their Sick Club membership number on my pension forms etc.

Mrs Samantha French has written in from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, for assistance in her research. She writes:

I am try to write a book about my mother's childhood in Bow Creek during the period 1924 - 1935. I would like some background information on the area and wonder if you could provide this.

I am particularly interested in details about the factories that abounded the area, in particular Baldwins and Fowlers. I also want historical information and pictures about the community in Orchard Place where my mother was born, and Bow Creek School which she attended.

I believe there was a great flood in 1928, if you have details about this I would like a copy. If you know of any books that would make suitable reading about either Bow

Creek, East India Docks, Chrisp Street and Rathbone St Markets and the Blackwall area, please let me have the titles.

My mother lives at 121 Boundary Road, Barking. Her name is Lucy Allen. Please send any information to her.

LIMEHOUSE MYSTERY

Mrs Sylvia Roberts, Holywell, Clwyd writes:

During the War, when I was a little girl, (about 1943), I was given a present by an old lady friend of the family. It was a china cup and saucer, supposedly about 50 years old then. It was very pretty and delicate, though I would not think expensive. The cup is shaped like a tulip and the saucer slightly scalloped like an open flower. The colour is mainly peach.

The interesting part is that printed in gold lettering in a scroll on the side of the cup it says "A Present from Limehouse". The mark underneath is 'A rampant lion (I think) with the letter T and Germany (all in green ink), there is another mark too, a red circle with the letter T and Made in Germany.

My query is, why should Limehouse have souvenirs? This has puzzled me for years and I would be very happy to know the history of such an item, especially as my Mother was born in Condor Street, Limehouse in 1896.

Editor's Note:

Can any of our members solve this mystery? Or is this one for the Antiques Road Show!

A Visit to Three Mills

Last May Day Bank Holiday (8th) there was an open day, and I went round the 18th century house mill. It is so called because it was next door to the miller's house. The Lea Valley Tidal Mill Trust is restoring it, and the house will become a visitors' centre. It is supposed to open later this year, but there seems to be a good deal more to be done.

We went up through the house, admiring the marble tiles, which would have been in the entrance hall and corridor originally. Going through to the highest floor of the mill we could see the hoist which would have lifted sacks of grain up to be stored in great bins. From these it could be made to flow downwards to the next floor, where it was cleaned and set in wooden frames. In the nineteenth century, some of them were modernised and metal was used. Below this again are the great mill wheels which provided the power for everything. They were worked by the tidal river as it flowed out and in.

We were told that the mill could only operate when the tide was running strongly - as the hours varied by one hour every day, the miller and his men had to work at all different hours of the day and night during the week.

It is surprising how much of the mill machinery has survived despite being neglected for about 50 years. However, the timbers used both for this and for the structure of the building have decayed in places, and have been replaced or will have to be later.

There has been a mill on this site for centuries, perhaps since Domesday Book with many more mills on the Lea than could have been needed for the local population.

Probably already by then they were milling corn for London.

The present mill however was built in the late 18th century to provide grain for a gin distillery which was built beside it. The distillery lasted longer than the mill, and I can remember an earlier visit for the History Society when Curtis's Gin provided us with free drinks! No gin now, but a refreshment stall, boat trips and a funfair on this open day. There should be more this summer I think. It is worth a visit.

Access when open: it is just south of Bow Bridge, off the Blackwall Tunnel approach, follow the signs to Tesco's. Bow Station is nearby, and you can walk along the towing path from Bow Bridge.

Ann Sansom

All About Eve - In Bromley By Bow

A small corner of Bromley By Bow has revealed a surprising little piece of history. Children's House in Eagling Road, built by Muriel and Doris Lester in 1923, and now used as an extension to Old Palace School, has a forty foot mural painted by Eve Garnett, author and illustrator.

As a young artist, Garnett sketched children in the East End slums. These were the basis of her illustrations for Evelyn Sharp's book, *The London Child* in 1927. Her experiences in the East End became the inspiration for her books about the Ruggles family, the first book, *The Family from One End Street*, published in 1937, won the Carnegie Medal in 1938. A successful author, Garnett has written extensively for the BBC and other broadcasters. She lives in Lewes, Sussex.

Tony Phillips, librarian at Fairfoot Library, passed on a photocopied write-up of the author on to me. He was intrigued by the mention of the mural and asked me to investigate. Sadly, some damage has been done to one section by the insensitive installation of a smoke alarm.

Rosemary Taylor

The Blitz - September 7, 1940 - 4.30 pm

It had been a lovely day and as usual we all went our separate ways. Dad had been walking, ending in the West End of London, Renee and Jim with their friends, Maisie and I out shopping in Chrisp Street, our local market, and Mother having a quiet afternoon at home.

I was buying a dress, at least I was thinking about a navy dress with white spots and a red collar, when the warning sounded. I gave the woman the 6 shillings she was asking for, grabbed the dress and ran. My sisters and Mother were home but no sign of brother Jim who was six years old at the time.

As I tore out again I looked up into the sky and they were coming up East India Dock Road in formation, and I felt as if I could have touched them, they were so low. I could not see my brother anywhere, in fact everyone had disappeared, so I made a quick run back, in time for the bombs to start dropping.

Dad meanwhile had bought a newspaper in the West End that stated that we had bombed Berlin, so he came home in a hurry in time for all the fun. We all sat huddled together wondering where Jim was. As soon as that wave of Bombers had gone over, I nipped out again and found him coming out of a house in Follett Street, nearby. The women of the street had just swooped the children up and taken them inside their shelters that the council had put into the back yards of the houses. My Mother was greatly relieved.

After the All Clear warning had gone, people came out to see what damage had been done. We had a fire on our roof, probably a Molotov cocktail, a small collection of incendiaries. Two bold heroes had a go at helping, one of them being a friend's father, he was four sheets to the wind as always. He tried to climb the gutter pipe, promptly fell after going halfway up, and broke his arm. I do not know what happened next, as my Father said to us to get ourselves ready, we are going to the West End, they will not bomb there.

The noise of that raid is something you simply do not forget. The screams of the bombs and the wait for the explosion. On our way to the West End to me was worse. Everywhere was chaos, burning buildings, gas mains flaring in the roads and huge gushes of water from the holes where the bombs had dropped. We were in a circle of fire that I knew we would never get out of. Years before I had had a nightmare dreaming that I was surrounded by fire. I could not escape. That stayed with me for a long time, but I never dreamt that I would be in that situation.

When we arrived as far as Stepney Station the warning went again, we just walked on as there was nowhere to go. We were surrounded by burning buildings and people were in an appalling state running around screaming. We finally reached Tower Bridge. My poor Mother was in a state because no way was she a walker. But with my sister Maisie and myself holding each arm, she managed. This was not a quiet stroll on a calm Saturday evening, this was a walk into a nightmare.

We took shelter in the crypt of All Hallows Church, and were joined by another family, and there we stayed in spite of the pleading of the Vicar to leave when there was a lull in the bombing. The bombing went on all night, it seemed as if the Germans wanted to completely wipe out the East End of London and the Docks.

In the early morning it had quietened down, and the All Clear went. We left the church and made our way home. There was devastation everywhere - fires, buildings collapsed in the roads, making it impossible to walk through. Luckily my Father had walked the area many times, as we all had, but he knew all the nooks and crannies, side streets and alley ways, but wherever we went we had to make a detour because the roads and streets were still on fire with the Gas and Water Mains that had been damaged. Commercial Street and East India Dock Road were impossible to go through at all. One poor family found their piano in the middle of the street. It was as if all hell had broken loose.

We arrived home to find that the house was still standing. We should have all stayed put. There was no gas or electricity at all, but my Mother, forever resourceful, cooked us a meal over an open fire.

Once we were washed and changed, my Father decided we should go to Kew Gardens for the day. I do not know or remember how we got there, practically walked the way until we reached an area that had not been touched by bombing.

It was another lovely day, which was a blessing, and the gardens were at their best. We must have toured the whole of the gardens, with an occasional sit, also the greenhouses. Then we made our way back to Charing Cross, where we went into the Milk Bar, a black and white cafe that was about in those days, had a bowl of tomato soup with a small packet of biscuits that you ate with the soup.

As we were thinking of what to do next, the warning went, and we had to find shelter, underneath Charing Cross Station, where in old times they used to keep the horses, and by the look of it still did. The place was full of people, but we managed to find a place against the wall and waited. I do not think anyone managed to sleep, but at least we felt safe. They built stations to last in those days.

It was sheer bedlam all the time we were there, and it was a great relief when the All Clear sounded and we were able to leave. Once again I do not remember how we arrived home. There must have been some buses running, as they had not started to bomb the city, and then we walked the rest of the way home.

The next day my Mother's brother came from Burdett Road where he worked as a Farrier, and told us to make our way to Romford, where he and his family lived.

We never went back to Poplar. My Mother found a house in the Rush Green area of Romford and there we stayed.

Christine Abbott (nee Tait)



I was invited recently by Rabbi Goldstein to speak to his History Club at Newbury. They wanted a talk on an aspect of Jewish East End history, and as I had been researching Miriam Moses, I thought I would share with the group the results of my research and hopefully glean some information from the members, many of whom were old East Enders. We had a lively afternoon and a great discussion about the good old days, the Brady Girls Club and the redoubtable Miss Moses.

However, as with a number of other remarkable women who were household names in their lifetime, there are only tantalising fragments of a life of dedication and service to the community to be found in several obituaries and her appearance on *This is Your Life*. It seems that no writer has as yet done an in-depth piece on the life of this Stepney-born daughter of a master tailor, who grew up in the shadow of the Princes Street Synagogue, and on deciding to take up public office, to round herself elected, not just the first woman Mayor of Stepney, but the first Jewess to hold that office in the history of Britain.

But the mysteries remain. Miriam Moses came from a large family. Do any of her relatives still live in the East End, and can they throw some light on her family life? Is there some one out there doing some research on this remarkable lady who was both admired and feared by generations of Jewish East Enders - "I'll tell Miss Moses about you," was a threat often heard around Brady Street, and led to instant obedience.

I would be very pleased to hear from anyone with tales to tell about Miriam Moses, so that I can write her up for my East End Women's Hall of Fame.

Rosemary Taylor
5 Pusey House, Saracen Street, Poplar,
London E14 6HG

AROUND AND ABOUT WITH THE ELHS IN 1994

Our lecture to start the New Year of 1994 was on Lord Rothschild and the 4 Per Cent Industrial Buildings was given by Clifford Lawton. Houses known as the Rookery were demolished in Flower and Dean Street and Keate Street to build Charlotte de Rothschild's Dwellings. These grim six storey towering blocks were to provide homes for the Victorian, mostly Jewish, working classes, from 1887 onwards. The company then went on to build Nathaniel Dwellings, completed in 1892. Strafford House, Ruth House and Irene House were added over the years. All these dwellings have been demolished and replaced with modern low level flats and houses. During the demolition Jerry White interviewed the tenants of Rothschilds Buildings and the result of his research was a fascinating book on a slice of East London Jewish history.

In February we welcomed a large audience eager to share their experiences of the evacuation of Cephas Street School and recall their memories of the head Alderman Kershaw. Daphne Glick, his daughter, had drawn on her father's detailed correspondence to his family, to draw a remarkable picture of war-time Stepney removed to Suffolk!

We were invited to an organ recital at Union Chapel, N1, organised to raise funds for the restoration of this beautiful non-conformist chapel, built by James Cubbitt in 1847, with a magnificent organ built by Henry Willis. The chapel is octagonal in design, richly decorated with marble inlay, stained glass windows and gothic decorative details in stone. It also has a piece of the Plymouth Rock mounted on the wall!

Jean Olwen Maynard's lecture on the migration of the non-conformist chapel from the City to Mile End, and the present site of the Latimer Congregational Church, was told in great detail. The link she was able to establish with the

Guardian Angels Church at Mile End was quite a surprise. Jean has produced an A4 paper-back of 58 pages on the subject, available from Rev. Reg Sago, Latimer Congregational Church, Ernest Street, Stepney, E1, £4 plus postage. The Coming of the Railways to London by our very own Railway buff Bob Dunn attracted its own set of enthusiasts. There was a lively discussion after the lecture, and we were left feeling that there was so much more we would like to know about the heyday of railway travel, when railway lines criss-crossed East London, and Railway Stations proliferated. But, as Bob reminded us, the golden age of steam engines was not quite as halcyon as some would like to remember it.

Keir Hardie was the first Independent Labour MP returned by West Ham in 1892, and Caroline Benn, whose book is the first major work to be published in recent years, gave us an insight into her research on the life of this remarkably complex man, which was based on a bundle of letters bequeathed to her husband, Tony Benn by Hedley Dennis in 1984.

The Coach Trip to Ipswich in May found us dodging the raindrops yet again. We had a guided walk around the town, founded in 1199, and discovered the wealth of history this Suffolk town has to offer. Christchurch Mansion, dating to 1567, houses paintings by Gainsborough, Constable and Steer. Thanks once again to Ann Sansom for an excellent trip.

Our Members' Evening in May on East London Pubs did not seem to strike a chord in many members' hearts, for we had only a fair to middling turnout. However, we did have an enjoyable evening, thanks to the appearance of a member of CAMRA.

Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery asked the Society to join them on their Open Day at the end of May. The work done by Rosemary Taylor, researching some of the graves in the cemetery, with the help of members of the society was put to good use, and the Walk attracted a large audience. The History Trail, with a map and a short history of the cemetery, sold well, and in fact soon sold out.

On 13 June the History Exhibition at the Soanes Centre, based on the above research, was opened, and the two halls packed with enthusiastic Councillors, teachers and members of the public, left us in no doubt as to the attention this history project has attracted. The Mayor Arthur Downes spoke in appreciation of the efforts of the History Society in preparing the exhibition, and Rosemary made a plea for the restoration of Will Crooks' grave. The newly-elected councillors have indicated their support and hopefully this will soon be carried out, when we know what the cost will be. It may be that we will need to do some fund-raising, before this can be done.

The History Exhibition is still open at the Soanes Centre in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, nearest tube Mile End Underground. The Centre is open Monday to Friday, daytime, but please ring to make sure that it is open - Janet or Patrick at 081 252 2504.

Following on from the opening of the Exhibition, a two week series of workshops for local school children was held at the Soanes Centre, organised by Rosemary Taylor and myself, with the assistance of Maggie Hewitt of Oxford House. Rosemary also produced a leaflet on Symbols on Graves, for the children, which proved to be very popular (so popular, in fact, that Abney Park rang up to ask if they could adapt the leaflet for their own use with school children).

The two weeks produced some of the hottest weather we have had, but the children enjoyed every minute of their time in the cemetery, and the teachers were amazed to find how much they could learn from reading the stones.

The Soanes Centre is an environmental studies centre and has workshops on bugs and beasties, wildflowers, pond life and much more. The Cemetery Park is now a local nature reserve, but we have been assured that the historical aspect of the cemetery will not be overlooked.

As part of a continuing effort to raise the profile of the cemetery as a source of local history research, Rosemary did another walk on 19 June, again with a large turn-out.

The cemetery is arguably one of our most precious resources, and a valuable source of local history. In the course of our research, we uncovered some curious features, such as the frequent references on grave stones to sudden death in the river, the docks or the sea. The Charterhouse graves, 15 in all, with up to 8 Brothers buried in each grave. All professional men fallen on hard times, we have yet to do an in-depth study of the names on the graves.

The Soanes Centre was named after the family who owned the Ropeworks, in what is now known as Ropery Street. However, when the Centre was opened by David Bellamy, the Soanes family headstone stood unnoticed just yards of the gate to the Centre. At a meeting to discuss the arrangements for the History Exhibition, Janet Ullman asked Rosemary if she could try and discover the whereabouts of the grave - and was amazed to learn that she knew where it was, and thought that everyone else did!

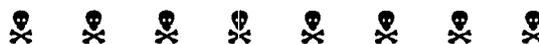
Local residents referred to the family grave of Mark Mayo as The Bounty Grave. This remained a mystery, until Eric Robinson, the geologist, demonstrated how to clean stones and restore the lettering, using a spray bottle and sponge. You'd have thought we'd won the pools, the excitement as the water gradually revealed the inscription and confirmed that it was indeed a 'Bounty' grave. Hannah Maria Purcell, buried with her mother, the sister of Mark Mayo, was the widow of William Purcell, ship's carpenter on the Bounty. The inscription recounts the harrowing journey in the boat and their final landing at Timor. William Purcell himself was buried at Portsmouth.

Two graves as yet uncovered, that of Alfred Linnell and the Perkins family. Also, although we know the location of the 3 Policemen's grave, we have not been able to identify it. Our thanks to Charles Stockley for pursuing this enquiry, hopefully the Leman Street Station will yield the answer to this puzzle.

So many questions remain unanswered and so much hidden local history in the cemetery yet to be uncovered - if any of our members know of any personality buried in what was always

known as Bow Cemetery, or comes across relevant obituary notices, we would be grateful if you could pass them on to us, to add to our information. Eventually, a fully illustrated book will be published.

DOREEN KENDALL



History Walks in the Cemetery:

- **Sunday 14 August 2.00 pm**

The East of London Family History Society have organised an Open Day on 14 August at the Soanes Centre, Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Southern Grove, E3 (nearest tube Mile End). There will be a Talk on the History of the Cemetery followed by a Guided Walk conducted by Rosemary Taylor at 3 pm.

- **Sunday 18 September at 11 am**

Further details ring 071 515 2960 (ansaphone, or call evenings)

If you have a group who would like a guided walk of Tower Hamlets Cemetery, please call Rosemary at the above number (evenings only) to discuss possible dates.



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*The editorial team consists of:
John Harris, cover design, printing and mailing.
Doreen Kendall, news features and notes.
Rosemary Taylor, editing, typesetting and layout.*

*If you have any articles, letters or queries please write to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, London E2 0RF or Rosemary Taylor, 5 Pusey House, Saracen Street, Poplar, London E14 6HG.
Tel: 071 515 2960 (ANS)*

The Flowery - Recollections

John Curtis, a long-time member of the East London History Society has sent us his reminiscences of life in Flower and Dean Street, Spitalfields. If you have any comments, you may contact John on 081 520 4808 or write to him at 9 Avon Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 3RB.

'The Flowery' was our street. You will not find it listed in any guide under such a title, but to the people living in the area immediately east of Aldgate Pump it only meant one street, the notorious Flower and Dean Street. Other thoroughfares had their names in full. It was Gravel LANE, Chicksand STREET, Commercial ROAD, but Flower and Dean Street was The Flowery.

It cannot be conceived that any similarity to the countryside or connection with horticulture should have given it such a rural sounding name. How could such a shabby street retain such a pretty name for so long? The answer was probably because the name rolled off the tongue so easily or perhaps there was some sense of individuality on the part of those living there, or it could even be some feeling of affection.

There may well have been a time when it had its share of flowers but that time had long passed by the time I lived there. The truth of the matter is that the name of the street derived from its two builders, John Flower and Gowan Deane. These were two Whitechapel bricklayers and speculative builders who erected the original street buildings in the 1650's.

There was an irony in the name because it must have been one of the meanest looking streets in the east end of London, a dark cavern of decaying tenement blocks, nearly all of them six storeys high. These effectively shut out much of the light and it is probably true to say that the only growing things were the many children of the neighbourhood. Like plants, though, many of these may have had their growth stunted in their environment.

These six-storied tenements had rather grand titles. There was Nathaniel Buildings along most of the side of the street and on the other was Rothchild's Buildings and my own buildings. I don't think our buildings had a collective name but the blocks in Flower and Dean Street were Irene House and Ruth House. Around the corner in Lolesworth Street was Helena House.

These 'houses' were not blocks in the true sense of the word in that they were not separated from each other but were just separate stairways in one big collection of flats which occupied three sides of the whole block. Each stairway was named as a 'House' and had four flats on each of its six floors.

At the Brick Lane end of the street the buildings were not so high. Part of these was a men's lodging house called Smiths. This was faced by a women's lodging house on the other corner, possibly owned by the same people. I think the premises over both establishments were more flats. On the ground floor in Brick Lane there were some shop premises.

Whether these lodging houses were superior to other lodging houses in the district I couldn't say, but we always called them such i.e., lodging houses, and not, as we called those in other streets, doss-houses. These common lodging houses have had bad accounts written of them, but I can remember going into the women's lodging house and everything was spotlessly clean. The bare wood tables and floor were well scrubbed and it was also nice and warm from a blazing open fire.

This canyon of buildings we called The Flowery connected Brick Lane and Commercial Street. At both ends the street narrowed to single width, making it somewhat self-contained and forbidding for outsiders to enter. I wonder if that contributed to its reputation? To go into it was like entering the neck of a bottle and could easily be seen as going into some form of trap. It was seldom used as a thoroughfare by strangers owing to its reputation. It was said that in Victorian times, policemen were forbidden to enter it alone but must go in pairs. I recall being told that a

policeman did venture on his won at one time and they found him head first down a street drain. I wondered at the time if this was true. It possibly wasn't because since then I have heard it said of other areas.

Halfway down the street there was another turning, Lolesworth Street. This formed a T-junction, and led away to Wentworth Street and the world-famous Petticoat Lane, and thence to Aldgate and the City of London.

This then was out home-town, our village. When people now ask where we lived as kids we tell them. 'Aldgate', this being the area in which the Flowery was. We didn't pronounce it Aldgate then, it was 'Allgit' to us. More properly, geographically, I would say it was off Whitechapel.

In those days the area was a bustling and lively place, especially at evening time. There were plenty of pubs and adequate public transport. Aldgate was the terminus for many bus routes and Gardiner's Corner at Aldgate was also a meeting place of Commercial Street, Whitechapel, Commercial Road, Leman Street and Aldgate. Strange to now think that this very busy junction was controlled by policemen on point-duty.

Trams ran along the middle of Commercial Street and there were shops all ablaze with lights, each seeming to send their smells out on to the crowded pavement. Our modern-age preoccupation with hygiene has ensured that these smells have sadly disappeared from the scene.

The big shop in Aldgate was Benny Woods. This business spread over four or five premises and sold meat, groceries and general provisions. Goodness knows how much sawdust they had to buy to scatter on their floors. Near this large business and separated from it by Half Moon Passage was Levys, selling wirelasses, gramophone records and the like, and an eating house, in whose window the bill of fare was cooked and displayed. Many wintry times did I stand in front of this warm window when sent on an errand. I would stand in front of this bubbling and steaming feast, gazing longingly

and vainly at the trays of sizzling sausages and browning onions and at the mountains of mashed potatoes. I promised myself that when I was grown up t his was a shop I would go inside. Alas, when I had grown up the shop and its fare had long vanished.

Strangely enough, many people think the east-end was, or still is, a dangerous area, but it wasn't to us. We were at home and danger wasn't anything to disturb or trouble us. We were not casual visitors or the transitional sightseers who found the area *interesting*. We knew every nook and cranny, every little alleyway, every empty house (usually inside and out), and probably every cat, dog and flea.

Immigrants have always been a feature of the area and we kids were a very mixed bunch, many being first or second generation children of European or Asian refugees. Sometimes we maintained a loyalty to the foreign blood in our veins, at other times we tried to hide it. I suppose it could be said that the Irish and the Jewish stock remained truest to their origins and most proudly proclaimed their roots.

Religion played a big part in this, but when it came to mixed marriages, both racial and religious, the descendants tended to lose this allegiance to a foreign blood and indeed, in some cases, tried to hide it. However, whatever our forebears, we were certainly all one thing. We were cockneys.

When we spoke we never sounded the th's... it was always 'teef' and not teeth, and 'barf' and not bath, although that word or the action it describes, was not used too often as far as I can remember. At the ends of the words we never sounded the 't' and at the beginning of words, none started with an 'h'. Nevertheless, in spite of these shortcomings we managed to communicate very well and to make our various ways in the world. It is unfortunate that the cockney accent has had to be lost by so many; whilst regional dialects and accents are accepted and often considered attractive, the cockney accent has to be ironed out and lost if one is to 'get on in the world.' To speak with a cockney accent seems to indicate a lack of formal education, which it unfortunately

sometimes does. To many people, it also seems to indicate a lack of intelligence, when very often, it doesn't. When a cockney speaks and wants to be heard, he or she has to hide his native accent or a barrier is immediately raised. Casting one's mind to television or radio, how many cockneys have made their mark there? Now compare that tiny figure, if you have one, with how many northerners, Scotsmen or Irishmen or foreigners with their native accents have succeeded.

On the other hand, some people think the cockney talks too much, especially when they have been caught on the end of some repartee. My own experience from my army days is that people from other parts of the country are wary of us, often thinking us cunning and artful, full of the 'big-city wiles'. Some look on us as characters, their opinions being shaped by the many 'professional' stage cockneys who try their best to communicate our supposed mateyness and good humour.

Editor's Note:

Many thanks to all those who responded to my request for reminiscences. We will be publishing more of your stories in the next Newsletter.

Mrs Phyllis Upchurch, Hampton Wick, who previously sent in her memories of Poplar Hospital, where she was a nurse during the Second World War, has fond recollections of St Matthias Church:

I was pleased to read in the Newsletter the news about St Matthias Church, the last time we saw it, it was in ruins. I worshipped there when nursing at Poplar Hospital during the War years and we were married there on August 25th 1940. Our son was christened there, after interruptions 3 times during the Service and having to retreat to the crypt for shelter due to the raids.

How lovely to know it has been restored and may I thank all local members of your Society and others who helped to bring this about. Please could you tell me more about this church. I would very much like to visit Poplar to see this church.

It was not possible to inform all our members of the visit to St Matthias Church, but we did publicise it at our lectures. Perhaps, on reflection, the visit should have been deferred until all our members, some of whom travel miles to attend the walks I've arranged in the past, were given the opportunity of hearing about it.

After reporting on the refurbishment of St Matthias in the last Newsletter, I received several requests for a visit to this fine old listed building, the only surviving legacy of the East India Company, in Poplar. The visit was organised for Saturday 4 June, after consulting with our members as to the best day and time. As the building had to be specially opened and a caretaker on duty, and I was providing refreshments, a small charge of £2 per head (£1 cons) was made to cover costs.

The day started out wet, and the rain continued all afternoon. Fortunately, the church was dry and warm. A talk on the history of Blackwall and the East India Company, a display of old photographs and prints of Blackwall and Poplar and a tour of the church, which has some fascinating plaques and memorials on the walls, took up most of the afternoon. Tea, with home-made scones, biscuits and cakes, was served. A tape of Robert Baldwin's talk on the history of St Matthias Church was played for those who wished to gain even more information. The visit ended with a short walk around the churchyard, with a look at the graves. Despite the weather, sixteen people came along, and all agreed it was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon. All the booklets on the history of the church were sold and there was also considerable interest in the work we are doing in Tower Hamlets Cemetery.

Perhaps it was the weather which defeated everyone's best intentions, but when the idea for an Open Day was first suggested, there seemed to have been a lot of support for it, which was why I went ahead with the arrangements. The majority of those who attended were not ELHS members but had seen it listed in East End Life. Several asked for details of membership to the ELHS, having enjoyed the visit and the talk. There was a lot of food left over, as I had catered for approx. 25, but fortunately it didn't go to waste. We just had cheese scones and cakes for the next few days!

Rosemary Taylor

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

September - December 1994

David Behr has been working hard arranging our forthcoming series of lectures. He has found it particularly difficult getting suitable Speakers, and contacting those suggested by various ELHS members. Despite his best efforts, David was unable to finalise the lecture programme for the whole year. However, he did manage to get speakers to agree on some dates:

Thursday 29 September - 7.30 pm

The London Hospital and the Mercers' Company - examples of respectable landlords in the East End from the Victorian Period.

An illustrated talk by Mona Paton.

Thursday 27 October - 7.15 pm

Annual General Meeting of the East London History Society.

Followed at 7.45 pm by

Regent's Canal - A talk by Michael Essex-Lopresti

Thursday 17 November - 7.30 pm

Tokens and Medals of Tower Hamlets - An illustrated talk by Philip Mernick

Thursday 1 December - 7.30 pm

History of Stoke Newington - An illustrated talk by Peter Foynes

Thursday 30 March 1995 - 7.30 pm

Asylums and Academics, the After-life of Hackney's Grand Houses (illustrated) by Isobel Watson

Thursday 27 April 1995 - 7.30 pm

The largest school in the world: The Jewish Free School, Bell Lane, Spitalfields 1817-1939 by Gerry Black

Thursday 25 May 1995

Shops and Street Markets in East London - Members' Evening

All the lectures are held in the Latimer Congregational Church Hall, Ernest Street, E1.

Ernest Street is between Harford Street and White Horse Lane off Mile End Road (Opp. Queen Mary and Westfield College)

The nearest underground stations are Stepney Green and Mile End, five minutes walk from either.

PLEASE NOTE:

For various reasons, the talks for January and February have yet to be finalised.

These will be announced at the lectures as soon as they have been arranged.

TOWER BRIDGE

1894 - 1994

The Centenary of Tower Bridge

was celebrated in great style on 2 July 1994. The programme featured demonstrations by the Red Devils and the Air Sea Rescue teams. There was a Craft Fair along with jugglers, jazz bands, dancers and Punch and Judy shows during the day, followed by a Fly Past and a fireworks display. Visitors were treated to the sight of the bridge being raised and lowered as river traffic continued to pass along the Thames.

Tower Bridge was opened on 30 June 1894 by the Prince and Princess of Wales. The architect Sir Horace Jones designed the bridge in the gothic style, its stone cladding designed to complement the nearby Tower of London. Unfortunately, he died in 1886. The engineer John Wolfe Barry was responsible for the construction of the bridge, which cost £1.2 million, funded by the Bridge House Trust which was administered by the Corporation of London.

When the bridge was opened, the bascules were raised approximately 20 times a day. Today, the average is 10 times a week, and a minimum of 24 hours notice must be given. A normal opening involves raising the bascules to an angle of 80 degrees. Royalty, the Lord Mayor of London and VIPs receive a salute of a full 90 degree opening.

In 1912 Frank McClean flew his plane through Tower Bridge below the high walkway. This was not intended as a stunt, the aircraft just did not have enough power to climb and the pilot had no choice but to fly through the bridge. Other pilots successfully repeated the stunt.

Another daring feat occurred in 1952 when the bridge was being raised and the lights failed to turn red. The driver of a No. 78 Double-decker bus jumped a three foot gap when he found he was unable to bring the bus to a halt in time.

One of the most memorable pictures of the bridge, now in the Imperial War Museum, is that taken on Black Saturday 7 September 1940 and shows the bridge silhouetted against a backdrop of burning docks.

The cover of our last Newsletter featured a School Certificate awarded to Ellen Rands of Ricardo School in 1911.

Nell Donoghue, as she was known after her marriage, was a dressmaker by trade and was always elegantly turned out, hence her nickname 'The Duchess'. I spoke to her recently and recorded her memories of Poplar.

A few years ago, when I had arranged an exhibition on Women in Poplar, Nell came along and presented me with her school certificates, as she felt that having kept them for so long, they were worth preserving. I felt deeply touched by her gift and her faith in me.

It is with regret that I report that Nell passed away peacefully on 11 July 1994.

The cover for this issue features a certificate awarded to Doris Wade. Doris joined Thomas Street Central School on 29th March 1915, from the Infants Department. she lived at 33 Clemence Street, Limehouse. Did any of our members know her?

Our thanks to Harold Mernick for the use of this certificate. It belongs to his extensive collection of school memorabilia. Other examples from his collection can be seen in our panels on The Education of Girls, 1900.

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1994

AUTUMN COACH TRIP

SATURDAY 1 OCTOBER

BELTON HOUSE AND GRANTHAM

Belton House, a National Trust property near Grantham, was built in 1685-8, and is described as the crowning achievement of Restoration house architecture in Britain.

It is richly furnished and decorated, with woodcarvings, plasterwork, tapestries, oriental procelain, and family silver. There is a 1000 acre wooded park, and fine formal gardens around the house.

Before going to Belton, we shall stop at Grantham for lunch (own arrangements) and a look around. Nowadays it is known as the birthplace of our most recent ex-prime minister, but long before this it was a stopping place for travellers on the Great North Road. There are some fine coaching inns and a beautiful mediaeval church.

Tea is available at Belton, and there is a NT shop.

The coach fare is £7.00 and entrance to Belton £3.20 (National Trust members free). Entrance money will be collected on the coach.

Please send bookings, with the coach fare to Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, Chingford, E4 7PF Tel 081 524 4506.

The pick-up will be at Mile End opposite the station at 9.30 am.

COACH TRIP 1 OCTOBER 1994

I/we would like.....tickets for the coach trip. Enclosed a cheque/P.O for £.....

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL. NO. _____ National Trust Member? Yes/No

Please send to ANN SANSOM 18 HAWKDENE CHINGFORD E4 7PF